Reframing the *Metamorphoses*: The Enabling of Political Allegory in Late Medieval Ovidian Narrative

Dissertation

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Abstract

This study develops a critical method for reading the vernacular frame narratives of Chaucer, Gower, and Lydgate based on the grammar-school commentaries that taught them classical rhetoric, philology, and history. In the course of developing this method, I answer the following questions: why do the school texts and vernacular works exist in the same format? Why is it that Christian writers appropriate the structuring principles of Ovid’s pagan *Metamorphoses* for their works? Furthermore, what inspired England’s obsession with Ovidian narrative structure during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries? Chaucer, Gower, and Lydgate, to name just a few, participated in this Ovidian vogue—attempting to capture the Roman’s sinister and playful voice and, more specifically, to master the frame-narrative device that gave it critical direction. Seeing Ovid’s collection of pagan myths as a cohesive and continuous poem, medieval commentators uncovered an argument about abuses of power. Vernacular writers adopted this approach to Ovid, interpreting his work as a model for literary navigation in a historically turbulent period.

I hereby alter the assumption that medieval writers mined classical literature merely as sources for their compilations of exempla with which to practice moralizing strategies. Chaucer, Gower, Lydgate, and their literate contemporaries would have learned in school that the *Metamorphoses* was a text replete with masterful grammar,
syntax, and rhetoric—but also with drama, subversion, and political intrigue. Schoolmasters generated an affinity for the _Metamorphoses_ by emphasizing how Ovid the exile depicted a corrupt empire that maintained its dominance by removing discordant subjects; and these instructors showed that Ovid represented such hegemonic abuses by repeatedly relaying myths in which outliers are physically transformed in order to silence them. Thus the peculiar character of medieval education, which achieved literacy through the reading of non-Christian texts, concatenated not only Ovid’s separate myths but also the pagan political past to their own politically charged Christian present. Understanding this overlap between classical and late medieval vernacular literature reveals a sophisticated rhetorical education that engaged with classical poesy in a manner that is generally attributed only to later humanist writers.
For my parents.
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Chapter 1: Framing Ovid: Building Fourteenth- and Fifteenth-Century Ovidian Structures

The Middle Ages appropriated Ovidian myths with the sole purpose of sanitizing and predigesting them in tidy Christian packaging. Or did it? When it comes to analyzing Ovid’s role in medieval literature, scholars have largely focused on the ways in which commentaries made the *Metamorphoses* palatable to a sensitive Christian audience afraid of the poet’s licentious and irrational pagan ways.¹ The *Metamorphoses* undoubtedly posed problems for medieval Christian audiences, and moralizing commentaries irrefutably assisted its transition into medieval vernacular literature. However, the moralizing tradition represents only one dimension of the surviving medieval manifestations of the *Metamorphoses*. Ovid’s narratives, like the subjects they discussed, underwent several transformations. Casting them aside as individual mythic episodes allegorized to avoid the censure of ecclesiastics overlooks the complex process, over several centuries, by which Ovidian narratives were absorbed into the vernacular frame

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narrative tradition that reached its flowering in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

The last two centuries of the Middle Ages witnessed an explosion of Ovidian adaptations within frame narratives such as Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*, John Gower’s *Confessio Amantis*, Giovanni Boccaccio’s *De casibus virorum illustrium*, *Decameron*, and *Genealogia deorum gentilium*, Christine de Pizan’s *Livre de la Cité des Dames*, and John Lydgate’s *Fall of Princes*, all of which adapt and reframe a variety of Ovidian tales alongside biblical and contemporary narratives. Using details from the *Metamorphoses*, these medieval writers prove to be proficient readers of the Roman poem. John Fyler, for example, argues that Chaucer’s Ovidian nuances reveal how he read the *Metamorphoses* “straight,” that is to say without a critical apparatus, summary, or moralizing framework that commentaries provide.² Although it is unlikely that Chaucer would have had a copy of the poem without an accompanying commentary, the fact remains that he understood Ovid’s rhetoric, which moralizing commentaries tend to ignore. As scholars such as Helen Cooper and Lisa J. Kiser note, medieval authors like Chaucer were acutely aware of the ways in which Ovid structured his narratives and the subversive narrative voices that he used to do so.³ The variety of tales that Ovid relays and medieval writers revise has indeed sponsored a wide range of scholarship devoted to comparing the two.⁴

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³ For further discussion, see Helen Cooper, “The Frame,” in *Sources and Analogues of the Canterbury Tales*, Vol. I, ed. Robert M. Correale and Mary Hamel (Woodbridge,
C. de Boer’s edition of the moralizing commentary, *Ovide moralisé*,\(^5\) has been a focal point for medievalists who assert the fact that the *Metamorphoses* mostly circulated with critical apparatuses. Alastair J. Minnis, Sheila Delany, and Peter Dronke demonstrate how moralization, especially allegorization, permitted medieval writers to disseminate Ovid’s pagan mythology throughout Christendom without fear of repercussions.\(^6\) Such commentaries supposedly “sanitize” Ovidian lore for mass consumption, leading medievalists to look to the *Ovide moralisé* as the missing link in transmission history that facilitated the recording of pagan mythology alongside Christian mythology.\(^7\) Such critics directly note both the

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importance of commentaries and moralization for vernacular adaptations. Yet the
Ovide moralisé is only one example of many moralizations of the anti-epic, and not
even the first or most popular one. As Frank T. Coulson points out, few manuscripts
contained the *Metamorphoses* without some form of critical apparatus.\(^8\) He explains
that commentaries in general actually became the standard means for transmitting
the *Metamorphoses* because almost every manuscript in France at this time
contained interlinear and marginal comments. Additionally, Coulson clarifies that
sometimes the original scribe added these notes, and sometimes readers would add
to them over time; together, such commentaries showed what medieval audiences
considered vital for understanding the *Metamorphoses*.\(^9\)

While the transmission history of Ovid’s poem in England differs from that in
France,\(^10\) it is the product of the French tradition. As this chapter will explain,
English commentaries lack the number of marginal notations found in French
versions, but they have similar exegetical approaches to Ovid’s poem.\(^11\) To

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\(^8\) Frank T. Coulson, “William of Thiegiis and Latin Commentary on the *Metamorphoses* in
Late Medieval France,” in *Vehicles of Transmission, Translation, and Transformation in
Medieval Textual Culture*, ed. Carlos Fraenkel, Jamie Fumo, Faith Wallis, and Robert
Wisnovsky (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2011), 484.

\(^9\) Ibid., 484.

\(^10\) Minnis notes the absences of glosses in English manuscripts. Minnis, “Absent Glosses: A
Crisis of Vernacular Commentary in Late-Medieval England,” *Essays in Medieval Studies* 20

\(^11\) This overview is partly misleading because our knowledge of Ovidian commentaries,
particularly those in England, is rather inchoate. While James Clark and Kathryn McKinley
have provided invaluable surveys and catalogues of Ovidian manuscripts in England, these
lists only differentiate between prose paraphrases and the *Metamorphoses*, lacking specific
details about their contents. As a result, this introduction can only provide a brief and
incomplete glimpse of the Ovidian world that Chaucer, Gower, and Lydgate adapted. For
more about the citations of English catalogues and manuscripts containing the
comprehend what English vernacular writers were doing with the *Metamorphoses*, the subject of this dissertation, we must consider the manner in which it was presented to them. Teachers frequently used Ovidian myths as material on which to practice moralization techniques like allegorization, which they also applied to the Bible. However, scholastic exegesis also included grammatical explications, mythographic definitions, rhetorical lessons, and explanations of narrative structure. Kathryn L. McKinley accounts for the various commentary approaches to Ovidian narratives, using, as her main example, the figure of the pagan female in its multiple incarnations.\textsuperscript{12}

Yet despite our knowledge of commentaries controlling the medieval reception of Ovid, a gap in Ovidian scholarship remains; no one has addressed the role of commentaries in relation to medieval frame narratives. Studies have focused exclusively on treatments of individual myths, ignoring the structural connections between Ovid’s frame narrative and late medieval vernacular versions of the framed narrative tradition. By focusing on moralizing commentaries’ treatments of individual pagan myths, we have lost sight of how medieval literary criticism instructed readers about the larger structure of the overall poem. Such scholastic lessons used the interrelated network of tales in Ovid’s anti-epic to teach rhetoric

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\textsuperscript{12} McKinley, *Reading the Ovidian Heroine: Metamorphoses Commentaries, 1100-1618* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2001).
and political criticism. This chapter offers a brief overview of the variegated forms and hermeneutics of late medieval school texts of the Metamorphoses. As a result, it will reveal that English writers such as Chaucer, Gower, and Lydgate inherited rich and multifaceted literary criticism, which allowed them to develop the vernacular frame narrative as a complex system of writing that exhibited sophisticated rhetoric as well as codified political commentary along the lines of the Ovidian texts they were reading. By applying the lessons learned by the commentary tradition, we can gain new insight about how Chaucer, Gower, Lydgate, and Boccaccio recreate Ovidian myths in light of their perception of Ovid as a vulnerable subject of a corrupt emperor and the battle with hegemony that led to his exile.

By analyzing the reading strategies that Ovidian commentaries exhibit, we can recreate the literary and political meta-narrative that fourteenth- and fifteenth-century vernacular writers inherited from their monastic predecessors. This study, then, illuminates how Ovidian tales contributed to a medieval mythology that encompassed pagan and Christian history alike, ascertaining an intersection between the sacred and profane in the classroom and on the vernacular page. To pursue this aim, I must connect cultural, historical, paleographical and rhetorical studies to understand how and why vernacular frame narratives were produced in imitation of a clerical tradition that preceded them. The development of the
vernacular frame narrative proves to be the product of complex cross-cultural and trans-historical exchanges—resisting conventional distinctions between the high and late Middle Ages as well as between continental Western Europe and England. The resulting English vernacular frame narratives, reaching prominence during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, are reminiscent of the classical genre as determined by the academic interpretations found in Ovidian commentaries. To unearth the impetus and foundation for this fourteenth- and fifteenth-century phenomenon, I will begin with a greatly needed, but condensed, overview of the Ovidian commentary tradition and some of the most influential contemporary studies about it. While the breadth and scope of this commentary tradition hinders one’s ability to generate an exhaustive account of its history, the purpose here is to treat its most significant aspects to lend medievalists a better understanding of the historical and rhetorical moment which produced one of the most significant literary formats for the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The purpose of this project then is to reopen the discussion about late medieval applications of Ovidian classical rhetoric, to extend English scholarship beyond its present episodic studies of Ovid’s influence in order to account for the poetic structure that he and his commentators lent to the English vernacular.

History of Ovidian Reception

Chaucer, Gower, and Lydgate inherited a dense Ovidian commentary
tradition that had undergone centuries of transformations. Commentaries, or aids for reading and studying authors, explicate difficult grammar, rhetoric, and ethics—some of them even provide original scholarship. A commentator largely converts complicated and obscure details into simple and clear statements of truth. In other words, his role is to bring classical literature to new audiences, making it not just grammatically coherent, but also rhetorically, culturally, and stylistically consistent with the medieval classroom. Each generation of readers appropriated the critical authorities from the past, which strengthens the continuity in the commentary tradition throughout the Middle Ages. However, Ovidian literature occupied a unique position in classical literary history because medieval readers failed to inherit ancient commentaries on his texts as they had for works by other classical authors. As Richard Tarrant notes, the *Metamorphoses* in particular lacks a complete extant manuscript until the second half of the eleventh century. Tarrant proceeds to say that all previous traces of the poem exist only in fragments; additionally, even these fragments only date back to the ninth century. The absence of ancient

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15 Richard J. Tarrant, “Ovid,” *Texts and Transmission: A Survey of the Latin Classics*, ed. L.D. Reynolds (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 276-7. However, Tarrant also states elsewhere that the lack of earlier extant copies could point to Ovid’s immense popularity—showing that his works were so over-read that they were worn out and had to be recopied during the twelfth century. Tarrant, “The Narrationes of ‘Lactantius’ and the Transmission of Ovid’s Metamorphoses,” in *Formative Stages of Classical Traditions: Latin Texts from Antiquity to the Renaissance*, ed. Oronzo Pecere and Michael D. Reeve (Spoleto: Centro italiano di studi sull’Alto medioevo, 1995), 83-115.
commentaries for Ovid allowed medieval scholars to generate their own critical apparatuses according to their medieval tastes and literary requirements. As Ralph Hexter argues, the creation of the Ovidian commentary tradition during the Middle Ages thus offers greater insight into how his works were read in medieval classrooms than other classical literature. Nonetheless, medieval masters often drew from commentaries on other classical writers, such as Servius and Virgil, imposing the exegetical practices applied for their texts to Ovid’s.16

Ovid’s Metamorphoses took centuries to become truly popular in schools, and the classical period largely neglected his works. James G. Clark mentions that Ovid garnered a short-lived place in grammar schools during the fourth century, only to be marginalized along with other pagan writers when Christian authorities revised their curricula.17 Additionally, when other pagan authors were reintroduced to classrooms during the sixth century, Ovid’s status was little changed. Nonetheless, the Narrationes or Argumenta, a commentary on the Metamorphoses incorrectly attributed to the patristic author Lactantius during the Early Modern period, might have originated during the sixth century.18 Alan Cameron even believes the Narrationes had an earlier date of composition, claiming that it was probably

16 Hexter, Ovid and Medieval Schooling, 7.
written before 200. This pseudo-Lactantian commentary consisted of a series of titles and of prose summaries corresponding to the order of the tales of the *Metamorphoses* (usually in the margins of Ovid’s text until it gained independent circulation as early as the Early Modern period). It influenced a variety of later medieval commentators—including Arnulf of Orléans, who will be addressed shortly. However, Clark suspects that, despite the *Narrationes*’s potential sixth-century (or even second-century) date of compilation, it incorporates some earlier *scholia* and is “too slight, and at times detached from the subject-text” to qualify as a substantial shift in Ovid’s place in the *curricula*.

Some assume that Ovid’s relative obscurity resulted from his status as a *persona non grata* within the Roman Empire; for some unknown reason, the Emperor Augustus exiled Ovid from his beloved Rome and it took centuries for

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23 Ovid committed either a literary or personal offense against Augustus. Ovid might have been exiled for his scandalous *Ars amatoria*, which is essentially a manual for womanizing,
Ovid's literary reputation to recover. The poet's questionable politics hindered the dissemination of his literary corpus, whereas other classical writers, such as Statius, Horace, Cicero, or Virgil, enjoyed wide popularity. Virgil, for example, enjoyed an early and vast readership in medieval England; in fact, he maintained an audience from the classical period until after the Middle Ages. According to Jan M. Ziolkowski, Virgilian exegesis varied and began while Virgil was still alive only to flourish again at the beginning of the fourth century; there are even reports that there were lectures on Virgil's works as early as 25 B.C.E. Christopher Baswell similarly notes Virgil's complex popularity in relation to the commentary tradition, explaining that Christian England both praised his eloquence but denigrated the "lies" he told about the pagan gods. As a result, Baswell identifies three primary exegetical approaches to dealing with Virgil's paganism in the high and later Middle Ages: pedagogical, allegorical, and moral. Yet, unlike for Ovid, these interpretive approaches to Virgil were developed by scholars well before the Middle Ages; for example, grammatical studies of the *Aeneid* and *Eclogues* were written by Servius during the fourth century, and sustained allegorical exegesis of the first six books of

\[\text{(Footnotes)}\]


27 Ibid., 8.
the *Aeneid* were composed by Fulgentius during the sixth century, (pseudo-)
Bernardus Silvestris during the twelfth century, and Cristoforo Landino during the
fifteenth century. Baswell suggests that these scholastic studies were revived in
the Middle Ages during the reign of Henry II because Virgil’s emphases on empire
and sustained lines of inheritance were a means for constructing a “justifying
prehistory for the Angevin line and its empire.”

Ovid’s less orderly representation of empires, rulers, and even pagan gods
resisted being appropriated as propaganda in support of monarchs and empires.
Thus his *Metamorphoses* travelled a longer and more winding road into the Western
European canon; nonetheless, he did arrive in it. Despite the fact that he never
replaced Virgil, Ovid gradually became a more prominent figure in the schools’
curricula, appearing in grammar and rhetoric texts for young boys. Jean Seznec
notices a shift in medieval perceptions of Ovid during the eighth century when
Theodulph, the bishop of Orléans, interpreted in his *Carmina* that Ovid’s text was a
false covering for concealed truths. But Seznec thinks that it still took four centuries

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30 James McGregor notices that while Ovidian texts were rare in universities before the
fifteenth century, John of Garland, the most important Ovidian scholar during the thirteenth
century, delivered lectures about Ovid during this period. His text, the *Integumenta Ovidii*,
claims to “uncover” the hidden meanings of Ovid’s poetry, mostly through moralizing his
myths in Christian terms. The *Integumenta* contained some influential readings of the
*Metamorphoses* that came to be incorporated with Arnulf’s from his *Allegoriae*. James
38. Any absolute claims about Ovid’s texts’ relationship to universities would be begging for
contradiction, but let it suffice to say that Ovid’s texts were of minor importance to
universities’ standard curriculum—even though John of Garland witnessed marginal
popularity in relation to Arnulf of Orléans and the Vulgate commentator.
after this point for Ovid to become popular.31 Ludwig Traube identifies an aetas Ovidiana that begins in the second half of the eleventh century, and lasts until the thirteenth.32 Yet the dating of the so-called aetas Ovidiana is debatable. McKinley points out that there was a steady, though modest compared to the continent, increase in Ovidian manuscript production between 1200 and 1500, with English libraries holding many copies.33 Moreover, Clark notices that the Ovidian renaissance begins in the ninth century and lasts in English monasteries long after the thirteenth century. In addition, he attributes the masters and students of English and Celtic monasteries as the founders of Ovidian criticism, showing that they gravitated toward Ovid before their continental European contemporaries.34

During the fourteenth century Ovidian manuscripts tripled at the same time that production of other classical manuscripts ebbed in England. Instead of being

34 Clark shows that while Ovid was of secondary importance during the initial interest in antiquity during the Middle Ages, he was well established in Benedictine monasteries during the ninth, tenth, and eleventh centuries, transforming him into a “medieval Ovid.” Clark, “Introduction,” 6; and “Ovid in the Monasteries,” 177-8.
confined to monastic houses, as they were during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Ovid's works were appearing in houses unaffiliated with the Church—such as the homes of aristocrats and the libraries of universities. The greatest growth was in the distribution of the *Metamorphoses*, which had rarely been copied in full before this point. Further, Clark maintains that these copies crafted their own approaches that were based on an amalgamation of the previous commentary traditions. This Ovidian revival originated in late medieval monasteries (especially the Canterbury convents, Durham, Glastonbury, St Albans, Westminster, and Worcester), which not only inherited and preserved the literary heritage generally, but also affected the reform movement of the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. Monastic libraries grew drastically during this period due to a desire to stock and re-stock some monastic houses. Some English cloisters even returned to in-house book production, bringing new prominence of academic authors and texts and reinforcing the old prominence to earlier texts and textual traditions. There was significant distribution throughout the community, in the cloister (carrels and

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35 McKinley, “Manuscripts,” 44-5.
36 Most readers of these works during the fourteenth century surely appreciated Ovid's amatory texts for their urbanity and love advice, but, according to Wetherbee, they also used the works as instructions for what not to do because they were morally questionable instructions from a pagan writer. While Marilynn Desmond similarly mentions the ethical instruction involved in *accessus* for Ovidian amatory works geared towards schoolboys. However, Desmond postulates that thirteenth- and fourteenth-century France was making efforts to make Latin auctoritas available for vernacular readers, helping to develop a “heteroerotic ethic.” Marilynn Desmond, “Gender and Desire in Medieval French Translations of Ovid’s Amatory Works,” in *Ovid in the Middle Ages*, ed. James G. Clark, Frank T. Coulson, and Kathryn L. McKinley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 108 & 118; and Winthrop Wetherbee, “The Study of Classical Authors: from Late Antiquity to the Twelfth Century,” in *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, Vol. II, ed. Alastair Minnis (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 129.

37 McKinley, “Manuscripts,” 45-6.
cupboards), libraries, and rooms of monks. According to fourteenth- and fifteenth-century book lists, there was a preponderance of Ovidian texts in this period of increased book distribution. Many fifteenth-century monasteries retained their pre-1200 manuscripts of Ovid, but also copied new versions for a new generation of readers.

Clark notes that these new approaches included the grammar-school masters’ emphasis on Ovid’s subject matter and style, because they were being used, in part, as a guide to the principles of rhetoric. He believes that during the middle of the fourteenth century there was a change in grammar teaching in England, which turned away “from the speculative grammar which had been preeminent in their schoolrooms since the early thirteenth century in favor of a new generation of prescriptive treatises which took their paradigms from original Latin works.” The cloister curriculum of this period appears to focus more on the ars rhetorici than do contemporary secular schools and universities. This stylistic and rhetorical emphasis for studying Ovid was also related to the desire to bring rhetorical flourishes to the pulpit to combat Wyclif’s appeal. Ovid’s imagery and poetic style gained importance in monastic schools alongside the growing importance attached to preaching. Siegfried Wenzel notices the prevalence of Ovid in medieval

38 Clark, “Ovid in the Monasteries,” 182.
39 Ibid., 183.
sermons—and most of these references come from the *Metamorphoses*. Through preaching, university study, lay readership, and increasingly mobile monastic manuscripts, Ovidian materials were reaching new and large audiences. These renditions of Ovid however were still shaped by practices of compilation, critical apparatuses, and manuscripts from the cloister, meaning that a broader audience now had access to Ovidian material shaped by centuries of scholarship.

*Accessus ad Auctores*

As Judson Boyce Allen states, “no medieval poet could have learned his Latin without having submitted his reading to a school *accessus*, nor could he have read at all widely without having encountered more or less marginal commentary.” The *accessus*, which is an academic introduction to a text, was used to define the important points that a reader should know and focus on when reading a work. *Accessus* frequently address the historical context in which the text was created, explaining how that context differs from the contemporary effects of the overall work. According to Coulson, their role was to “furnish for the reader both essential background information concerning the poet as well as a general orientation to the subject matter and nature of his poetry.” These academic introductions were an important part of the transmission of classical texts since the eleventh century in

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45 Gillespie, “The Study of Classical Authors,” 149.
England, but they were most popular from 1350-1450.\textsuperscript{47} By the fourteenth century, compilers even collected \textit{accessus} for multiple authors without the texts that they explicate; these compilations are called \textit{Accessus ad auctores}, which continued to circulate and evolve long after the commentary tradition.\textsuperscript{48}

Since R.B.C. Huygens produced his edition of the \textit{accessus ad auctores}, medievalists like Vincent Gillespie have gravitated towards these introductions as a lens for understanding how medieval readers approached the classics.\textsuperscript{49} Fausto Ghisalberti’s study of Ovidian biographies explains that in the absence of inherited classical commentaries, medieval students created a back-story for him by drawing variously from other commentaries and from his own writing. In general, Ghisalberti explains that medieval commentators aimed “to elucidate the causes determining its [the text’s] origins, the matter of which it was composed, its intentions, the useful lessons to be learned from it, its title, and, finally, to what part of philosophy it should be ascribed.”\textsuperscript{50} For example, Arnulf of Orléans wrote a long \textit{accessus} for his philological commentary with six broad categories that were the prototype for subsequent medieval introductions to the \textit{Metamorphoses}. These six headings were "\textit{vita poetae, titulus operis, materia, utilitas, intentio, cui parti}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{47} Ibid., 153; and Clark, “Introduction,” 14.
\item \textsuperscript{48} Clark, “Introduction,” 14.
\item \textsuperscript{49} Rather than retread well-traversed ground, this section will only provide a brief overview of \textit{accessus} tendencies. For more about this subject consult Clark, who says, “there are examples [of \textit{accessus}] in almost every one of the surviving literary compendia known to have been connected with a monastic reader.” Clark, “Ovid in the Monasteries,” 186. As McGregor notes, \textit{accessus} sometimes provided the space to warn teachers about the scandalous and un-Christian material within the text. McGregor, “Ovid at School,” 29.
\item \textsuperscript{50} Ghisalberti, “Medieval Biographies of Ovid,” 10.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
philosophiae subponatur—life of the poet, title of the work, subject matter, usefulness, intention and the philosophical category to which the work is to be assigned.”

Ghisalberti points out that these categories resemble those from the canon of classical grammarians, particularly Servius. Many accessus narrow these categories down to four, which Coulson identifies as the work’s titulus, materia, intentio, and utilitas. Ghisalberti mentions that these accessus were standardized according to these categories, but the information was then shaped by the particular text it discussed—mostly by alteration of the biographical information and some of the philosophical details to guide readers to what they should glean from the text at hand.

These particular reading instructions were developed expressly for students by medieval clerics intending to teach them proper Latin. Ghisalberti claims that this context forced commentators to write accessus that created ethical significance for all literature, and that this was an obligatory significance used to placate ecclesiastical authorities by claiming that Ovid aligned with Christian pedagogy. Suggesting that Ovidian accessus transformed into a humanistic or literary type of biography during the fourteenth century, Ghisalberti demonstrates that although earlier commentaries cited quotations from Ovid’s other works as biographical

51 [Title, subject, intention, and usefulness]. Coulson, “Ovid’s Metamorphoses in the school tradition of France,” 54.
55 Ibid., 15.
information, fourteenth-century accounts arrange them “to form an organic whole.”

Therefore, while some *accessus* harshly condemn the immorality of Ovid’s writings, they often include more specific information about classical poetry than morality. Most frequently, comments about morality in Ovidian *accessus* are generic using such phrases as "ethicae subponitur," and they support the notion, popular throughout the thirteenth century and after, that all poetry is ethical because all poetry explores human behaviors and, therefore, morals.

Some introductions identify information about Ovid’s life and historical context in order to test students on these topics. The “meta-narrative” of Ovid’s life became a means for uncovering the meaning of his works. For example, Hexter identifies a manuscript that defines the different types of exile in classical Rome for memorization. *Accessus* such as these reveal a tendency to acknowledge Ovid’s contentious political role instead of generically relegating his historical context to its

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56 Ibid., 19.
58 According to Gillespie, from 1150 to 1450 there was an increasing concern with the effect of poetics on readers—probably inspired by the twelfth-century rediscovery of Aristotle’s *Poetics* and its notions about the emotional response to art. Along with the reintroduction of Aristotelian learning, and its dissection of topics into their smallest constituent parts, came Aristotle’s notion of poetry as being affective, leading to catharsis and other such emotional responses. Allen discusses the tendency to view all poetry as ethical during the Middle Ages, pointing out that the commentaries and *accessus* that fail to do so are rare. Allen claims that the only exceptions to the *accessus* treating the *Metamorphoses* in this manner deal with cosmology in the beginning of the poem, but even these examples use an ethical classification to explain Ovid’s text. Allen, *The Ethical Poetic*, 7-9; and Gillespie, “The Study of Classical Authors,” 145-7.
59 Michael Calabrese discusses how Ovid’s biography works as a meta-narrative that informs Chaucer’s adaptation of his works. Michael A. Calabrese, *Chaucer’s Ovidian Arts of Love* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1994).
60 Hexter, *Ovid in Medieval Schooling*, 9.
Christian applications. Many of these accessus identify Ovid’s fraught relationship with Emperor Augustus. William of Orléans, for example, explains Ovid’s political position after defining the three types of transformations in the *Metamorphoses*:

> Intencio auctoris prosequitur materiam, eciam ad laudem Augusti et Romanorum terminare librum suum. Utilitas legentis cognicio fabularum, auctoris vero est Augusti et Romanorum reconciliacio, quos offenderat per Ovidium *De Arte*, sive delectacio.

In these lines, William acknowledges Ovid’s rift not only with Augustus, but also with the city and empire. Illustrating what Coulson regards as an interpretation of a characteristically “inveterate pragmatist,” William claims that the dispute resulted from Ovid’s writing, not his personal life, thereby presenting Ovid’s words as powerful material that can either destroy or mend political relationships. The passage then states that the potent words of the *Ars amatoria* also ruined the poet’s relationship with Rome itself—thereby suggesting that literature is supposed to function as public writing and Ovid’s did not. As the subsequent chapters reveal, such points about Ovid’s difficult political position left lasting impressions on Chaucer, Gower, and Lydgate. Yet, according to Ghisalberti, the accessus for the

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62 [The author’s intention follows the subject, since he ends his book in praise of Augustus and Rome. The usefulness for the reader is the knowledge of fables, but for the author it was the reconciliation with Augustus and the Romans, whom he had offended with Ovid’s *Ars amatoria*, or enjoyment.] My translation. Ibid., Accessus lines 46-9.

63 Coulson, “Hitherto Unedited Lives of Ovid (I),” 156.

64 Public writing gains popularity during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, as is exemplified by Lydgate’s *Fall of Princes*, which will be discussed later.
Metamorphoses mostly focused on the poem’s structure, placing Ovid’s narratives into groups to demonstrate how the Metamorphoses weaves together a continuous narration.65 These structural emphases have not yet been addressed in studies of medieval vernacular appropriations of the Metamorphoses, but the following chapters and the composite commentaries below will expressly address this unacknowledged medieval method of interpretation.

Metamorphoses Commentary Formats

Chaucer, Gower, and Lydgate were also influenced by the diverse commentaries and schoolbook annotations, which employed a greater variety of paradigms than the accessus. To begin with, some commentaries exist in a catena format, which only copies a few words from the primary text in each lemma to provide a reference point for its explications.66 Catena commentaries were especially popular during the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries.67 However, almost all extant commentaries produced after 1250 are in scholia, which transmit notes in the same manuscript as the primary text. Nonetheless, the formats of scholia also vary: scribes would write some notes in the margins around the text, some would write them interlinearly, and some used both areas.68 In addition, the

66 The catena format was popular after it originated in Germany during the eleventh century. John O. Ward, "From marginal gloss to catena commentary: the eleventh-century origins of a rhetorical teaching tradition in the medieval West," Paregon 13:2 (1996): 109-120.
68 Coulson, "Ovid’s Metamorphoses in the school tradition of France," 49.
same comments could be transmitted in both *catena* and *scholion* formats. David T. Gura distinguishes between the functions of the *catena* commentaries and the *scholion*, declaring the former to be a primary text and the latter to be a secondary one (with the primary source being glossed). According to Malcolm Parkes, the variations in manuscript formats reflect the changing demands of schoolmasters, students, and readers in general. The types of comments for the *Metamorphoses* also indicate a diverse reading population. Coulson explains that exegetical approaches of commentaries range from providing ethical examinations (which mostly take the form of allegorizations), utilitarian approaches (such as prose paraphrases, grammar explications, and literal explanations of allusions and difficult sections of the text), and grammar explications with ethical frameworks and sophisticated literary analysis.

**Format I: The Mythographic Tradition**

The mythographic tradition was the first major commentary tradition to incorporate Ovidian materials, but it tended to do so by distancing the text from the author. Marianne Pade defines these compilations as pragmatic and easy reference

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69 William of Thiegiis’s commentary, for example, uniquely exists in both forms, and it is the only *catena* commentary copied after 1230 in France. Coulson, “William of Thiegiis and Latin Commentary,” 486.


sources that assisted readers with allusions to the gods, heroes, and mythical places that they found in classical literature (particularly the texts written by Virgil, Statius, and Ovid). In general, mythographic commentaries are concise, distributing no mythic interpretations and only a minimal amount of factual information about the characters’ lineage and geography. Pade also explains that these commentaries were produced during a period when other Ovidian commentaries—especially prose paraphrases and allegorical works, abounded. Pade thus demonstrates that the mythographic text does not displace other commentary formats; it is a companion and a reference source for novice readers of mythology, and that includes all Greco-Roman mythology, not only Ovid’s. This commentary trend emerged during the fourth century, but it flourished during the sixth century with writers like Fulgentius. Technically, Gregory Hays takes issue with the term “mythographer” being applied to Fulgentius because it implies predominantly secular and pagan interests, whereas Fulgentius infuses his works with moral and Christian edifications. Therefore, the word “mythography” is employed here hesitantly with the stipulation that despite efforts to define distinct commentary

74 Ibid., 160.
75 Ibid., 160.
categories of exegesis, the late antique and medieval periods lacked such clear
delineations between their hermeneutical agendas.

Such overlap can be seen in the writings of the most influential
“mythographic” writer, Fulgentius. Fulgentius the mythographer, not to be confused
with the bishop of Ruspe, wrote four commentaries for Greco-Roman materials:
*Mitologiae, De aetatibus mundi et hominis, Expositio sermonum antiquorum,* and
*Expositio Virgilianae continentiae*—three of which were frequently transmitted
together (excluding the *De aetatibus*).  
78 The *Mitologiae* and *Expositio Virgilianae continentiae* were especially distributed in the same manuscripts.  
79 Hays proposes that the *Mitologiae*, an allegorical treatment of Greek myth, was written either
during the mid 540s or soon after 550.  
80 The *Mitologiae* was influential for several
subsequent mythographic writers, including John Ridevall who wrote *Fulgentius metaforalis* during the fifteenth century. Fulgentius’s commentary offered material
for many expressly Christian writers. The *Mitologiae* was useful for Christian
authors because it demonstrates that Fulgentius does not endorse pagan mythology,
he does not believe that they are true, and he presents no details that would be
objectionable for a Christian audience; yet, unlike later moralizing commentators, he

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78 Ibid., 164-5 & 243; and Ziolkowski, *The Virgilian Tradition*, 660.
80 Hays, “The Date and Identity of Fulgentius the Mythographer,” 244.
does not create overt Christian interpretations (such as the identification of
Hercules as Christ).  

Richard H. and Mary A. Rouse point out that the compatibility between
Christianity and paganism in mythographic commentaries perpetuated new
momentum for them during the thirteenth century—a period that they consider to
be the age of the compiler.82 This revival went so far as to induct Ovid into the
faculties of theology when English and Norman Cluniac monks neutralized pagan
myth as Lactantius, Fulgentius, and Isidore had. Clark also credits Boethius’s
Consolatio philosophiae for initiating the mythographic tradition when he
incorporated aspects of both Ovid’s Amores and Metamorphoses to present the
stylistic and figurative values of Ovidian characters and narratives.83 The
commentators who appropriated this mythographic approach include Remigius,
Alberic, the second Alberic, the Digby Mythographer, the second and third “Vatican
mythographers,”84 John Ridevall, Thomas Walsingham, and writers of anonymous
cribs, genealogies and mythographic summaries. Such works, which recast Christian
allegory in terms of exempla, inspired Beryl Smalley to classify such efforts as the
result of “classicizing friars,” who incorporated classical history and literature into

81 Ibid., 240-1.
82 Richard H. and Mary A. Rouse, Authentic Witnesses: Approaches to Medieval Texts and
83 Hays even suggests that Boethius and Fulgentius share many of the same literary
conventions and mythological details. Clark, “Introduction,” 5-11; and Hays, “The Date and
Identity of Fulgentius the Mythographer,” 171.
84 Technically, the Third Vatican Mythographer is known as Alberic of London, who wrote a
compendium discussing the genealogy of the gods—as did the anonymous Second Vatican
their Judeo-Christian biblical exegesis.⁸⁵ Smalley notices that most of these classical incorporations were derived from secondary sources.⁸⁶ Mostly focusing on the friars in Oxford and Cambridge, Smalley identifies the overlapping fates of biblical and pagan exegesis in the scholastic world.⁸⁷

Such mythographers were creating a curriculum to benefit monastics.⁸⁸ Yet secular and religious clerks alike regarded Ovid as a reliable authority for higher studies because mythographies presented pagan myths to complement Christian ones.⁸⁹ In essence, these works allowed Ovidian material to be incorporated into an encyclopedic collection of narratives that treated them as pieces of a universal mythology, or scientia universalis;⁹⁰ that aligned them with Christian mores.⁹¹ This practice expanded the circulation of the Metamorphoses, or at least portions of it, explaining why vernacular writers like Chaucer were writing Judeo-Christian narratives alongside Greco-Roman ones. Clerics used Ovidian figures to discuss contemporary themes for literate audiences, including literate lay people.⁹² This approach even trickled into visual art; in particular, the second half of the

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⁸⁵ Smalley, English Friars and Antiquity, 28-44.
⁸⁶ Ibid., 151-2.
⁸⁷ Ibid., 28-44.
⁹⁰ Seznec notices a general encyclopedic interest in medieval culture since the age of Isidore. Seznec claims that an obsession a scientia universalis grew from the twelfth century, compiling material to assign “natural,” “moral,” and “historical” values to it. Seznec, The Survival of the Pagan Gods, 123.
⁹¹ Allen attributes such interests in the universal or general applications of poetry (or ethical writing from a medieval perspective) instead of in particular examples the result of Averroes’s adaptation of Aristotle’s poetics. See, for example, Allen, The Ethical Poetic, 22-9.
⁹² Clark, “Introduction,” 19.
fourteenth century saw a wide array of mythographic illustrations that, similar to mythographic commentaries, defined and clarified Ovid’s mythology. However, unlike its visual counterpart, the literary tradition employed “euhemerism, scientific and moral allegorization, etymologization. More often than not, the gods do not really survive the operation; they become their explanations.” Euhemerism was an especially important tool for mythographers and their predecessors as it transformed myths into historical narratives mostly by reclassifying pagan gods as humans. This practice, created by Euhemerus, was even used during the classical period because educated Romans encountered the same struggle as medieval Christians when aligning traditional mythology with their literal beliefs. Euhemerism and the mythographic art, therefore, allowed Romans and medieval Christians to study the artistic craft of classical poets like Ovid without being hindered by their polytheistic content.

93 The mythographic tradition also relates to the growing number of illuminated manuscripts during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries because these manuscripts tended to focus on illuminating the figures of the gods. However, other than one manuscript of Pierre Bersuire’s Reductorium morale [Treviso, Biblioteca civica, MS 344 (Italy, s. xiv)], there are no known illuminated manuscripts for Latin commentaries. Illuminations tend to be reserved for vernacular Ovidian commentaries, especially the Ovide moralisé. In addition, because vernacular commentaries are less prevalent for English writers than Latin commentaries, I will gloss over their role in the mythographic tradition, referring readers to Carla Lord for more information about the matter. Carla Lord, “A Survey of Imagery in Medieval Manuscripts of Ovid’s Metamorphoses and Related Commentaries,” in Ovid in the Middle Ages, ed. James G. Clark, Frank T. Coulson, and Kathryn L. McKinley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 257-83.

94 Allen, The Ethical Poetic, 223.

95 Euhemerus’s work was one of the first books to be translated from Greek to Latin. Ennius’s translation of Euhemerus converted Picus, Janus, and Saturn into princes of Latium. Some Romans disregarded euhemerism as absurd, but it was eagerly revived when the Christian era began with apologists and Church Fathers using it as a tool against polytheistic texts. Seznec, The Survival of the Pagan Gods, 12.
The Third Vatican Mythography. All three Vatican mythographers were invested in disarming and disseminating pagan mythology in the Middle Ages. For example, the First Vatican Mythographer employs similar language and some of the same episodes as Fulgentius’s *Mitologiae*.\(^{96}\) In fact, Hays argues that the First Vatican Mythographer was copying from Fulgentius, failing to remove some of Fulgentius’s rhetorical flourishes, which fit jarringly with the First Vatican Mythographer’s own bland style.\(^{97}\) Yet the Third Vatican Mythographer, unlike his two predecessors, focuses on etymologies\(^{98}\) and allegorizations while repeatedly acknowledging his ancient authorities—including Ovid. His text, also called the *Liber Ymaginum deorum*, can be found in forty extant manuscripts.\(^{99}\) The work begins with a preface about Syrophanes, a rich Egyptian who constructs a statue to honor his deceased son. The mythographer claims that visitors’ reverence for this statue caused these people to create various names for it, thereby producing polytheism (that is to say, multiple names for the same false god). The majority of the text is devoted to moralizing the most prominent gods of Roman mythology, such as

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\(^{96}\) Hays, “The Date and Identity of Fulgentius the Mythographer,” 173.

\(^{97}\) Ibid., 174.

\(^{98}\) Ronald Pepin points out that the Third Vatican Mythographer derives many of his etymologies from Isidore of Seville’s *Etymologiae*. Ronald E. Pepin, *The Vatican Mythographers* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 7.

\(^{99}\) The identity of the Third Vatican Mythographer is much debated, but the two primary arguments identify Alberic or Alexander Neckam. Pepin believes that Neckam is the more believable author. Ibid., 9.
Saturn, Jupiter, and Juno. The remaining four chapters discuss Proserpina, Perseus, Hercules, and the twelve zodiac signs.\(^{100}\)

Hercules takes his place amongst the major Roman gods because of his deified father, Jupiter. But the mythographer only aligns Hercules with the gods to convert him back into a man when introducing him in the following manner:

Herculem quoque Jovis filium fuisse dicunt. Hic ab aliis invictus, Omphalae tamen amare subjacuit, quae eum nere et mulierum officia coëgit exercere. Hercules igitur quasi ἤρων χλεος virorum fortium Gloria, interpretatur. Hic Alcaeipos dicitur, unde et Alcides nominatur; αλχη enim Graece praesumptio dicitur. Nam et Alcmenam matrem habet, quae salsum interpretatur. Nec mirum. Etenim ex igne ingenii, ut ex Jove; ex praesumptione, id est animositate, ut ex avo Alcaeo; et ex sale sapientiae, ut ex matre Alcmena, virorum fortium nascitur Gloria; quae tamen a libido superatur. οµφαλη enim Graece umbilicus dicitur. Libido autem in umbilico mulieribus dominatur. Ostenditur ergo, quod libido etiam invictam domat virtutem.\(^{101}\)

This quotation begins by identifying Hercules according to patronymics; not only is he a son of Jove, he is also the grandson of Alcaeus, explaining why writers (namely

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\(^{100}\) Pepin claims that the text’s conclusion is abrupt, indicating that it is incomplete. See Ibid., 10-1.

\(^{101}\) [They say that Hercules was also the son of Jove. He was unconquered by others, but for love he subjected himself to Omphale, who forced him to weave and to perform women’s duties. Therefore “Hercules” is as if to say heron cleos, which means “the glory of strong men.” He is said to be the grandson of Alcaeus, and thus is also named Alcides, for alce in Greek means “boldness.” He also has Alcmena for his mother; her name means “salted.” No wonder, for the glory of strong men is born from the fire of intellect, as from Jove; from boldness, that is, courage, as from his grandfather Alcaeus; from the salt of wisdom, as from his mother Alcmena—which, however, is overcome by lust, for the navel is called omphale in Greek. Moreover, lust in their navel rules women. Thus it is shown that lust even overcomes unconquered strength.] Georius Henricus Bode, ed. Scriptores Rerum Mythicarum Latini Tres Romae Nuper Reperti, Vol. I (Celle, 1834; reprint Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung: Hildesheim, 1968), Mythographus Tertius, 13.1.17-29. Translated by Pepin, The Vatican Mythographers, 13.1.17-29.
Ovid) “confusingly” refer to him as “Alcides.” Yet in addition to such a genealogy, the mythographer defines him etymologically as strong, bold, and “salsum.” Despite his inherited etymological strengths, this passage explains that Hercules’s downfall results from a feminine lust that can defeat any type of physical strength. Interestingly, the Third Vatican Mythographer never discusses Deianira, Nessus, Lichas, or Iole, whom Ovid depicts as the primary characters at the end of Hercules’s mortal days. Instead, the mythographer uses Virgil to narrate the end of Hercules, omitting the Ovidian complications that fill the majority of Book 9 in the Metamorphoses. The commentator seems to be uninterested in telling a tale, proving instead that his primary goal is to explain the various references to Hercules that his audience might encounter.

The Digby Mythographer’s De Natura deorum. The anonymous twelfth-century De Natura deorum adapts large portions of the Third Vatican Mythographer’s commentary. The one extant copy of the work can be found in Bodleian MS Digby 221, written in early fourteenth-century English Gothic script. Although this text only remains in one manuscript, Allen claims that it was a sort of “odd link in a byway of the mythographic tradition,” influencing Giovanni Boccaccio, Nicholas Trevet, Robert Holkot, and Thomas Walsingham. Allen claims, “the book was certainly written after 1159, probably after 1180, but not long after 1179.” Allen, “An Anonymous Twelfth-Century ‘De Natura Deorum,’” 352-3 & 361-2.
contains a copy of Alberic’s mythography, Alexander Neckam’s commentary on Martianus Capella’s *de Nuptiis*, and Hermes Trismegistus’s *de Sex Principiis*.  In other words, the manuscript collects encyclopedic works pertaining to mythography and cosmology. The Digby mythographer is particularly interested in euhemerism, which he uses to present Ovid’s work as a genealogy of people more than a mythology of gods. To do so, the Digby Mythographer, like the Third Vatican Mythographer, begins the text by describing the origins of pagan gods. However, the *De natura deorum* begins with Demogorgon, who is not the originator of the gods according to ancient Roman mythology. Teresa Hankey insists that this god was created by an incorrect manuscript Latin transliteration for the Greek δημογοργός, who was the god too horrible to name. Nonetheless, by the time the text reaches

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104 The mythographer writes in his preface: “Superficiem totius genealogiae tam hominum quam deorum totiusque mythologiae quae non solummodo in Ovidianis sed in quibuslibet auctoribus dispersae sunt, et compendiose more nostro colligere proposuimus, communem potius utilitatem attendentes quam otium nostrum aut quietem.” [We propose to bring together an overview of all genealogy (as much of men as much of the gods) and of all mythology, which is not only in Ovid but dispersed in all authors—to bring them together collectively, as is our wont, attending more to common use than to leisure]. Virginia Brown, ed., *Liber de Natura Deorum*, in *Medieval Studies* 34 (1972): Praefatio.
105 This name came to be used frequently in mythographic works from the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries, famously finding its way into Boccaccio’s *Genealogie deorum gentilium libri*. Hankey believes that this incorrect transposition originated from Lactantius Placidus’s commentary on Statius. However, Pade suggests that “Demogorgon” can be traced back to the name “Demorigon” used sometime between 1076 and 1099. Pade believes that the great number of errors such as this one can be traced back to the no longer extant work of Theodontius; and given the preponderance of peculiarities like “Demogorgon” in subsequent mythologies, Pade deems Theodontius the Fourth Vatican Mythographer. Teresa Hankey, “Un nuovo codice delle ‘Genealogie deorum’ di Pablo da Perugia,” *Studia sul Boccaccio* 18 (1989): 74–5; and Marianne Pade, “The Fragments of Theodontius in Boccaccio’s *Genealogie Deorum Gentilium Libri*,” *Avignon & Naples: Italy in France – France in
the story of Cupid, Apollo, and Daphne, it mostly follows the order and content of the *Metamorphoses*. At this point the commentary becomes a type of *narratio fabularum*—“some of which seems to be direct, original summary of Ovid. The rest explains in some detail stories to which Ovid only alludes.”

The Digby mythographer presents one such *narratio fabularum* for Hercules in his sixty-first mythographic entry. The Hercules section begins by introducing its main cast of characters, when it says:


As advertised, the mythographer focuses on human genealogy, tracing not only the parents of Hercules, but also his half-brother and great grandfather, Perseus. As Allen explains, the *De Natura deorum* tends to disregard conventional allegories, focusing more on background details and character relationships than spiritual enlightenment. This passage then enhances the genealogical focus by excising

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108 [Perseus begat Gorgophon, who begot Electryon, who begot Amphitryon, was the son of Jove and Danae. Hercules strangled two snakes in his cradle. For Alcmena was keeping her two sons in a crib—to wit, Hercules was the son of Jove, and Hippolytus was the son of Amphitryon.] My translation. Brown, ed., *Liber de Natura Deorum*, LVI.1-2.

narrative details, especially the textual history that depicts these figures as gods. Abbreviating Hercules’s *vita* even more than the Third Vatican Mythographer, the Digby Mythographer ignores narrative development to the point that many of the sentences even lack transitions.

However, the *Liber de natura deorum* includes a few artistic flourishes. For example, after introducing Hercules, the anonymous writer states, “Unde Statius inducit eum dubitantem an faveat Graecis an Thebanis, dicens, ‘intento dubitat Tirynthius arcu.’” Here the mythographer depicts Hercules’s inner conflict as he grapples with the question about which side of the dispute to support. This heroic tableau with the hero frozen in indecisiveness presents artistic merit beyond the mythographer’s encyclopedic tendencies. But, as the mythographer acknowledges, Statius created the moment. Quotations such as these clarify the anonymous writer’s desire to focus exclusively on “factual” details, leaving the flowery prose to classical writers. As a result, Allen regards the overall work as an uneven reference book: sometimes the mythographer includes etymologies, sometimes he provides elaborate interpretations (as in the case of the Hercules myth), and oftentimes he omits interpretations altogether. Instead of looking to Ovid as a rhetorical master, the Digby and Third Vatican Mythographers focus on mining the *Metamorphoses* for historical details, sifting the fantastic elements from the more believable aspects of

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110 [Whence Statius represents Hercules questioning whether he ought to protect the Greeks or the Thebans, saying “Hercules wavers in judgment with his bow having been stretched out.”] Brown, ed., *Liber de Natura Deorum*, LVI.3.

his narratives. The result is the treatment of Ovidian lore as a version of history that demands to be converted into incontrovertible statements of truth.

*John Ridevall’s Fulgentius metaforalis.* John Ridevall, like all mythographers, positions himself as an explicator of the truths concealed by pagan artistry. Defining what Ridevall perceives to be the Christian truth behind the pagan gods, the fourteenth-century *Fulgentius metaforalis* begins by identifying the nature of idolatry and its origins—much as the Third Vatican Mythography had done before. Also like the Third Vatican Mythographer, Ridevall focuses on defining what he perceives to be the most significant mythological figures instead of explicating all of the *Metamorphoses.* Ridevall mostly adapts the order and pagan deities found in Fulgentius’s fourth-century mythography, but he provides new chapter headings. In addition, Allen notes how Ridevall only uses Fulgentius’s mythographic material to espouse his own ethical agenda.\(^{112}\)

*Thomas Walsingham’s Archana deorum.*\(^{113}\) Thomas Walsingham similarly adjusts the mythographic tradition to integrate ethical commentary into his *Archana*

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\(^{112}\) Ridevall’s text, however, is not presented as commentary for Fulgentius’s work; it circulated independently—that is to say, it was not disseminated as commentary in the margins of Fulgentius’s text. A.G. Rigg, *A History of Anglo-Latin Literature 1066-1422* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 222-3 & 255.

\(^{113}\) While Robert A. Van Kluyve entitles the commentary “De Archana deorum,” and while the following entry refers to Kluyve’s edition of the text, his transcription has been treated with universal suspicion—resulting from errors such as the lack of agreement between the preposition “de” and the declension of “archana.” Therefore, it is with hesitance that I cite Kluyve’s work, and only with the purpose of addressing the commentary’s general
deorum. Participating in the wide-scale manuscript production underway in his St Albans monastery, Walsingham was the most prolific writer of this large scholastic community.\textsuperscript{114} Writing the second study of the *Metamorphoses* by an English monk (the first of which is now lost, but is believed to have been composed by Walter of Peterborough), Walsingham drew from a variety of insular and continental materials.\textsuperscript{115} With sources like Pierre Bersuire, John of Garland, Arnulf of Orléans, Alberic of London (whom Walsingham calls Alexander Neckam), the three Vatican mythographers, and presumably most of the other major mythographers,\textsuperscript{116} Walsingham compiles his commentary from a virtual “who’s who” list among Ovidian commentators. This mixture of methods for commenting on the *Metamorphoses* has created a lack of consensus when classifying the *Archana deorum*. It resembles a prose paraphrase or grammar text (despite its lack of descriptions of the grammar that Ovid uses) because its summaries identify complicated and obscure references.\textsuperscript{117} Yet the commentary also belongs to the mythographic tradition because of its emphasis on euhemeristic historicization of classical mythology and its reliance on mythographic texts like the *De Natura deorum*. Clark explains that these disparate interpretations of the *Archana deorum* are the product of its two extant manuscripts belonging to two different recensions:

\textsuperscript{114} Clark, *A Monastic Renaissance at St Albans*, 163-4.
\textsuperscript{115} Ibid., 164.
\textsuperscript{117} Clark, “Ovid in the Monasteries,” 189.
the first of which was written as a resource for novices learning Latin, and the second of which was composed for more sophisticated readers to interpret the deeper meanings of Ovid’s “fables.” Nonetheless, Clark concludes that the English monk was primarily a contemporary historian, treating pagan mythology accordingly.

This combination of commentary efforts can be observed in Walsingham’s introduction to Hercules. Following the order and book designations of the *Metamorphoses*, Walsingham begins Book 9 with a paraphrase of Achelous’s account to Theseus of his fight with Hercules. After the paraphrase, the *Archana deorum* explains, “Et hic est sensus huius fabule, prout patet pleniūs in eadem, ubi Hercules comparat Achelou serpentī paludis Lernē.” In this first explanation of the struggle between Achelous and Hercules, Walsingham focuses on the literal meaning of the tale while also treating Achelous’s transformation into a serpent as a metaphor. Walsingham thus aligns himself with the mythographic tradition by correlating pagan mysticism with Christian rationalism. But he takes the commentary tradition one step further, interpreting the polytheism in pagan mythology as figurative poetic language. Clark points out that Walsingham, unlike

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118 Clark, *A Monastic Renaissance at St Albans*, 173-6 & 195.
119 Ibid., 163-4.
other fourteenth-century commentators, did not regard all pagan myths as lies, only their use of ornate language.\textsuperscript{121}

Thus Walsingham offers a variety of approaches to Ovidian narratives, suggesting that some transformations are figurative accounts of occurrences in the natural world, but the Zodiac descriptions are utter fabrications; and while some Ovidian myths can only be understood in terms of allegory, above all they provide historical information. This historical emphasis rejects Bersuire’s blanket moralizations by emphasizing secular interpretations and avoiding Bersuire’s accounts of mythic figures as representations of Christ or the Holy Church.\textsuperscript{122} After Walsingham rationalizes the metamorphosis of Achelous as a metaphor, he has the space to interpret its underlying significations. The text interprets the interaction between Hercules and Achelous, saying:

\begin{quote}
De contentione Herculis et Acheloi pro Deianira historicus sensus est quod Achelous per cautelas voluit surripuisse Herculii Deianiram, et ideo dicitur in serpentem mutatus, sed tamen sua sapientia vicit astutiam Acheloi, qui fuit quidam dominus in Calidonia et habebat illic aquarum multarum possessionem. Qui postea convertit se in taurum, id est movit contra Herculum aptertum bellum. Sed Hercules, fracto uno cornu eius, vicit eum, id est perempta altera parte sui exercitus eum ad deditionem compulsit.\textsuperscript{123}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{121} Clark, \textit{A Monastic Renaissance at St Albans}, 201.

\textsuperscript{122} Ibid., 200-3.

\textsuperscript{123} [The historical sense for the struggle between Hercules and Achelous on account of Deianira is that Achelous wanted to steal Deianira away from Hercules cautiously. And, therefore, it is said that he was changed into a serpent, but nevertheless his (i.e. Hercules’s) wisdom conquered Achelous’s craftiness; (Achelous), who was a certain ruler in Calidonia, was keeping the possession of many waters at that place. Afterwards he turned himself into a bull; that is, he set out open war against Hercules. But Hercules conquered him by breaking off one of his horns; that is, Hercules forced him to surrender after annihilating one part of his army.] My translation. Ibid., 9.1.41-8.
This passage begins by circumscribing the “historicus sensus,” using a phrase that appears frequently throughout the text. In contrast to the demarcation provided in the preceding quotation about the “sensus” of the Hercules myth, this section broadcasts its specific exegetical agenda. Walsingham thus presents the fight between Achelous and Hercules not only as a metaphor, but also as a historical record. Beneath the transformations of Achelous lies a hidden meaning about a noteworthy battle between the two, resulting in conquest and surrender. The narrative thereby relegates Deianira’s role by means of the two warring armies, converting it into a tale about conquest and empire instead of love and rejection.

Despite the *Archana deorum*’s emphasis on empire building and despite Walsingham’s decidedly English perspective, it was not a popular text in England. Written in early-fifteenth-century England, this commentary is more important because of the environment in which it was created than for the readings it generated. A.G. Rigg points out the significance of Walsingham as a near contemporary of Chaucer and Gower, illustrating how English poets and scholars shared a general interest in Ovidian lore. Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of Walsingham’s Ovidian contribution is its lack of Christian allegorization, focusing strictly on the literal and historical level of meaning.124 In fact, he replaces the increasingly popular overt Christian allegorizations such as those found in Pierre Bersuire’s *Ovidius moralizatus* (which this chapter addresses below) with readings from earlier commentaries. Clark notes that the *Archana deorum* is a testament to

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the increased availability of the earliest medieval commentaries from the continent in England during the second half of the fourteenth century. As the next three chapters will reveal, this dissemination of earlier continental commentaries in fourteenth-century England lends essential insight to what Chaucer, Gower, and Lydgate are doing with Ovidian material during the same period.

**Format II: Florilegia**

*Florilegia*, on the other hand, were mostly popular during the twelfth century, when Ovid and classical education regained popularity. Like mythographic texts, they are an archetypal form of *compilatio* that use portions of Ovidian myths as if the lines exhibit static and enduring significance. *Florilegia* collected moral sentences and precepts from patristic, ecclesiastic, as well as pagan writers. It was a particularly prominent literary form in Orléans, where most classical texts were being copied at this time. Many of these compiled excerpts were designed for monastic readers and preachers, who were viewing Ovidian material through a strictly Christian didactic lens. They were also important

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125 Clark believes that Walsingham was especially interested in Arnulf of Orléans. Clark, *A Monastic Renaissance at St Albans*, 196-204.
128 Gillespie, "The Study of Classical Authors," 179.
129 Yet, as Clark mentions, *florilegia* were among a variety of approaches to compiling excerpts from classical authors like Ovid. There were also *lemmata* and *sententiae* being compiled during this period—both of which contained shorter excerpts than *florilegia*, and the latter of which tended to focus on themed readings of classical literature. Clark, "Ovid in
educational tools for students because they collected samples of eloquence that were used for dictaminal training. Scholars such as Gillespie also attribute the accumulation of *florilegia* to the efforts of grammar-school masters and manuscript compilers to eliminate or minimize the adverse effects of Ovid's immoral and pagan literature during the twelfth century.\(^{130}\) According to Gillespie, *florilegia* offered students standard, but stringent, means for interpreting pieces of morally complex texts such as Ovid’s; these students kept their *florilegia* as they kept their anthologies with them throughout their careers. He also claims that *florilegia* were medieval readers’ primary point of access to Ovid, making audiences ill prepared to face the hermeneutical challenges of Ovid’s writings.\(^{131}\) However, while clerics might have frequently drawn from *florilegia* the variety of Ovidian materials in high and later medieval England attest to the fact that medieval audiences accessed his pagan mythology by way of more commentary traditions than *florilegia* alone.

**Format III: Philological Commentaries**

As Hexter explains, reading classical texts was the ends and the means for studying grammar in medieval schoolrooms.\(^{132}\) Grammar commentaries were mostly written in verse from 1100-1300. For example, Alexander of Villedieu’s *Doctrinale puerorum* was a versified Latin grammar, written sometime around 1200

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\(^{130}\) There are two major *florilegia* on the continent: *Florilegium Gallicum* and *Florilegium Angelicum*.

\(^{131}\) Gillespie, “The Study of Classical Authors,” 5.

\(^{132}\) Hexter, *Ovid in Medieval Schooling*, 5.
in leonine hexameter and used throughout Western Europe. Additionally, Flemish grammarian Everard de Béthune’s *Graecismus*, composed sometime around 1212 and extant in at least 123 manuscripts, explained Latin grammar in verse. Yet most commentaries written after 1300 were in prose. The pre-fourteenth century popularity of verse was most likely a product of the proliferation of town and village schools during this period, where fewer students could afford individual copies of the texts and verse helped them memorize their lessons. Verse and prose philological commentaries alike were directed toward elementary students, guiding them through difficult passages by explaining declensions, conjugations, idioms, metaphors, meanings of words, and, like the mythographic tradition, defining the mythological references. William of Orléans and Arnulf of Orléans wrote two of the most copied and adapted grammar commentaries for the *Metamorphoses* during the thirteenth century, and their influence lasted until the fifteenth century.

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135 While Clark argues that monastic schools never lost their prominence, Orme’s point stands that there were at least more secular schools than before. Nicholas Orme, *Medieval Schools: From Roman Britain to Renaissance England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 90.
William of Orléans’s *Versus bursarii*. William of Orléans commentary, *Versus bursarii*, covers Ovid’s entire poetic corpus and was written sometime around 1200.\(^\text{136}\) The text, which is most frequently found in *catena* format, explains only the sections with syntax that William considered difficult. He clearly organizes his work for elementary readers by introducing each book of the *Metamorphoses* with a breakdown of its major plot points and the lines in which they occur. After the brief synopsis, William explains the sections that he considers the most difficult to understand, demarcating his explications with the terms “continua” and “construe.”

For example, the beginning of Book 9 introduces Hercules’s contest with Acheleous in the following manner:

\begin{quote}
Nam, quod te iactas. Continua: Tu dicis filium Iovis et Alcmenes, sed propter hoc non debes habere puellam, nam, pro quia, petis patrem, adulterio matris in hoc, quod iactas et ita a tercio versu incipienda est contractio. [Met. 9,28] Non fortiter imperat ire, quia non aggressus es me, ut ira monebat. Ille enim videtur imperare ire, qui moderatur ire, sed illi imperat ire, qui paret ire. Construe: Imperat ire non fortiter accense, .i. non multum accense. [Met. 9,76] Forma precaria, .i. per preces acquisita, et est nomen legale a quo eciam dicitur quoddam adverbium ‘precario’, quod ita ponitur: obtineo precario hoc, .i. per preces.\(^\text{137}\)
\end{quote
In this passage and throughout the commentary, William marks his notes about difficult grammar by means of the term “construe.” William traces the word “precaria” to other uses of its root. Such philological notes differ from the sections beneath the heading of “continua,” which indicate sections in which the commentator provides extra mythographic and narrative details. William begins this passage expanding the literal meaning of the quotation “nam, quod te iactas,” determining that young students would not comprehend the nature of the complex insults that Ovid crafts for Achelous. The resulting literal explication uses genealogy to explain the humor of Hercules’s attempt to elevate his stature by claiming to be a descendant of Jove because that deflates his stature as the illegitimate son of an adulterous woman. William thus explains the subtlety of the text, particularly how Ovid uses genealogical connections throughout the text to craft nuanced humor. In essence, William reveals that the tales about Hercules are extensions of those about his parents, presenting narrative units as cohesive instead of discrete and individual. One should note the absence of Christian moralization. Instead of uncovering hidden meanings as Thomas of Walsingham does, William focuses on uncovering the text’s literal sense. William’s philological commentary, while addressing Hercules’s actions in broad moral terms about human behavior, 

*through prayers.* My translation. William of Orléans, *Metamorphoses (Ovidius Maior)*, 9.834-41. Notice that the Latin here is disjointed and seemingly nonsensical because William makes notes in shorthand. The underlined phrases refer to words from the *Metamorphoses*, making it difficult to follow his points without directly consulting Ovid’s poem. In fact, most of the commentaries discussed in this chapter will use similarly choppy Latin sentences, frequently using apposition, which makes them seem esoteric to modern readers.
imagines individual Ovidian tales as part of a larger narrative within the
Metamorphoses as well as within philological and mythological history. The most
important point to take away here is that even in the most elementary of grammar-
school texts, the Metamorphoses was treated as a continuous poem instead of
individual episodes—an important distinction as we turn to the frame narratives of
Chaucer, Gower, and Lydgate.

Arnulf of Orléans’s Philological Commentary. Arnulf’s philological
commentary shares some of William’s exegetical practices, explicating grammar,
defining mythological references, and identifying the narrative structure of the
Metamorphoses. These interpretations were foundational for the field of Ovidian
criticism because this text is one of the earliest extant commentaries for the
Metamorphoses, and it remained popular with scholars and readers until the
fifteenth century. Arnulf wrote the philological commentary along with an
allegorical one, entitled Allegoriae, c. 1175.138 Gura explains that Arnulf’s two
commentaries used to exist as one and were not divided for separate circulations
until the thirteenth century. The original commentary consistently followed the
same order of interpretation in each book, moving from glosulae to mutationes to
allegoriae.139 Glosulae primarily discuss grammar and philology, devoting itself to

138 For more about Arnulf’s Allegorie, see the section below about moralizing commentaries.
139 Gura claims that these texts were originally composite commentary with four parts: an
accessus, philological glosses (glosulae), a list of transformations (mutationes), and an
literal explications much like William’s commentary. But *glosulae* also address syntax, style, etymology, geographical references, historical and mythological context, calendars, philosophical interpretations, rhetoric, and poetic structure. The mythological information mostly comes from the Vatican Mythographers and Hyginus.\(^{140}\)

Arnulf devotes many notes in his *glosulae* to explicating Ovid’s references. For example, he clarifies how Ovid names characters in a variety of manners. In relation to the beginning of Book 9, Arnulf writes, “Aonius est Hercules Thebanus.”\(^{141}\) Arnulf thus explains that “aonious” is a geographical reference that applies to Hercules because he is a Theban, thereby showing how Ovid uses geographical names to identify his characters. As Gura demonstrates, Arnulf’s *glosulae* focus mostly on “morphology, grammar, syntax, geographical locales, mythological references, patronyms and matronymics, and the general ability to understand clearly the expression of ideas conveyed by the Latin.”\(^{142}\) However, defining, identifying, and clarifying Ovid’s poetic principles and language and references are not Arnulf’s only goals. He also identifies some of Ovid’s more allegorical interpretation (*Allegoriae*). However, some post-thirteenth century manuscripts even circulate Arnulf’s *mutationes* independently from the rest of the commentary. Gura, “A Critical Edition and Study of Arnulf of Orléans’ philological commentary on Ovid’s Metamorphoses,” PhD diss., The Ohio State University, 2010, 19-24. (THE:CLA2010PHD873).

\(^{140}\) Ibid., 20 & 59-75.

\(^{141}\) [Aonius is Theban Hercules], Arnulf of Orléans, “Philological Commentary on Ovid’s Metamorphoses” (unedited collation, University of Notre Dame, 2011). Transcribed by Gura, 9.112.

complex and abstract rhetorical choices—particularly how the poem’s structure crafts a *carmen perpetuum*. Gura notices the structural link at the beginning of Book 9 that glosses “quae gemitus,” the first words of the book, as “Acheloi.” This note also “refers back to *Met*. VIII.884, *gemitus sunt uerba secuti* and portends the story of Achelous and Hercules which is about to be narrated.”

Arnulf proves to be an astute reader of how Ovid employs intratextual links, underscoring repeated phrases and allusions as a means for structural linking. Gura explains, “Arnulf cites Ovid’s use of particular place names, patronymics, and other themes and motifs which correspond to other books and sections of the poem.”

Some of Arnulf’s concatenations are even more complex, resembling William’s comments about how Ovid continues narratives in different sections of the text. Resembling William, Arnulf adds to Ovid’s narrative, pointing out that the reader should “construe” a particular section in a manner that he discloses or “continua” the narrative where he sees connections. For example, Arnulf writes, “*at te Nesse*: ita continua: non solum Herculem et Acheloum mouit amor uirginis sed etiam te, O Nesse.” In this note, Arnulf points out how Nessus’s love for Deianira is a continuation of the contest between Achelous and Hercules in that all of these narratives revolve around love for the girl. Instead of treating each narrative as a solitary unit of mythology, Arnulf presents Ovidian narratives as continuous and

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143 Ibid., 83.
144 Ibid., 82.
145 [*but you Nessus: connect thus: not only does love for the maiden (i.e. Deianira) inspire Hercules and Achelous but even you, O Nessus.*] Arnulf of Orléans, “Philological Commentary,” transcribed by Gura, 9.101.

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interrelated. Despite grammar and philology being Arnulf’s primary objectives for the commentary, he also discusses how Ovid uses the structure of the poem’s narrative—an emphasis that is of paramount importance for later medieval vernacular poets’ adaptations of Ovid.

**Format IV: Moralizing Commentaries**

As mentioned earlier, Arnulf also wrote an allegorical commentary (or an allegorical component to his commentary). His *Allegoriae* and the moralizing commentary tradition in general endow pagan mythology with edifying Christian meaning, most of which allegorize the *Metamorphoses*. Smalley points out that Christian allegoresis was developed by Jewish scholars assisting Christian scholars with interpreting Hebrew and the Old Testament.\(^{146}\) However, she points out that it came to be developed as a polemical weapon that helped to spread Christianity, blending sacred with profane interests.\(^{147}\) To do so, these commentaries propose that they are uncovering the hidden truths, or *integumenta*, beneath the surface of Ovid’s myths. Edouard Jeaneau traces the word “integumentum” to twelfth-century grammarians attempting to explain the moral meanings of both sacred and profane texts.\(^{148}\) Jeaneau indicates that there are two types of *integumenta*: those which provide useful and edifying meanings, and those which test true philosophical

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\(^{147}\) Ibid., 20 & 373.  
sentiments. In essence, moralizations transformed Ovid’s myths into didactic exempla. Seznec points out that this interpretive method dates back at least as far as the Stoics, but it gained new momentum and purpose with the medieval impulse to tailor Ovidian paganism for the mass consumption of Christian audiences in grammar schools, universities, monasteries, and churches.

Many scholars render such commentaries the sole influences on medieval vernacular writers, noting how writers like Jean de Meun clearly gravitated towards such Christian packaging of pagan mythology. Moralizing commentaries are also accorded exclusive responsibility for repopularizing the *Metamorphoses* during the Middle Ages. Clark posits the rise in popularity of allegorical commentaries as a response to the Wycliffite reform and its hostility towards poesy, stating that this shift in scholastic methods required new types of manuscripts during the twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth centuries. Yet this moralizing approach still clung to

149 Ibid., 87.
151 Seznec explains that the Stoics’ desire to reconcile popular religion with philosophy led them to interpret the gods as symbols for the physical world, their figures as indications of a spiritual significance, and their actions as representations of moral lessons. Seznec, *The Survival of the Pagan Gods*, 84-5.
old commentary practices. In their attempts to rationalize mythic figures, commentators frequently resorted to the euhemeristic methods from their mythographic forbears.

*Arnulf of Orléans’s Allegoriae super Ovidii Metamorphosin.* Arnulf’s historical, ethical, and tropological readings of Ovid influenced more moralizing commentators than any other. As already mentioned, Arnulf originally fashioned the *Allegoriae* as part of his philological commentary. When separated, the full moralizing text situates allegories at the end of each of Ovid’s fifteen books, reclassifying Ovid’s intentions from a Christian perspective. Yet Arnulf’s allegorizations add more than Christianity to pagan myths. For example, Arnulf expounds after Book 9:

> Et cum eum desiccavit, postea Achelous se vertit in taurum i. per varios rivulos derivare cepit. Eum tandem Hercules fere desiccavit. Unde fingitur unum de cornibus ei fregisse quod sacratum est Copie, nam terra illa reddita est copiosa quam prius aqua occupaverat.

Here Arnulf uncovers a *historicus sensus* similar to the one we observed in Walsingham’s fourteenth-century mythography. Arnulf also incorporates farming

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154 “Tropological” means the treatment of characters as personifications of good and evil.  
156 [And when Hercules had dried him up, afterwards Achelous transformed himself into a bull; that is to say, he began to flow through various small rivers. Nevertheless, Hercules dried him up altogether. From which point it is imagined that he broke one of the horns that was consecrated to Copia (goddess of abundance), because land there, which was formerly occupied by water, yielded abundance.] My translation. Arnulf of Orléans, *Allegoriae super Ovidii Metamorphosin*, ed. Ghisalberti, *Memorie del Reale Istituto lombardo di scienze e lettere. Classe di scienze matematiche e naturali* 24 (1932): 9.1.
details into his account. Instead of using tropological and historical allegories exclusively, he compares Ovidian myths to relatable contemporary settings.

Arnulf’s resourcefulness made him popular for centuries. Giovanni del Virgilio, Pierre Bersuire, and sixteenth-century northern European humanists tailored aspects of Arnulf’s text to their own agendas. In addition, his interpretations assumed many forms: sometimes scribes copied the entire Allegoriae, sometimes they placed Arnulf’s comments in the margins of Metamorphoses manuscripts, and, after the thirteenth century, they intertwined them with John of Garland’s Integumenta Ovidii. As McKinley divulges, the fact that the Allegoriae subsumed interpretations from the Integumenta, and attributed the extended editions to Arnulf, exposes Arnulf’s auctoritas as an Ovidian commentator. In addition, the fact that other writers and commentators borrowed from texts attributed to Arnulf further establishes his critical reputation.

John of Garland’s Integumenta Ovidii. The Integumenta, composed in 1234 at Paris, allegorizes in elegiac couplets what he deems the most important sections of Ovid's narratives. He adapts some of his interpretations from his predecessors,

158 For example, McKinley notes that the thirteenth or fourteenth century Leiden, Bibliothèque der Rijksuniversiteit, Vossianus Lat. Q. 61 provides literal summaries of Ovid’s Metamorphoses written in anglicana script along with marginal comments from John of Garland. McKinley, “Manuscripts of Ovid,” 75-6.
including Arnulf, and, conversely, some of his successors inherit interpretations from him. His version of Europa’s rape, for instance, circulated widely. Sharing Arnulf’s euhemeristic treatment of Jupiter’s seizure of Europa, he deduces that Jupiter was labeled a bull (“taurus”) because he acquired Europa while in a boat that had a bull painted on it; therefore, it was the boat that was called “taurus,” not Jupiter. Commentaries gravitated toward this type of euhemerism because it rationalized the mysterious and magical transformations in Ovid’s poem. Almost every glossed manuscript of the *Metamorphoses* from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries incorporated such verses from the *Integumenta*.

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**Giovanni del Virgilio’s *Allegorie librorum Ovidii Metamorphoseos***. French and Italian commentary traditions collide in Giovanni del Virgilio’s *Allegorie librorum Ovidii Metamorphoseos*. In Bologna during 1321 or 1322, this friend of Dante borrowed allegorizations from Arnulf and John, and mythographic material from Fulgentius and the Vatican Mythographers. He then compares classical sources to determine the validity of their interpretations of pagan mythology. Redistributing these treatments in a primarily ethical commentary, Giovanni judges that most Ovidian characters represent God or the devil. He intended his allegories to

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161 Ibid., vv. 151-2 & 61-2.
162 Ibid., 64.
164 Coulson, “Failed Chastity and Ovid,” 22.
function as a companion to his philological commentary—similar to the relationship between Arnulf’s *Allegoriae* and *glosulae*. Giovanni’s first commentary is a traditional scholastic *expositio* with an *accessus*, including the four categories of Aristotelian causes, some biographical information about Ovid, and some philological guidance. Giovanni’s *Allegorie*, however, is less conventional than his *expositio*. Even though he draws many of his allegorizations from Arnulf and John of Garland, he uses a different format: alternating between expository prose and mnemonic verses. Giovanni derived this format from the Italian grammatical tradition that had developed during the thirteenth century.

The introduction to Book 9 offers a glimpse of Giovanni’s Italian style of explicating mythology in simple terms. To clarify the relationship between Juno and Hercules, he declares:


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165 Ballistreri, "Le Allegorie Ovidiane," 105.
166 Robert Black explains that Giovanni’s text was read as part of a two-year minimum lecture course about Virgil, Lucan, Statius, and Ovid. But his commentaries reveal that despite his name, Giovanni del Virgilio focused more on explicating Ovid than Virgil. Robert Black, “Ovid in Medieval Italy,” in *Ovid in the Middle Ages*, ed. James G. Clark, Frank T. Coulson, and Kathryn L. McKinley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 127.
167 [The first allegory is about Hercules and Juno. Through Hercules understand a virtuous man. But through Juno, his stepmother, we understand the active life. For there are three lives: namely the active life that is designated through Juno; the contemplative life that is designated through Minerva; and the lecherous life that is designated through Venus. To this extent, the...](52)
Giovanni emphasizes Juno’s role in Hercules’s struggle while he connects her to Venus and Minerva, suggesting that this narrative is only one example of a larger mythological pattern. This system bestows an ethical value on each mythological figure, simplifying Juno’s cruelty to Hercules by removing personal onus. Giovanni simplifies his language as well; he uses parallel sentence structures and the regular cadences of the verse. This passage also minimizes Ovidian complexity by excising the perspectives of Ovid’s embedded narrators. By beginning with Juno and Hercules, Giovanni shifts the focus of the book to Hercules instead of beginning from Achelous’s perspective. In general, Giovanni’s allegorizations transform Ovid’s texts, eliminating the narrative voices, moral complexity, and syntactic sophistication of the *Metamorphoses*.

*The Ovide moralisé.* The *Ovide moralisé*, like Giovanni’s *Allegorie*, incorporates some of John’s *Integumenta*. However, by using French vernacular and octosyllabic couplets, its moralizations reached new contemporary audiences among both pastors and devout laypeople. An anonymous Franciscan cleric from the Burgundian area composed the work sometime between 1300 and 1330 for Jeanne of Navarre, wife of King Philip the Fair. The 72,000-line commentary (six times as

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long as the *Metamorphoses*) paraphrases Ovid’s myths before moralizing, allegorizing, and pseudo-historicizing each tale. The Franciscan compiles these explications from medieval, ancient, and classical sources in the style of *Le Roman de la Rose*. This poetic style complicates scholars’ ability to classify the text: some critics call it poetry, more scholars call it a translation, yet Ana Pairet calls it a hybrid that combines the mythographic commentary with the encyclopedic tradition as it both remains faithful to Ovid and underscores its originality. Above all, the *Ovide moralisé* qualifies as a commentary following the traditions mapped out by its predecessors.

The commentator presents five or six such elucidations after each tale. According to Pairet, this accumulation of interpretive possibilities breaks the chain of Ovid’s metamorphoses, destabilizing any potential meaning for the myths. She concludes that while doctrinally the *Ovide moralisé* domesticates the transformations by reaffirming God’s omnipotence, rhetorically the text avoids single and unifying expositions. Nonetheless, she encourages us to read the *Ovide moralisé* as a cohesive text, calling for medievalists to look at the trajectory of

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172 Pairet, “Recasting the *Metamorphoses* in Fourteenth-Century France,” 84 & 90.
certain words or stylistic features, as well as the lexical, thematic, and formal connections between its interpretations. Pairet argues that the accumulation of narratives and hermeneutics recreate and imitate the flow of Ovid’s *carmen perpetuum*\(^{173}\) demonstrating how the *Ovide moralisé*’s emphasis on the *historicus sensus* of the *Metamorphoses* provides connective tissues for the commentary. She observes the work’s collection of terms that broadcast its historical emphasis: the “metalanguage” terms of “estorie” and “istoire” appear thirty-three times in Book I, usually announcing an interpretation based on euhemerism or Biblical history.

On the other hand, she indicates that the text demarcates moral and spiritual explications by means of the terms “sens,” “sentence,” “entendement,” “exposicion,” and “allegorie.”\(^{174}\) For example, the commentator interprets the battle between Hercules and Achelous, saying:

Mais pour en dire l’alegorie est en brief assavoir que creature humaine a troyes enemis, c’est assavoir la char, le monde et le deable, dont Dieu par son omnipotence la voulut jadis delivrer, quant il ot prins humaine forme ou ventre d’une Vierge saincte. Et en icelle humanité le combatit jusques à la mort corporelle il vainquit l’ennemy d’enger et delivra les ames des saincts pères de ses lyens, et puis les mena là sus es cieulx en la gloire de paradis. Et si monstra en terre exemple de toute humilité contre l’orgueil du monde avecques aspre penitence pour les pechiez en abolir.\(^{175}\)

\(^{173}\) Jung makes a similar point about the *Ovide moralisé* being a *carmen perpetuum*, but from a translator’s perspective, not a poet’s. Jung, “L’*Ovide moralisé*,” 113; and Pairet, “Recasting the *Metamorphoses* in Fourteenth-Century France,” 113.

\(^{174}\) Pairet, “Recasting the *Metamorphoses*,” 103-6.

\(^{175}\) *But, so as to note in words, the allegory in brief is that the created human has three enemies: namely the flesh, the world, and the devil. For that reason, God, by means of his omnipotence, formerly wanted to save it when, at the same time, he had taken human form by way of the womb of a holy Virgin. And in that humanity he fought until corporeal death. He vanquished the enemy of anger, and delivered the friends of saintly fathers from their chains.*
This quotation provides a glimpse of only one of the interpretations for this myth, fabricating a hidden relationship to the Bible. Additionally, as this sample reveals, one of the commentator’s favorite approaches to the Metamorphoses transforms the pagan characters’ immoral acts into figurations of Christ’s struggles for mankind. Like Giovanni’s Allegorie, the Ovide moralisé uses details from the myths to represent contemporary values, resulting in an ethical lesson. This strict Christianization, the array of interpretations, and the vernacular language make this commentary an attractive source of data for medievalists tracing vernacular adaptations of Ovid’s tales. However, we lack material evidence that this commentary circulated in England before Caxton’s English vernacular translation of it in 1480, unlike Pierre Bersuire’s Ovidius moralizatus.176

Pierre Bersuire’s Ovidius moralizatus. Pierre Bersuire’s Ovidius moralizatus is the Latin counterpart to the Ovide moralisé, similarly treating the Metamorphoses as a compendium of exempla—but primarily for preachers. The Ovidius moralizatus comprises Book 15 of Bersuire’s much longer Reductorium morale. This fifteenth book also contains fifteen chapters; the first chapter, entitled De formis figurisque deorum, often circulated independently from the rest of the Ovidius moralizatus and

And then he led them there toward the same sky in the glory of paradise. And thus he presented himself on earth as the example of all humility, in contrast to the pride of the world, by means of rough penance in order to abolish sins.] My translation. C. de Boer, ed., Ovide moralisé en Prose (Texte du Quinzième Siècle) (Amsterdam: North-Holland Publishing Company, 1954), 9.1.

176 Clark, A Monastic Renaissance at St Albans, 182-3.
played a large role in the mythographic tradition.\footnote{Coulson and Bruno Roy, \textit{Incipitarium Ovidianum}, 24 n.1.} Coulson identifies two redactions of the complete \textit{Ovidius moralizatus}. The first was written between 1337 and 1340 at Avignon; the second was a revision produced before 1362 at Paris, and it uses portions of the \textit{Ovide moralisé}.\footnote{Coulson, “Failed Chastity and Ovid,” 19.} After that point, the \textit{Ovidius moralizatus} enjoyed nearly two centuries of immense popularity before the Church banned it in 1559.\footnote{McKinley, “The Medieval Commentary Tradition 1100-1500 on Metamorphoses 10,” \textit{Viator} 27 (1996): 118.} Bersuire’s text has been attributed to writers such as Robert Holkot, John Ridevall, Adam de Stockton, and Thomas Walleys.\footnote{I suspect that these various Englishmen were given credit for writing the text because of its immense popularity in England. Coulson and Roy, \textit{Incipitarium Ovidianum}, 24 n.1.} With 29 extant copies, mostly from 1375-1425,\footnote{Clark, \textit{A Monastic Renaissance at St Albans}, 182-3.} it immediately became the most popular literary commentary during the later Middle Ages.\footnote{Clark, “Introduction,” 18.} The work entered English libraries by 1374 (as a library catalogue attests). Clark shows that the \textit{Ovidius moralizatus} eclipsed all other critical apparatuses for the \textit{Metamorphoses} and even Ovid’s text itself in English cloisters—yet there appears to be almost no trace of its near contemporary commentary the \textit{Ovide moralisé}.\footnote{Clark, “Ovid in the Monasteries,” 188.}

Nonetheless, the \textit{Ovidius moralizatus} shares many exegetical approaches and readings with the \textit{Ovide moralisé}, particularly its correlations to Christian scriptures. In his introduction, Bersuire points out that the Bible uses mythology just as poetry does.\footnote{Clark, “Ovid in the Monasteries,” 188.} Yet Coulson determines that Bersuire does not restrict his interpretations...
to spiritual allegory in relation to Christ and the Christian soul; Bersuire also looks at natural or physical significations, historical or euhemeristic, and tropological.

Bersuire introduces his commentary by displaying his primary investment in moral and allegorical interpretations, but the other interpretive categories still arise on occasion.\(^{185}\) Wenzel explains that this moral approach, primarily allegorical, was useful for sermons.\(^{186}\) The resulting text creatively combined a variety of exegetical methods, as can be seen in its account of Nessus versus Hercules:

\[
\text{Vel dic quod Nisus est intellectus seu ratio, que in civitate anime nostitur imperare, capilli eius sunt virtutes, et potissime crinis fatalis dicitur, quia quamdiu in capite intentionis nostrae fuerit, nec pater eius s. ratio per peccatum moritur, nec regnum anime expugnatur.}\(^{187}\)
\]

Bersuire transforms Nessus the villain into a personification of \textit{ratio}, which Christian morality must protect. This interpretation downplays Hercules's role, eradicating all traces of the wronged hero from Ovid's tale. The resulting tropological signification also deploys the classical notion of the body politic, with the head representing the head of state. Incorporating much of the same language—\text{“civitate,” “anime,” and “capite”—the \textit{Ovidius moralizatus} then converts the political analogy into a moral one.} Seznec observes that while the classical period distinguished between historical, physical, and moral exegesis for literature, the

\(^{184}\) Coulson, “Failed Chastity and Ovid,” 19.
\(^{185}\) Ibid., 20.
\(^{186}\) Wenzel, “Ovid from the Pulpit,” 168.
\(^{187}\) [\text{Or say that Nessus is intelligence or reason, which is thought to rule in the state of the soul. His hairs are moral perfections, and it is most appropriately called “fatal hair.” For, as long as it was at the summit of our intentions, his father (that is to say, reason) does not through sin, nor is the kingdom of the soul assaulted.}] My translation. Pierre Bersuire, \textit{Ovidius moralizatus}, ed. Ghisalberti (Rome: Ditta Tipografia Cuggiani, 1933), Cap. 9., Folio 72r.
medieval period did not. Sections like this one reveal how Bersuire had a variety of classical sources at his disposal, leaving traces of their origins while reconfiguring them as Christian moralizations.

**Format V: Composite Commentaries**

The moralizing tradition has attracted most of the attention devoted to Ovidian commentaries. However, this pivotal component of late medieval scholasticism existed amongst a variety of hermeneutics. As noted about commentaries like Giovanni’s *Allegorie* and even the *Ovide moralisé*, moralizing commentaries did more than reconfigure pagan myths according to Christian paradigms. Moralizing commentaries also presented interpretations based on contemporary politics and concerns in addition to providing mythographic material. The composite commentary tradition goes even further to illustrate the mixed interests of medieval audiences of the *Metamorphoses* by blending the interpretive practices found in all of the commentary traditions discussed above. Conveying a complex network of exegetical practices, this tradition relays information for all levels of readers. It includes the mythographic, philological, and moralizing traditions, while adding unique rhetorical analysis.

*The “Vulgate” Commentary.* The so-called “Vulgate” commentary exudes this eclectic style of explication even in the layouts of the manuscript pages; it

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synthesizes commentaries produced from the eleventh to the mid-thirteenth centuries in France, Italy, and even a twelfth-century German commentary.\textsuperscript{189} The Vulgate was written in the third quarter of the thirteenth century in Orléans, and became the most authoritative interpretation of the \textit{Metamorphoses} during the high Middle Ages. Coulson explains that all of the Vulgate manuscripts have a consistent format as \textit{scholia} with comments overwhelming Ovid’s text, surrounding the \textit{Metamorphoses} in all four margins and interlinearly; it never circulated as a \textit{catena} commentary.\textsuperscript{190} The top and bottom margins typically hold allegories (probably because they require more space than the other comments), which resemble John’s and Arnulf’s allegories; the interlinear spaces contain several definitions, synonyms, and grammar tips reminiscent of Arnulf’s and William’s philological commentaries; and the right and left margins contain mythographic and scientific notes, like John Ridevall’s \textit{Fulgentius metaforalis}, and these spaces contain original rhetorical analysis.\textsuperscript{191} The fact that the commentary can now be found in 22 manuscripts, eclipsing the \textit{Ovide moralisé} in popularity, indicates that medieval audiences considered this unique rhetorical approach important as well.\textsuperscript{192} The “Vulgate” has a more stable text than other medieval commentaries, and it was copied throughout

\textsuperscript{189} Coulson, “Ovid’s Transformations in Medieval France,” 53.
\textsuperscript{190} Coulson, “Ovid’s \textit{Metamorphoses} in the school tradition of France,” 68.
\textsuperscript{191} Coulson, “Failed Chastity and Ovid,” 17; and Coulson, “Ovid’s \textit{Metamorphoses} in the school tradition in France,” 58.
\textsuperscript{192} While none of these manuscripts is from England, English scholars who have noted Chaucer and Gower’s apparent awareness of the \textit{Ovide moralisé} (which also lacks an extant English manuscript before Caxton’s translation) prove that English scholarship about extant Ovidian commentaries is incomplete. But the following pages will show how English writers were at least aware of the rhetorical lessons presented in commentaries like the Vulgate.
the fourteenth century—there is even evidence that it was used as late as 1475.\textsuperscript{193} Many of the extant manuscripts were owned by teaching masters, thereby proving its didactic value. Grammar masters would select sections from the commentary depending upon the sophistication of their students.\textsuperscript{194}

In relation to the unique notes about rhetoric, Gillespie points out that the work considers Ovid a skilled poet with several methods of narration that exhibit his rhetorical dexterity.\textsuperscript{195} Distancing himself from previous writers of \textit{accessus} to the \textit{Metamorphoses}, the Vulgate commentator claims that his predecessors’ introductions focus on information that is better suited to an exposition of Ovid’s \textit{Heroides} than of the \textit{Metamorphoses}. To focus exclusively on the anti-epic, the commentator considers it essential to understand the author’s intentions when interpreting the \textit{Metamorphoses}; the Vulgate indicates that reconciliation with Augustus motivates Ovid, and it discusses the deification of Julius Caesar at the end of the book as well as the transformations throughout as attempts to honor the Emperor. The \textit{accessus} also emphasizes the poem’s distinct subject, which, to him, means the title and the fourfold transformation of forms: natural, moral, magical and spiritual. In addition, the Vulgate commentator suggests that the rhetorical format of the \textit{Metamorphoses} is also markedly different from the \textit{Heroides}, but

\textsuperscript{193} Coulson, “Ovid’s \textit{Metamorphoses} in the school tradition of France,” 65-70.
\textsuperscript{194} Vaticano, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana MS Vat. Lat. 1598, which Coulson regards as the most authoritative extant copy of the Vulgate commentary, contains comments written by more than one scribal hand. The later hand often inserts himself to correct what he considers to be erroneous points written by the earlier commentator. Coulson points out that such correction also reveals how the manuscript was frequently used. Ibid., 65-70.
\textsuperscript{195} Gillespie, “The Study of Classical Authors,” 198.
typical of a classical poem: it begins by stating a proposition, making an invocation, and then proceeding to narration.

The commentator annotates Ovid’s exemplary rhetorical choices throughout the poem. For example, he deciphers Ovid’s playful wit when referring to Juno’s vexed relationship with Hercules:

Hoc dicit ironice propter Herculem quem habebat odio Iuno et muta ferocia facta ei iubebat ut eum distrueret; mitebat enim eum ad monstra devincenda et hoc est quod Hercules ad laudem sui supra memineret dicens: “Et superata suae referabat iussa nomine.”

Here the commentator points out Ovid’s ironic reference to the animosity between Hercules and Juno. This explication focuses on the literal meaning of the text, showing how this reference to the animosity between them relates to another narrative moment within the poem. In a very important move, the commentator hereby inculcates in readers that Ovid’s references and wit can only be realized by those who understand the whole text. He even addresses narrative connections explicitly, such as his note about the language Ovid uses to depict Achelous’s speech to Theseus: “Sicut Thereus linguam Philomene unde supra: luctantemque loqui compressam forcipe linguam etc.” The commentator links the moment when Achelous says that he will not hold back the truth to the moment when Philomena

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196 [Here he speaks ironically on account of Hercules, whom Juno hated. And she, cutting him down, ordered him to do many fierce deeds so that she could destroy him. In fact, she sent him to conquer monsters, and this is what Hercules recalls above in his own praise saying: “And with all that he had overcome at her (i.e. Juno’s) command, he brought back his renown.”] My translation. Coulson, ed., Vaticano, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana MS Vat. Lat. 1598 (unpublished transcription, The Ohio State University, 2011), Folio 91r, 9.123.

197 [Just as Tereus (held) the tongue of Philomena above: her tongue having been compressed by forceps and struggling to speak] My translation. Ibid., Folio 90v, 9.78.
cannot speak in Book 6, noting that both sections depict the image of a tongue being held by forceps. This comparison of phrases conjoins disparate portions of the text, underscoring the attributes that make this work a *carmen perpetuum*. Following the mission statement in the *accessus*, the commentator treats the *Metamorphoses* as a typical classical poem.

As a conventional work, the *Metamorphoses* invites comparison to other classical literature. The Vulgate frequently points out narrative connections not just within Ovid’s poem, but also within the field of authoritative poetry. A few lines after the Philomena comparison, the commentary addresses the transition from Achelous’ narrative to Nessus’ in three separate entries:


The first section relates the demise of Nessus in the *Metamorphoses* to the same scenario in the *Heroides*, providing another classical text for cross-reference. While elsewhere in the Vulgate the text discusses other authoritative commentaries for

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198 *Where in the book of Heroides [9.140]: “Nessus the half man fell through the putrefaction of the Lernean poison.” / Behold, the transformation from Lichas into a stone. But at that point he digresses. This is the connection: thus Theseus, having availed himself of Achelous’s hospitality, fell back to sleep at dawn. Achelous, on the other hand, concealed himself for shame but etc. Or let the connection be such: love of Deianira had not seized Achelous alone (who parted with his horn and was transformed on account of her). He says “swift” in relation to what follows, where it is said: “The arrow flew and hit them in their back as they fled, etc.”] My translation. Ibid., Folio 90v, 9.101-2.
other writers, like Servius for the *Aeneid*, this point creates intertextual continuity for Ovid’s works. The second entry to readers that the transformation of Lichas will appear in this general area of the text. Such cross-references and plot markers assist readers in parsing out Ovid’s literal level of meaning, instead of explaining away the narrative in Christian terms and mythographic definitions.

The variety of textual assistance here almost resembles a modern critical edition, explaining contextual and structural details such as the embedded narrative—demarcated by the phrase “ecce.” The second commentator, adding the information transcribed inside of the brackets in the previous quotation, reminds readers about the contest Ovid already depicted. He employs the love of Deianira as both the connection between narratives and the specific source of Achelous’s losses. This moment uses the point-of-view of the wronged parties to concatenate the tales, presenting an uncommon interest in characters’ perspectives and motivations.\(^{199}\) McKinley explains how such moments provided direct access to “Ovid’s structuring of tales and shifts in narrators and tale-tellers.”\(^{200}\)

The Vulgate’s primary interest in Ovidian structure appears to lie in structural linking. Whereas the commentator used shared phrases to demarcate intertextual links between small sections of the text, such as the reference to the forceps in the Philomela myth, the word “continuatio” maps out larger connections

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\(^{199}\) Coulson points out that the Vulgate’s character analysis can be seen in places “(such as the figure of Niobe from Book 6), or as revealed in several poems (such as the portrayal of Medea in *Her.* 7 and *Met.* 7).” Coulson, “Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* in the school tradition of France,” 68-9.

\(^{200}\) McKinley, “The Medieval Commentary Tradition,” 117.
between books. Continuationes are marked frequently throughout the Vulgate, as the philological commentaries of William and Arnulf of Orléans did. Similar to Arnulf and William, the Vulgate commentator uses this marker to show that the brief Ovidian narrative extends beyond the confines of the episode in question. In the instance above, the Vulgate draws Theseus into the tale to indicate how the incident with Achelous results in and from other incidents throughout the poem. Unlike the mythographic commentaries that treat each episode as an individual encyclopedic event, these popular French commentaries like the Vulgate repeatedly draw attention to the ways in which Ovid constructs a carmen perpetuum. These representations of the Metamorphoses as a highly concatenated poem would seem to indicate that Chaucer, Gower, and Lydgate—writing long after the heyday of mythographic texts—had related views about Ovid’s version of mythology.

William of Thiegiis’s Commentary. William of Thiegiis also wrote a commentary in the vicinity of Paris during the thirteenth century, probably the last quarter of it. Its Oxford and Paris manuscripts contain virtually identical comments, although the Oxford manuscript seems to be “truer.” The recently discovered Oxford manuscript is the only extant French catena commentary to be written after 1230. Despite its general absence of originality and its existence being confined to

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only two manuscripts, William’s text proves that commentaries could include multiple scholastic authorities and multiple hermeneutical approaches. He even admits in his colophon that he collected glosses from multiple places for the instruction of elementary students. His accessus, for instance, conflates several earlier versions, particularly twelfth-century southern German ones with the Vulgate. In addition, William uses Arnulf’s allegories, while embedding them in prose summaries.²⁰³ Coulson points out that William’s commentary mostly comes from twelfth-century commentaries and the Vulgate, but that he adds some new material and authorities to his compilation. His additional material includes the common pedagogical technique of transitio, or prose summary employed for transitioning between strands of narratives. He uses transitio to explain sections like Ovid’s shift from primordial chaos to the four elements in Book I, defining “gigantes” as the great philosophers who mentally connect the two.²⁰⁴ William also incorporates some original critical analysis in the style of the Vulgate, such as his explanation of Ovid’s metaphorical use of the verb “deducere” in the four-line prologue to the Metamorphoses.

William’s commentary, like the Vulgate, also identifies the interwoven narrative strands of the text that lead the poem to be a carmen perpetuum. William writes:

²⁰³ Ibid., 485-9.
²⁰⁴ Ibid., 487-8.
William employs Horace’s classical auctoritas to define the nature of a cohesive and continuous narrative. Nonetheless, William has a more immediate source for this interpretation of the Metamorphoses, namely the Vulgate. Coulson explains how, similar to the Vulgate commentator, William devotes much of his attention to the structure of the Metamorphoses. As we saw in the Vulgate and philological commentaries by Arnulf and William of Orléans, the commentary of William of Thiegiis mostly signals its notes about intertextual links by means of the term “continuatio.” Coulson evaluates William’s ability to identify Ovid’s subtle narrative devices as comparable to the Vulgate commentator’s; William notices how Ovid transitions between story patterns, and he identifies Ovid’s multiple layers of narratives and narrators embedded within the frame of the text.206

Format VI: Prose Paraphrase

Unlike William’s commentary, the prose paraphrase does not define its exegetical approach. Nonetheless, prose paraphrases for the Metamorphoses, like all

205 [I.e., Perpetual song, for there is no interruption in what is perpetual. Or read perpetual, that is to say continuous. According to Horace: The beginning should be joined to the middle, the middle to the end.’ Or he says perpetual touching upon what is perpetual and eternal. But I need not expound further on this since it can be explained by these verses: ‘Perpetual has a beginning but no end’ etc.] Notes to Met. 1.4. Coulson, “William of Thiegiis and Latin Commentary,” 491.

206 Ibid., 492-4.
of the other types of commentaries discussed above, explicate the esoteric myths and narrative details that Ovid provides. Critically, prose paraphrases have attracted less attention than any other category of commentary. Even though the renowned Giovanni del Virgilio produced a prose paraphrase of the *Metamorphoses*, entitled *Expositio*, and even though the commentary was intended as a companion to his *Allegorie*, modern critics have scarcely acknowledged its existence.207 Such negligence results from the perception that these summaries reduced Ovidian myths to their most rudimentary plot points, replacing Ovid’s more sophisticated text, and removing all of the stylistic and philosophical complexity that other commentaries address. Yet their medieval prominence demands our attention. Developing during the twelfth century along with anthologies, prose paraphrases attracted more attention in England than any other commentary format. While they lack specific grammatical, syntactical, theological, or philosophical feedback, they focus on narrative, seeking both to reproduce and encapsulate Ovid’s tale-telling methods more than any other commentary format. Ziolkowski notices that in Virgilian prose paraphrases, such as Tiberius Claudius Donatus’ *Interpretationes Vergilianae*, the commentators are more interested in rhetoric and character perspectives than in grammar.208 Donatus’ Virgilian exposition is considered

207 Giovanni del Virgilio’s *Expositio* begins with an *accessus* and then provides a prose paraphrase. The *accessus* contains a complete biography for Ovid. Ballistreri, “Le Allegorie Ovidiane e Giovanni del Virgilio,” 105-6. It begins as a regular commentary, but then it switches to prose paraphrase with dramatic dialogue. Coulson, “Failed Chastity and Ovid,” 23.

208 Ziolkowski, *The Virgilian Tradition*, 625.
popular because it is extant in three Carolingian copies. By that same logic, the Ovidian prose paraphrase found in Oxford, Bodleian Library, Rawlinson B 214 is an immensely popular commentary on Ovid’s rhetoric and character perspectives. In fact, Clark identifies five other fourteenth- and fifteenth-century manuscripts that contain this prose paraphrase, which begins with “Cum Saturnus regnaret.”

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Oxford, Bodleian Library, Rawlinson B 214 and Oxford, Merton College, MS 299.

Poetic anthologies Rawlinson B 214 and Oxford, Merton College, MS 299 contain one such prose paraphrase of the *Metamorphoses*. A.G. Rigg explains that Rawlinson B 214 was “written by John Wilde, precentor of Waltham Abbey, Essex, in the late fifteenth century (after 1469).” The manuscript begins with Thomas Walsingham’s *Dites ditatus*, which describes the Trojan War along with the subsequent text, Simon Chèvre d’Or’s *Ylas*. After the Trojan War narratives, Wilde

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210 Cambridge, UL, MS Mm.2.18, folios 168r-218r; Cambridge, St John’s College, MS 97, folios 281v-303v; Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodley MS 571, folios 237r-256v; Oxford, Bodleian Library, Hatton MS 92, folios 40r-70r; and Oxford, Merton College, MS 299, folios 240r-273r. Clark actually argues that Rawlinson B 214 contains a different prose paraphrase; however, when examining Rawlinson B 214 and Merton MS 299, I noticed that despite spelling and word order variations, the two expositions are virtually identical. Clark, *A Monastic Renaissance at St Albans*, 182 n.79.

traces a version of English history from the Roman Brutus by incorporating Thomas Elmham’s *Verse History of Britain*. The manuscript then supplies a few texts about English kings such as Edward III. But other than Rigg’s manuscript overview, only its mythographic diagrams have drawn modern critical attention. These diagrams depict the natural elements and genealogies for the pagan gods, and Rigg points out that they relate to both the prose paraphrase at the end of the manuscript and the *Dites ditatus* at the beginning.\textsuperscript{212} Rigg claims that they act as a preface for the subsequent *Metamorphoses* explication, following the example of Pierre Bersuire and Thomas Walsingham’s Ovidian commentaries—thereby proving that Wilde carefully planned this manuscript as a unified collection of historical and mythographic material.\textsuperscript{213} Wilde frames the manuscript with pagan mythology and disperses English history and Christian prayers throughout the rest. Yet the fluid trajectory from pagan myth to English myth to Christian prayer and back again in varying orders shows that Wilde does not consider them all discrete literary genres. Rigg concludes that Wilde reveals an “incipient humanistic attitude” in Rawlinson B 214, presenting literary texts “as something to be studied and placed in a literary and historical context.”\textsuperscript{214}

Fifteenth-century Merton 299, for example, is an anthology similar to Rawlinson B 214; it compiles multiple Ovidian commentaries, including one by

\textsuperscript{212} For more about the nature of these mythographic illustrations, see Lord, “A Survey of Imagery,” 271-5.
\textsuperscript{213} Rigg, “Medieval Latin Poetic Anthologies,” 322-3.
\textsuperscript{214} Ibid., 330.
Pierre Bersuire, John Seward, and John of Garland. This prose paraphrase’s appearance alongside such Ovidian authorities and in at least six fifteenth-century English manuscripts (probably more, considering that Ovidian prose paraphrases have not yet been edited or carefully studied) lends weight to its readings. Clark even believes that Thomas Walsingham referred to a copy of it when writing his Archana deorum.\textsuperscript{215} Similar to most of the commentaries already discussed, the text follows the order of Ovid’s books in the Metamorphoses. However, it summarizes all of the major fables without using marginal notes, except for those that provide brief chapter headings and the occasional interlinear identification of characters, which were added by a sixteenth-century hand. Rigg says, “this technique of \textit{expositio ad litteram} distinguishes it from the work of the mythographers.”\textsuperscript{216}

The prose paraphrase also differs from mythographic texts by imitating Ovid’s narrative style. Rawlinson B 214 and Merton 299 retain the narrative voices, pointing out that the narrative of Hercules starts with Achelous recounting to Theseus his defeat. The commentator writes:\textsuperscript{217}

\begin{quote}
Cum Theseus quereret ab Achelao cur ingemisceret, Achelaus ait: “Cum multi Deyaniram in matrimonium affectassent nulli eorum est concessa nisi mihi et Herculi unde inter nos post nimiam disceptacionem determinavimus.”\textsuperscript{218}
\end{quote}

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[215]{Ibid., 182.}
\footnotetext[216]{Rigg, “Medieval Latin Poetic Anthologies,” 323.}
\footnotetext[217]{The following transcriptions for the prose paraphrase are based on Rawlinson B 214; however, I will demarcate any variant readings from Merton 299 in the footnotes.}
\end{footnotes}
The commentator clearly abbreviates Ovid's narratives, removing details about Achelous's despair and the role of Deianira's father. However, instead of reducing the narratives to plot points and genealogies as the mythographic texts do, the paraphrase retains the Ovidian framework; Achelous and Theseus have a conversation about the contest between Achelous and Hercules, and Hercules never speaks for himself. The writer retains such interest in characters' points-of-view throughout the commentary, even switching the narrator to Iole as Ovid does later in Book 9. Such clear retentions of taletellers were also an emphasis of philological and composite commentaries. In a sense, this paraphrase imitates the *Metamorphoses* in the ways that earlier commentaries, like the Vulgate, recommend. This summary even retains the sequence of events found in the *Metamorphoses*; additionally, he uses words like "cum" and "post," and the interrogative "cur" to lead Achelous to tell his story, emphasizing an active progression of events despite the past-tense of the tale's verbs. In other words, the prose paraphrase pays homage to Ovid's methods of providing context, sequence, and narrative perspective to provide a truncated, but stylized version of Ovidian myths.

The prose paraphrase also unabashedly adheres to Ovid's pagan material without altering it according to contemporary philosophical beliefs. For example, the writer relays Achelous's transformations into a serpent and a bull when fighting after Deianira in matrimony, she was yielded to none of them except to me and Hercules. From this point we determined amongst ourselves after a huge disagreement."

Hercules. The writer even embraces Hercules’s transformation when he dies, writing, “Hercules vero in celum translatus est qui antequam obit virtutes quas fecerat et quam diversas terras peragrasset narrat Boecius De Consolatione Philosophiae.” To begin with, the writer accepts Hercules’s apotheosis without euhemerism, allegory, or even moral edification. Instead of denying or revising Ovid’s conclusion to the overtly pagan tale of Hercules, the paraphrase supports it with a reference to the authoritative Boethius. The text presents the same intratextuality that can be found in other commentaries, connecting Hercules’s transformation and Boethius’s Consolatio philosophiae. Moreover, it does so without overtly Christianizing and sanitizing the text.

The paraphrase similarly retains the Ovidian complications involved in Iole’s lament over her sister Driope’s metamorphosis. In this section, Ovid incorporates Iolaus, Hercules’s charioteer, in a brief inset narrative about fate and age because Hebe changed him from old to young. After Hebe makes Iolaus perpetually young, she is about to vow never to do so again, when Themis dissuades her. The paraphrase preserves Themis’s prophecy about the downfall of Thebes without Hebe’s assistance, and then it concludes the tale by saying:

Calliroe filia Acheloy et Almeonis uxor filii Amphiorai rogavit deos ut perpetuam filiis sui iuventutem concederet. Et haec est causa quare Hebe non iuraverat quod ex datione Themis adhuc hos pueros

\(^{219}\) Oxford, Bodleian Library, Rawlinson B 214, Folio 217r, 9.6-12.
\(^{220}\) quas

[Hercules was truly transported to the heavens, and what great feats and how many lands he travelled over before he died, Boethius narrates in his De Consolatione Philosophiae] My translation. Oxford, Bodleian Library, Rawlinson B 214, Folio 217r, 9.30-2.
The writer clearly has no qualms with Ovid’s polytheistic tendencies because he keeps not only the presence of multiple gods, but also their debates about manipulating natural laws. The summary even exhibits rhetorical sensitivity, playing with a pun on “Fata” with “fatatum.” Much like Ovid and his commentators, this writer integrates etymology and rhetorical styling—not just summarizing. Similar to other commentaries, this conclusion to the narrative of Iolaus and Hebe also emphasizes genealogies, clarifying the familial connections involved in Jupiter’s reference to his three sons, the judges of Hades.

Although the summary lacks marginal notes that provide literary training and rhetorical guidance, it strips away our misconceptions about allegorization being the only serviceable approach to reading the *Metamorphoses*. This paraphrase

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[Callirhoe, daughter of Achelous and wife of Alcmaeon (who was the son of Amphioraus) asked for Hebe to yield perpetual youth to her sons. And this is the reason why Hebe would not swear to do what she had hitherto done to make Themis’s sons grow up as a gift for her. The gods were scarcely putting up with the fact that Hebe was given such power; the gods were already complaining, saying: “It is not my place to go against Fate, which was made to be upheld. In fact, if I wanted my own sons, Minos, Aeacus, and Rhadamanthus, to grow young again, I couldn’t.” Indeed, they are the three judges of the underworld. Aeacus is the son of Aegina, Rhadamanthis is the son of Taygete, and Minos is the son of Europa.] Oxford, Bodleian Library, Rawlinson B 214, Folio 218r, 9.61-9.
reveals how pagan mythology was no longer a foreign entity to be handled with the “kid gloves” of intense moralization. Furthermore, in Rawlinson B 214 it could exist as an extension of English history that was traced from the Trojan War, through Rome to Albion, and down the genealogical line of English kings. Unlike a mythographic commentary, the prose paraphrase both defines Ovidian references and constructs a cohesive narrative with quotations. It retains Ovid’s complex narrative form with all of its polytheism, embedded narrations, direct quotations, and narrator perspectives to generate a perpetual song with concatenated narrative units. The paraphrase exhibits rhetorical sophistication, structure, narrative voice, characterization, and narrative context. In many ways, the prose paraphrase appears to be the application of comments provided by the most sophisticated rhetorical commentaries for the *Metamorphoses*. Instead of disregarding this commentary style as the “Sparks’ notes” of the Middle Ages, prose paraphrases prove to be the missing and seminal link between the commentary tradition and late medieval vernacular adaptations.

**Conclusion**

The depth and variety of the Ovidian commentary tradition has long been overlooked. Medievalists studying vernacular adaptations frequently assumed that medieval writers only used the *Metamorphoses* for story collecting and encyclopedias.\textsuperscript{222} Although mythographic texts reveal an undeniable taste for

\textsuperscript{222} Cooper, for example, defines the different types of story collecting during the Middle
encyclopedic story collecting, they represent only a portion of the medieval tradition. Commenting on Ovid turned into something of an art form during the later Middle Ages. Several complete commentaries on Ovid’s works were even gathered together and published in their own manuscript.\footnote{McKinley, “Manuscripts,” 47.} In general, Ovidian explications lacked a singular form and, therefore, cannot be encapsulated by a mythography, moralizing commentary, or any individual commentary’s approach. The medieval Ovidian commentary had an ever-evolving nature because it was the product of a culture that regarded the text as alive and changing, continuously requiring new approaches and elaborations. Auctores for Ovidian commentaries existed, but readers and schoolmasters revised their texts as well. The Vulgate especially with its multiple hands shows that even a frequently copied commentary was not free from tampering.

These revisions speak to their frequent use by students and schoolmasters, showing how they manipulated the text to suit the circumstances of their immediate environments. Schoolmasters sometimes utilized commentaries by teaching from them or setting students to transcribe from them,\footnote{Hexter, Ovid and Medieval Schooling, 9.} encouraging students to imitate the Latin style of auctores like Ovid. By the thirteenth century, readers were actively engaging with, and creating meaning rather than passively reading. Gillespie claims that medieval readers could see beyond commentators’ attempts to generate

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\item Ages, focusing mostly on Giovanni Boccaccio’s Decameron and Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales.
\item Cooper, The Structure of the Canterbury Tales (Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 1984), 178-9.
\end{itemize}
\end{flushleft}
“closed” readings, and instead saw that Ovid opened a great deal of creative space for readers, commentators, interpreters, and imitators. But considering that John of Garland, among others, demonstrates how a commentator responded to his predecessors, these writers did not seem to consider the commentary genre “closed.” Instead, they prohibited the field from closing. Works like the *Ovidius moralizatus* with its multiple interpretations for each tale show that this tradition focused on interpretive possibilities to inspire readers to approach the *Metamorphoses* creatively—rather than supplying one definitive interpretation.

Commentators created this open creative space because they employed the *Metamorphoses* as an *exemplum* for students to imitate. Clark indicates that, beginning in the ninth century, interlinear and marginal glosses elaborating Ovid’s metrical and rhetorical structures provided accomplished students with guidance for recreating such devices in their own compositions. In addition, Clark says, “Ovid was also adopted by the twelfth-century pioneers of the *ars dictaminis,*” which are rules for composing letters and official documents for the chanceries of popes, kings, aristocrats, or city governments. Schoolmasters and their students would select the sections most relevant to their studies or their cultural context, rather than reading the entire *Metamorphoses* or a full commentary for it. The commentaries thereby function as a means for allowing readers to choose whatever portions of the text they desired, noting narrative continuity to retain Ovid’s poetic structure and style.

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without having to read the entire text. In other words, the selective reading process does not treat the *Metamorphoses* as an episodic collection of pagan myths; each myth was ingrained in a commentary that suggested interpretations and connected it to other portions of the text by means of allegorical relationships, genealogical links, philological correlations, intertextual links, or intratextual connections.

One of the most important rhetorical approaches to the *Metamorphoses* to develop during the late Middle Ages was the awareness of Ovid’s framing devices used to provide structure and cohesion for the tales in the *Metamorphoses*, analyzing the text as a *carmen perpetuum*. They presented narrative in general as continuous even when episodic. Apparent even in the early philological commentaries’ notes beneath the heading of “continua,” medieval audiences understood that Ovid employed subtle rhetorical devices to generate a continuous poem. Moreover, the prose paraphrase tradition accumulated this wealth of commentary knowledge, applying tips about Ovidian structure and style to summaries that imitated the *Metamorphoses* instead of simplifying and subverting his pagan mythology.

Gillespie claims that these diverse approaches developed because of the elusive and subtle nature of Ovid’s literary *persona* in the *Metamorphoses.* Ovid’s transitions between tales and their tellers subverted a single authoritative voice. Nonetheless, as *accessus* like William of Orléans’s reveal, medieval audiences

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recognized the political agenda beneath the poem’s layers of narratives and narrators; they uncovered his vexed relationship with Augustus and his attempt to use poetry to rectify the situation. Such introductions display an awareness of how context shapes a text. *Accessus*, along with marginal and interlinear comments were training readers to view narratives not as static and stable units of meaning, but as culturally determined and constantly shifting material that can be repeatedly interpreted because the significance changes when applied to a new historical, political, and narrative context—and the commentary tradition itself reflects this as it continuously returned to the same commentary authorities like those at Orléans only to adapt portions of their commentaries according to their own contextual and instructive purposes.

This wealth of commentary knowledge was undoubtedly bestowed upon vernacular writers like Chaucer, Gower, and Lydgate. Although we know little about the formal education of Chaucer and Gower, we know that they received an education, and that Ovid was a part of it. Whatever the school, Ovidian commentaries were likely part of the curriculum. Gower potentially studied more advanced interpretations of the *Metamorphoses* at a university, but Chaucer could have gained access to such information through his friendship with Gower, his travels to France and Italy, or even his connections to the English court. However, rather than engaging in wild speculation about the nature of their access to the *Metamorphoses*, we can look to the variety of exegetical methods in the Ovidian

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228 McKinley, “Gower and Chaucer,” 199.
commentary tradition to open up our understanding of how Chaucer, Gower, and Lydgate were adapting pagan mythology and why they all gravitated towards Ovid's frame narrative structure. The use of embedded narration techniques in these English writers' texts reveal that they had a more sophisticated understanding of the Ovidian tradition than previous studies about their relationship to the *Ovide moralisé* alone have been able explain.

Focusing exclusively on individual Ovidian episodes and on moralizing commentaries like the *Ovide moralisé* has created a general devaluation of medieval writers' poetic craft, and a misunderstanding of their classical frame-narrative structures. The following pages will reopen the discussion of classical appropriations during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries by reevaluating the Ovidian commentaries that instructed and ultimately inspired these vernacular authors. The point of interest here is not to engage in source study alone or to describe the history of Ovidian commentaries, but rather to analyze the exegetical practices that led to the late medieval presentation of Ovid's pagan narratives alongside Christian ones within their complex networks of tales. By defining the exegetical practices that these texts copy, I will uncover the cultural impetus that created such a deluge of vernacular Ovidian frame narratives during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Examining the structure of the works that employ Ovidian narratives, the following pages address how meaning is produced and reproduced for each Ovidian tale through the use of exegetical practice that recognized Ovid's
rhetorical merit and political voice. Overall, this dissertation attempts to revise our assumptions that medieval adaptations of classical poesy lacked rhetorical sophistication and structure because, in general, the creative *imitatio* practiced in grammar schools allowed Chaucer, Gower, and Lydgate to develop an English vernacular version of classical poetics that wove together complex networks of narratives as codified political criticisms.
Chapter 2: The Labor of Sloth: Gower’s Reformulation of the Metamorphoses in Book 4 of the Confessio Amantis

Under the toun of newe Troye,
Which took of Brut his ferste joye,
In Temse whan it was flowende
As I by bote cam rowende,
So as Fortune hir tyme sette,
My liege lord par chaunce I mette;
And so bifel, as I cam neigh,
Out of my bot, whan he me seigh,
He bad me come in to his barge.
And whan I was with him at large,
Amonges othre thinges seyde
He hath this charge upon me leyde,
And bad me doo my busynesse
That to his hipe worthinesse
Som newe thing I scholde booke.\textsuperscript{229}

This preamble to the first recension of John Gower’s Confessio Amantis introduces the text as the product of an epic encounter with King Richard II in a metaphorical “newe Troye,” where Brutus landed to inaugurate British history, which emerged out of the classical world from which the old Trojans were displaced. Creating a parallel between Aeneas’s foundation of Rome and Brutus’s of Britain,\textsuperscript{230} Gower would seem to be preparing his audience for an epic of Virgilian proportions to fulfill Richard’s request for “som newe thing I scholde booke.” However, the


\textsuperscript{230} Gower is following an established tradition of referring to London as the New Troy, which this chapter will address below.
following pages depict a framed story about a lover confessing to a priest of Venus in the form of inset moralized Greco-Roman, Judeo-Christian, and pseudo-folkloric mythology. Gower’s classical inspiration thus proves to be Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, a frame narrative written by a man often referred to as a *praeceptor amoris*. Contemporary scholarship does not acknowledge that Gower imagines himself to be generating a new type of English book that is founded upon one classical poetic format.\footnote{Robert F. Yeager acknowledges Gower’s classical sources—especially for his “Tale of Florent”—and he claims that Gower uses ancient authorities to protect himself while venting contemporary political criticisms. My research bolsters Yeager’s argument by identifying the classical source for this rhetorical method—Ovid’s frame narrative. Robert F. Yeager, “The Politics of Strength and Vois in Gower’s Loathly Lady Tale,” in *The English “Loathly Lady” Tales: Boundaries, Traditions, Motifs*, ed. S. Elizabeth Passmore adn Susan Carter (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute, 2007), 45-7.} Focusing on his moralizations and specific political references, medievalists have lost sight of the Ovidian forest for his episodic trees. The following pages reintroduce and foreground the Ovidian framing device that contains and structures Gower’s individual tales. The frame unifies the text’s disparate narratives, however, the mythic and pseudo-historicized figures within it often reveal themselves to be at odds with one another, making the representations of Gower’s England resemble Ovid’s classical world, one in which rulers make detrimentally arbitrary and self-serving resolutions in the name of Fortune.

Scholars have acknowledged the seeming contradictions within Gower’s ethical framework, noting the lack of consistency between tales and even between the stories and their interpretations by Genius (the fictive priest of Venus).

Approaching John Gower’s text from his moral reputation alone has forced
medievalists to regard him as Chaucer’s rhetorically inferior contemporary. Critics such as Diane Watt and Robert F. Yeager have revived interest in Gower’s *Confessio* by making Gower less morally simplistic and more politically complicated than he seemed before. Watt reveals, for example, that the *Confessio* can be considered amoral and multifaceted when interpreting it from a hermeneutical standpoint. In other words, Watt and Yeager finally prove that we can read the *Confessio* for more than the pedantic and repetitive exegesis that Genius the priest provides. Yet the prevailing opinion about the *Confessio* is that it is an encyclopedic collection of pagan, biblical, and folkloric narratives, which Gower categorizes according to a moral framework. Patricia Batchelor, for example, regards the *Confessio* as a compendium of exempla with Latin apparatuses that challenge Genius’ vernacular lessons for each tale, resulting in a text with an

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234 She claims that the *Confessio* “invites multiple interpretations, and that author, text, and reader collaborate in the production of complex, often contradictory, and sometimes ‘perverse’ (mis-)readings.” Diane Watt, *Amoral Gower: Language, Sex, and Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 17.

unstable and inconsistent version of truth. Kurt Olsson similarly considers Gower a compiler, separating his narratives according to topics. In essence, many medievalists treat the Confessio as the product of Gower’s practice of pillaging myths from writers such as Ovid, molding them with limited success to accord with his didactic agenda, which Eve Salisbury claims still fails to create a coherent genre.

The Confessio’s moral framework led Dhira Mahoney to state that Gower, unlike Chaucer, “is not interested in establishing the place of his work within a literary tradition.” Despite being redeemed as a writer with an acute political agenda, medievalists struggle to align that goal with the literary format that shapes it.

Scholarship that overlooks the poetic structure of the Confessio Amantis frequently focuses on the text from Genius’ perspective, assuming that Gower shares Genius’ desire to treat all tales as exempla for instructing Amans in the ways of love. Conversely, some criticism analyzes the text with the supposition that

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239 Mahoney, “Gower’s Two Prologues to Confessio Amantis,” 35.
241 Such scholarship follows the line of logic set out by A.G. Rigg and Edward S. Moore that “Ricardian authors often depicted themselves as players in their own productions.” A.G. Rigg and Edward S. Moore, “The Latin Works: Politics, Lament and Praise,” in A Companion to Gower, ed. Siân Echard (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2004), 163. In addition, Peter Nicholson’s whole project of analyzing the Confessio’s structure of conversion is based on
Amans and Gower are the same entity because Amans calls himself Gower in Book 8. Whether scholars conflate Gower with the character Genius or Amans, the resulting interpretations regard Gower, similar to his two characters, as a two-dimensional writer with little more to express than that each of his narratives exemplifies either a problem concerning or a solution for the sin to which the book is devoted. However, although Genius’ moral interpretations allegorize myths in a manner similar to other medieval compilations, Gower’s stories generate a second text that competes with Genius’ explications of them. The structure of Gower’s tales indicates that they operate with a degree of independence from Genius’ moral framework; Gower employs intratextual links in the narrative introductions to his tales in order to weave a cohesive and subtly crafted poem that operates in spite of Genius’ limitations. This second, narrative-based text of the Confessio resembles the complexly interrelated tales that medieval Ovidian commentaries point out in the Metamorphoses; both use each narrative to continue and comment upon the tale and message of that which precedes it. By analyzing his relationship to the Ovidian

the assumption that Genius is the one organizing the tales into discrete units of moral lessons, assuming that Genius’ project and Gower’s are one and the same. Peter Nicholson, Love and Ethics in Gower’s Confessio Amantis (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 2005).


243 The question of Ovidian structure has been much discussed by classicists, such as Betty
commentary tradition, we can see that Gower had a clear understanding of classical rhetoric, and that he deployed it with great sophistication and political impetus.244

**Gower’s Political Environment**

As critics such as Yeager and Kathryn McKinley have indicated, Gower invites his audience to think about politics while reading his first and only English text, the *Confessio*. Nonetheless, consensus about what Gower politically advises in the *Confessio* ends there. Some scholars, such as A.G. Rigg and Edward S. Moore, read the *Confessio* as a testament to Gower’s political support for Richard II, while others, such as Russell Peck, interpret it as an indication of Gower’s shifting allegiance to the future Henry IV. Most medievalists who engage in the Richard-Henry debate begin by addressing Gower’s original dedication to Richard in his prologue (part of

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244 Medievalists have long understood that Gower was an educated reader of Ovid. G.C. Macaulay pointed out in 1904 that Gower seemed to be able to flip through Ovid’s works, knowledgeably selecting sections from Ovid as if he knew each section perfectly. G.C. Macaulay, ed., *The Complete Works of John Gower*, Vol. I (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1904), xxxiii. Simpson similarly notices Gower’s Ovidian aptitude; Simpson, *Sciences and the Self in Medieval Poetry*, 150-4. However, these studies look at individual lines that Gower adapts from Ovid’s works into his own, whereas this chapter will examine how Gower generates Ovidian structure and rhetoric in his own words.
which is cited above) and/or Gower’s second redaction which is dedicated to Henry of Lancaster.\textsuperscript{245} In their article “The Latin Works: Politics, Lament, and Praise,” Rigg and Moore interpret the \textit{Confessio} as a purely Ricardian text. They focus on the 1380s as the date of composition to prove Gower’s Ricardian affinity, claiming that Gower’s political stance did not change until the 1390s. In fact, they believe that it was not until Henry ascended the throne and Gower wrote the \textit{Cronica} that Gower came to support Henry—at which point Gower became hostile towards Richard.\textsuperscript{246}

Russell Peck, on the other hand, regards the \textit{Confessio} as a product of Gower’s increasing disillusionment with Richard. Peck explains that Gower developed his notions about kingship and proper rule during the reign of Edward III.\textsuperscript{247} Peck points out that the comparison to Edward cast Richard in an unfavorable light. Thus even though Gower was ideologically royalist, he insistently and steadily criticized misbehaving kings like Richard, censuring Richard’s lack of self-discipline.\textsuperscript{248} Peck places the date of the \textit{Confessio}’s composition in the 1390s to claim that the \textit{Confessio}’s first version was the beginning of the end of Gower’s optimism about Richard’s early, childhood reign.\textsuperscript{249}

\textsuperscript{245} Mahoney, for example, analyzes how the two liminal frames of Gower’s Lancastrian and Ricardian dedications both influence and result in different meanings for the \textit{Confessio}. Mahoney, “Gower’s Two Prologues to \textit{Confessio Amantis},” 17-37. I opted to use the prologue from the first recension because it is extant in the most manuscript copies. Fisher, \textit{John Gower, Moral Philosopher}, 303-9.

\textsuperscript{246} Rigg and Moore, “The Latin Works: Politics, Lament and Praise,” 159.


\textsuperscript{248} Ibid., 224-8.

\textsuperscript{249} Ibid., 229.
Robert Epstein and McKinley, unlike Peck, Rigg, and Moore, consider the *Confessio* devoid of a static political perspective. Both interpret the text as an illustration of Gower’s shifting alliances, emanating from Gower’s increasing distaste for Richard’s abuses of power. Epstein interprets the *Confessio* as the predecessor to Gower’s notoriously harsh criticisms of Richard, suggesting that Gower was exhibiting independence, rather than acting in response to patronage.250

One of the only points universally conceded by those studying Gower’s political stance is that his second recension was a response to Richard’s maturation from an excusably ignorant child king into an increasingly prodigal adult king.251 Most of these political interpretations rely on Thomas of Walsingham’s *Chronicon Angliae* or *Historia Anglicana*,252 which criticizes the king for being unnecessarily extravagant, injudicious, and for misappropriating the kingdom’s resources.253

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250 Some medievalists believe Gower’s claim in his prologue that he encountered Richard on the Thames, at which point Richard commissioned the *Confessio*. Ibid., 233.
251 Mahoney discusses the differences between Gower’s recensions as a result of Gower’s changing political perspective. She, following the example of Macaulay’s edition of *The English Works of John Gower* for EETS, adds a third recension that most scholars ignore: the one that “drops the passages added to the book [in Books V, VII, and a rearranged Book VI] in the second recension, but provides the Lancastrian preface and epilogue of the second recension, finishing with the last two lines of the Latin envoy to Henry.” Mahoney, “Gower’s Two Prologues to *Confessio Amantis,*” 20-1. Nevertheless, no matter how many versions of the text critics argue that there are, Mahoney and Macaulay, among others, regard the revisions as the result of Gower’s changing perceptions of Richard.
253 Dodd points out that Walsingham mostly complained that Richard was young, even though Richard was 17 when Walsingham wrote his complaint—mostly because Richard had not yet matured. Dodd claims that Walsingham’s views of Richard represented the general contemporary response, proven by the fact that in 1386 “royal authority was overthrown completely and the king himself was forced into a quasi form of political exile.”
Caroline M. Barron explains that Richard maintained his minority until he was 23 years old, and the transition to his “hands-on” style of governing was sudden, leading chroniclers such as Walsingham to interpret the king’s travels throughout the kingdom as his attempt to live at others’ expense. Thus when Richard requested that London—the New Troy in which Richard supposedly commissioned Gower to write a new book—supply men for fighting and when he used direct and indirect taxation to amass supplies for his army (because Richard could obtain money more quickly this way than by following the usual procedure of seeking money through Parliament), London refused. Barron says that except for a few individuals, Londoners denied the king any funds during times of peace. Thus Richard took action in 1392, responding to their constant riots. Sylvia Federico says that the dispute between Richard and London’s citizens culminated with Richard revoking the city’s customary liberties and arresting some of the city’s officials. In point of fact, when Londoners claimed that they could pay no more, Richard set out to make an example of them, removing from the metropolis the

255 Ibid., 131-2.
256 Ibid., 137.
257 Barron points out that Richard actually had to intervene in London on multiple occasions because of various factions between different types of merchants, merchants and aristocrats, and supporters for different mayoral candidates. The multiple factions led to a riotous period of strife, which was common for London (except during the period of Edward III’s reign). However, the Londoners were unaccustomed to Richard’s interference because of his long minority, leading to a general lack of support for him when he did finally take action. Ibid., 137-47.

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chancery, the rolls of the king’s bench, the Fleet Street prison, and the exchequers of accounts.\textsuperscript{259} pleas, and receipt.\textsuperscript{260} Additionally, in 1392 Richard suspended the city’s freedom and ruled London directly.\textsuperscript{261}

As a token of reconciliation, the Londoners staged a ceremonial procession to glorify and almost deify Richard in order to convince him to relent and restore London’s customary liberties.\textsuperscript{262} The pageant catered to Richard’s, perhaps youthful, taste for entertainment and lavish displays.\textsuperscript{263} During his pageant of reconciliation in London, Richard was staged in iconic biblical tableaus, seemingly exacting penance from disobedient disciples. According to Peck, such actions and excessive spending only resulted in the disaffection of his people, Gower included.\textsuperscript{264} Furthermore, as Federico points out, Richard and London’s citizens were not

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\item \textsuperscript{259} Barron points out that in 1387, after Nicholas Brembre’s third re-election as mayor, Richard threatened to remove the Exchequer if London could not elect a mayor who could govern well. Barron, “Richard II and London,” 148.
\item \textsuperscript{260} Federico notes that Richard retaliated by suspending London’s customary freedoms, including removing the mayor and sheriffs from their offices and imprisoning them. Richard also fined London’s citizens for their inability to govern themselves, and he took control of all London’s income. Federico, “A Fourteenth-Century Erotics of Politics,” 144.
\item \textsuperscript{261} Barron explains that London was more peaceful during this period for a brief time. Barron, “Richard II and London,” 149.
\item \textsuperscript{262} Barron questions whether Richard or the Londoners staged the pageant. Barron, “Richard II and London.” 152. However, Federico argues that the Londoners were responsible for the pageant. Federico, “A Fourteenth-Century Erotics of Politics,” 144.
\item \textsuperscript{263} Barron explains that Richard had a general taste for pageantry. During the next Christmas, the Londoners led a pageant to Richard at Kennington with a procession leading Anne of Bohemia when she arrived to marry Richard. Richard’s taste in pageantry extended to tournaments as well—all were seemingly efforts to duplicate his coronation pageant. Barron, “Richard II and London,” 150-2. Federico points out that not all sources describing the pageant ridiculed Richard. Federico explains that Richard Maidstone’s \textit{Concordia Facta inter Regem Riccardum II et Civitatem Londonie}, written in 1393, is from a perspective that is loyal to the king. Federico, “A Fourteenth-Century Erotics of Politics,” 144.
\item \textsuperscript{264} Peck, “The Politics and Psychology of Governance in Gower,” 234-5.
\end{itemize}
reconciled until 1397 when Richard finally restored the city’s customary liberties.265

The fact that London was the center of dissension during Richard’s reign makes it a curious place for Gower to stage the meeting between Richard and Gower. Gower is undoubtedly tapping into the political discord of the place, situating it as the source of the new empire’s power as well as its vulnerability.

Such interest in the problems of empires and accumulations of power makes Ovid’s Metamorphoses, or the medieval commentary tradition that grew around it, an ideal literary model for Gower. Of course, I am not the first to note the relationship between Ovid’s Metamorphoses and medieval political criticism. Winthrop Wetherbee discusses how Latin literature in general provided fodder for social criticism, and the Latin tradition especially offered a context for Gower that was essential for his social critique.266 However, it is not simply the Latin tradition, but Ovid in particular who provides models for how Gower could criticize social mores, because Ovid was an especially apt commentator and analyst of the world around him. As many accessus to Ovid’s Metamorphoses attest,267 the Metamorphoses responds to Ovid’s vexed relationship with Emperor Augustus, who sent Ovid into exile from his beloved Rome.268 These accessus regard Ovid as a

268 The most influential studies of Ovidian accessus include Alastair Minnis, Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages (London: Scholar Press, 1984); Ralph Hexter, Ovid and Medieval Schooling: Studies in Medieval School Commentaries
political commentator attempting to curry favor with Augustus, especially in the last book of the *Metamorphoses*, where Julius Caesar is deified and Ovid suggests that Augustus will follow.  

Although Gower’s *Confessio* lacks any such apotheosis for Richard, Gower’s prologues to the text provide explicit attempts to curry favor with Richard and then Henry.  

Perhaps inspired by the symbolic deification of Richard during his reconciliation pageant in London, Gower clearly turned to the *Metamorphoses* for inspiration regarding how to handle his relationship with an arrogant monarch. The English poet appropriates the Roman’s tales that discuss power abused by a deity or a person empowered by a deity because he was witnessing hegemony being similarly vitiated by personal interests. The fact that Gower gravitates towards the *Metamorphoses* for the *Confessio* indicates his disaffection with the king. However, rather than boldly describing gods and kings abusing power, Gower slyly tends to focus on the Ovidian narratives that include mortals heading to their own demise by means of the bad choices that they make. Only Book 8 includes a direct criticism of a king, which Watt aptly interprets as Gower’s ethical criticism of Richard’s turpitude. 

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According to Conrad Mainzer, Gower was undoubtedly using medieval
Ovidian commentaries to craft the *Confessio*, noticing a correlation between Pierre
Bersuire’s *De formis figurisque deorum* (which the first chapter describes) and
Gower’s description of the pantheon in Book 5 along with both authors’ renditions
of myths such as Deianira and Nessus.\(^{271}\) Mainzer also believes that Gower was
familiar with the *Ovide moralisé*, claiming that many of its versions of myths and
Gower’s also overlapped.\(^{272}\) McKinley, however, expands the scope of Ovidian
source studies for Gower, claiming that his eclectic approaches to Ovidian materials
indicate that he used moralized texts in addition to omnibus editions and a variety
of other commentaries—but not *florilegia* because he incorporates full verses from
the *Metamorphoses* at times.\(^{273}\) These source studies for Gower’s myths provide
useful information about his details and linguistic choices, but they lack an
explication of why the *Confessio* relays these episodes in the manner that it does.
These moralizing commentaries and omnibus additions do not account for the
rhetorical training that other commentaries offer, and which English prose
paraphrases imitate. As my introductory chapter explained, the fourteenth and

\(^{271}\) Mainzer thinks it is likely that Gower had access to Bersuire’s *Ovidius moralizatus*
because there were at least two manuscripts of the text in England during the end of
the fourteenth century: B.M. 15 C XVI ff. 1r-59v (“which was in the library at Ashbridge, having
come there from the hospital of St. Thomas of Acon, London); and Trinity College Dublin
115 ff. 55-156 (“this item was copied by Stocton at Bedford, Lynn, Otford in Kent, and a
place he calls *Utson*”). Conrad Mainzer, “John Gower’s Use of the ‘Mediaeval Ovid’ in the

\(^{272}\) Ibid., 215-23.

\(^{273}\) Kathryn L. McKinley, “Gower and Chaucer: Readings of Ovid in Late Medieval England,”
in *Ovid in the Middle Ages*, ed. James G. Clark, Frank T. Coulson, and Kathryn L. McKinley
fifteenth centuries witnessed a unique interest in Ovidian poetic style and rhetoric in England, and Gower’s Confessio was a part of that trend.

**Ethical Interpretations of the Confessio**

Clearly, the moral emphasis of interpretations of Gower’s Ovidian impulses have their limitations, in part because his text conveys so many, sometimes conflicting, morals. Elizabeth Porter, for example, argues that Gower’s tales have multiple ethical meanings, but that only one of these is relevant for the monarch.\textsuperscript{274} Gower derives such manifold implications for each of his tales from the Ovidian commentary tradition, such as the *Ovidius moralizatus*, which provides several moralizing and allegorizing interpretations for each Ovidian myth. Ethical interpretations of Gower’s tales tend to focus on the moral categories for each of Gower’s books, such as the category of Sloth for Book 4, and Genius’ exposition for each of the tales. Yet this interpretive method leads Peter Nicholson to notice that each book’s structure is drastically different from the next. Nicholson explains:

> The most obvious aspect of the form of the *Confessio* is its organizing scheme, the division of the poem into books according to the Seven Deadly Sins, and within each book, the division of each sin into its species or subtypes. In Books 7 and 8 Genius sets this plan aside, just as he abandons the format of the confession, for the purpose of constructing his final lesson.\textsuperscript{275}

According to Nicholson, Gower only considers the Seven Deadly Sins when organizing the first six books of his tome, but he abandons this plan for the last two


\textsuperscript{275} Nicholson, *Love and Ethics*, 70.
books. In other words, Nicholson’s format for the *Confessio* applies to six out of eight books alone. Nicholson also observes drastic differences between each book and between all of the books’ openings and conclusions.276

These discrepancies encourage medievalists such as Watt to estimate the *Confessio* as ethically inconsistent due to its varying messages about personal or political governance.277 Elizabeth Allen similarly considers the moral framework of the text problematic because “any interpreter’s moral choice is an unpredictable and idiosyncratic process, a creative invention based on revising the past—a process that partakes in the imaginative dynamism of the plot itself.”278 David Aers also argues that the *Confessio* contains political and ethical contradictions that are not carefully constructed and defy attempts to designate a singular ethical or political system that will lead us to perfection in the text—essentially claiming that Gower is not a careful writer.279

Whether approaching the text from Nicholson’s, Watt’s, Aers’s, or Allen’s perspective, we are forced to regard Gower as inconsistent and disorganized with narratives that only tenuously accord with his ethical agenda. Such emphasis on

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276 Ibid., 75.
277 For Watt, Gower’s ethical variability makes him a more interesting and valuable writer, but the following pages will reveal that Gower derived these inconsistencies from the Ovidian poetic form that inspired him. Watt, *Amoral Gower*, xviii.
278 While Allen is mostly presenting this argument in regards to Book 8, which she considers a romance instead of an exemplum, she argues that all of Gower’s exempla require individual imaginative responses from the audience, which defy standardized readings. In point of fact, she claims that exemplarity depends on variety of audience response. Elizabeth Allen, “Newfangled Readers in Gower’s ‘Apollonius of Tyre,” *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 29 (2007): 422-3.
moral interpretations led Aers to claim that the Confessio “tends to be compiled in units that are paratactically sealed off from each other rather than brought into dialogue,” declaring the Confessio “episodic.” The Book to suffer most from this analytical avenue is Book 4. Nicholson claims that in this book Gower abandons his agenda for the rest of the Confessio because Sloth, its resident sin, is not equally immoral in love as it is in a Christian context. Nicholson believes that while Pride, Envy, and Wrath are wrong at all times, Sloth is not. Nicholson claims that because Gower could not condemn both Sloth in love and in spirit (because amatory Sloth could help defend against the spiritual sins of flesh in love), Gower chose to focus on Sloth in love. As a result, Book 4 is more focused on love than any other book in the Confessio. If we accept Nicholson’s, Aers’s, Allen’s, or Watt’s interpretation of Gower as simply organizing his text according to sins and their subcategories, our outline of Book 4 would look like the following linear list:

I. Procrastination:
   a. Aeneas and Dido
   b. Ulysses and Penelope

II. Cowardice:
   a. Pygmalion and his statue
   b. Iphis and Ianthe

III. Forgetfulness:
   a. Demophon and Phyllis

IV. Negligence:
   a. Phaethon
   b. Icarus

V. Idleness:
   a. Rosiphelee
   b. Jephtha’s Daughter

VI. “Travail” Against Sluggishness:

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280 Ibid., 193.
281 Nicholson, Love and Ethics, 72.
This outline leads to a fractured perception of Gower’s organization for the book. For example, Harbert assumes that “The Tale of Ceyx and Alcyone” is a digression about dreams in the Book of Sloth, about which Harbert writes:

When treating Sloth, Gower praises Pygmalion as one free from this vice, because his beloved came to life through his own efforts; the section on Sloth also contains the story of Ceyx and Alcyone in a digression on dreams, since it was in a dream that Alcyone learnt of Ceyx’s death.  

Harbert argues that Genius’ commentaries about Pygmalion and Alcyone contradict each other because they praise the action of Pygmalion in one, but they also

condone Alcyone’s inactive dream in the other. Gower warns against over-indulging in sleep and dreams, which Harbert regards as a digression after the section in which Gower explains how labor, invention, and some forms of alchemy help one to overcome Sloth. Amans then claims to be free of the sin of over-sleeping, claiming that he can hardly rest because he prefers to be in his lady’s company and is often too tormented by his lack of success to keep his eyes closed for long. Amans admits that it is a rare occasion when he rests, and even then he awakes discontent because in waking moments, unlike in his dreams, his lady does not return his love. Amans’s discussion of his unfulfilling dreams leads Genius to discuss how some dreams are significant because they can betoken true things, as is the case for Alcyone’s dream of her husband, Ceyx. In “The Tale of Ceyx and Alcyone,” Alcyone bemoans the long pilgrimage of Ceyx. Additionally, when Ceyx fails to return after two months, which is the time when he promised to reunite with her, she makes a sacrifice to Juno to learn what has happened to delay him. As a result, Juno sends Iris to the god of sleep to conjure a dream that will reveal the truth about Ceyx’s death to Alcyone.

Harbert considers this narrative to have no connection to Genius’ preceding discussion about labor and alchemy, let alone the preceding heroic narrative about Hercules and Achelous who fight to earn Deianira in marriage. The relationships between the narratives about Hercules, Alcyone, and alchemy would indeed seem tenuous if one paid attention to Genius’ moral interpretations alone. To begin with,

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283 Gower discusses alchemy as a type of labor that can help a person avoid sloth, but he broaches this subject carefully because while alchemy was productive for great minds of the past, he considers the ancient texts about this practice coherent to only a select few of his contemporaries.
Genius’ moral for the fight between Hercules and Achelous to win Deianira is that “the women loven worthinesse / Of manhode and of gentilesse.” Genius essentially says that ladies love robust but courteous men, and then he explains acceptable activities to combat sloth, such as alchemy. The moral for Genius’ description of the various types of “besinesse” to overcome this sin presents the merits of the Romans, who properly understood labor, about which Genius says:

The Latins of himself also / Here studie at thilke time so / With gret travaile of scole toke / In sondri forme for to boke, / That we mai take here evidences / Upon the lore of the sciences, / Of craftes bothe and of the clergie; / Among the whiche in poesie / To the lovers Ovide wrot / And tawhte, if love be to hot, / In what manere it scholde akiele.\textsuperscript{285}

Genius declares the “Latins” well equipped for fending off sloth because they studied various crafts and sciences, including religion. Among these diligent workers is Ovid with his amatory poetry, teaching lovers how to ease overly passionate love (i.e. Ovid’s advice in the \textit{Remedia amoris}). The depiction of Romans laboring in their scholarship and lovers cooling down their overly passionate love seems to be irrelevant for Genius’ lesson about women being attracted to male vigor and manners.

Moreover, both the moral for Genius’ labor section and the moral for “The Tale of Hercules and Achelous” deviate from Genius’ moral for “The Tale of Ceyx and Alcyone.” After narrating Alcyone’s dream and her transformation into a bird along with her dead husband, Genius says:

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[Ibid., 4.2661-71.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Lo, thus, mi sone, it mai thee stere / Of swevenes for to take kepe, / For ofte time a man aslepe / Mai se what after schal betide. / Forthi it helpeth at som tyde / A man to slepe, as it belongeth, / Bot slowthe no lif underfongeth / Which is to love appourtenant.286

Genius hereby claims that sometimes dreams reveal the future, whereas sometimes dreams help a man to sleep—yet sloth is always unacceptable to anyone in love. In a sense, the moral is even incongruous with the tale because Alcyone’s dream allows her to see the truth about her husband’s death, which happened in the past. In addition, she is already in love and her prophetic dream does nothing to help her achieve or maintain love. Genius’ lesson here seems to contradict itself as well as the two preceding lessons about male vigor and Roman labor.

Such seeming inconsistencies have led critics to accuse Gower of incompetence.287 But rather than retread such inconclusive ground, I propose that we look at Genius’ moralizations in much the same way that Marilynn Desmond interprets them in the Ovide moralisé, when she says that “narrative followed by commentary isolates each story […] as a discrete unit with a set of competing interpretations.”288 The outline above, delineated according to Genius’ didacticism, generates such isolation for each narrative as Desmond describes. Following the outline relayed by Genius’ categorizations has led medievalists to determine the degree to which Gower’s tales fit the moral headings beneath which they are placed.

287 Watt, Amoral Gower, xviii.
Nonetheless, by examining Gower’s exempla more than Genius’ expositions, one can discover a more cohesive collection of stories than the criticisms of Genius’ moralizations alone indicate.

The above outline begs several questions about how Gower is organizing his narratives, not the least of which is why many of these narratives are not narratives at all (especially those in the section about labor). To read the text only in relation to Genius’ instructions, one must assume that Gower’s project is a random collection of musings loosely tied to each other with morals that often fail to create cohesion and clarity for the text. However, Gower is a poet to be distinguished from Genius the moralist. Genius provides the organization for the above outline; and while many medievalists have aptly explained the similarities between Gower and his confessor character, one loses much of Gower’s subtle rhetorical craftsmanship by assuming that they are one and the same person. Rather than creating a compendium of moralized mythology in the English vernacular himself, Gower ascribes this function to Genius, who is fashioned as an educator and a commentator figure.

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290 Ian Thomson and Louis Perraud discuss how schools such as those at Loire were encouraged to produce straight-forward imitations of the great *auctores* as purely stylistic exercises (unlike the Chartres school’s philosophical allegories). Ian Thomson and Louis Perraud, eds., *Ten Latin Schooltexts of the Later Middle Ages: Translated Selections*, Vol. 6 (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1990). By imitating Ovidian commentaries, Gower does much the same thing as what Loire schools trained their students to do.
**Structural Links**

Gower’s interrelated narratives reveal another system of meaning that often opposes Genius’ expositions of them. To begin with, the thematic relationship between “The Tale of Icarus” and “The Tale of Phaeton,” both of which discuss the dangers of flying too high or too low, has been well established.\(^{291}\) But Gower does not reserve such careful attention for interrelating only the tales about negligence in the Book of Sloth; in fact, he connects these two stories to tales outside of the negligence section—not the least of which is the preceding tale about Demophon, which similarly depicts the dangers of travelling and not heeding the guidelines presented before embarking upon the journey. Gower explains that the death of Demophon’s wife, Phyllis, results from his delay in returning to her,\(^{292}\) and not from Juno revealing to Phyllis in a dream that Demophon is dead (the latter version appears in Ovid’s *Heroides*\(^{293}\)). Yet Gower employs more than thematics to link his narratives. In his Trojan tales, Gower also uses geography to create cohesion for his myths. Of all Gower’s books, Book 4 comes closest to what modern scholars call Ovid’s *Iliad* (roughly Books 11-13 of the *Metamorphoses*). With most of the narratives of Gower’s Book 4 issuing from or driving towards Troy, this book proves to be held together by more than the loose moral category of Sloth.

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\(^{291}\) For more about the relationship between these two narratives, consult Niall Rudd, “Daedalus and Icarus: From Rome to the End of the Middle Ages,” in *Ovid Renewed: Ovidian Influences on Literature and Art from the Middle Ages to the Twentieth Century*, ed. Charles Martindale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 21-35.


The geographical link involving Troy goes so far to even fuse Book 3 with Book 4. The last tale in Book 3, “The Tale of Telaphus and Teucer,” addresses Troy when Genius says:

Whan Achilles and Telaphus / His sone toward Troie were, / It fell hem, er thei comen there, / Agein Theucer the king of Mese / To make were and for to sese / His lond, as thei that woden regne / And Theucer pute out of his regne.294

This passage stipulates that when Achilles goes to Troy with his son Telaphus, they fight against Teucer in order to seize his land and rule there before reaching Troy. Gower relays the Troy reference in passing. He could have started the tale with the fifth line of this quotation, making the narrative even more concise—and brevity seems to be Gower’s goal for most of the tales in the Confessio.295 Even though one could disregard the significance of this Trojan detail because Gower takes it from his source, he has no qualms about excising details from all of his tales when he wants to, making some of his narratives seem terse.296 He often omits the locations from his sources in his tales; for example, “The Tale of Pygmalion and his Statue” lacks a defined location. In addition, he removes all but two of the locations from Ulysses’s travels in his rendition of “The Tale of Ulysses and Penelope” in Book 4.297 Such a tendency to omit settings indicates that this Troy reference is more than a “throw-

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295 Note that the average length of Gower’s tale is less than 150 lines, only “The Tale of Apollonius” in Book 8 and “The Tale of Constance” in Book 2 have more than 1,000 lines.
296 Ovid also has a tendency to be terse when narrating. Kenney explains that Ovid often focuses on a specific moment of action, focusing on descriptions, and assuming that the audience understands the rest of the narrative. Kenney, “Ovid’s Language and Style,” 79-86.
297 This chapter will later discuss how Gower removes all of Ulysses’s dalliances, so that the tale includes only Ulysses in Troy and at home.
away” line. This reference becomes even more significant because it appears in several of the following tales in Book 4. In general, the reference to Troy serves hardly any purpose in this tale except to relate the narrative to the first in Book 4.

Among those connected by Troy is the first tale of the book, which significantly revises the classical myth about Dido and Aeneas. Adhering to neither the Ovidian nor the Virgilian tradition, Gower depicts Aeneas’s tale as an exemplum warning against the dangers of sloth. To begin the exemplum, Genius describes Aeneas’s travels much like how he introduces Telaphus’ journey to Troy. Genius says:

Agein Lachesce in loves cas / I finde how whilom Eneas, / Whom Anchises to sone hadde, / With gret navie, which he ladde / Fro Troie, aryeth at Cartage, Wher for a while his herbergage / He tok; and it betidde so, / With hire which was qweene tho / Of the cite his aquaintance / He wan, whos name in remembrance / Is yit, and Dido sche was hote, / Which loveth Eneas so hote / Upon the wordes whiche he seide, / That al hire herte on him sche leide / And dede al holi what he wolde.\footnote{Gower, \textit{Confessio Amantis}, 4.77-91.}

Aeneas and Telaphon are both travelling in relation to Troy, and both are introduced in terms of their paternal genealogies. The geography, not the moral, qualifies this tale to be included within this section of the \textit{Confessio}. If anything, the moral seems to be an after-thought imposed upon this Trojan narrative, leading Genius to alter the narrative in ways not found in his sources. First of all, Aeneas’s goddess mother, Venus, does not appear to remind him of his patriarchal duties. Unlike all source texts, this tale lacks the presence of any deity. Second of all, Aeneas’s foundation of Rome is converted into an undefined sojourn. Gower
truncates Aeneas’s monumental establishment of the future Roman empire and rebuilding of a home for the dispossessed Trojans into three lines: “Fro then he goth toward Ytaile / Be schipe, and there his arivaile / Hath take, and schop him for to ryde.” Reducing Aeneas’s epic adventures into a short boat ride and a change of location, Gower excises divine intervention and Aeneas’s political achievements to turn Aeneas into nothing but a lazy lover from Troy on vacation. Editing the tale down to its basic plot points and geographical locations makes it a poor excuse of a narrative and exemplum, but only when interpreted individually as Genius encourages. But if we keep in mind the Troy connection, we can begin to see that Gower wants us to link these stories geographically and to think of Troy as, metaphorically, London.

In other words, Gower the author uses structural links to Troy in this section of the Confessio to encourage his audience to look beyond the overly simplified moralization that Genius provides. In “The Tale of Ulysses and Penelope,” Gower introduces Ulysses in the same way as he did Aeneas when he writes:

    At Troie whan king Ulixes / Upon the siege among the pres / Of hem that worthi knihtes were / Abod long time stille there, / In thilke time a man mai se / How goodli that Penelpe, / Which was to him his trewe wif, / Of his Lachesce was pleintif; / Whereof to Troie sche him sende.

299 Ibid., 4.93-5.
301 Ibid., 4.147-55.
Ulysses is thus presented as a man of action, toiling with his fellow knights in Troy. Additionally, Penelope further upholds his virtue, writing him a letter to encourage him not to be slothful by delaying his return to her. Gower is again playing “fast and loose” with his classical epics. On the one hand, even the greatest classical praise for Ulysses focuses on his rhetorical achievements,\(^{302}\) not the knightly prowess that Gower emphasizes. On the other hand, as with the Aeneas tale, Gower again condenses epic mythologies to their bare minimum actions; in this case, Ulysses goes to Troy and then returns home, with Gower excising the hero’s his long, famous journey to get there and his extra-marital adventures.

Yet perhaps the most striking section in Ulysses’s tale occurs at the end, when Ulysses promptly returns to Penelope. About his return, Genius states:

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\begin{align*}
\text{And when the time is so befallen} & \quad \text{That Troy was destroyed and burnt,} \\
\text{He made no delay, but got him home in all his} & \quad \text{Wher that he fond before his yhe} \\
\text{A good wife in good estate.} & \quad \text{His worthy wife in good estate.}\end{align*}
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Essentially excising the Ulysses’s odyssey from the *Odyssey*, Gower adapts Ulysses’s tale to begin and end with Troy. Ulysses’s life outside of battle is insignificant for Gower because he decides to use the intersection between love and war as the nucleus of Book 4; therefore, Ulysses’s philandering during times of peace are irrelevant to Gower’s project. As Wetherbee claims, “Ulysses’ epic role is viewed


\(^{303}\) Ibid., 4.224-9.
through a haze of chivalric fantasy." James Simpson claims that Genius avoids the *Aeneid* and *Heroides* for his “under-reading” of Dido and Aeneas to provide a superficial interpretation. Simpson writes:

> This interpretation is driven less by imaginative remembrance and more by the fantasy that Aeneas and Dido could have shared erotic happiness were it not for an unfortunate delay. The superficiality of this reading is underlined later in the book, when Genius praises none other than Aeneas as an active lover in gaining the hand of Lavinia.  

I accuse Genius of doing the same with Ulysses and Penelope, turning their epic trials into one minor inconvenience that they could easily overcome. According to Genius, Ulysses does what Aeneas could have done. The connection between these narratives is all the more pronounced by mutually situating them in Troy to inaugurate their diminished adventures. Gower could have removed Troy from both narratives, just as he took out the majority of the narrative details from both tales.

Russell Peck claims that Gower makes such revisions in order to speak “strongly against foreign wars—even the crusades—which do nothing to advance the faith or the common good.” However, Genius’ revised accounts of Aeneas and Ulysses function as more than criticisms for foreign wars like the Trojan War. The most suspicious aspect of Gower’s revisions and excisions is that Gower selects epic heroes with divinely ordained missions and makes them ordinary men and lovers without political agendas; Aeneas goes on an undefined sojourn, and Ulysses

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promptly and easily returns home without placing his territory at risk of being overtaken due to any extended journey. As Simpson points out, Dido and Aeneas are the “highest profile literary sources available to Gower,” and Ulysses would be amongst the most renowned classical narratives by the end of the Middle Ages as well. Thus Gower’s audience would not be unaware of his tampering.

Wetherbee points out how “Gower radically downplays the decisive events of epic history that center on Troy itself, and his individual heroes exhibit little trace of Homeric or Virgilian dignity.” Genius systematically diminishes monumental, historic Troy into a place to and from which people casually travel. Genius similarly turns epic journeys and discoveries into domestic disputes, and divinely selected heroes into mundane lovers. After noticing such obvious narrative manipulations in the Confessio, readers can conclude that Gower is suspicious of the superiority of those whom divinity selects and history remembers, a distinction reserved not only for Aeneas and Ulysses but also for kings like Richard—especially when we remember that London can be “Troy.” In addition, as mentioned in the first chapter, such questioning of authority and power is the most defining characteristic of Ovid’s Metamorphoses. McKinley, in a general statement, notes that “Gower draws on Ovid at times to extend the subjectivity of both narrators and characters as a means

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309 One of the most important discussions of Ovid’s claims about the abuse of power is Alessandro Barchiesi, The Poet and the Prince: Ovid and Augustan Discourse (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 141-80.
to offer veiled counsel to the king”—and I suggest that Gower is doing exactly that in his stories about Ulysses and Aeneas.

Yet Gower does not only use Ovidian episodes to construct veiled regal and ethical council; by stringing narratives together, he undermines the hierarchical imperatives that each narrative and moral category represents individually. Aeneas, Ulysses, and Teucer are not alone in Gower’s Troy circuit. Even though we enter Genius’ subcategory of forgetfulness in sloth with “The Tale of Demophon and Phyllis,” Gower connects this narrative, the last tale of Book 3 with the first two of Book 4 by means of allusions to Troy. Genius introduces Demophon according to the geographical destination of his journey when he notes:

King Demephon, han be schipe / To Troieward with felaschipe / Sailende goth, upon his weie / It hapneth him at Rodopeie, / As Eolus him hadde blowe, / To londe, and rested for a throwe.

Gower emphasizes the fact that Demophon is travelling to Troy, which concept he repeats in lines 772 and 780. This trek becomes more significant when considering that Gower’s source, Ovid’s *Heroides*, depicts Demophon returning from, (rather than going to) Troy in the beginning. The fact that Demophon travels there with a fellowship also provides a political agenda (of the sort that Gower omitted from both the Aeneas and Ulysses narratives). Gower seemingly adds a knightly duty for

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311 Genius narrates “The Tale of Demophon and Phyllis” after the cowardice section that includes “The Tale of Pygmalion and His Statue” and “The Tale of Iphis and Ianthe,” but this chapter will later explain how these two tales are linked to other aspects of Book 4 as is “The Tale of Demophon and Phyllis.”

Demophon, which makes Phyllis’s concerns about his delayed return much like Penelope’s. Such similarities between tales generate a subtext for the stories that runs in contradistinction to Genius’ ethical agenda.

Nonetheless, Gower did not come up with the idea of geographical and thematic links himself. Such methods for interrelating books are identified by many of the Ovidian commentaries discussed in the first chapter. The Orléanais commentators especially illuminate these rhetorical connections, which they identify with words such as “continua” and “continuatio.”313 The composite and philological commentaries from this region during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries acknowledge that the Metamorphoses is a carmen perpetuum. The so-called Vulgate, for example, scatters discussions about continuationes throughout the commentary. It addresses the structural links throughout the text, illustrating Ovid’s ability to generate cohesion cunningly for his anti-epic. One example of the Vulgate’s explanation of Ovid’s organization appears at the beginning of Book X, which introduces the Orpheus myth. The commentator links the Orpheus tale to the last narrative in Book IX about Iphis and Ianthe, when he writes, “Continuacio: ita Himeneus interfuerat nupciis Yphidis et Yantes; inde ex illis nupciis. Vel a Creta ubi fuerunt nupcie Yphidis et Yantes.”314 This quotation points out that Hymen is present at the nuptials of Iphis and Ianthe, thereby linking the Iphis and Ianthe in

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313 For more about these connections, refer back to the sections in the first chapter about composite and philological commentaries.
314 [I.e., the connection: thus Hymen attended the nuptials of Iphis and Ianthe; thence from those nuptials. Or by Crete where Iphis and Ianthis were married.] Ibid., 10.1.90ra.
Book IX to the Orpheus in Book X by means of Hymen's presence and the unspoken theme of marriage. In addition, the commentator creates a geographical link, pointing out that the nuptials occurred in Crete.  

Exactly how and when Gower had access to the Orléanais Vulgate may be unclear. Yet there is an English source that demonstrates the same reading practices. The prose paraphrases in Oxford, Bodleian Library, Rawlinson B 214 and Oxford, Merton College MS 299 (both described in the preceding chapter) incorporate this same structural link, saying at the beginning of Book 10, “Hymeneus, descendens de nupciis Yphidis et Yantis, infuit tristis nupciis Orphei et Euridicis.” Without using the word “continuatio,” the Rawlinson B 214 and Merton MS 299 expositors create the same one as the Vulgate commentator does for Books 9 and 10 of the Metamorphoses. Unlike Ovid and all other edited commentaries of the Metamorphoses, the Vulgate and these prose paraphrases explicitly refer to Iphis and Ianthe to introduce Book 10. The prose paraphrases even integrate the Vulgate’s linguistic link between the two books by repeating the word “nupciis,” indicating that these two narratives are connected by the goddess

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315 Coulson explains the commentator’s various means for connecting narratives when he writes, “No single, unified method characterizes the approach of the “Vulgate” commentator. Rather he adopts a highly varied and eclectic approach to the text, dealing with the most rudimentary questions of grammar and syntax; more advanced problems related to mythography and science; and most interestingly, matters of more literary import.” Coulson, “Failed Chastity and Ovid: Myrrha in the Latin Commentary Tradition from Antiquity to the Renaissance,” in Chastity, ed. Nancy van Deusen (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 17.
316 Hymeneus descendens] Himenius discedens Yphidis et Yantis] Ifidis et Hiantis [Hymen, coming down from the nuptials of Iphis and Ianthe, was present at the nuptials of mournful Orpheus and Eurydice.] My translation. Oxford, Bodleian Library, Rawlinson B 214, Folio 218v, 10.2-3.
Hymen as well as the setting of a wedding. This section hereby proves what Hugues-V. Shooner claimed about *Orléanais* commentaries being models for imitation, a point which Gower’s *Confessio* also supports by duplicating its systematic concatenation for inset narratives.

Much like how the Vulgate commentary and prose paraphrases connect the tales to each other according to allusions to the deities and marriage, Gower creates a thematic strand for Venus and Cupid after “The Tale of Ulysses and Penelope.” Venus and Cupid figure prominently in Book IV—and throughout the *Confessio* for that matter. For example, Gower’s third tale in Book 4, “Pygmalion and his Statue,” introduces Venus when she hears and accepts Pygmalion’s prayers and penance.

Genius narrates:

> Bot how it were, of his penance / He made such continuance / Fro dai to nyht, and preith so longe, / That his preiere is underfonge, / Which Venus of hire grace herde; / By nyhte and whan that he worst ferde, / And it lay in his nakede arm, / The colde ymage he fieleth warm / Of fleissh and bon and full of lif.\(^{318}\)

In this passage, Venus observes Pygmalion in his bed with his marble statue, intervening into his affairs to fulfill his desires. While Gower removes the presence of the deities from the Troy strand of narratives, he maintains them in his more amorous and seemingly less political narratives about Pygmalion and the following tale about Iphis.

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Such interaction between a deity and a mortal in his bedchamber reappears in the following tale about Iphis. When Iphis and Ianthe are placed together:

Liggende abedde upon a nyht, / Nature, which doth every with / Upon hire lawe for to muse, / Constreigneth hem, so that thei use / Thing which to hem was al unknowe; / Wherof Cupide thilke throwe / Tok pité for the grete love, / And let do sette kinde above, / So that hir lawe mai ben used, / And thei upon here lust excused.\textsuperscript{319}

Homophobia aside, this passage presents some of the same details as the passage about Venus intervening for Pygmalion in his bedroom. Pygmalion and Iphis are both in bed at night when a god assists them. Cupid and Venus both take pity on these mortals and supply them with grace. Additionally, through the transformation of flesh, both Ianthe and Pygmalion’s statue become a “lusti yonge [...] wif”\textsuperscript{320} and a “lusti wif”\textsuperscript{321} respectively. Gower includes the deity for such intimate bedroom scenes, perhaps suggesting that pagan deities are only pertinent to the bedroom and not to the battlefield. The parallel circumstances for divine intervention connect these tales beyond their morals about cowardice, repeating the settings in order to emphasize their relationship to each other as bedroom narratives.

Interpreting the myths about Pygmalion and Iphis as exempla against “cowardice” narratives, as Genius purports, makes Gower look inconsistent, because although Genius insists that both Pygmalion and Iphis took action to make their impossible loves possible, their desires are fulfilled when lounging in their bedrooms, which is the least active context possible. Such nonsensical

\textsuperscript{319} Ibid., 4.483-92.
\textsuperscript{320} Ibid., 4.503.
\textsuperscript{321} Ibid., 4.424.
interpretations by Genius lead Watt to claim that in Gower’s stories about rape, same-sex desire, and sexual transformation, “the distinction between the natural and the unnatural, between virtue and vice, becomes blurred.”322 But rather than casting aside these amorous tales as morally ambiguous, we can see that more than cowardice holds these narratives together. Venus and Cupid provide an Orléanais style continuatio for these two tales and many of the tales to follow in Book 4. It might not be surprising to see so many allusions to Venus and Cupid in a text entitled Confessio Amantis, but sometimes Gower uses their names to replace other gods as if he were stressing a continuatio strategy. Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of the passage above about Cupid’s pity for Iphis is the fact that Cupid is involved at all. In Ovid’s version, Isis, the goddess of marriage, is the deity to intervene and transform Iphis into a man.323 Gower’s substitution of Cupid for Isis in the passage above helps to keep the Iphis narrative related to the Pygmalion tale considering that the deities belong to the same immediate family. But beyond genealogical relations, the presence of Cupid makes the Iphis tale more about courtly love in the bedroom than marriage.

McKinley demonstrates how Gower employs the Ovidian art of love to express his political vision of instructing his princely reader in self-governance, subordinating love to the body politic.324 As such, Gower follows a literary tradition of using the gods of love to censure public officials. In the Chronicon Angliae,

323 Isis oversees the transformation of Iphis in the lines 9.666-797 of Ovid’s Metamorphoses.
Walsingham famously ridiculed Richard’s household knights by calling them “knights of Venus,” indicating Walsingham’s distaste for the courtly ways of Richard and his knights. W. Mark Ormrod explains that Walsingham

Commented memorably of the members of Richard II’s circle that ‘more of them were knights of Venus rather than of Bellona, defending themselves more with their tongue than with their lance, being alert with their tongues, but asleep when martial deeds were required’ (‘Et hii nimirum milites plures errant Veneris quam Bellonae, plus potentes in thalamo quam in campo, plus lingua quam lancea viguerunt, ad dicendum vigilis, ad faciendum acta martia somnolenti’).325

Ormrod indicates that Walsingham represented the general public opinion about Richard and his knights during the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries; and that opinion was general disapproval of the king’s household knights and the general cowardice of the society for being reluctant to participate in war.326

Walsingham’s *Chronicon*, first written in 1388, responds to the perceived shift of knighthood from the fields of war to courts of love. Walsingham and Gower both wrote during the first of England’s peace treaties with France, and Walsingham along with many of Gower’s contemporaries imagined a foreign threat of invasion. Richard’s lack of response to this perceived threat led to general criticism. Ormrod points out that Walsingham, in response to Richard’s inactivity, coined the phrase “knights of Venus” and placed Richard’s knights in the bedchamber to contrast them with Edward III’s household knights, who came to be known as “knights of the king’s chamber” during the Good Parliament of 1376 when the influence of the king’s

326 Ibid., 291.
retinue began to be questioned. Ormrod connects Walsingham’s political perspective in his *Chronicon* with Gower’s in *Vox clamantis* and in 5.1382-443 of the *Confessio*, saying that both writers viewed the cult of Venus as promoting promiscuity and contributing to the knights’ loss of personal honor and chivalry. Gower’s similar presentation of Venus in the bedchambers of the tales of Iphis and Pygmalion echoes Walsingham’s, suggesting an underlying criticism of the courtly emphasis of Pygmalion and Iphis despite Genius’ praise of their steadfast devotion to love. Gower’s placement of the gods of love in the bedchamber is significant because of the tales in which they appear; unlike most of the other narratives in Book 4, Iphis and Pygmalion lack any mark of martial duty—they are solely courtly characters. Resembling Richard’s “knights of Venus,” the gods of love appear in bedchambers only to satisfy the desires of lovers. Unlike Genius, who promotes these courtly lovers, Gower reduces the gods of love to chamber servants, eliminating all other responsibilities from their offices to make them “gods of the bedchamber.”

Such devotion to lovers in bedchambers becomes more pronounced when Venus slighted characters like Phyllis who fail to qualify as courtly lovers. In “The Tale of Demophon and Phyllis,” when Demophon forgets to return home within the two month period that he promised, Phyllis goes to the sea to look for him

> Bot al for noght, sche was deceived, / For Venus hath hire hope weyved, / And schewed hire upon the sky / How that the day was

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327 Ibid., 292.
328 Ibid., 293.
faste by, / So that withinne a liter thorwe / the daies lyht sche mihte knowe.\textsuperscript{329}

Gower turns Demophon’s death in *Heroides* 2 into momentary absent-mindedness and Venus ignoring Phyllis’s desires. One could interpret this alteration to mean that Venus is uninterested in lovers who have already been married, choosing to focus instead on assisting bonds to be forged, not maintained. The fact that Venus is only mentioned to ignore the lover’s lament here, exclusively serves to emphasize her disregard for married lovers.

This chapter already discussed Demophon and Phyllis in the section about the Troy strand, with Gower emphasizing Demophon’s travelling. The fact that this tale is related to the *continuatio* for both of these thematic strands illustrates Gower’s subtle weaving of cohesive threads throughout Book 4. Gower insists on such interrelatedness by replacing one deity for another in the Demophon narrative—this time Venus for Juno—to concatenate Pygmalion and Iphis, thereby emphasizing the martial activity of Demophon in contrast with the purely courtly Iphis and Pygmalion. In fact, Gower fully removes Juno from the tale, not even acknowledging her when Phyllis is transformed into a filbert tree in the end. Gower simply states that “the goddes were amooved”\textsuperscript{330} by Phyllis’s sorrow, instead of stating that Juno pities Phyllis after being formerly frustrated with Phyllis’s laments as Ovid expresses in *Heroides* 2. The English poet uses a collective reference to deity,

\textsuperscript{329} Gower, *Confessio Amantis*, 4.823-8.  
\textsuperscript{330} Ibid., 4.861.
rather than distinguishing Juno’s role, thereby diminishing and almost removing the roles of individual gods other than those affiliated with love.

Gower even inserts Venus into a narrative that is not native to classical mythology. “The Tale of Rosiphelee” seems to be a unique concoction made from a multitude of folk sources, including *Dame Sirth*. Genius explains that Rosiphelee was slothful towards love,

\[
\text{Til whanne Venus the godesse, / Which loves court hath for to reule, / Hath brought hire into betre reule / Forth, with Cupide and with his miht.}\]

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Genius initiates Rosiphelee’s story by including Venus and Cupid together in the same tale for the first time in Book 4. But the gods fail to change the lovers’ circumstances immediately (as they do for Pygmalion, Iphis, and Phyllis). Venus and Cupid introduce a situation to Rosiphelee to instruct her, much in the same manner that Genius advises Amans in the ways of love. Venus even reappears as late in the book as the section about dreams when Cephalus appeals to Apollo and Diana in his prayer.332

Yet even more illuminating in regards to the role of Venus and Cupid in Book 4 is that they are not present in all of the tales about love. In fact, these two gods are absent from the tales about Ulysses and Penelope, Nauplius and Ulysses, Hercules and Achelous (and all of the inset narratives in this section: i.e. Penthesilea and Pyrrhus, Philemenus, and Aeneas and Lavinia), Ceyx and Alcyone, and Argus and Mercury. Gower even excises Venus from her own son’s narrative, “The Tale of

331 Ibid., 4.1262-5.
332 Ibid., 4.3242-9.
Aeneas and Dido” in the beginning of Book 4. Nicholson regards the *Confessio* as a simple text about love, in which Gower arranges tales about married and unmarried lovers like Amans into a moral framework to present a wide range of moral and ethical choices and illustrate how love binds all humans.\(^{333}\) However, the most Ovidian book in this text about love is largely unpopulated by the gods associated with love, indicating that Gower and even Genius are invested in much more than the family of Venus and her reign.

The most prominent theme to encompass the majority of Book 4 is the overlap between love and war, primarily the Trojan War. Genius explains that the duties of knighthood sometimes trump direct duties in love. Such a hierarchical delineation of a man’s duties leads to the next portion of the text, which could be regarded as the knighthood circuit, including tales that present Ulysses, Achilles, and Hercules as men of arms. Before narrating his second Ulysses tale, Genius says:

> Upon knythode I rede thus: / How whilom whan the king Nauplus, / The fader of Palamades, / Cam for to preien Ulixes / With other Gregoris ek also, / That he with hem to Troie go, / Wher that the siege scholde be, / Anon upon Penelope / His wif, whom that he loveth hote, / Thenkende, wolde hem noght behote.\(^{334}\)

Returning to the Ulysses narrative, Genius incorporates the Troy setting and Ulysses’s devotion to his wife again; however, this time Genius presents the mythic figure’s devotion to his love as a fault because it impedes his knightly duty.

After Nauplius speaks with Ulysses to inform him of his misguided devotion to Penelope to the detriment of his chivalric duties, Ulysses cedes to Nauplius’

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judgment. Ulysses repeats the sentiments about knighthood that Genius provides before the tale, when he says that he will enter the Trojan War. Ulysses realizes that he had inappropriately fixed his heart on his wife, and turns to Nauplius ashamed

And hath withinne himself so tamed / His herte, that al the sotie / Of love for chivalerie / He lefte, and be him lief or loth. / To Troie forth with hem he goth, / That he him mihte noght excuse. / Thus stant it, if a knyht refuse / The lust of armes to travaile, / Ther mai no worldes ese availe, / Bot if worschipe be withal. / And that hath schewed overall; / For it sit wel in alle wise / A kniht to ben of hih emprise / And puten alle drede aweie,\textsuperscript{335}

This passage illustrates the aspect of Ulysses that might be more familiar to readers of the classics than the battling Ulysses from the beginning of Book 4; here he must be corrected and coerced to enter the Trojan War. Genius essentially says that Ulysses returned home from his discussion with Nauplius tamed, leaving the foolishness of love for martial duties and then going to Troy. Ulysses's conversion results from the fact that no true knight can refuse a call to arms. Chivalry is supposed to summon all men of honor, and it is shameful when love for a woman interferes. In other words, Genius indicates that a man is only allowed to dote on his lady during times of peace. In this passage, Genius places Troy as the literal opposition to indulging love, and it is through his journey to Troy that Ulysses proves to be an honorable man and not just an honorable lover.

Genius’ discussion of the relationship between love and chivalry leads to a series of inset narratives, including the letter that Laodamia sends to her husband, Protesilaus. This letter to her husband results from her anxieties about him fighting

\textsuperscript{335} Ibid., 4.1885-99.
in the Trojan War. She asks him to restrain his manly desire to disembark from the boat before any of his comrades because she fears his death. However, Gower states that he proves to be an honorable knight by pursuing his masculine duty and showing courage in the face of war. Protesilaus is eager for masculine labor in Troy and disregards his wife’s feminine devotion to love. This narrative praises Protesilaus’ virility, depicting love as a potential impediment to chivalry—but one that can be overcome by virile men with a strong sense of honor and duty.

The second inset tale, while not related to Troy directly, discusses honorable service in knighthood, and Samuel provides a warning much like Laodamia’s when he prophesies the death of King Saul. Samuel tells King Saul that he will die on the first day of battle along with his son Jonathan; nevertheless, King Saul, “this worthi kniht of his corage / Hath undertake the viage, / And wol noght his knythode lette / For no peril he couthe sette.” Genius approves of Saul’s behavior because he honors the courage of knighthood over concerns about personal peril. Wetherbee claims that Gower presents romance with a “calculated naiveté, thematic and historical [that] sets off the dangers of chivalric individualism, the concatenated violence and instability with which knightly restlessness affected fourteenth-century society at all levels.” Yet when reading the knighthood strand of narratives, we can see that together they provide the solution to individualism, not the inspiration for it. The examples of Ulysses, Protesilaus, and Samuel prove that


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unlike love, which encourages men to be egotistical, knighthood prompts men to think beyond their self-promotion and self-preservation.

By means of these narratives, Gower establishes the principles of knighthood as a unifying philosophy that can combat the sloth found in love. Nauplius, Laodamia, and Samuel’s warnings present the Orléanais style continuatio of knighthood, which also links these tales to the non-narrative explanation of the philosophical principles that Achilles learned. Gower’s definition of knighthood as a belief system instead of a profession or course of action, allows him to transition between war stories and education descriptions seamlessly. This philosophical connection then helps Gower to return to war narratives when he introduces Hercules and Aelous after his description of Achilles’s studies. In “The Tale of Hercules and Aelous” Genius re-emphasizes this theme when he says:

Upon knighthode of this matiere, / Hou love and armes ben aqueinted, / A man mai se bothe write and peinted / So ferforth that Pantasilee, / Which was the queene of Feminee, / The love of Hector for to sieke / And for th’onour of armes eke, / To Troie cam with spere and schield, And rod hirself into the field / With maidens armed al a route / In rescouss of the toun aboute, / Which with the Gregois was belein.338

The example of Penthesilea, Queen of the Amazons, shows that love and knighthood are not always opposed. Penthesilea comes to Troy with her spear and armor for the sake of her love for Hector. Genius thus returns to the Troy setting that permeates most of Book 4. But here, unlike any other portion of Book 4, Gower presents a woman with armed maidens, showing that his lessons in love apply to people, not just men. Penthesilea’s journey to Troy from the Amazons links all four minor

338 Gower, Confessio Amantis, 4.2136-47.
narratives inset within “The Tale of Hercules and Achelous”—the tales of Philemenus and Pyrrhus, the son of Achilles, whom Penthesilea sought out to destroy in Troy, and Aeneas winning Lavinia in Italy. All four embedded stories revolve around knighthood and the end of Troy.

Wetherbee conversely considers these different representations of knighthood contradictory when he writes:

The world of chivalry is amorphous, unified only by the preoccupations and besetting whims of knighthood as defined by the many tales that deal, almost always indirectly, with Troy.  

However, all of the chivalric narratives and the non-narrative sections about Achilles’s lessons generate a consistent signification for knighthood: it is a duty that undergirds moral fortitude, unlike the love that often shamefully impedes knights from attaining their potential. Such an extensive collection of tales revolving around chivalric ideals, while considered a digression by some critics, actually portrays the amatory treatise’s primary concern that love is a labor to pursue during times of peace, and not during times of war.

Gower’s interest in practices to pursue during times of peace might result from the fact that in 1389 England and France arranged their first of a series of truces. Peck believes that Gower’s *Confessio* promotes the peace that had finally been arranged after a long series of wars. Interpreting the text primarily from Genius’ moral perspective, he claims that Gower argues “strongly against foreign wars—even the crusades—which do nothing to advance the faith or the common

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good.” However, Gower’s knighthood circuit and even his Venus and Cupid sections suggest otherwise. Gower professes that love, not war, is a distraction from a man’s true functions, and that a man is obligated to participate in war whenever the opportunity arises. In addition, Gower’s references to the gods of love in the bedchamber, suggest that Gower has an affinity with Walsingham’s criticism of Richard’s peaceful policies. Unlike Nicholson’s argument that Book 4 must choose between criticizing sloth in love and religious sloth because what is sinful for one is not sinful for the other, the exempla in Book 4 seem to relay a unified message about sloth: this sin results from excessive devotion to courtly love to the detriment of one’s chivalric duties.

The exempla in Book 4, unlike Genius’ interpretations of them, provide a cohesive argument about overcoming sloth. In this book, love is not a primary focus because it is only one field of endeavor, and a secondary one at that, for a man trying to protect himself from sloth. Because Gower establishes love as a pursuit for times of peace alone, he is able to continue Book 4 with discussions about other labors that ward off sloth in general, and that are seemingly unaffiliated with the amatory objectives. The most obvious activity to ward off sloth is battle, which the book continually implies but Genius never acknowledges. Critics such as Simpson have analyzed the short narrative tales of Book 4 and Genius’ moralizing commentaries about them, but the rest of the book, which contains discourses on labor, alchemy, and invention, defies their attempts to analyze Genius’ literary activity. Simpson, 341

342 Nicholson, Love and Ethics, 72.
among others, tends to avoid Gower’s non-narrative sections, focusing solely on Genius’ moral expositions about the tales. Gower’s non-narrative discussions about labors, such as alchemy, thereby often garner the label of “digression.” Although Genius’ discourse about labor lacks central narratives, Gower is not the first to incorporate philosophical lectures into a frame narrative. Book 15 of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* is filled almost exclusively by explanations of Pythagoras’s philosophical beliefs, ranging from vegetarianism to the sanctity of life. In point of fact, Book 15 integrates eleven of Pythagoras’s theories in comparison to having only four narrative sections about Myscelus, Hippolytus, Cipus, and Aesculapius.

While many scholars regard Genius’ discussions about labor, inventions, and alchemy to be random ramblings because Genius does not organize these comments by placing them in story form, the knighthood strand proves that Gower wants us to see these sections as fused together by shared themes, geography, and philosophical principles, not linear narrative sequences. Gower’s non-linear understanding of texts appears when Genius begins his discussion of labor by describing the beginning of human history. Genius says:

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Throughout the *Confessio*, and this section is no exception, Genius discusses the wisdom and edification found in old books. Genius says that men who understood the teaching that God gave to them recorded it in books first, whereas nowadays men have to learn things anew everyday. In other words, men had closer relationships to texts in olden days, but men prefer experiences to texts in contemporary times. Similar to Gower’s version of the degradation of ages in the Prologue, Genius returns to the notion that contemporary times are inferior to the past.

After Genius comments on the first people to write down their knowledge, he comments on the nature of knowledge before people could write. He says:

> And er the wisdom cam aboute / Of hem that ferst the bokes write, / This mai wel every wys man wite, / Ther was gret labour ek also.\(^{345}\)

Unlike man’s relationship to literary knowledge, labor has remained consistent throughout human history—even in pre-biblical history. Genius hereby introduces this non-narrative section by stating that the concept of labor existed before written literature and, therefore, need not be described in narrative form. Genius then lists the discoverers and inventors of writing in multiple languages and disciplines. In


\(^{345}\) Ibid., 4.2378-81.
essence, despite this section’s lack of specific narrative details, Genius still focuses on literary knowledge.

After describing the Three Philosophers’ Stone, Genius introduces the first practicing alchemists by means of written records about them. The fictive priest of Venus lists the first alchemists

Among the whiche is Avicen, / Which fond and wrot a gret partie / The practique of Alconomie; / Whos bokes, pleinli as thei stoned / Upon this craft, fewe understonde; / Bot yit to put hem in assai / Ther ben full manye now aday, / That knowen litel what thei meene.346

Genius explains that alchemical texts do not lead to knowledge because few people understand the practice or the books written about them. However, the narratives from old texts actually lead to understanding because of their capacity to be more easily deciphered than alchemy. In general, Genius distinguishes between the narratives he has been providing for Amans and the instruction of alchemy. In comparison to specialized and mostly incoherent texts about alchemy, narratives are comprehensible for all. Therefore, discussing alchemy in relation to writing connects the “digressions” in the section about labor to all of the other tales for which Genius cites literary sources.

The difficulty of interpreting alchemical texts provides a continuatio to what Harbert considers a digression regarding Genius’ beliefs about dreams. At first glance, the subsequent section about dreams is unrelated to Genius’ descriptions of labor, alchemy, and literary knowledge, but Genius proves that dreams can be interpreted and analyzed just like literary texts. In fact, Gower invites his readers to

346 Ibid., 4.2610-7.
analyze our relationship with literature throughout the *Confessio*, beginning in the Prologue. Gower establishes himself as a literary author, not a compiler, and he presents his poetic identity in relation to those who have come before him, when he writes:

> Of hem that written ous tofore / The bokes duelle, and we therefore / Ben tawht of that was write tho: / Forthi good is that we also / In oure tyme among ous hiere / Do wryte of newe som matiere, / Essampled of these olde wyse, / So that it myhte in such a wyse, / Whan we ben dede and elleswhere, / Beleve to the worldes eere / In tyme comende after this.\(^{347}\)

In these first lines of the whole text, Gower essentially states that we learn about the past from books, which is why it is good for us also to write about new matters by modeling our writing upon old works, so that when we are dead it can be left behind us. Gower starts by situating his own work in relation to those that have been composed before his, establishing a textual link between him and his predecessors. By saying that “the bokes duelle,” Gower presents his textual understanding of history, emphasizing a literary imprint on history because books remain after people are gone. Gower thus presents literature as capable of immortality, outliving the historical times and personages that created them.

Gower introduces his work from a rhetorical, rather than a spiritual or historical, perspective. However, that does not mean that Gower depicts Genius as a pure literary critic. While Genius is unmistakably an exegete of narratives, the opening lines of the Prologue also explain the didactic nature of literature. The classics record instructions for the future, and it is this informative and pragmatic

\(^{347}\) Ibid., Prologue 1-11.
role that has led Gower to write his own work for posterity. The last tale of Book 4 pursues this notion of using narrative to convey messages for the future and it connects the thematic strands that precede it: Venus and Cupid, interpreting texts, and masculine obligations to the state. Iphis, suffering from unrequited love like Amans, invokes both Venus and Cupid to assist him with his lovers’ lament. He invokes them because they provide all fortune in love, whether good or bad. He tells Venus and Cupid that “I ne mai your hond asterte.”

He states that he cannot escape the grip of love, and because he can find no remedy, he must die. Unlike the knighthood narratives above, Iphis claims that nothing can divert his attention from love. Whereas the Trojan War can assist other lovers into remembering their political and historical functions, he is afforded no such luxury.

As a result of Iphis’s lack of true labor like war, science, or alchemy, he commits suicide and presents his body as a text to be read by others. Anaxarete finds his body and

Anon sche wiste what it mente, / And al the cause hou it wente / To al the world sche tolde it oute, / And preith to hem that were aboute / To take of hire the vengance, / For sche was cause of thilke chance, / Why that this kinges sone is spilt.

Just like the dreams and old books presented previously in Book 4, his body becomes a text that Anaxarete can read. He wants the whole world to know what she knows about his dead body, and she seeks retribution against herself. She

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348 Ibid., 4.3562.
349 Ibid., 4.3603-9.
immediately understands his body, unlike an alchemy book, and knows that she is responsible for the death of the king’s son.

However, the fact that Iphis is the king’s son leads to many questions about how Gower is constructing and revising this narrative. First of all, Gower alters his source to make Anaxarete remorseful, whereas Ovid’s character retains a cold heart that inspires the gods to turn her into stone. Second of all, Gower switches the social status of these characters, making Iphis the one with superior social status, whereas Anaxarete is in Ovid’s version. I suspect that Gower makes her remorseful to concatenate the tales within Book 4 and to underscore the likeness between her response and Aeneas’s response to Dido’s death in the first tale of the book. Gower’s continuatio from the first to the last tale in the book should remind his audience of how unorthodox his account of Dido’s suicide was, which resulted from Aeneas’s undefined delay in returning to her. In many ways, Iphis’s suicide evolves in the way that Dido’s should have; Dido was supposed to end her life because of her despair, her dead body was intended to be a message, and she leaves her people without an heir for Carthage. The fact that Dido and Iphis are part of the ruling class, and that both of their suicides are presented as hasty actions that could have been resolved with patience makes their demises shameful and politically destructive.

**Conclusion:**

By repeatedly diminishing the roles of epic and noble personages and turning them into supercilious and hasty lovers, Gower creates an anti-epic much like Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* and the medieval commentaries that address Ovid’s rhetorical
structure. Both frame narratives highlight the foibles of those in positions of power through careful manipulation of well-known narratives and through using continuationes to encourage audiences to interpret narratives in relation to each other and in relation to their broader contemporary contexts. Gower discusses politics by suspiciously omitting and downplaying monumental political acts, such as the suicides of monarchs, wars, and human history. He converts the history-altering actions of Aeneas and Ulysses into the egotistical and mundane actions of courtly lovers, setting the tone for the rest of Book 4 as a collection of exempla about frivolous lovers who shirk their political responsibilities. The lack of political motivations for Dido, Iphis, Aeneas, Ulysses, and even the gods of love create an environment in which courtly and chivalric duties contradict each other. Even though Genius promotes courtly devotion to lovers, Gower’s exempla totally undermine Genius’ lessons.

Such conflict between the different interpretive moves of Gower and Genius has led medievalists to assume that Gower is a contradictory writer and a failed rhetorician. However, Gower at no point forces us to assume that he and Genius have the same motives. The continuationes of the exempla suggest that Gower is a poet unlike his fictive priest of Venus—who is a literary exegete. Reading the Confessio as the Vulgate and prose paraphrases encourage us to read the Metamorphoses, we can see that Gower uses concatenation to criticize slyly the courtly focus of Richard and his household knights. The embedded narrative style of Ovid’s Metamorphoses offers Gower the subtle tactics to censure the abuses of
power that Walsingham more overtly states in his *Chronicon*. Gower’s use of Ovidian frame narration encourages readers to interpret the text according to more principles than the didactic character of the framing narrative, *Genius*, advises. Rather than analyzing the structure of Book 4 according to the morals, I suggest that we analyze the text according to a more intricately interwoven structure.

The frame narrative’s concatenated and self-referential nature defy attempts to analyze the structure exclusively according to chronological order. In point of fact, a linear outline cannot accommodate all of the categorical relationships among the exempla. Assuming that the exegesis *Genius* provides is the only structure Gower wants his audience to regard does the *Confessio* an immense disservice; this approach to the text has caused medievalists to evaluate the *Confessio* as a compendium instead of an Ovidian frame narrative. Overall, then, Gower’s *Confessio* contains two competing texts: *Genius*’ moral expositions and Gower’s literary frame narrative. The former text follows the allegorical tradition recorded by early medieval Ovidian commentators; the latter text follows the commentary tradition from Orléans and the English prose paraphrases emerging at the end of the Middle Ages, which elucidate and mimic his rhetorical craft. The second text implicitly allows Gower to extend political criticisms from a safe distance. Therefore, the *Confessio* does more than sanitize and predigest Ovid; it provides an early imitation.

By removing the motivations for the actions of gods and the ruling class in general,
Gower and Ovid similarly criticize those in positions of power for their seemingly arbitrary decisions that are based on selfish purposes.

To an extent, Genius’ expositions parody the overly simplified interpretations of Ovid found in moralizing commentaries like the Ovide moralisé. Such commentaries disregard Ovid’s rhetorical aptitude for presenting a political stance through nuance and wit. Gower’s distaste for neat Christian packaging of complex pagan Ovidian material can be seen in the “Tale of Dido,” for which the moral is such a strain that it changes the narrative, eradicating all of Aeneas’s motives. Yet such overextended moralizations do not apply to the whole Ovidian commentary tradition. By embodying the principles of philological and rhetorical commentaries, Gower attempts to address the Metamorphoses according to Ovid’s historical milieu, instead of subsuming him completely into sanitized and predigested contemporary Christian terms. The moralized tradition necessitated episodic appropriations of Ovid’s text, which medievalists have been content to embrace. However, Gower adapted the framework rather than individual narratives, helping to introduce classical structures to vernacular audiences in England and to reinvigorate Ovid’s reputation as a literary master.
Chapter 3: Chaucer’s Monkish Endeavor: “The Monk’s Tale” as a Codified Commentary on the Monastic Ovidian Commentary Tradition

Tragedie is to seyn a certeyn storie, / As olde bookes maken us memorie, / Of hym that stood in greet prosperitee, / And is yfallen out of heigh degree / Into myserie, and endeth wrecchedly. And they ben versified communely / of six feet, which men clepen exametron. / In prose eek been endited many oon, / And eek in meetre in many an sondry wyse.351

As Chaucer’s Monk storyteller professes in his prologue, “The Monk’s Tale” qualifies as a tragedy, providing what Henry Ansgar Kelly declares the first mention of the term in English literary history.352 According to the Monk, this genre entails a fall from “greet prosperitee” into misery and wretchedness. The seventeen “mini-narratives”353 that follow this preamble all adhere to this definition—even though the Monk’s forcing them into this tragic mold often alters them. Transforming stories from the “olde bookes” of Judeo-Christian, pagan, and contemporary history into generic tragedies, the Monk produces a seemingly cyclical and repetitive collection of stories sharing the same plot. The extent to which the Monk adapts Boethius’s Consolatio philosophiae to fashion his version of tragedy has been

thoroughly discussed by critics such as the aforementioned Kelly, in addition to Warren Ginsberg, Ruth Morse, D. Vance Smith, and Christine Herold. All of these critics acknowledge the tale as a recreation of Giovanni Boccaccio’s De casibus virorum illustrium, which is a much longer collection of stories about historical falls—mostly narrated by those who have suffered from Fortune as they appear to Boccaccio while he writes. The connection is undeniable, considering that “The Monk’s Tale” uses De casibus virorum illustrium as its subtitle. However, this connection, along with comparisons to the other narratives in The Canterbury Tales, frequently generates rather mixed and misleading reviews about the tale’s merit and overall value with respect to Boccaccio. Besides, Boccaccio and Boethius are not the only two sources to address the mutability of fortune—Ovid does as well in the Metamorphoses.

357 Christine Herold discusses Chaucer’s general use of tragedy throughout his writings, citing Boethius’s version of Seneca as his inspirational model for the genre. Herold, Chaucer’s Tragic Muse: The Paganization of Christian Tragedy (Lewinston, NY: Mellen, 2003).
358 Fausto Ghisalberti even explains that medieval accessus tend to identify this mutable fortune emphasis. Ghisalberti, “Mediaeval Biographies of Ovid,” Journal of Warburg and Cortauld Institutes 9 (1946): 43.
Many scholars interpret the Knight’s and Host’s interruption of the tale as an indication of its inferior merit, comparing it to the interrupted “Tale of Sir Thopas.” Considering the tale unfinished, scholars such as Alfred David and M.C. Seymour regard it as Chaucer’s early and failed attempt at poetry. In addition, looking at the text according to its seventeen Boccaccian stories compels medievalists variously to label it a tiresome compendium, an “experiment in reductivism,” arbitrary moralism, and “sham humanism.” Some critics, nonetheless, have challenged this approach, viewing it as a self-reflexive exploration of the nature of telling tales and the audience for those tales. Robert Boenig also redeems the tale as a complete effort with a conclusion, instead of an incomplete fragment, because he notices traditional fourteenth-century closure at the end of the

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360 “The Tale of Sir Thopas” is narrated by Chaucer’s fictional self-representation on the pilgrimage. The tale imitates the romance genre, but in a manner that seems endless because of its devotion to superfluous details that impede plot development.


363 Ginsberg, Chaucer’s Italian Tradition, 238.


366 Michaela Paasche Grudin, for example, states that the Knight and Harry Bailey’s responses to the Monk represent a tension between discourse and its audience. Michaela Paasche Grudin, Chaucer and the Politics of Discourse (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1996), 135-48.
tale. In other words, “The Monk’s Tale” has been the “problem child” of The Canterbury Tales, seemingly ironic because of its interruption and because of the repeated plot cycle that displeases modern literary sensibilities. However, the deluge of frame narratives appearing during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries suggest that medieval readers were much more appreciative of collections such as this one than modern readers are.

Kelly attributes its fourteenth-century qualities to Chaucer's "resurrection" of tragedy, which retains Boccaccio's depressing original tales—"but sandwiche[s] them between a humorous prologue and humorous epilogue and cap[s] the lot with a humorous beast-fable, The Nun’s Priest’s Tale." In other words, Kelly claims that "The Monk’s Tale" translates Boccaccio's De casibus, but originally crafts a frame for it by using humorous tales and a comedic prologue to enfold it. Kelly keenly points out Chaucer's unique structure for the tale, but it is important to see that Chaucer also frames the individual narratives within it. Overlooking the internal organization, scholars have not yet noticed that Chaucer relies on more than Boccaccio and Boethius to shape this group of tragedies. He adapts and transforms a variety of sources for all of his other tales, and “The Monk’s Tale” is no exception. With the Monk, Chaucer follows the trend that he establishes when the Wife of Bath

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368 Chaucer and Boccaccio both wrote several frame narratives, such as Legend of Good Women, De mulieribus claris, and Genealogia deorum gentilium. Other examples of frame narratives from this period include John Gower’s Confessio Amantis, Christine de Pizan’s Livre de la Cité des Dames, and John Lydgate’s Fall of Princes.
369 See, for example, Kelly, “The Evolution of The Monk’s Tale,” 413.
tampers with the romance tradition, and the Miller with the fabliau. Indeed, details about his adaptations of genres have become the common language of those analyzing the majority of his tales. “The Monk’s Tale,” however, has been more difficult for scholars to classify than the others. This trend leads many scholars to acknowledge Chaucer’s acute awareness of genre. Details about his adaptations of genres have become the common language of those analyzing the majority of his tales. “The Monk’s Tale,” however, has been more difficult for scholars to classify than the others.

More recently, critics have embraced “The Monk’s Tale” as a serious effort by Chaucer, as opposed to an early, failed attempt at writing. Kelly, for example, notes that “The Monk’s Tale” carefully constructs the collection of tragedies, which undergo more revision and rearrangement than any of Chaucer’s other tales or works. This painstaking tinkering allows Richard Neuse to regard it as a series of

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372 See, for example, Cooper, “Responding to the Monk,” 432.

tales clearly mirroring the entire *Canterbury Tales* in that both of them collect
distinct yet interrelated stories. Neuse hereby provides essential insight into “The
Monk’s Tale,” showing its indebtedness to the same style of narration that forms *The
Canterbury Tales* as a whole. However, Neuse’s sophisticated approach to “The
Monk’s Tale” still focuses on the text as a collection of *de casibus* instead of a unified
tale. All of these studies lack an essential piece of information to determine the
genre of the complete tale, which is indebted to the monastic literary tradition to
which Chaucer is responding. The Monk’s narrative style echoes literary trends and
scholastic preferences that shaped the monastic culture of his day—namely its
fascination with Ovid’s frame narrative, the *Metamorphoses*. Fourteenth-century
English monasteries were disseminating manuscripts with texts that closely
resembled “The Monk’s Tale.” By incorporating this monastic trend into the
discussion about Chaucer’s most perplexing tale, “The Monk’s Tale,” like *The
Canterbury Tales*, demonstrates Chaucer’s rhetorical mastery of the classical Ovidian
frame narrative. He would have learned this format through a commentary similar
to the one from which we can assume that the Monk is reading, teaching him the
rhetorical craft of interrelating multivalent narrators and narratives to produce
codified systems of underlying meaning.

In fact, the passage above that introduces his tale provides an *accessus of
sorts*, that is to say an academic introduction to a work that has established itself in

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This *accessus*, like the commentary style it emulates, defines the Monk's method of narration and sources. He begins by identifying his literary tradition as tragedy, but refines the term to define it as a story with a historical record—that is to say, a narrative that has attained *fama* and has been committed to recorded memories. He then identifies his historical source as Ovid when he describes the types of books he uses, beginning with an "exametron" work; hexameter is the meter of epic and, more specifically, the *Metamorphoses*. Yet the Monk mentions that his source is not always found in hexameter; sometimes it can be found in prose as well as in various types of poetic meter. The most popular, other than Arthurian lore, pseudo-historical text to have so many poetic and non-poetic manifestations during the Middle Ages is the *Metamorphoses*, which Ovid wrote in hexameter and medieval commentators reformulated in prose and various types of poetry (such as the *Ovide moralisé*). The Monk hereby exposes his varied Ovidian education and demonstrates his awareness of the rhetorical tradition that uses the *Metamorphoses* to train students in the art of versification. According to Jahan Ramazani, the Monk is the only pilgrim to mention meter and genre at length, making him a rival poet to Chaucer. However, he notes that this rivalry marks the Monk as the poetic antithesis of Chaucer. Razamani aptly points out the

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375 This variety of sources supports Kathryn L. McKinley's claim that Chaucer used several clerical commentaries for his Ovidian material. Kathryn L. McKinley, “Gower and Chaucer: Readings of Ovid in Late Medieval England,” in *Ovid in the Middle Ages*, ed. James G. Clark, Frank T. Coulson, and Kathryn L. McKinley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 199.

relationship between the Monk and Chaucer as poets, but he misses the largest connection between the two—their shared use of Ovidian frame narrative.

The following chapter will explain how categorizing “The Monk’s Tale” as a collection of tragedies written in the De casibus tradition has provided a limited picture of what Chaucer and his Monk are doing to craft a cohesive frame narrative. By acknowledging the monastic tradition that inspires the Monk’s art of storytelling, we can see that his tale is a more structured work than anyone has yet been able to see. “The Monk’s Tale” imitates and represents a monastic frame narrative inspired by the Ovidian commentary tradition. Yet this monastic tradition provides more than a lens for understanding “The Monk’s Tale”; it also offers insight into a monastic literary trend that was pushing its way into fourteenth-century vernacular literature, producing a deluge of frame narratives that included Chaucer’s Legend of Good Women, John Gower’s Confessio Amantis, Christine de Pizan’s Livre de la Cité des Dames, and Boccaccio’s De casibus—to name just a few. “The Monk’s Tale,” therefore, lends us a unique portrait of the historical moment during which the Ovidian frame narrative emerged from monasteries and schools to forge a lasting place in vernacular literature. In the end, “The Monk’s Tale” adds another piece of the puzzle that has plagued medievalists for generations: why Ovid, and why the fourteenth century?

Fourteenth-Century Monasticism
Recent discoveries reveal the active literary life of fourteenth-century monks. Most importantly, James G. Clark reveals that English monasteries retained their *scriptoria*, which were copying copious numbers of manuscripts for schools, libraries, aristocrats, and even themselves. Interpreting newly recovered books and book lists from late medieval England, Clark finds evidence for vital study of pagan and secular literature in monasteries. This wide-scale manuscript production included more copies of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* than ever before. Furthermore, Ovid continued to be important for mature monks, like Chaucer’s, after they left the schoolroom. For the majority of monks, Ovid served as a source of routine historical and moral reflections. Yet, at the turn of the fourteenth century, the exposition of his works, and the *Metamorphoses* in particular, also encouraged an engagement with contemporary literary criticism.

As discussed in the first chapter, medievalists previously assumed that writers were exclusively interested in Ovid at this time because they could practice their moralizing techniques—particularly allegoresis—on his myths. Chaucerians have especially been focused on this angle of the medieval Ovid, both regarding Chaucer as a trailblazer for disregarding the overt moralizations found in other works, and tracing his Ovidian sources to the *Ovide moralisé*. As early as 1918, John Livingston Lowes postulates that Chaucer drew from the French moralizations on

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occasion.\textsuperscript{379} Sheila Delany similarly notes the relationship between the two, citing specific instances in which Chaucer borrows from the French commentary to compose his \textit{House of Fame}.\textsuperscript{380} Yet despite Chaucer’s possible access to the \textit{Ovide moralisé}, his tales deviate from the commentary’s readings of Ovid’s myths. While analyzing “The Manciple’s Tale”—Chaucer’s overtly Ovidian tale about Apollo and Coronis—Jamie C. Fumo points out that scholars often associate the moralization of the Manciple’s mother with the \textit{Ovide moralisé}, but “matters are significantly more complex” than such a correlation suggests.\textsuperscript{381} Michael A. Calabrese tries to explain such complexities away when he says, "Chaucer’s Ovid does not directly correspond to academic commentaries but, rather, grows out of the tensions implicit in his culture’s inconsistent approaches to the poet it alternately adored, studied, and scorned.”\textsuperscript{382} Calabrese is correct to note that Chaucer deviates from academic commentaries, but mostly from their moral packaging for pagan mythology.

Helen Cooper notices striking parallels between Chaucer’s works and the \textit{Ovide moralisé}, but she suggests that there are a variety of possibilities that could explain these similarities. She states that he could have been reading Ovidian mythology through the mediation of one of Guillaume de Machaut’s French vernacular works that use the \textit{Ovide moralisé} or Latin commentaries—her point

being that while Chaucer shares exegetical territory with moralizing commentaries, he ultimately distances his works from them. She concludes that Chaucer is more devoted to narrative than to moralizing.\textsuperscript{383} Our limited knowledge about Ovidian commentaries in medieval England have hindered medievalists’ ability to make definitive claims about Chaucer’s Ovidianism. However, as scholars like Fumo, Calabrese, and Cooper note, the \textit{Ovide moralisé} connection is overextended. The primary reason for this strain is that, as Clark explains, there is no trace of the French commentary in England before Caxton’s translation of it, which was completed c. 1480.\textsuperscript{384} In addition, we need not assume that Chaucer did all of his Ovidian reading in France; there is a better explanation for his familiarity with Ovid’s works: England was producing its own Ovidian commentaries in monasteries.

It is likely that Chaucer acquired his Ovidian material from at least one source that incorporated some non-moralizing interpretations. The \textit{Metamorphoses} tended to be used to train elementary students how to read and write Latin, meaning that Chaucer probably studied Ovid in school to learn how to compose in Latin. These lessons would focus on Ovid’s rhetorical craft to encourage students to imitate his poetic style.\textsuperscript{385} Such rhetorical training explains why scholars like Cooper

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\textsuperscript{384} Clark, “Ovid in the Monasteries,” 188.

\textsuperscript{385} Ralph Hexter, \textit{Ovid and Medieval Schooling: Studies in Medieval School Commentaries on Ovid’s \textit{Ars amatoria}, \textit{Epistulae ex Ponto}, and \textit{Epistulae Heroidum}} (München: Arbeo-
notice that Chaucer is primarily interested in narrative instead of moralization.

Kathryn L. McKinley argues that *The Canterbury Tales* exhibits how familiar he was with contemporary clerical readings of Ovidian literature, but she focuses on “The Manciple’s Tale” (like Fumo) and “The Parson’s Tale.” Chaucer’s use of Ovidianism in “The Monk’s Tale” has largely been overlooked because we have assumed that he received his Ovidian material, such as the Hercules myth, “second-hand” from his Boccaccian source. Although many of the Monk’s stories are indeed inspired by Boccaccian biblical and historical mythology instead of Ovidian lore, the frame narrative structure is distinctly Ovidian. This chapter will extend the definition of “Ovidian” to incorporate rhetorical and structural impulses, not Ovidian narratives exclusively.

Chaucer may have discovered this rhetorical and structural information from a monastic manuscript that he obtained either from a monastic library, a private library, or even a school. While we might never know the precise commentary source (or sources) that Chaucer uses, fourteenth-century monastic manuscripts

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387 Ibid., 200.
388 Despite the growing number of secular schools during this period, Clark uncovers a still vibrant school tradition attached to the Church—particularly monasteries. For more about the rise of the secular school, see Nicholas Orme, *Medieval Schools: From Roman Britain to Renaissance England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 90. For more about monastic education, see Clark, “Ovid in the Monasteries,” 189.
389 McKinley points out that Chaucer seemingly used a variety of Ovidian texts to inform his own writing, but that he relies less on moralized commentaries than Gower (potentially because the popular *Ovidius moralizatus* was not circulating in England when he wrote *The
like Oxford, Bodleian Library MS. Rawlinson B 214 depict a fascination with history and mythology similar to that found in Chaucer’s “Monk’s Tale.”\textsuperscript{390} Rawlinson B 214, produced at Waltham Abbey in Essex, for example, compiles saints’ lives, English history, and various versions of classical mythology; it even contains satires on the Estates and against monks.\textsuperscript{391} But the single text to resemble “The Monk’s Tale” most closely in style and content is the prose paraphrase of Ovid’s \textit{Metamorphoses}.

As discussed in my first chapter, despite studies that show prose paraphrases to be the single most popular Ovidian commentary format in late medieval England,\textsuperscript{392} scholars have disregarded these fascinating works as unworthy of their attention. Nonetheless, the Ovidian exposition in Rawlinson B 214 is an important representative of the genre, which also appears in the unstudied Oxford, Merton College, MS 299. In general, these summaries lack the moralization, philological data, and overt rhetorical explanations that define other Ovidian commentaries. But while prose paraphrases deviate from other commentary paradigms, they were still

\textit{Canterbury Tales}, but was while Gower wrote his \textit{Confessio Amantis}). In fact, McKinley notices that “Chaucer was quite able, when he chose, to translate directly from Ovid’s Latin and eschew any moralising or summarising alternative,” indicating that he was not using \textit{florilegia}. McKinley, “Gower and Chaucer,” 199.
\textsuperscript{390} Technically, Rawlinson B 214 was copied sometime after 1469, but A.G. Rigg explains that another fourteenth-century monastic anthology was copied from the same source as Rawlinson B 214. Rigg, “Medieval Latin Poetic Anthologies (I),” \textit{Mediaeval Studies} 39 (1977): 281-330.
\textsuperscript{391} Ibid., 292-320.
inspired by them. For example, the Rawlinson B 214 *accessus*,\(^{393}\) or academic introduction, explains:

> Et est tripliciter mutacio: naturalis, magica, et spiritualis. Naturalis est que fit per contexionem et retexionem: ut de spermate fit puer, de ovo pullus, per retexionem ut quando corpora retexuntur et in elementa rediguntur. Magica est que fit per prestigia magicorum, ut de Lycaone et Yo qui corpore non animo mutati sunt.\(^{394}\)

In this passage, the commentator categorizes the transformations found in Ovid’s poem, briefly rationalizing the mutations by comparing them to occurrences in the natural or Christian world. But the commentator did not create this method of interpretation; he follows a commentary tradition that at least dates back to the twelfth century in France. Frank T. Coulson notes the relationship between Rawlinson B 214 and Arnulf of Orléans’s commentary,\(^{395}\) proving that the prose paraphrase writer was familiar with the Orléanais tradition discussed in the first chapter. This section of the *accessus* contains most of the same words that Arnulf wrote in his *vita Ovidii* for grammar-school students.\(^{396}\) The only difference between

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\(^{393}\) While Rawlinson B 214 calls its introduction to *Metamorphoses* a “prologus,” it aligns more with an *accessus* because its information provides academic information instead of a narrative opening for the poem.

\(^{394}\) *And there is a threefold transformation: natural, magical, and spiritual. The natural is that which is made through joining and laying bare: just as a boy is made from sperm and a young animal is made from an egg, just as bodies are revealed through laying bare and are forced back into simple substances. The magical is produced through the talismans of magic, such as that about Lycaon and Io who were changed not in body but in spirit.* My translation. Oxford, Bodleian Library, Rawlinson B 214, Folio 201r, lines 58-63.


\(^{396}\) Arnulf’s *accessus* states, “In hoc titulo designatur materia, de mutacione enim agit tripliciter scilicet de naturali, de magica, et de spirituali. Naturalis est que fit per contexionem vel retexionem elementorum: per contexionem quando scilicet elementa
the two is that the selection above condenses Arnulf’s version, simplifying the sentences much like he simplifies Ovid’s text.

There are three possible reasons the prose paraphraser condenses Arnulf’s *vita Ovidii*: he is using an intermediary text (indicating that Arnulf’s commentary had already been circulating in England); he is recalling the major points of discussion from his grammar-school lessons; or he is merely abbreviating his source as he does with the rest of the Ovidian material. The last solution might seem to be the most probable, but it is actually the least likely because the commentator extends Arnulf’s version earlier in the *accessus*, adding lines from William of Orléans’s *vita Ovidii*, from Ovid’s *Tristia*, and some of his own. The resulting prose paraphrase mimics the Orléanais commentary tradition, but, even more importantly, it imitates the Ovidian text in the manner that these French commentators designate. This focus on *imitatio* explains why the commentator—instead of summarizing all of the material from Arnulf or William’s *vita Ovidii*—omits ethical interpretations from the *accessus*. In other words, the expositor, much like Chaucer himself, avoids the moralizing portion of the Ovidian tradition.

As an alternative to moralizing, the commentator highlights rhetorical traits, which, as revealed in chapter one, the Orléanais tradition also explained.

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Emphasizing Ovid as a poet in addition to a compiler of fables, the prose paraphrase *accessus* states that Ovid truly joined his spirit to the “arti versificatorie.”\textsuperscript{397} Citing Book 4 of Ovid’s *Tristia*,\textsuperscript{398} the expositor writes, “‘Et mihi iam puero celestia sacra placebant.’ Inque sua furtim Musa trahebat opus.”\textsuperscript{399} The expositor thus presents Ovid as a hopelessly poetic youth, drawn to poetry despite his best efforts. Using Ovid’s autobiographical voice from the *Tristia*, this *accessus* presents itself as an authentic biography, adhering to Ovid’s own words. The expositor hereby shows his desire to remain faithful to Ovid’s text and authorial persona while “trying on” the poetic voice he so admires by quoting the first-person perspective. This propensity for citing Ovid, however, also copies William of Orléans, who scatters throughout his *accessus* quotations from all of Ovid’s known works. Nonetheless, the Rawlinson B 214 expositor focuses exclusively on Ovid’s *Tristia*. In fact, the Rawlinson B 214 *accessus* includes eleven quotations from the *Tristia*, as opposed to the eight found in William’s *vita Ovidii*. The expositor thus presents a singular devotion to Ovid’s poetic voice as opposed to an exclusive desire to summarize for mythographic information. The phrase “arti versificatorie,” potentially referring to Matthew of

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\textsuperscript{398} Ovid’s *Tristia* is a collection of elegiac letters written after his exile from Rome. In this collection, Ovid contemplates his exile, his literary corpus (including the *Metamorphoses*), and his life. These personal reflections make the *Tristia* an ideal source for medieval commentators attempting to discover Ovid’s intentions.

\textsuperscript{399} [“And even as a boy the heavenly rites delighted me.” That is to say his Muse was clandestinely drawing his work forth.] My translation. Oxford, Bodleian Library, Rawlinson B 214, Folio 200v, *Accessus* lines 18-9.

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Vendôme’s twelfth-century *Ars versificatoria*, further emphasizes the rhetorical poetic tradition to which Ovid belongs and which the commentator admires.

Employing Ovid’s *Tristia* as evidence, the commentator discusses Ovid’s life in terms of his birthplace, father, and brother, highlighting familial and geographical background as a means for framing the author’s work. In a sense, the details about Ovid’s life characterize him as the product of his environment and circumstances, discussing him as if he were one of the mythological figures he depicts. As Calabrese argues, *accessus* to Ovidian works reveal that medieval poets regarded Ovid’s life and work as a single “meta-narrative” because the scholastic tradition viewed poetry as personal history. This meta-narrative especially accounts for the ways in which political context shapes a text. In Rawlinson B 214 and the Orléanais tradition, the *accessus* determines that the *Ars amatoria* caused Augustus to exile Ovid from his beloved Rome, and, as a result, the *Metamorphoses* belongs to a collection of exile poems. The commentator explains:

Rediens ergo ad poesim rogatu Maximi et vt famam perpetuaret, librum Heroidum primo conposuit, secundo Ouidium Amorem, tercio Artem amandi per quem Romanorum et Augusti Cesaris inimicicias incurrit, adeo vt exularet [sic]. Alie traduntur cause sui exilii esse: incensio vxoris Augusti quam ficto nomine in Amoribus Corinnum appellauit. [...] Alii dicunt quod missus est in exilium quia vidit Cesarem abutentem puero. 401

401 [Therefore, returning to poetry at the request of Maximus so that he might also cause his fame to continue, he composed first the book of *Heroides*, Ovid’s *Amores* second, *Ars amatoria* third—through which he incurred the hostility of the Romans and Caesar Augustus, to the extent that he was exiled. There were some other things recounted to be causes of his exile: the angering of Augustus’s wife whom he called Corinna—under an assumed name in the *Amores*, [...] Others say he was sent into exile because he saw Caesar abusing a boy.] My translation.
This *accessus* (like the Orléanais versions by Arnulf, William, and the Vulgate commentator addressed in the first chapter) introduces the Roman poet in terms of his turbulent political relationship with Augustus. It describes how the *Ars* offended Augustus, and the *Metamorphoses* attempted to reconcile with him. However, it deviates from its Orléanais sources by providing two other possibilities for the exile: insulting Augustus’s wife when he created the pseudonym “Corinna” for her in the *Amores,* or witnessing Augustus’s abuse of a boy. While the other commentators focus on Ovid’s textual relationship to Augustus, this expositor analyzes the overlap between the poet’s textual and historical life—he even adds that Ovid views literature as a means for securing a place in history by establishing “fama” for both him and Augustus.

The expositor then imagines that Ovid’s notions of *fama* convince him to return to poetry to restore his relationship with Augustus. After rationalizing Io’s transformation into a cow as a spiritual transformation, the *accessus* suggests the possibility that:

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Vel intencio sua est multa genera mutacionum enumerare, ut per tot mutacionum genera que videntur impossibilia mutacionem Iulii Cesaris in stellam vel deificationem esse veram ostenderet, et ita benovolenciam Augusti caperet.403
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402 The Corinna reference would be grounds for exile because the majority of the *Amores* describes Ovid’s relationship with a mistress he calls Corinna.

403 *Or his intention is to enumerate the many types of transformations, so that, through so many transformations that seem impossible, he might show the transformation of Julius*
This passage suggests that Ovid writes the *Metamorphoses* in hopes of regaining favor with Augustus. The expositor then shows that this interpretation requires one to view all of the poem’s mythological transformations as typological prefigurations for Julius Caesar’s and, by extension, Augustus’s transformations. The expositor, again, did not create this interpretation—both Arnulf and the Vulgate commentator (also from Orléans) offer this possible inspiration for the *Metamorphoses*. The Orléanais and Rawlinson B 214 commentators argue that one text can remedy the political fallout from a previous written work, and they encourage readers to examine intratextual relationships. These literary and historical connections guide audiences to read narratives comparatively, establishing both intertextual links between myths occurring in separate works and intratextual links within Ovid’s works themselves.

*Caesar into a star or his deification to be real, and thus he attempts to seize the benevolence of Augustus.* My translation. Oxford, Bodleian Library, Rawlinson B 214, Folio 201v, Accessus lines 86-90.

Arnulf writes, “Vel intencio sua est multorum enarrare mutaciones, ut per tot mutacionum genera que videntur impossibilia mutacionem Iulii Cesaris in stellam id est deificacionem veram esse confirmet.” Arnulf, “Arnolfo d’Orléans: Un Cultore di Ovidio,” 181. David T. Gura even records manuscript variations for Arnulf’s philological commentary that add “et ita benoventiam augusti captat” just as Rawlinson B 214 does. Gura, ”A Critical Edition and Study of Arnulf of Orléans’ philological commentary on Ovid’s Metamorphoses,” PhD diss., The Ohio State University, 2010, 179, n.67. (THE:CLA2010PHD873). The Vulgate similarly explains, “Videamus autem ad quid agat. Offenderat enim Augustum Cesarem per Artem Amatoriam. Vnde ad sui reconciliationem per deificacionem Iulii Cesar a se ostensam scribit ad honorem Augusti de mutacionibus rerum ut uerisimile uideatur Iulium in stellam mutari, quod est in fine presentis operis ostensurum. Et hec est eius intencio.” [Moreover, let us examine at what the author was aiming. Ovid had offended Augustus Caesar by means of the Ars amatoria. Hence, to bring about a reconciliation through showing the deification of Julius Caesar, he writes about transformation to honor Augustus so that it might seem that Julius was similarly transformed into a star, which he showed at the conclusion of the present work. And this is his intention.] My translation. Coulson, ed., The ‘Vulgate’ Commentary on Ovid’s *Metamorphoses: The Creation Myth and the Story of Orpheus* (Toronto: Centre for Medieval Studies, 1991), Accessus lines 98-103.
Accessus like these identify how genealogical, geographical, historical, and political context shapes a text. These commentary passages demonstrate how medieval schools were training students to use frame narratives like the *Metamorphoses* to craft rhetorically political statements that one can discover by analyzing their historical, political, and literary contexts. The personal meta-narrative associated with Ovid’s paternal genealogy and geography trickles into the prose paraphrase’s treatment of all the Ovidian narratives; the exposition introduces its characters in the same terms as its *vita Ovidii*. This exegetical approach to both the author and his subjects exhibits the commentator’s self-conscious application of context as a means for framing narratives. The Rawlinson B 214 expositor thus leads one to assume that he is reading philological commentaries from Orléans, incorporating their biographical information about Ovid as well as their rhetorical lessons about the *Metamorphoses* as a continuous and interrelated narrative. By connecting Ovid’s work to his genealogical, political, literary, and geographical context, Rawlinson B 214 reproduces a typological interpretation (that is to say, one that demands the use of prefiguration) of both Ovid and his poem. In the following pages we will see how the Monk’s rhetorical education, much like that propounded by Rawlinson B 214 and the Orléanais commentaries, moves him to identify Ovid’s frame narrative structure as a means for generating narrative

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405 Calabrese also believes that Chaucer uses the language of Ovidian commentaries, thereby differing from John Fyler who believes that Chaucer read Ovid “straight.” Calling Chaucer the medieval Ovid, Calabrese explains that by the time Chaucer was writing it was impossible to read Ovid “straight” because the school commentary tradition provides some of the vocabulary provided by vernacular writers. John Fyler, *Chaucer and Ovid* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 1-20. Calabrese, *Chaucer’s Ovidian Arts of Love*, 1-14.
groups, thematic connections, and geographical links. By analyzing the structure of the stories that the Monk narrates, we can uncover the codified message that the Monk and Chaucer conceal beneath their layers of narrators and narratives. Interpreting each narrative according to its relationships with others—as the commentaries above encourage—we can uncover a more rhetorically sophisticated tale than we previously considered possible from the Monk.

The Monk’s Clerical Frame Narrative

The interrelated nature of the Monk’s narratives can be seen from the beginning of the tale when he provides a strange rendition of Lucifer’s fall from Heaven. After bewailing the tragedy of great men falling from fortune in general, the Monk turns to Lucifer even though Lucifer is not a man, and even though medieval literature consistently characterizes him as a villain. The Monk meagerly justifies Lucifer’s inclusion in the tale by explaining that he fell from great heights, saying:

For though Fortune may noon angel dere, / From heigh degree yet fel he for his synne / Doun into helle, where he yet is inne. / O Lucifer, brightest of angels alle, / Now artow Sathanas, that mayst nat twynne / Out of miserable, in which that thou art falle.\(^{406}\)

The Monk discusses how Lucifer became lowly Satan after falling into misery from his position as the brightest, or purest angel. In other words, the Monk presents Lucifer not just as falling from grace, but also as changing his essence to become a degraded life form. Conspicuously absent from this tale are all character details and motivations, including God and Satan’s sin of pride. In point of fact, the Monk

removes all of the distinguishing details about Satan’s descent, transforming Satan into a generic tragic figure. L.O. Aranye Fradenburg notices such moves throughout “The Monk’s Tale,” claiming that the Monk blatantly disregards human characters and values, which undermines his sentimental responses. The Lucifer narrative thereby depicts the core plot cycle that all of the following stories will follow: an ambiguously drawn character begins in a position of power and then Fortune causes him to fall.

Elizabeth Scala finds that fourteenth-century vernacular authors tend to write absences into their works, highlighting the narrative’s missing pieces by changing well-established sources. Scala argues that narratives are structured by missing stories because these absences are noticeable moments when textuality and authority openly conflict. In other words, the writer draws attention to his artistic manipulation by altering well-known details, creating a narrative structure that underscores what it omits. Lisa J. Kiser explains that Chaucer uses this abbreviating practice to parody it. When analyzing his Legend of Good Women, Kiser says that Chaucer parodies brevitas and abbreviatio to show how authors use them to falsify and do injustice to their sources. “The Monk’s Tale” follows this pattern of condensing popular stories to present a clearly erroneous representation of his

The Monk undercuts his claim to be a faithful intermediary for historical sources by beginning with Satan as opposed to any other pitiable character from history or mythology. Presenting Satan’s fall as his opening example of tragedy, he even undermines his own definition of tragedy: he begins his tale by defining the genre as a seemingly arbitrary downfall, and a medieval audience would be well aware of Satan’s willful dissent. Interpreting Satan according to context, as the commentaries above advocate, Chaucer’s contemporaries would consider the Devil proud and deserving of God’s vengeance. This story selection sets the stage for a series of seemingly untragic narratives about mostly despicable characters throughout Judeo-Christian, Greco-Roman, and Chaucer’s contemporary history—including Nero and Nebuchadnezzar. Clearly, the Monk is using the strategies of Ovidian prose paraphrases and commentaries.

The second mini-narrative, about Adam, similarly tests the Monk’s definition of tragedy while incorporating some of the conspicuously absent details from the

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410 One could also call this abbreviating practice “paradoxography,” which Alan Cameron accuses Ovid of exhibiting in the Metamorphoses. According to Cameron, a “paradoxographer reduces explanatory detail to a minimum and exaggerates the element of sheer wonder (ch. VI.3). Ovid is clearly more interested in wonders than explanation.” Cameron, Greek Mythography in the Roman World (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 268.

411 The Monk defines tragedy in the tale’s opening lines, saying, “I wol biwaille in manere of tragedie / The harm of hem that stoode in heigh degree, / And fillen so that ther nas no remedie / To brynge hem out of hir adversitee. / For certein, what that Fortune list to flee, / Ther may no man the cours of hire witholde. / Lat no man truste on bylynd prosperitee; / Bewar by thise ensamples trewe and olde.” Chaucer, “The Monk’s Tale,” VII.1991-8.
Lucifer/Satan story. The Monk depicts Adam’s descent as the product of disobeying God as the Bible says that Satan did, explaining:

Loo Adam, in the feeld of Damyssene / With Goddes owene finger wroght was he, / And nat bigeten of mannes sperme unclene, / And welte al paradys savynge o tree. / Hadde nevere worldly man so heigh degree / As Adam, til he for mysgovernaunce / Was driven out of hys hye prosperitee / To labour, and to helle, and to meschaunce.412

As he did with Lucifer, the Monk depicts Adam by introducing his original position of heavenly favor. Satan and Adam have narratives that are virtually indistinguishable from one another: both exhibit a vaguely defined fall from a privileged state into dismay. The Monk hereby makes clear his lack of interest in plot variations and the nuances of characterizations, focusing on collective moral states instead of individual ones. Using the same plot arch with different character names, the Monk establishes the relationship between all of his narratives as indecipherable cogs within the larger wheel of Fortune.

However, the interchangeable stories do not mean that they are endless repetitions of the same thing. The Monk encourages us to read context and interrelatedness into each story, just as Ovidian accessus propose. Each of the Monk’s mini-narratives provides slightly new information to inform his audience’s understanding of the rest. For example, while the Monk exalts Lucifer’s original position as the brightest of angels, the Monk glorifies Adam’s original state as God’s creation; God produced both entities, but the Monk only identifies God when he gets to Adam’s description; God is absent in Satan’s story. Conversely, the Monk accuses

412 Ibid., VII.2007-14.
Fortune of causing Lucifer’s fated fall, but he blames Adam for willfully disobeying God and entering the fallen world of mortality. Analyzing the mini-narratives as unrelated segments, Satan becomes a more sympathetic and tragic character than Adam. This presentation deviates from a long tradition of exonerating Adam as an unwitting victim of villainous Satan’s temptation. Even the De casibus absolves Adam, depicting his fall in his own words as he claims he was the victim of the serpent’s deceit. Boccaccio also enhances the readers’ sympathy for Adam by presenting him as a weak, suffering old man instead of the youthful, prelapsarian figure from the Judeo-Christian Bible. Reversing the roles of Satan and Adam in the De casibus and most medieval renditions of Adam’s fall, the Monk draws attention to his own manipulations; he proves how alterations to a narrative’s frame transform audiences’ perceptions of it. Beginning his tale with arguably the two most famous myths during the Middle Ages and then switching the roles of their protagonists, the Monk introduces his audience to his rhetorical exploitation and, thereby, his control over their interpretations.

The Monk’s rhetorical manipulation, which also deletes Eve from the Adam mini-narrative, uses Ovidian style intertextual links to call attention to itself. Eve’s removal becomes all the more conspicuous when another famous biblical wife appears in the Monk’s Sampson story. Unlike his version of the Adam narrative, his

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413 In the De casibus, Adam speaks as an old man to the Boccaccio narrator, blaming the deceit of the serpent for his fall. Giovanni Boccaccio, De casibus virorum illustrium, Tutte le opere di Giovanni Boccaccio, Vol. IX, ed. Arnoldo Mondadori (Milan: Mondadori, 1983), Chapter I.
Sampson retains the criticism of women that Boccaccio’s *De casibus* emphasizes. While the Monk never goes so far as Boccaccio to include a chapter against women, the role of women is forever hovering behind these narratives (an important point considering that Harry Bailey criticizes his wife and then ridicules the Monk for refusing to marry in “The Monk’s Prologue”). The Monk belabors the complaint against women when he says, “O noble, almighty Sampsoun, life and deere, / Had thou nat toold to wommen thy secre, / In al this world ne hadde been thy peere!”

Introducing Sampson by means of his wife’s role in his downfall accentuates the absence of Adam’s wife in the preceding story. By applying a typological approach to the *casibus*, each of the Monk’s narratives becomes part of that which precedes and follows it; thus, even though he does not mention Eve in the narrative about Adam, he implies Eve’s involvement in Adam’s fall by emphasizing Delilah’s role in Sampson’s fall. The juxtaposition of these two stories indicates that part of Adam’s “mysgovernance” was his trust of Eve, even though this point remains unspoken. Such typological moves are also visible in the commentary tradition.

The Monk further establishes this connection between his first three characters when he introduces Sampson in much the same way that he does Lucifer and Adam, saying:

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415 The omission of Eve in “The Monk’s Tale” is all the more pronounced considering how most of the other pilgrims emphasize her role when alluding to Adam in their tales and prologues. The Merchant, Wife of Bath, Pardoner, Chaucer the pilgrim in “The Tale of Melibee,” Nun’s Priest, and Parson all mention Eve and the extent to which we should blame her for Adam’s demise. The fact that the Monk is the only pilgrim to mention Adam without Eve makes her absence especially suspicious.

160
Loo Sampsoun, which that was annunciat / By th’angel longe er his nativitee, / And was to God Almyghty consecrat, / And stood in noblesse whil he myghte see. / Was nevere swich another as was hee, / To speke of strengthe, and therwith hardynesse; / But to his wyves tooled he his secre, / Thurgh which he slow himself for wrecchednesse.\textsuperscript{416}

The Monk introduces Sampson with the word “loo,” which he also uses to introduce Adam. The repetition of the exclamatory “loo” for both tales provides a rhetorical link between the two narratives. When this passage then identifies Sampson’s relationship to angels, the Monk connects Sampson to Lucifer, a former angel, and Adam, who communed with angels. Sampson and Lucifer are also both described as being marvels to see because of their elevated positions. Yet while God is involved in Sampson’s glory, God disappears when the Monk depicts Sampson’s demise.

Douglas J. Wurtele focuses on the Monk’s misinterpretations of Sampson to indicate that he is an inept cleric with little knowledge of the Bible.\textsuperscript{417} The Monk undoubtedly plays “fast-and-loose” with the Bible, and all of his source materials for that matter, but there are other forces at work here—rhetorical and structural forces that manipulate narratives to generate an interrelated collection of mini-narratives, strategies visible in the commentary tradition.

The absence of God in Sampson’s fall helps the Monk to transition seamlessly from the Sampson story to pagan Hercules. Boccaccio’s Lucifer and Hercules only make cameo appearances in other characters’ chapters (such as Sampson’s) and in

\textsuperscript{416} Chaucer, “The Monk’s Tale,” VII.2015-22.
moralizing chapters (such as Boccaccio’s diatribe against women). Kelly points out how Boccaccio orders his narratives to move from Israelite history to the narratives surrounding the disaster of Thebes. However, placing the Hercules narrative after the biblical Sampson and before the biblical Nebuchadnezzar, Chaucer’s Monk does not limit himself to the same categorizations as Boccaccio. Chaucer, unlike Boccaccio, does not organize his narratives according to source texts. As he exhibits throughout the *Canterbury Tales*, the English poet maneuvers between all types of sources and genres without drawing attention to the transitions, thereby revealing his understanding of the grammar-school commentary tradition like Thomas Walsingham’s *Archana deorum*, which presents all myths and narratives as history without distinguishing between the sources’ authors or religious backgrounds.

The interrelatedness of the Monk’s mini-tales also extends to the episodes not found in the Judeo-Christian Bible. Instead of relying on his sources to organize his material, the Monk uses intertextual links to do such work for him. While the *De casibus* relies on geographical regions and religions to organize its narratives, the Monk, as commentators point out about Ovid, provides parallel settings and themes to connect stories. The Sampson story ends boldly when he pulls down the temple’s pillar to kill three thousand of his enemies along with himself. The Monk then concludes, “That no men telle hir conseil til hir wyves / Of swich thyng as they wolde han secree fayn, / If that it touche hir lymes or hir lyves.”418 In other words,

the Monk moralizes Sampson’s life by saying that no man should trust a woman with anything that is important because women cannot keep secrets.

Hercules then begins where Sampson concludes—in a state of absolute physical dominance over all of his enemies. The Monk even defines Hercules’s demise in the same terms as Sampson’s, blaming a woman for destroying a hero who is physically unconquerable. Rhetoric also connects them, illustrating their physical prowess with parallel terminology. The Monk describes Sampson’s greatness as the result of killing a lion, and at another point killing 1,000 men using nothing but an ass’s jawbone. The Monk similarly introduces Hercules by saying:

Of Hercules, the sovereyn conqueror, / Syngen his werkes laude and heigh renoun; / For in his tyme of strengthe he was the flour / He slow and rafte the skyn of the leoun; / He of Centauros leyde the boost adoun; / He Arpies slow the cruell bryddes felle; / He golden apples rafte of the dragoun; / He drow out Cerberus, the hound of heele. Hercules’s glory ensues from feats like slaying Harpies, skinning a lion, and besting a dragon and Cerberus. We could interpret the moment when Hercules obtains apples from a dragon as a connection to when Adam procures apples from a serpent—in which case the Monk reminds us again about the details he omitted from Adam’s story. In addition, the lion reference could be an intertextual link to Sampson’s encounter with a lion. The Monk’s emphasis on the physical nature of these figures indicates his interest in secular, and not only clerical, matters. The Monk hereby

419 Ibid., VII.2119-26.  
420 Ibid., VII.2095-102.
generates a collection of mini-narratives that encapsulate all human history, not clerical or secular history alone.

In addition, just as the Wife of Bath’s mention of Jankyn’s abuse in her prologue informed her portrait in the General Prologue,\textsuperscript{421} this emphasis on physical prowess in the Monk’s anthology might be informing the Monk’s portrait as well. Considering that Harry Bailey makes a pointed comment about the lack of information the pilgrims have about the Monk,\textsuperscript{422} the General Prologue’s extensive and colorful depiction of the Monk is curious. Chaucer the pilgrim explains the Monk’s secular interests, saying:

\begin{quote}
What sholde he studie and make hymselfen wood, / Upon a book in cloystre alwey to poure, / Or swynken with his handes, and laboure, / As Austyn bit? How shal the world be served?\textsuperscript{423}
\end{quote}

This passage presents the Monk as an active outdoorsman instead of a studious shut-in. Many scholars have focused on this curious characterization, presenting varying views about the validity and the reason for making the Monk a hunter.\textsuperscript{424}

\textsuperscript{421} Her description of Jankyn striking her on the head leads Chaucer the pilgrim to say, “she was somdel deef” in the General Prologue. Chaucer, “The Wife of Bath’s Prologue,” III.794-5; and “General Prologue,” I.446.

\textsuperscript{422} Harry Bailey tries to fill in what he does not know about the Monk, interpreting the Monk’s robust and handsome appearance, but the Monk never responds to provide personal information. Harry Bailey says, “But, by my trouthe, I knowe nat youre name. / Wher shal I calle yow my lord daun John, / Or daun Thomas, or elles daun Albon? / Of what hous be ye, by youre fader kyn? / I vowe to God, thou has a ful fair skyn; / It is a gentil pasture ther thou goost. / Thou art nat lyk a penant or a goost: / Upon my feith, thou art som officer, / Som worthy sexteyn, or som celerer, / For by my fader soule, as to my doom, / Thou art a maister whan thou art at hoom; / No povre cloysterer, ne no novys, / But a governour, wily and wys, / And therwithal of brawnes and of bones / A wel farynge persone for the nones.” Chaucer, “The Monk’s Prologue,” VII.1928-42.

\textsuperscript{423} Chaucer, “General Prologue,” I.184-7.

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Medievalists have also pointed out the relationship between the Monk and the Knight, suggesting that the portrait reflects their antagonistic relationship because both men come from upper-class backgrounds and both are characterized as sportsmen of sorts.425 In addition, Terry Jones offers the possibility that “The Monk’s Tale” criticizes the Knight’s despotism, leading the Knight to interrupt the tale as a personal attack on his values.426 Perhaps interpreting the Monk’s mini-narratives as personal reverence for physical prowess, Chaucer the pilgrim characterizes him as a man who eschews his Augustinian labors.427 The General Prologue imagines that the Monk embodies the values that his tale espouses, picturing him as a man who seeks to serve the world physically like Sampson and Hercules, instead of hiding away from it in a cloister. However, just as Chaucer the pilgrim proves to misread characters elsewhere in the General Prologue,428 his version of the Monk proves to

424 Howell Chickering, for example, argues that the portrait of the Monk is ironic. Chickering, “And I seyde his opinion was good: How Irony Works in the Monk’s Portrait,” in “Seyd in Form and Reverence”: Essays on Chaucer and Chaucerians in Memory of Emerson Brown, Jr., ed. T.L. Burton and John F. Plummer (Provo, UT: Chaucer Studio Press, 2005), 3-18.
425 See, for example, Stephen Knight who claims that Chaucer’s Knight interrupts the Monk to remind the Monk of “the inappropriate nature of his assumed lordship.” Knight, “My Lord the Monk,” Studies in the Age of Chaucer 22 (2000): 385.
427 Perhaps it is also important that the Monk is Augustinian because monastic anthologies like Rawlinson B 214 were produced at Augustinian scriptoria. Rigg, “Anglo-Latin Poetic Anthologies,” 292.
be misguided. “The Monk’s Tale” represents him as a studious cleric who understands and embodies the literary habits of the monastic tradition despite his handsome and healthy physical appearance (which could also be explained by the fact that many monks were responsible for doing their own farming). The General Prologue thus provides an inaccurate assumption when it exclusively characterizes the Monk as a “manly man” who likes hunting. But by painting the Monk in this fashion, the General Prologue proves to be interpreting the storyteller according to the details from his narrative, examining how the Monk concatenates his mini-narratives—such as Sampson and Hercules—to determine the nature of the Monk’s character.

In fact, the echoes that connect the physical prowess of Sampson and Hercules also appear in “The Wife of Bath’s Prologue,” which generates a similar connection between the two mythological figures. The two heroes appear in her prologue when she discusses Jankyn’s so-called Book of Wicked Wives, which describes

How Sampson lost his heres: / Slepynge, his lemmen kitte it with hir sheres; / Thurgh which treson loste he bothe his yen. / Tho redde he me, if that I shal nat lyen, / Of Hercules and of his Dianyre, / That caused hym to seete himself afyre.

According to this passage, Jankyn’s Book of Wicked Wives links Sampson and Hercules by means of the women who undermined them and led to their downfalls.

The fact that the Monk duplicates this order and theme in his own frame narrative situates “The Monk’s Tale” as an extension of Jankyn’s anti-feminist, clerical propaganda. In fact, the Wife of Bath even narrates a version of the Adam and Eve tale from the Book of Wicked Wives, which blames Eve for the downfalls of Adam, Christ, and mankind in general.\textsuperscript{431} This repeated sequence of stories and the shared interpretations of Sampson and Hercules in “The Monk’s Tale” and Jankyn’s Book of Wicked Wives further indicate that these narratives emerge from the same literary tradition produced by monastic scriptoria.

Monastic anthologies like Rawlinson B 214 and British Library MS. Cotton Titus A xx (which were both copied from the same exemplar)\textsuperscript{432} contain antifeminist messages similar to the so-called Book of Wicked Wives. With works such as De coniuge non ducenda and De mulieribus compiled along with their mythological expositions, these monastic anthologies portray a literary culture similar to the fictional Jankyn’s. Yet the Wife of Bath, due to her gender and lack of formal education, approaches this text with a different framing perspective.\textsuperscript{433} In her prologue, she mentions an Aesopic fable about a man conquering a lion and then painting a picture about it. In regards to this painting, she asks, “who peynted the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{431} Ibid., III.715-20.
\item \textsuperscript{432} Rigg, \textit{A History of Anglo-Latin Literature}, 312 c; and “Medieval Latin Poetic Anthologies,” 285.
\item \textsuperscript{433} Furthermore, Fumo traces the Wife of Bath’s story-telling techniques and \textit{auctoritas} subversion to Ovid. Fumo also points out how the "Wife of Bath's Prologue" contains prefigurations for her tale. Fumo, "Argus' Eyes, Midas' Ears, and the Wife of Bath as Storyteller," in \textit{Metamorphosis: The Changing Face of Ovid in Medieval and Early Modern Europe}, ed. Alison Keith and Stephen Rupp (Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2007), 131-2.
\end{itemize}
leon, tel me who?” Medievalists have used this question to prove her proto-feminism as she points out that men unfairly control all historical records. She examines the nature of how personal perspectives manipulate interpretations and how the conquerors are the ones who write—or, in this case, paint—history. The Monk’s repetition of the Sampson and Hercules connection and their warning against women implicate him as complicit with the clerical tradition of misogyny, the same tradition the Wife is complaining about. In addition, as Peggy A. Knapp observes, the Monk speaks in an aristocratic language that supports hierarchal structures of power. In other words, the aristocratic and clerical voice with which the Monk narrates represents the exact voice that the Wife of Bath denounces. While she seeks to destabilize the masculine clerical control over literacy, the Monk represents a re-stabilization of that monastic and aristocratic voice that espouses misogyny.

In his strand of mini-narratives vilifying women, the Monk characterizes them, whether wives or lovers, as agents of Fortune. Examining the relationship between Fortune and women, he says:

> Lo, who may truste on Fortune any throwe? / For hym that folweth al this world of prees / Er he be war is ofte yleyd ful lowe. / Ful wys is he that kan hymselven knowe! / Beth war, for whan that Fortune list o glose, / Thanne wayteth she her man to overthrowe / By swich wey as he wolde leest suppose.437

To forge a connection between Deianira and Fortune, the Monk makes her Hercules’s girlfriend instead of his wife.438 He then uses this mythological revision to transition seamlessly between condemning Hercules’s girlfriend to condemning the female personification of Fortune: both only grace Hercules with their favor for a brief period of time. On the one hand, the Monk’s transformation of Deianira into Hercules’s lover instead of his wife removes his culpability when he abandons her for another woman. On the other hand, the transformation makes her a personification of Fortune; Hercules does not possess Deianira, just as he does not possess Fortune. Pursuing the clerical tendency to vilify women, the Monk damns both Deianira and the female personification of Fortune together as representations of fickle women.

Winthrop Wetherbee claims that the Monk trivializes Sampson, Hercules, and Antioch.439 If we examine the individual narratives, all of the Monk's subjects

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439 Wetherbee, “Chaucer and the European Tradition,” *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 27 169
seem trivialized. However, the Monk’s connection between his narratives and the Wife of Bath’s references to Jankyn’s clerical text suggests that the Monk and Jankyn are not the ones doing the trivializing, their clerical source texts are. Wetherbee notes the differentiations between Hercules and Sampson because one is pagan and the other is not.\textsuperscript{440} Such distinctions are undeniable, but not the only organizing principle at work here. In fact, the structure of their narratives binds them to each other rather than separates them by using Ovidian intertextual links pertaining to their strength and the women in their lives. Even the Wife of Bath links the two without pause. Due to the fact that the Monk and the Wife of Bath have seemingly received these narratives from clerical sources, they are responding to a literary tradition that had long ago removed their Judeo-Christian/pagan distinctions in order to use them as representative figures within a typological history of the world. The transformation of Boccaccio’s first-person narrative into a monastic typology leads to two questions: why adapt Boccaccio’s \textit{De casibus} into a scholastic commentary resembling the \textit{Metamorphoses}, and why transform Boccaccio’s voice into a monastic narrator?

**Boccaccio vs. Monastic Politics**

Boccaccio’s text offered Chaucer a mixture of historicized mythological tales from which to select, but, more than that, he offered a voice invested in the edification of his audience. Boccaccio’s expressed concern for the utility of his

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{440} Ibid., 16.
\end{footnotesize}
narratives is mirrored in the beginning of “The Monk’s Tale,” when the Monk says, “whan that Fortune list to fell, / Ther may no man the cours of hire withholde. / Lat no man truste on blynd prosperitee; / Be war by thise ensamples trewe and olde.”

In this passage, the Monk presents his collection of narratives as a series of exempla to instruct his audience in the unpredictable and devastating effects of Fortune’s blind machinations in the lives of prosperous people. In essence, the Monk claims that Fortune is fickle, unpredictable, and inescapable. His only advice is to be vigilant at all times and never become complacent about Fortune. The Monk’s narration proper, however, seems to lack any such example that his audience can follow. In point of fact, the Monk suggests that no human action can be taken to avoid the warnings that his stories offer, and his warning about fortune appears to provide such general and impractical advice that it cannot qualify as guidance. Kelly makes a similar point about Boccaccio, claiming that Boccaccio’s narratives can also be reduced to a general warning for both good and evil people to be vigilant because they all fall.

Scholarship tends to focus on the ethical significance of “The Monk’s Tale” because of the assumption that the Monk’s secluded lifestyle would preclude his involvement with secular politics. Neuse, for example, claims that, unlike Boccaccio’s De casibus, Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales as a whole does not provide “detailed
concern with politics and historical events in their various dimensions.”\textsuperscript{443} Ginsberg identifies how the Monk’s disengagement with secular politics results from Chaucer removing political criticism from his Monk’s version of the \textit{De casibus}. Ginsberg explains that while Boccaccio was fully engaged in exploring the nature of the communal life and politics of Florence in the \textit{De casibus}, Chaucer’s use of a Monk to narrate Boccaccio’s text exhibits his avoidance of direct discussions of communal life. Ginsberg claims, “Despite his exposure to Florentine politics, despite his knowledge of Boccaccio’s republicanism, Chaucer seems to have remained aloof from both.”\textsuperscript{444} Neuse similarly believes that the Monk is more interested in the world than a particular city (as opposed to Boccaccio’s \textit{De casibus} showing particular interest in his native Florence).

However, “The Monk’s Tale” exhibits more focused political interests than others have acknowledged and the gateway to our understanding these interests is Ovid. Chaucer the pilgrim and the Monk both present themselves as unbiased recorders of history, attempting to erase their personal agendas. Nevertheless, both narrators appear to be apt readers of Ovidian commentaries like those of the Orléanais tradition, structuring their narratives by means of intertextual links to craft a resounding message about the complex relationship between clerical and secular audiences. The resulting message resembles that which is found in Ovid’s

\textsuperscript{444} Ginsberg, \textit{Chaucer’s Italian Tradition}, 235.
Metamorphoses and Gower’s Confessio Amantis about abuses of power; but instead of directly attacking the emperor or king, Chaucer deflects his political ideas onto the clerical hierarchy and delivers them in the voice of the Monk. Most critics are content to assume that the Monk’s simplified versions of Boccaccio’s stories indicate that Chaucer is simply removing Florentine politics from the discussion. However, by analyzing the structures of both of these frame narratives we can see that Chaucer’s Monk is actually redirecting Boccaccio’s political discourse, not removing it.445

Boccaccio begins the De casibus by explaining his personal encounter with the immorality of powerful men, and he decides that from his “labore studiorum” he can perform a service for the “rei publice.” With the first line of his Proem, Boccaccio indicates that his work is an educated performance on behalf of the republic, using his knowledge to help alleviate the problem of immoral acts by those in positions of power. To frame his literary service to government, Boccaccio establishes the unknown controllers of men’s fate as a focal point for his narratives, when he writes:

445 Katharine Gittes, using the generic definitions of story-collections established by Cooper, declares that “The Monk’s Tale” and Boccaccio’s De casibus virorum illustrium are not frame narratives despite the fact that both of them have prologues and Boccaccio’s work has an epilogue. However, I consider any collection of stories presented within an overarching narrative to be a frame narrative. In addition, the fact that both of these texts preserve narrator biases and structural links prove that these are more than encyclopedic collections of tales. Katharine S. Gittes, Framing the Canterbury Tales: Chaucer and the Medieval Frame Narrative Tradition (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1991), 110-1.
447 “Exquirenti michi quid ex labore studiorum meorum possem forsan rei publice utilitatis addere.” Ibid., Proemio 1.
Sane cum tales, obscenis sueti voluptatibus, difficiles animos demonstrationibus prestare consueverint, et lepiditate hystoriarum capi non nunquam, exemplis agendum ratus sum eis describere quid Deus omnipotens, seu—ut eorum loquar more—Fortuna, in elatos posit et fecerit. Et, ne in tempus aut sexum cadat objectio, a mundi primordio in nostrum usque evum, consternatos duces illustresque alios, tam viros quam mulieres, passi disiectos, in medium succintce deducere mens est.[...] Se ex claris quosdam clariores excerpsisse serit, ut, dum segnes fluxosque principes et Dei iudicio quassatos in solum reges viderint, Dei potentiam, fragilitatem suam, et Fortune lubricum noscant, et letis modum ponere discant, et aliorum periculo sue possint utilitati consulere.\[448\]

Boccaccio identifies the decisive overlap in pagan and Christian discussions about the causes for seemingly unexplainable events, looking at how God (for Christians) and Fortune (for pagans) are used to explain such occurrences. Boccaccio clarifies that what he calls God, the pagans call Fortuna, and, therefore, he plans to adopt their terminology to discuss both their mythology and the Christian God’s control over fate. By discussing all types of people who fell from Fortune, Boccaccio intends to illustrate how unreliable Fortune is. As a result, Boccaccio hopes that his audience will learn from his examples to appreciate God. Kelly argues that Fortune is a way for Boccaccio to include God,\[449\] but, more importantly, it is a way for Boccaccio to present the correlations between Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian mythology about inexplicable downfalls from positions of power. In essence, Boccaccio is

\[448\] [I intend to tell them what God, or—as they are accustomed to calling it—Fortune, can do to those who are in high place; and, to prevent any objections on the score of time or sex, I also intend to give a succinct account of fallen leaders and of the falls of other famous persons, both men and women, from the beginning of the world up to our own age. [...] So that when men see princes old and frail, and kings cast to the ground by the judgment of God, they might acknowledge God’s power, their own frailty, and the slipperiness of Fortune, and learn to place a limit upon their joys; and thus by the danger that has occurred to others they will be able to take counsel for their own profit.] My translation. Ibid., Proemio 6-7 & 8-9.

\[449\] Kelly, Chaucerian Tragedy, 28.
establishing that pagan and biblical narratives share the same territory, and, as such, both can be used to interpret human events from the perspective of a universal history.450

The eight lines of the Monk’s introduction establish from the beginning that his tale is a condensed version of the *De casibus*. Nonetheless, the fact that the Monk excises large sections of Boccaccio’s Proem and that the Monk’s introduction is concise does not mean that the Monk’s version removes all of Boccaccio’s political notions or Boccaccio’s framework. To begin with, the Monk establishes the same analytical focus as Boccaccio in his prologue. The Monk says:

I wol biwaille in manere of tragedie / The harm of hem that stoode in heigh degree, / And fillen so that ther nas no remedie / To brynge hem out of hir adversitee. / For certein, whan that Fortune list to flee, / Ther may no man the cours of hire withholde.451

This passage emphasizes that people in high positions are destined to fall. The Monk, like Boccaccio, shows that the focus of his stories will be the difficulties and dangers of life, and he, like Boccaccio, identifies Fortune as playing a role in such strange hardships. The Monk also shares Boccaccio’s emphasis on the impossibility of a human controlling his own destiny. The Monk and Boccaccio present the human condition as bleak and uncontrollable. Yet the Monk deviates from Boccaccio’s

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450 Paule Mertens-Foncke points out that Chaucer uses the structure of debate throughout *The Canterbury Tales* to depict universality, categorizing his pilgrims to show the inadequacy of categorizations. Mertens-Foncke, “The Canterbury Tales and the ‘Via Moderna,’” *Poetica* 67 (2007): 37-51. In other words, this emphasis on universally applicable truths is not limited to “The Monk’s Tale,” further establishing the tale as a miniature of the overall *Canterbury Tales.*

mission statement by identifying Fortune as the sole producer of such tragedies without even mentioning God’s role in controlling the fates of men. The Monk seemingly adopts Boccaccio’s pagan-centric terminology without the disclaimer explaining how notions of God and Fortune overlap.

Ginsberg addresses this excision of God, claiming that critical debate about “The Monk’s Tale” originates from the fact that Chaucer translates Boccaccio’s *De casibus* while he disconnects Boccaccio’s links between “idioms of humanism and those of communal republicanism,” reading Boccaccio from a poetic, rather than a political, perspective.452 In other words, Ginsberg believes that Chaucer’s text regresses from Boccaccio’s humanism, adapting only the Italian’s language and plot points, but not the sophisticated underlying commentary about communal politics. In Ginsberg’s view then, Chaucer’s resulting text reformulates the civic tension that Boccaccio depicts into a “conflict between the estates,” looking primarily at the past instead of present political issues.453 Ginsberg is correct to note that Chaucer is reformulating Boccaccio’s politics, but just because Chaucer places Boccaccio’s frame narrative in the mouth of a clergyman does not mean that he is removing political concerns. “The Monk’s Tale” is rife with notions about communal politics; it just so happens that those communal politics are associated with the commune of a monastery rather than that of Florence. Perhaps when Chaucer translates the *De casibus* into the English vernacular, he also sees the need to translate it into an

452 Ginsberg, *Chaucer’s Italian Tradition*, 238.
453 Ibid., 238-9.
equivalent English political setting, and a monastery would be the only location in which communal politics operate in England. Or perhaps Chaucer was drawn to the *De casibus* because of its treatment of communal politics—which Florence was trying to urge on Rome in the days before the Great Schism. Or Chaucer could have gravitated to this text because it provided another means for him to hide behind multiple layers of narration, enabling him to discuss covertly contentious clerical issues. Whatever the reason, the result is a tale that does not remove Boccaccio’s context, but reinscribes Boccaccio’s criticisms onto a new environment. The Monk’s condensed introduction to the *De casibus* avoids addressing politics directly, but that does not mean that the entire text lacks politics. Chaucer’s Monk still grapples with the unexplained phenomenon of powerful men falling from positions of power.

**Abuses of God-Given Power**

The Monk’s typological treatment of falls throughout historicized mythology implicitly emphasizes the role of God (or the lack thereof) in selecting and unselecting people in positions of power. Ovid and his typologically organized *Metamorphoses* were also known for such questions about power. Marilyn Desmond, for example, explains how Ovid questions the ethics of the gods, arguing that the *Ovide moralisé* removes that contention by rationalizing the transformations of its subjects.\(^{454}\) As the *accessus* at the beginning of this chapter

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\(^{454}\) Marilynn Desmond, "The Goddess Diana and the Ethics of Reading the *Ovide moralisé*," in *Metamorphosis: The Changing Face of Ovid in Medieval Ovid in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. Alison Keith and Stephen Rupp (Toronto: Centre for Reformation and 177
demonstrate, Ovid’s narratives all prefigure his political relationship with Augustus. Classicists still interpret the *Metamorphoses* from this perspective; Alessandro Barchiesi, for example, sees that Ovid fills his poem with tales about those who suffer at the hands of the powerful men and gods who rule unpredictably and arbitrarily.\(^{455}\)

In a sense, the Monk picks up where the *Metamorphoses* left off, adapting and adding to Ovid’s examples of the unjust distribution of power. Just as Adam, Lucifer, Sampson, and Hercules squandered the gifts God gave them, the next narratives discuss how men in all stations and regions grapple with the power bestowed upon them. Nero is a particularly horrific example of a ruler who abuses his authority. The Monk introduces Nero by saying:

> Although that Nero were as vicius / As any feend that lith ful lowe adoun, / Yet he, as telleth us Swetonius, / This wyde world hadde in subjeccioun, / Bothe est and west, [south] and septemtrioun. / Of rubies, sapphires, and of peerless white / Were alle his clothes brooded up and doun, / For he in gemmes greatly gan delite.\(^{456}\)

The Monk says that Nero belongs in his collection of tragedies because Suetonius identifies how Nero once amassed a large amount of wealth and territory. The depiction of Nero as a conquering emperor connects him to the Monk’s Nebuchadnezzar and Zenobia, who precede this mini-narrative. Nero’s conquering nature also links him to Alexander the Great, whose narrative is well after Nero’s.

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\(^{456}\) Chaucer, “The Monk’s Tale,” VII.2463-70.
The extent of Nero’s wealth also relates his story to those about Belshazzar, Nebuchadnezzar, and Croesus (the last story in “The Monk’s Tale”). In short, the details about Nero correlate with mini-narratives throughout “The Monk’s Tale.”

Perhaps the most significant linking detail introduced here is Nero’s ferociousness, a trait which becomes a focal point for many of the Monk’s stories. The narrator acknowledges the fact that Nero was as cruel, or “vicius,” as a fiend, which also implicitly relates to Lucifer—despite the Monk’s excision of Lucifer’s demonic nature. This implicit relationship encourages readers to view these figures as pieces within a larger historical puzzle. Using Nero to relay a message about people who abuse their power, the Monk states:

Now fil it so that Fortune list no lenger the hye pryde of Nero to cherice, / For though that he were strong, yet was shestrenger. / She thoughte thus: “By God! I am to nyce to sette a man that is fulfild of vice / In heigh degree, and emperour hym calle. / By God, out of his sete I wol hym trice; / Whan he leest weneth, sonnest shal he falle.”

Fortune realizes that she bestowed too many gifts upon Nero and decides to renege her favor when he least expects to be punished. The Monk thus suggests that, although people consider Fortune mysterious because they lack the rationales for her actions, she actually waits until they feel comfortable in their state of luxury to repossess whatever she has given them.

Morse points out how Chaucer’s version of Boethius makes the same points about Nero, Croesus, and Hercules that the Monk does—namely, that the power of

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457 Ibid., VII.2519-26.
kings is unstable. However, the Monk’s message about Fortune is more complicated here than it has been before this point. Whereas the Monk claimed that Fortune was fickle and unpredictable in his prologue and in all of the preceding tales, Fortune here responds directly to Nero’s vicious nature and crimes against humanity. This revised definition of Fortune justifies what happened in all of his stories about falls: Lucifer, Adam, etc. were punished as a result of their sins. The Monk could have incorporated stories about some of the more sympathetic characters in the De casibus, such as Dido, but he chose some of the most reprehensible characters he could find. The Monk thus undermines his topic sentence about Fortune being impossible to comprehend by using narratives in which the characters’ falls from Fortune have already been explained in historical accounts as punishments for their actions. Nero’s fall does not result from Fortune’s mysterious ways; it results from the people whom he tyrannized rising up against him. Thus deviating from his Ovidian and Boccaccian sources that depict power and Fortune as hopelessly perplexing, the Monk presents a clear order of cause and effect in the world.

The logic behind Fortune’s actions becomes even more coherent when we notice how many times this same passage mentions God. The repetition of the phrase “by God” in Fortune’s proclamation indicates her relationship to a higher power. While the Monk never directly identifies God as being the agent causing the downfalls of men, Fortune presents herself as acting on his behalf. Such a

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Morse, “Absolute Tragedy,” 7.
description of her being one of God’s agents explains why the Monk can depict Fortune as the cause for Lucifer’s fall, as opposed to depicting God hurling Lucifer out of Heaven. Therefore, when Fortune questions why she gave Nero so many luxuries and realizes that she can just as easily take them away, the Monk is able to describe God’s actions without directly questioning God’s role in the rise and fall of men. In other words, the Monk uses Fortune to present the codified message that whomever God selects, he may also unselect.

But rather than leaving this a general statement about the nature of the world, the Monk particularizes the argument. Similar to how Ovidian commentaries explicate Ovid’s mythological examples of power relationships as sly criticism of Augustus, the Monk reframes historicized mythology to examine contemporary issues. By decoding the Monk’s intertextual links, the reader can uncover the Monk’s emphasis on Rome. For example, the Monk mentions Rome eight times in Nero’s mini-narrative. Taking a cue from Ovidian commentaries, the Monk uses repetition of a geographical location to create intertextual links. Just as the prose paraphrase *accessus* repeats “Sulmo” to explain Ovid’s biography in relation to his family’s, the repetition of “Rome” underscores its importance. This significance is all the more pronounced by the conspicuous absence of any of the mythology leading to Rome’s foundation. The Monk’s collection of narratives about tragic falls omits one of the most famous and pitiable historical falls known during the Middle Ages—the fall of Troy. This fall was an immensely popular subject of literature before, during, and

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after Chaucer wrote *The Canterbury Tales*. In general, *The Canterbury Tales* emphasizes Rome more than Troy. Only “The Merchant’s Tale” discusses Troy at length, whereas the Monk, Pardoner, Man of Law, Second Nun, Physician, and Wife of Bath discuss Rome at length, and several other pilgrims mention Rome in passing.\footnote{For example, the General Prologue mentions that both the Wife of Bath and the Pardoner have been to Rome; she went for a pilgrimage, and he went for papal letters. In addition, Constance hails from and returns to Rome in “The Man of Law’s Tale.”}

This emphasis on Rome instead of Troy calls attention to its contextual relevance. John Hirsh mentions Chaucer’s focus on Rome in relation to what he calls Chaucer’s “Roman tales,” which are “The Physician’s Tale” and “The Second Nun’s Tale.” Hirsh argues that Chaucer uses these tales to discuss the “corruption of legitimate civil authority.”\footnote{John C. Hirsh, “Chaucer’s Roman Tales,” *Chaucer Review* 31 (1996): 47.} Such an emphasis seems to be true about the tales that Hirsh discusses, but “The Monk’s Tale” crafts his Roman narratives according to his monastic perspective, commenting on the historical city’s religious significance.

Most likely the Monk’s references to Rome relate to the Great Schism or the papal turmoil leading up to it. Joëlle Rollo-Koster interprets the unrest surrounding the 1378 Great Schism as being a long time in the making. She explains how the papal court had not been in Rome for several decades before this point, with Gregory XI being the first to break that absence when he returned in 1377. The papal court had been meeting in Avignon for almost eighty years before this point, meaning that the papal college already retained a division between a southern and a northern French
lobby before the Great Schism. Rollo-Koster places the origins of the papal dispute earlier, explaining how Urban V was welcomed into the Roman papacy openly in 1367 only to be contested and pushed out a few months later. When Urban left in 1370, he returned to Avignon where Gregory XI was crowned pope in 1371. Gregory did not return the papal seat to Rome until 1377.

Daniel Williman explains that when the weak and ill Gregory XI returned to Rome, the Romans displayed evident hatred of ultramontane cardinals that he brought with him, encouraging the pope to stay in Italy so that they could control the next papal election. The Romans made it clear even before Gregory XI’s death that they wanted a Roman pope. Thus the papal disputes were foreseen—even by the dying Gregory XI. After the former pope’s death, clerics were hindered from leaving and aristocrats were forbidden from entering. These safety measures, while probably intimidating the members of the conclave, were meant to secure them from the external influences of powerful men and to reduce the length of the conclave to protect against exiling another pope from Rome. Williman explains that the first night of the conclave the Roman mob was chanting for an Italian pope. Fearing the drunken mob outside would be unsatisfied with their decision,

462 Ibid., 439-40.
465 Ibid., 450.
the conclave asked the cardinal of St. Peter to pretend to be the newly elected pope. After leaving the mob, Prignano was crowned Pope Urban VI.

However, soon after the election, Urban VI “abrogated the peace which Gregory XI had settled with the Prefect di Vico in Viterbo, and threatened to reignite the wars with Florence and the Visconti, rejecting a hard-earned and desperately needed peace.”\(^{467}\) In fact, the Florentine republic, in which Boccaccio is writing, was encouraging Roman aristocrats to seek independence from the pope while maintaining the liberties of Roman communal politics.\(^{468}\) Richard C. Trexler argues that communal Florentine pressures to fight the French before the 1378 papal election led to Roman ambivalence towards the papal court.\(^{469}\) In general, Urban VI promptly revealed his desire for serious reformations, reprimanding prelates of all ranks and cardinals who exhibited inappropriately extravagant tastes. The result was alienation of prelates as well as secular leaders. His antagonism led many to regard him as an unsuitable pope.\(^{470}\) The archbishops noticed a solution to the growing problems produced by Urban VI, disregarding Rome’s desire for an Italian pope and electing Pierre de Cros to be Clement VII. Pierre de Cros was archbishop of Arles, papal chamberlain, head of the Camera Apostolica curial ministry, and cousin of Gregory XI.\(^{471}\) The new pope arranged for a peace negotiation with Florence, and he advised discontented cardinals to leave Rome slowly to return to Anagni, leading

\(^{467}\) Ibid., 39-40.

\(^{468}\) Rollo-Koster, “Looting the Empty See,” 437.


\(^{471}\) Williman, “Schism Within the Great Curia,” 40.
a furious and ill-informed Urban to call Clement a traitor and to summon the seceded ultramontane cardinals to return to Tivoli.472

Each pope collected large groups of followers, churches, rulers, and clergymen.473 Hirsh argues that Chaucer and the English people supported Rome’s position of defying Avignon and its selection of the anti-popes Clement VII and, later, Benedict XIII.474 Similarly, Ian Christopher Levy explains how John Wyclif originally supported Urban VI, believing in his call for reforms. Levy says that Wyclif weighed in on the Great Western Schism, believing the electoral process to be corrupt.475 Furthermore, in 1379, in the middle of the Great Schism, Wyclif published De potestate papae. Wyclif, like the Monk’s subtext, says that all power on earth comes from God to point out that no human election can bestow any real power without attaining it from God. Wyclif thus claims that the pope’s power only exists as long as he acts in accordance with God’s will.476 Levy explains that Wyclif views the human election of a pope as precarious because it can neither bestow or confirm righteousness, and that God retains the ability to refuse an unfit candidate.477 As a result, Levy notes that Wyclif considered many modern popes as unfit because they

472 Ibid., 44.
473 Ibid., 29-30.
474 Hirsh, “Chaucer’s Roman Tales,” 46.
did not live up to the apostolic standard, showing signs that they were being persuaded by the devil’s power instead.478

The point here is not to claim that Chaucer was employing Wycliffite theology for “The Monk’s Tale” because, as Amanda Holton has pointed out, it is unlikely that Chaucer used the Wycliffite Bible.479 Additionally, as Karen A. Winstead discusses about “The Parson’s Tale,” “Chaucer reclaims the figure of the “good priest” of orthodoxy and rejects the identification of certain themes and modes of writing with Wyclif and his followers.”480 But to reject Wyclif, Chaucer also has to address him. According to Knapp, Chaucer often incorporates Wycliffite ideology, even though he often does so ironically.481 Therefore, even if the Monk does not directly respond to his theories, De potestate papae proves that the Great Schism and its resulting notions about power were topics of conversation in England, explaining the Monk’s queries about abuses of power in relation to Rome.

Coupling the Monk’s references to Rome with the subsequent tales about historical disputes between claimants to the seat of the Roman Emperor, the tale draws a parallel to contemporary political disputes. The double claim to the Roman

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478 Ibid., 147.
479 Amanda Holton explains that Chaucer most likely used the Vulgate Bible, which was extremely common—especially among men of his station—and was clearly accessible for someone with his level of Latin proficiency. She states that he might have also used the French Bible, Bible historiale, but the Vulgate was undoubtedly his primary source. Holton, “Which Bible Did Chaucer Use? The Biblical Tragedies in the Monk’s Tale,” Notes and Queries 55 (2008): 15-7.
481 Knapp, Chaucer and the Social Contest, II.6.
papacy and the notions of a man falsely raising himself up to the position colors the Monk’s characterization of Julius Caesar as well as of Nero. The Monk introduces Julius Caesar as a self-made man, rising from a humble beginning to royalty by means of his wisdom and labor. The Monk says that Caesar

That wan al th’occident by land and see, / By strengthe of hand, or elles by tretee, / And unto Rome made hem tributarie; / And sitthe of Rome the emperour was he / Til that Fortune weex his adversarie.482

The Monk uses Rome to introduce Julius Caesar’s power; the fact that he can make a city renowned for its supremacy pay tribute to him makes Caesar’s authority all the more impressive. While the Monk’s description emphasizes the magnitude of Caesar’s position, the story defies the tragedy genre because the Monk begins the story by describing Caesar’s humble beginnings instead of introducing the Emperor at the height of success. Caesar’s narrative is a cycle instead of a rapid decline, presenting either a mistake in the Monk’s notion of tragedy, or a willful deviation from strict adherence to the genre. The latter points seems more relevant because the Monk consistently gravitates towards characters with absolute power instead of those whose downfalls would inspire sympathy. In addition, this Roman rise to Fortune leads the audience to reconsider the rises of the tale’s similarly unsavory characters, like Nero, Lucifer, and Nebuchadnezzar.

In point of fact, the Monk cannot even remain fixed on Caesar as the object of scrutiny within Caesar’s own biography. As short as the Monk’s narratives are, a second character emerges in Caesar’s story to become the focal point. The Monk

gravitates towards Pompey’s tragedy, explaining Caesar’s great victory over Pompey, who was a “noble governour of Rome.” The Monk explains how one of Pompey’s men,

A fals traitour, / His [Pompey’s] heed of smoot, to wynnen hym favour / Of Julius, and hym the heed he broghte. / Allas, Pompeye, of th’orient conquerour, / That Fortune unto swich a fyn thee broghte!

The Monk bewails the Fortune of Pompey who fled his son-in-law, Julius Caesar, only to have one of his own men behead him. The Monk emphasizes Pompey’s pitiable circumstances, which fulfill the requirements for tragedy that the Monk identifies in the beginning of his tale. Pompey begins in a position of power and did not raise himself from a low social status, as Caesar did. This passage even presents Fortune and Julius Caesar as the culprits for Pompey’s tragic end. Furthermore, the Monk alters his Boccaccian source, which devotes a chapter to Pompey’s fall, to make Julius Caesar the title character of his narrative. The Monk thus takes a more conventional tragedy, Pompey’s story, to focus on a less conventional one, Julius Caesar’s rise and fall from power.

The Monk presents the two claimants to the throne of the Roman Empire and the influential Roman mob as a mirror for the two claimants to the Roman papal seat. The Monk presents Caesar as the illegitimate claimant to the throne. In fact, when looking back at the introduction to Julius Caesar, we can see that the Monk describes Caesar as a purely self-elevated man. The Monk only mentions Fortune in

484 Ibid., VII.2679-94.
485 Boccaccio, De casibus, VI.ix.
Caesar’s introduction to describe how Caesar fell, not how he rose. Caesar thus becomes a representation of the Avignon anti-popes. But as such, the Monk claims by extension that while Caesar and Pompey are self-made popes, Fortune and God still have the power to bring them down from their elevated seats—the same point that Wyclif makes in his _De potestate papae_. As Linda Georgianna explains, “Chaucer typically singles out for attack clerics who _abuse_ their offices and their orders, not the clerical authority itself.”

Her argument applies to Chaucer’s Monk in that he depicts people in authoritative positions, but God exhibits His power by removing them from these positions.

The parallels between Fortune and God (in addition to Ovid’s and the Monk’s political criticisms about abuses of power) elucidate the Monk’s decision to end the tale with a different definition of tragedy than that with which he began. The Monk concludes the story about Croesus and his overall frame narrative when he says:

Anhanged was Cresus, the proude kyng; / His roial trone myghte hym nat availle. / Tragedies noon oother maner thing / Ne kan in sygyng crie ne biwaille / But that Fortune alwey wolde assaille / With unwar strook the regnes that been proude; / For whan men trusteth hire, thane wol she faille, / And covere hire brighte face with a clowde.

The Monk concludes that proud Croesus could not enjoy his royal throne and was hanged. Furthermore, the Monk explains that tragedies are about proud men being stricken down by Fortune when they least expect it. This emphasis on Fortune

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bringing down proud men slightly differs from the definition at the beginning of his tale, which entails a warning to all men (not just proud ones) that Fortune strikes down everyone. This revised definition of tragedy justifies the Monk’s character choices, particularly why he initiated his story-collection by narrating a brief version of Lucifer’s fall from his glorified position in Heaven. “The Monk’s Tale” hereby becomes a complex narrative about God’s ability to remedy seemingly unjust social elevations and how all human history is subject to God’s control—whenever people believe in God and acknowledge him as the source of changes in Fortune, or whether they omit his role and attempt to replace him with a Boethian notion of fickle and unpredictable Fortune.

**Conclusion**

Fusing together a series of influences and revising them into a monastic frame narrative, “The Monk’s Tale” hardly qualifies as the reduction of Boccaccian *de casibus* into tragedies. Just as Chaucer devotes attention to crafting the narrative voices for his other tales, he generates a monastic voice that reflects both a stereotypically educated monk and a uniquely active one. Whether his activity is the product of hunting, reading, or political activism within codified narrative structures, the Monk takes his place amongst Chaucer’s other distinct storytellers. Through this clearly defined perspective, Chaucer reveals that the abuses of power
that Ovid rails against in the *Metamorphoses* are not limited to secular rulers and deities, but extend to the papal representatives of God as well. The Monk depicts those who were seemingly selected and favored by God’s agent, Fortune, because the dual claimants to the throne were both making the same declaration. This message about God’s relationship, or lack thereof, to clerical and secular hegemony reveals that Chaucer’s “Monk’s Tale” does not avoid political criticisms as some medievalists have assumed. In point of fact, Chaucer adapts Boccaccio’s commentary about the communal government in Florence for a Monk because the monastery is the only equivalent communal environment in England. Anglicizing throughout the *Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer also depicts a pilgrimage to Canterbury (instead of Rome or Jerusalem) in order to discuss strictly English concerns. The primary Anglican concern exhibited through the Monk pertains to clerical abuses. The Monk’s subtext argues the Wycliffite point that people in power are not always selected by God, but sometimes they are self-elevated, like Julius Caesar. In addition, with narratives about those who misuse their authority, like Nero and Lucifer, “The Monk’s Tale” proves that even when God grants supremacy to a man, that person can lose those favors.

Thus while elements of “The Monk’s Tale” are clearly parodic, the Monk still proves to have an apt literary understanding of the literary traditions it emulates. Ovidian commentaries exhibit the same tendency to co-opt the pagan past and place
it within a typological picture of all human history. Neuse identifies that Boccaccio and Chaucer are “blurring the distinction between history and myth or fable,”⁴⁸⁸ but this practice is not reserved for them alone—they adhere to a long rhetorical tradition. Chaucer participates in creating a mythology that is no longer determined by the religious background of the source text, but can be viewed as part of a universal human history, encompassing all mythologies: Judeo-Christian, Greco-Roman, and contemporary alike. Nonetheless, “The Monk’s Tale” is not a pure parody because it carefully links all of its stories to each other and to a larger political message. Each character functions as more than a cameo in a tiresome recitation of historicized figures who fell from Fortune. Many of the pilgrims discuss fortune at length, along with their notions about its meaning; yet only the Monk focuses exclusively on that topic, altering each moment of his tale according to his theme. More than any other pilgrim, the Monk interweaves narratives just as the Canterbury Tales does, similarly employing, in an Ovidian fashion, thematic and geographical links and allusions. Chaucer devotes 775 lines to the tale not simply to test the limits of his audiences’ patience, but to weave a subtle political subtext based on Ovidian commentators’ notions of frame narratives.

The result of his collection of stories is an Ovidian style criticism about abuses of power and a Boccacian style commentary regarding communal politics. Chaucer selects this character for his miniature frame narrative because of the

fourteenth-century monastic tradition producing such texts, one which is inspiring
Boccaccio as well. Ovidian narratives were so ingrained in monastic traditions in
England that their rhetorical skills, their preaching, even their teaching relied on it.
Chaucer’s monk, enmeshed in an English monastic culture whose literary interests
did indeed revolve around Ovid during this period, proves to be an accurate
depiction of an individual living a monastic life—despite medievalists who question
the acceptability of a monk personally owning manuscripts. Chaucer hereby
transforms Boccaccio’s secular Ovid back into a monastic Ovid, just as his
contemporary English scholars were doing. While the Monk truncates Ovidian and
biblical myths and contemporary narratives, he appears to be following the prose
paraphrase tradition. Yet both the Monk and his expository forbears imitate Ovid’s
frame narrative, employing his rhetorical devices to weld stories together into over-
arching structures.

Nonetheless, the meaning underlying “The Monk’s Tale” is an ironic one. By
imitating the monastic frame narrative, the Monk discloses a fundamental point
about misused sovereignty—but that sovereignty is his own. Revealing a
relationship with Jankyn’s Book of Wicked Wives, the Monk exposes his complicity
with a self-serving and antifeminist culture that controls recorded history. In
essence, Chaucer presents “The Monk’s Tale” as a glimpse of monastic culture:
misogynistic, but subtly and masterfully crafted. By seemingly using materials such
as those found in the Book of Wicked Wives, the Monk almost gloats in the face of the
Wife of Bath, taunting her that he does in fact control literacy and the making of historical records. He shows that he can alter history—even the Bible—by using his advanced rhetorical skills and his monastic literacy to create new records. The Monk thus underscores how he displaces established sources. He demonstrates his Ovidian skill of fashioning complex and interrelated narratives into a codified message about his own ability to abuse power while alluding to the papal disaster that similarly highlights misplaced clerical authority.

Therefore, while revealing his learning, the Monk highlights his control of the literary culture that the Wife of Bath and so many of Chaucer’s pilgrims challenge. In fact, the structure of *The Canterbury Tales* contests this very clerical control over literacy by writing in the vernacular and lending voices to the disenfranchised—like the Wife of Bath, as well as the Miller, the Reeve, and the Cook. Chaucer constructs his own response to the Monk’s control over literacy and record keeping; he crafts an Ovidian frame narrative of his own in *The Canterbury Tales*. Employing the same Ovidian types of narrative groupings as the Monk, he depicts narratives as responses to each other—such as the connection between the Wife of Bath and the Monk. However, in *The Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer destabilizes the narrative voices of his stories, showing all (like the Monk’s) voices to be products of their own agendas—which is an especially Ovidian lesson. Chaucer’s selection of storytellers becomes all the more revealing when looking at the *Canterbury Tales* as a response to “The Monk’s Tale.” By using many illiterate characters and even by writing in the

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vernacular, Chaucer defies monastic control over literacy, history, and classical literary forms. Giving voices to the literarily disenfranchised, he transforms Ovid’s frame narrative from the language of monastic hierarchy into that of the dispossessed Englishman. Taking a genre associated with the pinnacle of writing achievements, the sample from which to study and to copy, Chaucer imposes a vulgar tongue, duplicating the power struggle for which the Metamorphoses was famously known. Chaucer and his Monk, through an antagonistic relationship, give an Ovidian voice and poetic structure to English literature.

“The Monk’s Tale” provides a comparable imitatio to a prose paraphrase, condensing narratives while practicing Ovidian rhetoric; however, The Canterbury Tales takes that rhetorical practice to a new level, showing a truly Ovidian spirit of toying with narrator voices and interactions as well as biased perspectives. Chaucer’s experience with reading Ovidian commentaries taught him how a frame narrative can provide the space for all of his poetic voices, while, at the same time, creating a cohesive work. The Canterbury Tales thereby responds to the monastic tradition that had controlled Ovid for so long, returning the exile to people like himself—who themselves had been poetically exiled. Thus “The Monk’s Tale” offers a glimpse of the tradition that every ounce of The Canterbury Tales rejects: the tyrannical monastic regime that controlled history, poetry, rhetoric, and language for centuries.
Chapter 4: Out of the Classroom and Into the Frying Pan: Lydgate’s Literary and Clerical Blend of Ovidian Frame Narratives in Book I of *The Fall of Princes*

The fact that Chaucer’s “Monk’s Tale” emphasizes monastic abuses of clerical authority and literacy makes it a curious source text for John Lydgate, a fifteenth-century monk. Nonetheless, Lydgate’s *Fall of Princes* imagines itself to be completing Chaucer’s unfinished tale. By acknowledging Chaucer’s subtly crafted political discourse in “The Monk’s Tale” it becomes somewhat easier to understand why Lydgate—a public writer—would select such an inspiration. In general, Lydgate’s contributions to late medieval literature have mostly been studied in relation to his contemporary political environment and his ability to translate literature into vernacular English. While his texts are beginning to draw serious scholarly interest, studies tend to focus on his role as a “public” or clerical writer instead of analyzing his literary merit. 489 *The Fall of Princes* suffers the most from Lydgate’s lack of a rhetorical reputation because it is often disregarded as a mere translation of Laurent de Premierfait’s translation of Giovanni Boccaccio’s *De casibus virorum*

illustrium—two texts which have also been categorized as anthologies of simple narratives about falls from fortune in both Christian, pagan, and contemporary historicized mythology. While critics such as Maura Nolan defend The Fall of Princes from accusations that the text tiresomely, repetitiously, unimaginatively, and monotonously translates Boccaccio and Premierfait, no one acknowledges Lydgate’s remarkable rhetorical craftsmanship in relation to the clerical frame narratives that he inherited (including “The Monk’s Tale and a monastic library full of Ovidian commentaries).

Granted, other scholars have variously tried to defend Lydgate’s writing. James Simpson, for example, notes the paradox of disavowing Lydgate’s artistry while praising his sources as examples of proto-humanism. As a result, Simpson acknowledges Lydgate’s complex maneuvering that provides discursive, rather than singular, appropriations of the past. Simpson ultimately argues that Lydgate is a reformist translator, meaning that he adapts and reforms material from a variety of his predecessors. Additionally, Nolan points out that Lydgate manipulates poetic forms and genres to generate new meanings for his exempla. Nonetheless, scholarship about The Fall of Princes focuses on it as a translation and adaptation of specific episodes, looking to Premierfait, Boccaccio, Chaucer, and exemplum to

491 Simpson, “Bulldozing the Middle Ages,” 228.
492 Ibid., 230.
493 Ibid., 239.
understand his text. By studying the individual stories, medievalists have lost sight of the overarching structure of *The Fall of Princes*. The work's 36,356 lines have undoubtedly impeded analysis of the frame narrative. However, to understand why Lydgate transforms his sources as he does, one must analyze the format he employs—which is based on his thorough clerical education in rhetoric.

As a monk at Bury St. Edmunds and writer for Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, Lydgate would have had an impressive number of texts at his disposal. Taking his clerical sources into account, one can see how *The Fall of Princes* is more than a pedantic and didactic text translated for English vernacular audiences. His vast libraries and formal clerical education allow him to employ sophisticated rhetorical structures in his story collections, which are largely based upon the formal approaches discussed in various Ovidian commentaries as well as Chaucer's adaptations of them in the aforementioned "Monk's Tale." Despite popular opinion, Lydgate does not simply cut and paste from his sources; he revises the structure of the collection of narratives that he inherits, using framing devices to weave a unique text with a distinct message relating to his relationship to

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495 Humphrey commissioned Lydgate to adapt Boccaccio's *De casibus* to reformulate the narratives as depictions of falls of princes resulting from choices that the princes made instead of from the fickle and arbitrary judgments made by Fortune. Ruth Nisse addresses Lydgate's relationship to Humphrey's request. Ruth Nisse, "'Was it not Routhe to Se?': Lydgate and the Styles of Martyrdom," in *John Lydgate: Poetry, Culture, and Lancastrian England*, ed. Larry Scanlon and James Simpson (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), 286.

Humphrey. Of course, one must acknowledge that Lydgate is not himself introducing Ovidian narratives and structure to the text, but rather that he both translates and reformulates the intertextual and intratextual references in addition to the introductory frameworks that he found in his sources. Similar to “The Monk’s Tale” scholarship discussed in the last chapter, the only criticism to discuss the format of *The Fall of Princes* focuses on the genre of tragedy or *exemplum* that Lydgate uses to craft the individual inset narratives. 497 Even those who acknowledge Ovid’s influence on the text focus on how he adapts Ovidian elegy instead of looking to Ovid as the *auctor* of the frame narrative genre to which Lydgate is indebted. 498 Medieval frame narratives are often mistaken for story-collections and disregarded as vehicles for tediously accumulating renditions of the same plot while only changing the cast of characters. As the successor of frame narratives like the *De casibus, De cas des nobles hommes et femmes*, and even the *Confessio Amantis* and *The Canterbury Tales* (especially “The Monk’s Tale”), *The Fall of Princes* returns to these texts to offer a new perspective on this old genre.

Interpretations of *The Fall of Princes* as a translation of a translation of Boccaccio’s stories disregard Lydgate’s rhetorical transformations of his sources’ political messages. Lydgate employs Ovidian concatenation, constructed through the

497 Nigel Mortimer, for example, traces how the genre would have been passed down to English writers, concluding that Chaucer’s version was the one with which Lydgate ultimately aligned himself—and Chaucer’s version was mostly about sad stories, as presented in ”The Monk’s Tale,” with an emphasis on *pathos*. Nigel Mortimer, *John Lydgate’s Fall of Princes: Narrative Tragedy in its Literary and Political Contexts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 167-215.

repetition of patronymics, to generate a political discourse about the building and maintaining of empires throughout human history. The fact that Lydgate adapts the frame narrative to discuss empires clarifies why he—a monk well-versed in Latin—selects Premierfait's text instead of Boccaccio's: Premierfait had revised Boccaccio's Florentine understanding of communal politics to make the text refer better to the political hierarchies of the rest of Europe. Unlike the previously discussed Chaucer's “Monk's Tale” (which uses a monk to adapt the *De casibus* into a comparably communal English milieu) Lydgate's commission by Duke Humphrey required hierarchical systems of government instead of conventual ones.

It is this very interest in governing systems that leads Lydgate and Humphrey to an Ovidian text. Ovid was an attractive writer for the educated population during the late Middle Ages because of his thorough understanding of how subjects suffer from the seemingly arbitrary punishments and rewards allotted to them by those in positions of power. Unlike Virgil's *Aeneid* and other Roman literature, Ovid's

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499 Stephen Michael Wheeler explains Ovid's structural means for crafting a continuous poem when he writes, "Given Ovid's description of his poem as a *carmen perpetuum*, the primary experience of the *Metamorphoses* is assumed to be sequential and continuously cumulative, one story after another. If one reads the *Metamorphoses* against the background of the epic genre—a background that is regularly invoked in the poem—the repetition of formulae, scenes, themes, and structure is a characteristic way that epic continues itself. Equally important, repetition is fundamental to the archetypal or paradigmatic nature of mythological discourse, one of whose preoccupations is the repetition of cosmogony. [...] the recurrence of narrative patterns is crucial for the poet's play with the reader's expectations and the production of meaning. [...] Each story is part of a series and has two frames of reference: stories of the same type (paradigmatic); and stories that proceed and follow (syntagmatic). There is also a third frame of reference. Many of the stories that Ovid tells have literary antecedents. Hence, the *Metamorphoses* is repetitive in the sense that it retells familiar Greek myths." Stephen Michael Wheeler, *Narrative Dynamics in Ovid's Metamorphoses* (Tübingen: Narr, 2000), 9-10.
Metamorphoses was a novel yet classical text, yet one relatively untouched, that allowed medieval scholars to formulate their own critical response because the Metamorphoses was unattached to commentaries from the classical and late antique periods. In general, the analytical framework surrounding the Metamorphoses could be freshly interpreted as relevant to the medieval period. As addressed throughout this dissertation, medieval accessus to the Metamorphoses largely pointed to Ovid’s vexed relationship to Augustus, which led to his exile. Medieval commentators stressed Ovid’s position as an out-of-favor subject trying to navigate a world where a monarch can make seemingly capricious and life-altering decisions. While Humphrey might not have been aware of the particular political message being explained about the Metamorphoses in the medieval commentaries on it, Lydgate’s manipulations of his sources reveal that he was aware of Ovid’s messages about abuses of authority. Lydgate carefully revises these criticisms of people corrupted by power to provide the first medieval English frame narrative to promote criticism of conquerors and the empires that they build and maintain.

Ovid’s Metamorphoses provided not only a political argument to manipulate, but also a formal rhetorical approach that appealed to late medieval writers trying to tread carefully around Lancastrian nobles who were sensitive about their relatively indirect genealogical lines of inheritance.\textsuperscript{500} According to Paul Strohm,

\textsuperscript{500} As Anthony Goodman explains, the Lancastrian line interrupted the direct father-to-son line of regal inheritance that England had enjoyed since the beginning of the thirteenth century. Additionally, Paul Strohm points out that chronicler John Hardyng depicted “an ambitious Lancastrian attempt to reconfigure dynastic origins.” Hardyng claimed that John
Lydgate and Hoccleve “staged their lives and careers in complex relation to the Lancastrian court, and were consciously and deliberately Lancastrian in their affinities.”\footnote{Strohm, “Hoccleve, Lydgate, and the Lancastrian Court,” in The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 640.} However, Strohm points out that those political ties were not constant; Lydgate wrote different texts for different patrons and some texts for no discernible patron.\footnote{Ibid., 640-1.} Lydgate had to navigate a turbulent political environment, surviving the reigns of four different kings in addition to protectorships and constableships between Richard II and Henry VI—not all of them Lancastrian. Strohm explains:

Rather than a single Lancastrian court, we must recognize a fitful Lancastrian aspiration, embracing such divergent energies as John of Gaunt’s pre-dynastic manoeuvrings; Henry IV’s precarious and rebellion-ridden early years, and his complicated relations with the ambitious and resentful prince; Henry’s extended absences, fostering unease among his subjects about priorities regarding their possible subjection to France; emergence of the mercurial Gloucester as custos of Gaunt was upset that his son, Henry Bolingbroke, had not been named heir to the throne; therefore, in a decade-long attack on chronicle information, John bolstered the monarchical claims of his ancestor Edmund Crouchback (the younger brother of future Edward I and son of Henry III) to encourage deposing Richard II and replacing him with Henry. Strohm points out that English subjects began to question the legitimacy of Richard II, wondering if he was a bastard child. They had similar questions about Henry IV when he ascended the throne; the first decade of Henry’s reign included many military responses to plots (real and imagined) to dethrone him. In other words, the transition between Richard and Henry was tumultuous and contested—with English subjects lacking a consensus of approval for either king. Furthermore, according to Strohm, the way for the Lancastrians to retaliate against dissent was to control chronicles and to commission writers, like Lydgate, to produce works that validated the Lancastrian monastic legitimacy. Anthony Goodman, “Kingship and Government,” in The Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries, ed. Ralph Griffiths (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 192; and Paul Strohm, England’s Empty Throne: Usurpation and the Language of Legitimation, 1399-1422 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 3-14 & 64-5.
Anglie and all the uncertainties of Henry VI’s premature and troubled reign.\textsuperscript{503}

In other words, Lydgate survived several regime changes and an incessantly transforming government. A coded system of writing was essential, allowing Lydgate to avoid offending any of his potential audiences. The \textit{Metamorphoses’s} ability to confront the powerful in a coded manner and the prestige of its classical genre thereby appealed to medieval writers like Lydgate.

Ovid’s anti-epic became the first choice of medieval English writers to imitate in their attempts to inaugurate their vernacular into the ranks of formal literature. Such medieval \textit{auctores} turned to their Roman predecessors to shape respectable English vernacular literature. However, medieval \textit{auctores} seem to have been aware that while Virgil provided a profound foundation myth, the \textit{Aeneid’s} praise for pagan heroism contradicted their Christian view of the world. The fact that the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries provided a wide variety of frame narratives but no traditional epics attests to late medieval writers’ sense that “Christianity killed the epic.” While the \textit{Aeneid} highlights the heroic traits and feats of Aeneas, the \textit{Metamorphoses} emphasizes the profoundly un-heroic characters and actions in Roman mythology.\textsuperscript{504} The second chapter similarly points out that Ovid even transforms the heroic Aeneas into a selfish abandoner of Dido. Overall, Ovid’s denigration of classical heroic values and his troubled relationship with a

\textsuperscript{503} Ibid., 641.
\textsuperscript{504} For more about Ovid’s unheroic, and anti-Virgilian characters, see, for example, G. Karl Galinsky, \textit{Ovid’s Metamorphoses: An Introduction to its Basic Aspects} (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1975), 225-6; and Genevieve Lively, \textit{Ovid’s “Metamorphoses”: A Reader’s Guide} (London and New York: Continuum, 2011), 91.
temperamental ruler made his version of frame narrative the genre of choice for late medieval *auctores* trying to establish themselves as serious writers on a classical scale.

Lydgate's *Fall of Princes* contains perhaps the most explicit political commentary of the fourteenth- and fifteenth-century vernacular adaptations of Ovid. Coming from a long tradition of using mythology from Ovid and the Judeo-Christian Bible together (as established by Chaucer, Gower, and Boccaccio) *The Fall of Princes* manipulates myths to weave an intricate political commentary. Lydgate, an avid reader of Chaucer, Gower, Boccaccio, and Premierfait, formulates a frame narrative reminiscent of all of them. He inherits their rhetorical methods to concatenate narratives and contemporary issues. Thus while Lydgate probably read Ovidian commentaries in his monastery, he also inherited literary frame-narrative traditions that had already been established in English and continental texts and that had been a part of English-language literature before he started writing. Lydgate’s product is indebted to its rhetorical and clerical predecessors, but it combines their disparate exegetical methods into literary instruction for a patron vexed by his precarious place in politics and history. Lydgate brings frame narrative into a new age of public writing, but he does so to generate a text that coheres in

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505 While Lydgate does not allude to Gower as he does to Chaucer, he certainly reads and uses Gower’s *Confessio Amantis*. The clearest proof of Lydgate’s relationship to Gower appears in the tale about Canace, which uses many of the unique details that Gower added to his version of the narrative. This chapter will explain this Canace connection later in the chapter.
spite of its segregated periods of history, literature, clerical commentaries, and political commentaries.

Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, as established by the preceding chapters, tended to be distributed to late medieval England in the form of prose paraphrases. Such commentaries are essential to discussions of *The Fall of Princes* because they were frequently produced in monasteries like Lydgate’s. These expositions, based on the earlier Orléanais tradition that focused on explicating Ovid’s grammar and rhetoric, condense Ovid’s myths while generating a continuous narrative. To create a truncated yet coherent narrative, these expositions remove flowery rhetoric and focus on plot points and character traits—much like Lydgate’s expositions of myths in *The Fall of Princes*. For example, the summaries found in Oxford, Bodleian Library, Rawlinson B 214 and Oxford, Merton College MS 299 state:


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506 Aurea est...est] Aurea sata est quia ver tellus] quasi tellus simplici] simplicitatem saeculum esse...postea] saeculum aureum esse postea post successionem] per successionem ad quartam] ad quartam sic dicit protinus irrupit dicit sic in versibus protinus eripuit de gigantibus...ceperunt] tunc temporis gigantes rognare reperunt 205
This passage provides quotations from the *Metamorphoses*, presenting itself as a catena commentary or a companion to the *Metamorphoses* itself. The Ovidian quotations followed by brief expositions gives the text a “shorthand” style that relies upon abbreviation. The most obvious excision is Ovid’s creation myth, which depicts the world in chaos with warring elements before an undefined god creates the world. The Rawlinson B 214 and Merton MS 299 prose paraphrases begin instead with the four ages of man, or rather “the degradation of ages,” in which human history is presented in terms of suffering and decay.

The expositors remove Ovid’s depiction of chaos and uncreated matter to begin in more Christian terms—discussing human labor. Skipping over Ovid’s creation myth, Rawlinson B 214 and Merton MS 299 attempt to account for men toiling on earth in terms that parallel Adam and Eve in Genesis. Without directly allegorizing the text, these prose paraphrases present a version of Ovid’s text in which the moralized language has been deeply ingrained. This commentary thus proves that Ovid’s myths had been so thoroughly Christianized that writers could refer to such interpretations obliquely—using the terminology without having to provide extensive explicatures about how pagan gods like Saturn had been reformed.

[“Golden is the first (age) that was sown” etc., when Saturn ruled, all time was as if it were spring, and the land was giving all things of itself without labor for men. Whence it is said, on account of the simplicity of men and the fertility of the land, that the age was golden, as in that place “golden was the first sown (age)” etc. Moreover, afterwards, the age began to decline into something worse and was compared to silver, about that generation or about that age it was written thus, “after Saturn,” etc, and the age was already compared to silver. After a succession of time one reached the fourth age, which was compared to iron, thus it is said, “Then burst in” etc: with the giants having aspired to the heavens—as in the place, “And on land it should be” etc, then, at that time, the giants began to reign.] My translation. Oxford, Bodleian Library, Rawlinson B 214, Folio 203r, 1.9-20.
into Christian mythology. Additionally, these shorthand techniques are not confined to ethical interpretations; the expositors show that they are well versed in the general commentary tradition, revealing their awareness of how Ovid uses rhetoric to structure his tales. For example, the expositors begin their narratives with Saturn, identifying him as the progenitor for all of the following events. In fact, as we can see in all of the samples from these manuscripts provided in the other three chapters, this exposition tended to use patronymics to introduce all of its narratives. In this case, the expositor uses Saturn to introduce the text in terms of hegemonies with each regime change creating a societal decline—with the giants’ ambitions initiating the last and worst age of man. The expositions thereby abbreviate Ovid’s introduction to include only the conquerors and the adverse affects that they have had on the world. In essence, these summaries present the *Metamorphoses* as a narrative about warring factions, highlighting Ovid’s political messages by removing the obfuscating poetic details. This Christianized, politicized, and simplified version of the *Metamorphoses* lends itself easily to Lydgate’s political and rhetorical agenda.

**The Anxiety of Influence: Lydgate’s Approach to his Poetic and Clerical Sources**

To analyze the Ovidian structure of *The Fall of Princes*, this chapter primarily focuses on Book I because it is the most Ovidian of the books in Lydgate’s tome.\(^{507}\)

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\(^{507}\) In addition, as Mortimer points out, the advantage of analyzing Book I is that “(with 7,070 lines it is Lydgate’s longest, being nearly 2,000 lines longer than the next longest, Book III) and the range of narratives it offers: while certain books are arranged by content (for example, Book VI is Boccaccio’s ‘Roman Book’), the first book contains a mixture of mythology, Trojan and Theban ‘history,’ and biblical material. It is also usefully a book in which Lydgate exercises large-scale editorial power (as in, for example, his omission of...”)
Lydgate tries to position himself alongside the authority of Boccaccio, Chaucer, and Ovid, citing them repeatedly throughout the text. Lydgate’s emphasis on his literary lineage is a common poetic ploy from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. According to Simpson, “Fourteenth- and fifteenth-century writers often represent themselves as the last point in a complex gradation of authorities.”508 As a result, Simpson notices that texts from this period exhibit a sort of schizophrenia, presenting multiple voices from their sources and their patrons, which are often conflicting.509 For Lydgate, these competing voices include Humphrey, Boccaccio, Chaucer, Ovid, and many other authorities that he does not name. To begin with, Lydgate names Boccaccio more than sixty times in Book I alone, which might seem unsurprising because he is claiming to translate Boccaccio’s *De casibus*; however, Premierfait’s French translation contains less than one-third of these references. Lydgate’s additional mentions of Boccaccio exhibit a greater regard for textual authority than his French predecessor; in other words, Lydgate found more of a need than Premierfait for establishing the line of transmission from his sources—or at least the authorities he wanted people to believe that he was using. Along these lines of identifying a reputable transmission history from Boccaccio, Lydgate also establishes a literary heritage that dates back from Chaucer and Ovid. Nigel Mortimer identifies twenty-two references to Ovid in the *Fall of Princes* (most of
which appear in Book I) and seven to Chaucer (most of which praise Chaucer for his indelible impact on English vernacular literature). Mortimer points out how Lydgate incorporates some original references to other sources in order to authorize his deviations from Premierfait’s De cas, which is his primary source for The Fall of Princes.\(^{510}\) However, it appears that Lydgate’s references are more than justifications for alterations; they also exhibit Lydgate’s persistent interest in auctoritas and literary lineage. Lydgate aligns himself with the three perceived masters of frame narrative: Ovid, Boccaccio, and Chaucer.

Nevertheless, even though Lydgate professes undying devotion to Chaucer’s literary influence throughout The Fall of Princes, he only tangentially follows the example that Chaucer lays out for him in “The Monk’s Tale.” The Fall of Princes and “The Monk’s Tale” both identify the influence of Boccaccio’s De casibus in their respective texts.\(^{511}\) But Chaucer’s narratives are brief and often ironic, whereas Lydgate’s are not. The previous chapter illustrated that Chaucer’s narratives often point to the incommensurability of grieving for the subjects’ downfalls and the despicable moral quality of these characters. Chaucer’s characters are mostly human (except Satan), base, and despicable. Gower’s Confessio Amantis also focuses on the human characters from Ovid’s Metamorphoses and the Judeo-Christian Bible. Lydgate’s frame narrative, however, is the first in vernacular English to incorporate pagan deities like Saturn and Jupiter as subjects of tragic falls.

\(^{510}\) Mortimer, John Lydgate’s Fall of Princes, 41.
\(^{511}\) Although Chaucer never mentions Boccaccio by name, he uses Boccaccio’s own title and many of Boccaccio’s narratives.
Lydgate derives his classical narratives from several different Ovidian commentary traditions, beginning with the standard moralization and rationalization of un-Christian material. To incorporate pagan deities into his text about tragic falls, Lydgate introduces euhemerism to the English vernacular in a style reminiscent of early allegorical commentaries of Ovid’s _Metamorphoses._

Lydgate introduces Saturn when he writes:

These olde poetis with ther sawes swete / Ful couertli in ther vers do feyne, / How olde Saturne was whilom kyng of Crete, / And off custum dede his besy peyne, / Off his godhed list for to ordeyne / That he sholde, as off his nature, / Echon deuoure as by his engendrure. / In this mateer shortli to soiourne, / To vnirstonde off poetis the processe, / Thei meene pleylni that this word Saturne / Doth in it-silff nothing but tyme expresse; / And philisophres bere also witnesse,‘ That as in tyme, forth eueri thyn is brought, / So tyme ageynward brynith eueri thing to nouht. / Clerkis recorde eek in ther writing, / Vndir support as I dar reherse, / How that fir wastith eueri thyng, / And iren hard doth nesshe thynges perse; / Yiff auht a-bitt that they may nat transuerse, / Yit comyth tyme, and bi contynuance, / Ad al consumeth with his sharpe launce.\(^{512}\)

Lydgate explains that Saturn was simply a king of Crete and that poets’ references to the pagan god are merely personifications of time. Following the moralizing commentary tradition such as those by John of Garland and Thomas Walsingham that are discussed in the first chapter, Lydgate explains away all of the pagan mythology associated with Saturn. Pagan Saturn becomes a tool for discussing universal concepts about time and human nature as Lydgate distinguishes between poets’ mistaken beliefs about Saturn’s pagan significance and clerks’ correct beliefs about Saturn’s allegorical Christian significance. Lydgate hereby claims to bridge the

\(^{512}\) Lydgate, _The Fall of Princes_, I.1401-21.
gap between poets and clerks, inserting clerical commentary into his vernacular poetry to show how the sacred and profane need not be contrasting genres anymore.

Scholars tend to assume that medieval writers used allegoresis to bridge the gap between the sacred and profane, doing so by “Christianizing” pagan sources. Jennifer Summit points out how Lydgate defines allegoresis in Book III when he writes:

Poetis sholde esche[w] al idilnesse, / Walke be ryuers and wellis cristallyne, / To hih mounteyns a-morwe ther cours up dresse, / The mist defied whan Pehbus first doth shyne, / Studie in bookis of moral discipline, / Nothyng coueite, but sett ether entent, / With moderat foode for to be content. / Ther cheeff labour is vicis to repreve / With a maner couert symylitude, / And non estat with ther langage greeve / Bi no rebuking of termys dul and rude; / What euer thei write, on vertu ay conclude, / Appeire no man in no maner wise: / This thoffise of poetis that be wise.513

Summit explains that this section reveals how allegoresis was “traditionally used to justify the recuperation of classical texts for Christian meanings,” showing how seemingly un-Christian information could be interpreted allegorically to revise them into acceptable Christian terms.514 She thus considers The Fall of Princes a collection of poetic exempla to which Lydgate adds Christian envoys to instruct princes.

Summit claims that he views envoys as the space in which clerks display their special ability to “decode” poetry to unveil moral lessons.

Lydgate undeniably defines clerks as being the “decoders” of opaque poetic language. However, in the section to which Summit refers, Lydgate actually encourages poets (not clerks) to be such moral interpreters of works. Instead of fortifying the old distinctions between clerks and poets, he calls for poets to take on clerks’ roles. Lydgate imagines himself to be such a new kind of poet—one who can straddle both sides of the poetic/didactic role of literature. He argues that he is reforming poetry so that it does not need the external work of clerks to explain it, but it incorporates instruction in its own framework. Moreover, the frame-narrative genre provides the ideal format for poetry with built-in moral explanations: inset narratives allow the text to comment on its own narrative details. In addition, grammar schools had been using moral commentaries to interpret Ovid’s pagan frame narrative for centuries before Lydgate came around to it. Lydgate thus reveals that he envisions himself as a poet following the long tradition of clerical commentaries as well as classical literature.

Rita Copeland notices this growth of the poetic field to incorporate didactic impulses at the end of the Middle Ages. Copeland actually argues that *The Fall of Princes* should be reclassified in relation to “the long history of the disciplinary

515 Ibid., 218-9.
construction of rhetoric," or between poetic and political models of rhetoric.\textsuperscript{517} She, revising the long tradition of viewing Lydgate’s poetry as “mundane,”\textsuperscript{518} argues:

\begin{quote}
Rhetoric is sugared language, but it is also the oratorical proficiency that can move the will of a king to secure the good of the state. Lydgate manages the conflict by allowing the poetic to subsume the political.\textsuperscript{519}
\end{quote}

Thus Copeland inaugurates Lydgate into discussions about rhetorical poetics, identifying how rhetoric is not confined to flowery language but also includes persuasive arguments. She rightfully acknowledges Lydgate’s disavowal of flowery poetics because he considers them to detract from the truth of literature;\textsuperscript{520} nonetheless, as Copeland points out, he is still a rhetorical writer. Yet Lydgate’s knowledge of rhetorical construction extends even beyond persuasive rhetoric; in a classical sense, it also applies to the structure of his poetic presentations. The \textit{Metamorphoses} proves that classical literature was more than inflated rhetoric and grandiose statements of sentiment. Orléanais and prose paraphrase commentaries of Ovid’s \textit{Metamorphoses} (in addition to vernacular frame narratives like Gower’s \textit{Confessio Amantis}, Chaucer’s \textit{Canterbury Tales} and “Monk’s Tale”) attest to the fact that medieval writers also displayed an acute awareness of overall literary structure in the \textit{Metamorphoses}. Accusations that classical literature consists of inflated and


\textsuperscript{519} Copeland, “Lydgate, Hawes, and the Science of Rhetoric in the Late Middle Ages,” 244.

\textsuperscript{520} For example, Lydgate praises Premierfait’s unadorned statements in his translation of Boccaccio’s \textit{De casibus} and promises to provide plain, unadorned statements of truth in his own adaptation. Lydgate, \textit{The Fall of Princes}, Vol. I, Prologue 77-84 & 227-234.
flowery rhetoric relates more to writers like Virgil and Homer than to Ovid. In fact, classicists often accuse Ovid of being terse, and the prose paraphrases produced by monastic English *scriptoria* made Ovid even more succinct. This concise and arguably unadorned poetry appealed to Lydgate because he was invested in writing unembellished truths within a classical structure.

Lydgate employs a framing device that was mediated by several adaptations of the *Metamorphoses*. To understand the literary tradition to which *The Fall of Princes* adheres, one must at least address the genres and rhetorical traits of its sources. To begin with, Lydgate is not even the first English writer who claims to translate Boccaccio’s *De casibus*. The prior chapter revealed how Chaucer’s “Monk’s Tale” presents a greatly condensed and syncopated version of Boccaccio’s work. Warren Ginsberg and Henry Ansgar Kelly argue that “The Monk’s Tale” converts Boccaccio’s notion of Fortune into tragedy. According to Mortimer, while tragedy was rarely used as a vernacular word during the Middle Ages, “tragedy” and “*de casibus*” became synonymous quickly after Chaucer employed the terms in his “Monk’s Tale.” Most critics view *The Fall of Princes* as a tragedy because of its frequent use of the term; Mortimer counts eighty-five uses of the term in the poem,

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a large proportion of these instances (fifty-seven) occurring in the post-narrative envoy sections which Lydgate claims he added to the poem at the request of his patron.\textsuperscript{524} Mortimer concludes that Lydgate tends to use the term “tragedy” in all of his poems to refer to a sad story, following the example of Chaucer’s Monk, suggesting that tragedy results from pathos surrounding the sad fate of innocent characters.\textsuperscript{525}

Like Mortimer, Ruth Nisse imagines that Lydgate is completing the project that Chaucer began when he adapted part of Boccaccio’s \textit{De casibus} in “The Monk’s Tale.”\textsuperscript{526} Examining “The Monk’s Tale” and \textit{The Fall of Princes}, Mortimer suggests that Boccaccio’s stories were quickly accepted as tragic exempla, yet this generic word appears more in Lydgate’s envoys than in the body of his tales.\textsuperscript{527} Even though \textit{casibus} are undoubtedly used as exempla, Mortimer’s explanation only accounts for Lydgate’s envoys. Resembling many medieval writers like Gower, Lydgate’s explicitly didactic comments are not always consistent with the rest of his narratives. As the previous chapters prove, medieval frame narratives in particular allow writers to generate contradictions between the sanctioned moral authority stated in the frame of the text and the narratives inset within them.

Mortimer, Kelly, and Ginsberg define tragedy in the \textit{De casibus} and its adaptations according to the plot details or flowery and ornate poetics used to

\textsuperscript{524} Ibid., 153.
\textsuperscript{525} Ibid., 210-5. Additionally, I refute such claims about the Monk’s characters being pitiable sufferers in the preceding chapter.
\textsuperscript{526} Nisse, “Was it not Routhe to Se?” 287.
\textsuperscript{527} Mortimer, \textit{John Lydgate’s Fall of Princes}, 211-2.
generate *pathos*. However, the fact that Lydgate avoids figurative language and strings together so many plots demonstrates that he imagines himself to be compiling more than simple tragedies. The fact is that our perceptions of how genres were constructed during the Middle Ages mostly rely upon the *florilegia* and encyclopedia that Mortimer mentions. However, readers during the Middle Ages had access to more materials than these sententious, selected quotations. Especially as a monastic scholar, Lydgate would have known a variety of Ovidian literary manifestations. The collection of Ovidian commentaries, if nothing else, attests to the variability and expansiveness of medieval scholasticism and literary appreciation. At no point does Isidore or any other classifier of tragedy claim that a collection of narratives can fit into this category: each definition pertains to a singular character, plot, and fall. Focusing on these brief definitions of tragedy has restricted our field to discussing one narrative at a time instead of the overall frame narrative. But a new focus on the frame-narrative structure changes how we can approach the text: Lydgate invites readers to view tragedy as a plot that extends throughout human history instead of through the life of one important individual.

Phillipa Hardman notices, to an extent, the cohesive nature of *The Fall of Princes*. In relation to Lydgate’s syntax, she points out:

Connectedness is a quality Lydgate must have valued highly. This is apparent not only in the linking of sentences by rhymes and the
overflowing of stanza bounds but in the frequency with which his sentences start with a conjunction: and, but, or for.\footnote{Phillipa Hardman, “Lydgate’s Uneasy Syntax,” in John Lydgate: Poetry, Culture, and Lancastrian England, ed. Larry Scanlon and James Simpson (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), 23.}

While Hardman uses this connectivity to combat accusations that Lydgate employs a loose and uneasy syntax, the same connectivity can also be seen in Lydgate’s use of the continuations of Ovidian commentaries—which link not only passages to each other chronologically, but also to passages throughout the text. More than anything, Lydgate exhibits a popular monastic approach to interrelated narratives. Similar to Chaucer’s fourteenth-century monk, fifteenth-century Lydgate belongs to an active literary community. James G. Clark points out that many English monasteries demonstrated profound and influential interest in Ovidian materials and literature in general—Lydgate’s Bury St. Edmund’s particularly exhibited an unabashed literary interest in Ovid.\footnote{James G. Clark, “Ovid in the Monasteries: The Evidence from Late Medieval England,” in Ovid in the Middle Ages, ed. James G. Clark, Frank T. Coulson, and Kathryn L. McKinley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 179.}

Clark points out that Ovid became an important model for fourteenth- and fifteenth-century monks who were studying not just rhetoric, but also the practical application of Ovid in the ars dictaminis—which was encouraged by the growing burden of monastic administration as their litigation expanded over spiritual and temporal arenas. Some secular schools even accepted monks as students for their studies of the ars dictaminis. Ovid was a popular, if not the only, companion text for
studying *dictamen*, as his work provided an epistolary style for imitation.\(^{530}\) Lydgate belongs to this collection of classically trained monks, having been educated at Oxford and also having access to Humphrey’s impressive humanist library. All of the preceding chapters attest to the growing popularity of the prose paraphrase tradition in England during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries; and it is no coincidence that these Ovidian expositions were growing alongside of vernacular adaptations of Ovid’s frame narrative—such as *The Fall of Princes*.

**Lydgate’s Continuous Narrative**

Lydgate inherits a collection of frame narratives, including prose paraphrases, which demonstrate how to link narratives into coded political messages. Yet, imitating the rhetorical methods of his literary forbears, Lydgate especially manipulates his introductions to stories, showing his investment in personally framing his text for his audience. His unique packaging is apparent from the beginning when he tailors Boccaccio and Premierfait’s first tale about the fall of Adam and Eve. The work of all three medieval writers resembles the Ovidian prose paraphrase tradition in that they begin the frame narrative envisioning the first humans, thereby inaugurating their mythological frame narratives as exhaustive depictions of human history. Premierfait introduces his first narrative about Adam and Eve by saying:

\[\text{Se en ce livre n’estoient aultres exemples fors que cestui qui racompte le cas de noz premiers parens, si devroit il souffire sez aultre a}\]

\(^{530}\) Clark, “Ovid in the Monasteries,” 190-1.
nettoier les couraiges humains de l’orgueil et cruauté dont les nobles hommes et femmes sont corruppuz et enteschiez, en tant qu’ilz lievent leurs testes contre le ciel et cuident de leurs piez soubmarchier les estelles. Nous deuussions resgarder devant noz piez le mortel tresbuchet de fortune.  

This passage points out that the book recounts many falls, the first example of which is Adam and Eve. Premierfait emphasizes human agency, focusing on how ‘our first ancestors’ by means of their pride and sin gave men and women their corruption, defying heaven. He says that we ought to view our sins as the downfall of fortune. By aligning Adam and Eve’s falls with those of everyone, he introduces this narrative and even the whole text as a history of downfalls from fortune as well as of human agency.

Premierfait’s emphases become all the more apparent when reading them in conjunction with Boccaccio’s. While Premierfait begins with Adam and Eve, Boccaccio starts with falls in general. Boccaccio’s introduction states:

Maiorum nostrorum dum flebiles casus, ut satis dignum principem infortuniis assummerem ex deiectorum multitudine, animo volverem, et ecce senes astitere duo, tam grandi annositate graves, ut vix artus tremulos posse trahere viderentur. Quorum sic alter:—Ut primi vir et uxor auctore Deo celum hausimus, sic Inimico suadente homini Fortune lubricum primi experti sumus: et ideo preter nos nemo decentius quod quaceris dabat principium. —Ego intueri decrepitos, mirari homines extra nature officinam productos, mortalium parentes

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531 [Thus in this book there are not other examples except that, according to that which recounts the fall of our first parents, he is indeed obliged to suffer enough for another to cleanse human thoughts of pride and cruelty—for which reason noble men and women are corrupted and tainted, insofar as they raise their intentions towards heaven and imagine their emotions drag down the stars. We ought to consider the deadly fall from fortune before our emotions.] My translation. Laurent de Premierfait, De cas des nobles hommes et femmes, Book I, ed. Patricia May Gathercole (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968), I.ii.1.
omnium et paradisi ante obitum incolas stupens cepi, ac inde libens preferendos assumpsii.\footnote{532}{While I reflected on the woeful downfall of our ancestors, and when I took up from the multitude of downcast the first worthy enough of misfortune—look, two old people stand before me, weighted down with old age, so they seem scarcely able to drag along their trembling limbs. Thus another one of them—just as man and wife we looked upon the sky after God engendered us, so with the devil persuading mankind, we first suffered the slippery fall of fortune, and for that reason no one except us will give you a more fitting beginning which you seek. And I began to look on them aghast, those decrepit individuals, to marvel at men brought forth outside nature’s workshop, parents of all mortals and residents of paradise before death, and I willingly adopted them as models.] My translation. Giovanni Boccaccio, \textit{De casibus virorum illustrium}. \textit{Tutte le opere di Giovanni Boccaccio}, Vol. IX, ed. Arnoldo Mondadori (Milan: Mondadori, 1983), I.i.1-3.}

The first line of Boccaccio's narrative introduces Adam and Eve's fall as “flebiles,” or lamentable, which is an emotional perspective that Premierfait’s account lacks. Unlike Premierfait, Boccaccio defines falls by means of the great disparity between the person’s originally princely status and his or her eventual degraded existence. To explain these demises, he uses the passive voice, which presents his characters as passive observers of their own falls. Boccaccio focuses on the sudden and unpredictable nature of fortune without discussing the role of human agency. This account of Adam also deviates from the previously discussed “Monk’s Tale,” which also inspired Lydgate. Although “The Monk’s Tale” incorporates Fortune into the Adam and Eve narrative, Chaucer’s Monk emphasizes human agency more than fortune or Satan’s temptation.\footnote{533}{For more about Chaucer’s approach, see the preceding chapter.} Boccaccio, like Premierfait, discusses Adam and Eve’s defiance of God in relation to fortune, but he deemphasizes Adam and Eve’s authorship of their own fall, providing less disambiguation than Premierfait about God’s role in the matter.
On the surface, Premierfait’s version adheres to Humphrey’s request that Lydgate write about the choices men make that bring about their downfalls.\textsuperscript{534}

However, Lydgate does more than translate the French text. His version of the Adam and Eve myth begins by saying:

\begin{quote}
Whan Iohn Bochas considred hadde \& souht / The woful fall off myhti conquerours, / A remembraunce entrid in his thought, / Reknyng the noumbre off our predecessours, / And first to mynde cam the progenitours / Of al mankynde, ferre Ironne in age, / And toward hym holding the passage, / As hym thouhte in his inward siht, / In ther comyng ful pitousli trembling, / Quakyng for age and for lak off myth, / Ther gret feeblesse be signes out shewyng; / And oon off hem, first at his comyng / —Our fadir Adam—sodenli abraide, / And to myn auctour euene thus he saide [...]\textsuperscript{535}
\end{quote}

This passage presents several of the themes to which Lydgate returns throughout the text. To begin with, he, unlike any of his sources, draws attention to his source, citing Boccaccio as his \textit{auctor} to introduce the narrative section of his text. Lydgate establishes from the beginning that he derives his text from great \textit{auctores}, and he relies upon their \textit{auctoritas} to establish his own. In addition, Lydgate adds to this first narrative introduction the reference to the “ferre Ironne in age.” Veering away from Boccaccio and Premierfait’s accounts, Lydgate underscores his placement of this narrative on his chronological timeline. This Iron Age reference might be paying homage to Ovid, who introduces the \textit{Metamorphoses} by explaining the degradation of ages in his creation myth.\textsuperscript{536} Whatever the inspiration for the reference, Lydgate

\textsuperscript{534} Mortimer’s book is essentially a source study showing how Lydgate follows Premierfait’s example more than Boccaccio’s. Mortimer, \textit{John Lydgate’s Fall of Princes}.

\textsuperscript{535} Lydgate, \textit{The Fall of Princes}, I.470-83.

\textsuperscript{536} In the first book of the \textit{Metamorphoses}, Ovid explains that the final age was the Iron Age.
is pointing to a model of the world worsening with age, placing the beginning of human history at the most degraded point of the world’s history.

Similar to Ovid, and the prose paraphrase cited above, Lydgate introduces the Iron Age in terms of bringing wars into the world. However, he mentions that Boccaccio focuses on such a war-like mentality. This introductory passage claims that Boccaccio writes a collection of narratives about the falls of “myhti conquerours,” suggesting that Boccaccio’s text is about the winners of such wars. Despite using the auctoritas of Boccaccio to authorize the topics of his own text, Lydgate is fabricating Boccaccio’s martial interest where it does not exist. Boccaccio mentions the princely estate, but he uses no words that resemble “conquerours”—nor does Premierfait, for that matter. Lydgate hereby shifts the emphasis of his narratives from princes to warriors and empire builders. In the first lines of Lydgate’s narrative, he proves to be revising the texts of both Premierfait and Boccaccio in order to emphasize authoritative systems of power.

Lydgate’s subsequent narrative about Nimrod begins in much the same way as his Adam one. He introduces the tale of Nimrod by returning to the authority of Boccaccio, but also to the role of God in the Old Testament. Lydgate writes:

Myn auctour Bochas, as he that vndirstood / The vengaunces & myscheuis huge / Which that God took with Noes Flood, / Whan he sente an vniuersel deluge, / Ageyn[e]s which there was no refuge, /

Ovid explains that this inferior metal brought forth evil into the world, replacing deceit and fraud for truth and faith. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, I.127-31. The “Vulgate” Commentary interprets this section by providing the false etymology for “iron,” saying that it means “all evil.” The Vulgate also explains that Ovid considers the world to get worse with each age.
Sauf eihte personis in that mortal wo /Withynne a ship were sauyd and no mo. / Wherfore myn auctour lihtli ouergoth, / Makith off that age no special remembraunce, / But passeth ouer from Adam to Nembroth.\(^{537}\)

Lydgate aligns himself again with Boccaccio, explaining how his text derives from the *De casibus*. However, Lydgate also feels the need to account for the gap that Boccaccio leaves in the narration of human history. He points out that Boccaccio omits the monumental biblical incident about Noah's flood. Yet Lydgate is careful to retain Boccaccio's respectability, pointing out how the Italian writer undoubtedly knew about the narrative, but “passeth ouer” it. Lydgate still does not provide a full narrative about Noah, but by mentioning this gap he shows that he is more interested than Boccaccio in presenting a comprehensive account of human history.

The English writer suggests here that his story collection is complete and, unlike Boccaccio's, at least accounts for all major human events in order to provide historical continuity.

Lydgate even extends this biblical timeline to incorporate his pagan characters, such as the subsequent narrative about Saturn. Saturn is allowed to become an extension of his biblical predecessors because the text uses euhemerism to transform him into a mortal king who ruled over Crete.\(^{538}\) He writes:

\[
\text{In the firste age from Adam to Noe, / Prudent listres, which list in bookis reede, / Fynde of Fortune no mutabilite, / Nor off hir chaungis}
\]

\(^{537}\) Lydgate, *Fall of Princes*, I.1002-11.

\(^{538}\) Euhemerism was a common interpretive technique used in allegorical commentaries for the *Metamorphoses*. Thomas of Walsingham, for example, used the same interpretation of Saturn in his *Arcana deorum*, which also discusses biblical and pagan mythological figures according to their chronological order on a Christian timeline.
Lydgate reestablishes the chronology that he presented when he introduced Nimrod, providing the number of years between these Judeo-Christian and pagan characters to substantiate his discussion and legitimize his historical timeline. Yet despite these clearly delineated periods of time (with Adam and Noah occupying the first age of human history) fortune remains constant in its “mutabilite,” transcending all periods and regions to affect all ages of man. Thus while Lydgate presents a version of history that is differentiated and categorized according to generations, he simultaneously presents a version of history that is universal and constant. The two functions of his notions about history explain why critics have struggled to understand Lydgate’s moral impetus for each of his narratives. Unlike Mortimer, who wants to interpret Lydgate’s moral framework as inconsistent,\(^{540}\) this passage indicates that Lydgate thinks that stability and mutability operate in the world simultaneously and without contradiction.

Lydgate even employs Saturn as a figurative representation of his notions about historical consistency and instability. Instead of treating Saturn like an

\(^{539}\) Lydgate, *The Fall of Princes*, l.1450-63.

\(^{540}\) Mortimer claims that Lydgate’s warning about the changeability of the world contradicts his introduction to Saturn’s malice being punished. Mortimer, *John Lydgate’s Fall of Princes*, 60.
exemplum in line with the other narratives, the text presents him as a

personification of the lesson about the nature of history. Lydgate explains:

Clerkis recorde eek in ther writing, / Vndir support as I dar reherse, /
How that fir wastith every thing, / And iren hard doth nesshe thynges
perse; / Yiff auht a-bitt that they may nat transuerse, / Yit comyth
tyme, and bi contynuaunce, / And al consumeth with his sharpe
launce. / His sharpe toth of consumpcioun / In stille wise doth his besi
cure / For to anentise, in conclusioun, / Alle thyng that is brought
foorth bi Nature, / Bi long abiding thei may hem nat assure; / For olde
thyngis deuourid men may see, / Fer out off mynde, as thei neuer had
be.\textsuperscript{541}

This passage represents the clerical perspective on Saturn, investing the narrative
with the \textit{auctoritas} of scholarship and drawing attention to how Lydgate is bringing
clerical knowledge to poetry. The reference to iron and fire could also be regarded
as an allusion to Ovid's creation myth, in which Saturn is a prominent figure
representing the old regime to be overthrown by his own son. Lydgate establishes
with his first narratives in Book I that this text is about historical processes in which
time degrades and replaces people with power, yet fluctuations in fortune are
constantly occurring. Thus the text becomes a diatribe about flux and permanence
at the same time, and this notion of history allows for pagan mythological figures to
coexist with Christian ones because they coexist on the same timeline and they all
serve related instructional purposes, which Lydgate then uses to discuss downfalls
and regime changes.

By making Saturn a mortal king of Crete, Lydgate segues into his collection of
narratives about changing governors and conquerors—beginning with Cadmus.

\textsuperscript{541} Lydgate, \textit{The Fall of Princes}, I.1415-28.
Lydgate first introduces Cadmus long before his narrative, making his life a frame for a series of inset narratives about characters with similar martial values. To introduce the inset tales in the Cadmus section, Lydgate returns to the timeline concept, pointing out another gap in Boccaccio’s historical overview. As with his description of Boccaccio’s omission of the Noah narrative, he claims that Boccaccio skipped over the 1,711 years between Adam and Nimrod because nothing notable happened between these years. Lydgate justifies such selective historicizing when he writes about the years between Adam and Noah, saying:

In whiche space, who that considreth weel, / Ther be no thyngis write in special, / Digne off memorie nor spoke off neueradeel, / Which that be notable nor historial; / But fro the tyme Nembroth hadde a fal, / Onto Cadmus the yeeris to contene, / Thei were a thousand, foure hundrid & fourtene.542

Lydgate draws a parallel between the period between Adam and Nimrod and Nimrod and Cadmus—both extend beyond a thousand years. The English poet thus establishes that his narrative segments are interrelated because important historical figures are dispersed throughout time. Moreover, as he did with the first narrative segment, he briefly accounts for how other notable people figure into this timeline of historical highlights. In essence, Lydgate draws attention to the fact that he also chooses history, even though it spans all of human existence. His selectivity appears to be the result of setting up test cases for generalizations about the moral

542 Lydgate, The Fall of Princes, I.1457-63.
nature of the world instead of devoting himself to repeating the same general lesson for each narrative.\textsuperscript{543}

Rather than resigning himself to Boccaccio’s and Premierfait’s didactic connections between stories, Lydgate introduces the next series of narratives by means of both time period and thematic correlations. Immediately after describing how the time period for Adam-Nimrod correlates to the time period for Nimrod-Cadmus, he says about Vixoses:

\begin{quote}
Thoughyng this Cadmus, as Bochas list tendite, / It is rehercid bi rethoriciens, / How oon Vixoses, in bookis as thei write, / Was maad first kyng off the Egipciens, / Where philisophres & nygromanciens / Gan first tabounde ther renoun to auaunce.\textsuperscript{544}
\end{quote}

Lydgate foregrounds Cadmus in this introductory section, but only to discuss Vixoses. Lydgate justifies placing these subsequent narratives here—despite claiming that nothing monumental occurred between the lives of Nimrod and Cadmus—by using Cadmus as the linking principle. Vixoses thus earns a place in this section because of his status as the first king of Egypt. Yet Lydgate identifies “rethoriciens” as the source for this narrative, as opposed to Premierfait’s customary references to “auteurs historians.”\textsuperscript{545} The English writer hereby aligns himself not just with the historical tradition, but also with the rhetorical arts. His creation of the frame narrative’s relationship to rhetorical literature, and his

\textsuperscript{543} Lydgate’s notions about exempla being used to describe exceptional, rather than standard, cases is all the more obvious in relation to Premierfait’s version of this same portion of the text. Lydgate removes Premierfait’s general reflections about falls occurring throughout the history of the world without differentiation. Premierfait, \textit{De cas}, 112-3.

\textsuperscript{544} Lydgate, \textit{The Fall of Princes}, I.1464-9.

\textsuperscript{545} Premierfait, \textit{De cas}, 112-3.
seamless transition between the two—beginning with the timeline of historians and moving to the flourishes of rhetoricians—proposes that the historian and rhetorician can, and do, share narrative territory within frame narratives, a principle that Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* would have shown him. Thus the story about how Vixoses obtained his kingdom also becomes the shared terrain of a historian and rhetorician like Lydgate. His shift to focus on rhetoricians instead of historians informs us that he does not wish to castigate literature in general, only some of its obfuscating techniques. Or, perhaps, this shift exhibits his keen awareness of the lies incorporated into history as well, a point which he would have learned from Chaucer’s *House of Fame*.546

Introducing, and thereby justifying, the techniques of rhetoricians allows Lydgate to link Vixoses creatively to the biblical timeline that he provided above, when he says:

Nachor that tyme hauyng the gouernaunce / Off the Hebreus, as maad is mencioun— / Afftir Nembroth, bi trewe rehersaile, / Thre hundred yeer bi computaciou, / Four score & tuelue, which tyme, it is no faile, / That Vixorses gan to were & eek bataile / Off volunte geyn straunge naciouns, / And to conquere citees, burwes & touns. / Bi force onli, withoute title off riht, / He wan al Egipt to encrece his name; / But for al that, who list to haue a siht, / There is no lefft no report off his fame, / Sauf Bocahs writ, how he first dede attame / His myhti conquest off entencioun / That the glory and the hih renoun / Ascryued were onto

546 After marvelling at a temple’s engraven history of Aeneas and Dido, the narrator seeks out the source of such marvels. His resulting dream-vision journey takes him to the House of Fame and the House of Rumor, which both represent the creation of historical records as a flawed and biased business. The narrator is guided to a court where Fame reigns and crowds of suitors plead for her to grant them fame. Geoffrey Chaucer, *House of Fame*, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd edition, ed. Larry D. Benson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), I.470-9 & II.1538-III.2154.
his worthynesse, / And the residue and the surplusage / Off gold, off tresor, off good & off richesse / Turne sholde to comoun auaantage / Off al his people, that every manner age / Reporte myhte, it was to hym mor nerre / Boue synugulerte his comoun to preferred.547

This passage begins by pointing to the parallel time period in the Judeo-Christian Bible, and, more specifically, in Israel. Lydgate thus uses the Judeo-Christian narrative about Nahor’s reign to introduce Vixoses’s reign, relying on an Ovidian principle of interrelatedness to explain Vixoses’ position in the text. But Vixoses is noteworthy for Lydgate because of the fact that he has not been noted anywhere but in Boccaccio’s *De casibus*. Lydgate points out how most people have forgotten about Vixoses despite his rise to great fortune to become the first king of Egypt.

Lydgate provides Vixoses as an exception to the rule for historical figures who attained impressive fortune, land, and fame. Instead of explaining this omission, Lydgate resigns himself to the mystery of historical records, in which not all men who achieve greatness can be remembered. He appears to be influenced by Chaucer’s *House of Fame*, which offers a similar message about the capricious selection of historical figures that are granted fame when many more seem to deserve a similar place in written memory.548 Lydgate emphasizes the arbitrary nature of Vixoses’s exclusion from chronicles by revealing how the king’s circumstances relate to so many well-known historical figures, such as the other

548 Fame rules chaotically, “And somme of hem she graunted sone, / And somme she werned wel and faire, / And some she graunted the contraire / Of her axyng utterly. / But thus I seye yow, trewely, / What her cause was, y nyste. / For of this folk ful wel y wiste / Thay hadde good fame ech deserved, / Although they were dyversly served.” Chaucer, *House of Fame*, II.1538-46.
conquerors and empire builders whom the text proceeds to describe.549

Furthermore, Lydgate draws attention to the fact that he and Boccaccio are reintroducing Vixoses into historical records by aligning his narrative with those who have already been noted in them. In essence, Lydgate presents himself as a hybrid of a historian and rhetorician, but he also shows (like Chaucer) that he is aware of the biased, selective, and inherently rhetorical nature of the construction of historical records. Lydgate uses rhetoricians to justify the inclusion of a narrative that historians have traditionally omitted, presenting his project as an extension that reaches beyond the historical realm to a rhetorical meta-narrative that addresses how chronicles in general are constructed. He thus creates a rhetorical and historical text while providing a clerical meta-commentary about the nature of such a construction.

This self-conscious rhetorical manipulation of historical records presents Vixoses as a conqueror to align him with the other mythological figures in the subsequent narratives. In point of fact, Lydgate introduces “conqueror” to both De casibus and De cas, which do not use the term. He thereby collects an extensive list of conquerors and empire builders who reigned between Nimrod and Cadmus, including Thanaus, Zoroaster, Ninus, Moides of Sodom, Pharaoh, Oggigus, and Amphion. These conquerors and empire builders reciprocally are introducing and being introduced by Cadmus through their shared historical roles and time periods.

549 Chaucer’s House of Fame portrays the same point when the narrator observes that Fame’s suitors seem to resemble each other, yet are awarded fame and even punished by slander differently. Ibid., III.1545-82.
Nevertheless, the Cadmus section is not a disparate unit of narrative unconnected to
the rest of the text; Lydgate incorporates several Ovidian style intertextual links to
introduce Cadmus, beginning with a reference to Saturn. The tale begins by
identifying Saturn as Jupiter’s father before showing how Jupiter abducted Cadmus’s
sister, Europa:

Be rehersaile off many an old poete, / Be discent the lyne conueied
doun, / Next Saturnus, the myhti kyng off Crete, / Ioue was crownyd
bi successioun, / As next heir bi procreacioun, / Aftir his fadir the
lond to enherite, / Regned in Crete, as poetis list to write. / Sone off
the lynage, as I you tolde afforn, / Off the goddis most souereyn and
enteere, / Yit thouh he was off blood so hih I-born, / He ches Europa
for to been his feere, / And doun descended from his heuenli speere, /
As he that was, for al his deite, / Supprisid in herte with hir gret
beute.550

Lydgate includes patronymics to initiate the narrative, placing Saturn first as the
progenitor of this line of inheritance, thereby validating Jupiter’s position as king
and correlating him to the preceding allusions to Saturn, including Saturn’s tale.
These continuationes demonstrate not only narrative continuity, but also a
sustained line of descendants for the same throne. By introducing Saturn as the
father of Jupiter and Europa as the mother of Jupiter’s children, Lydgate converts
Europa’s rape into a tale about lineage and procreation rather than base lust and
savagery.

These revisions to the brutal narrative about Europa are all the more
significant because this is one of the places that he deviates most from his source
texts. Boccaccio introduces the same narrative by saying:

550 Lydgate, The Fall of Princes, I.1842-55.
Both Lydgate and Boccaccio cite old writers as the source for their knowledge, and both foreground geography and patronyms. However, Boccaccio introduces the tale by focusing on Agenor as the king of Tyre and father of Europa. In addition, Boccaccio’s introductory passage incorporates a reference to Europa’s rape, while Lydgate’s omits such language. The disparity between the two accounts of the same narrative highlight how the Italian’s text aligns the narrative with the victim by focusing on her lineage and her rape in the introduction, whereas the English version foregrounds the aggressor and his patronage by removing the emphasis on what he does to Europa and reducing her role in the narrative. The English text lacks pathos for Europa and, consequently, a tragic classification.

551 [Widely published among men of old is the story that Europa, the daughter of Agenor—King of Tyre and the Phoenicians—was secretly abducted by the Cretan Jove, and on this account constrained by grief, that same man ordered his son Cadmus to look for her, adding a law to his command that he not return home without her. And after he boarded the boat with his comrades, thinking it inconsistent with his courage to hunt out the trail of his ravaged sister, he willingly accepted the exile imposed by his father and looked for a home for himself and his comrades, driven to Greece in his voyage, having followed the response of the Delphic oracle about his future.] My translation. Boccaccio, De casibus, I.vi.1-2.

552 Lydgate does not even mention Europa’s rape until the twenty-eighth line of the narrative, saying that he was so stricken by her beauty and love for her that he used his force to ravish her. This ravishment is thus explained as a result of his being conquered by her beauty and conquering by means of his physical strength—highlighting him as a conqueror again while justifying his actions as a result of her excessive beauty. Lydgate, The Fall of Princes, I.1869.
Premierfait’s version focuses more on the aggressor than Boccaccio’s does, but not to the extent that Lydgate’s does. Premierfait writes:

Assex commune chose est envers les ancians historians que Jupiter, roy de l-isle de Crete, ravist et prist par force Europa la fille de Agenor roy de la cite de Thir, qui est ou pays de Fenice qui devers Oriant touche a Arabie et devers Midi elle touche a la Rouge Mer. Et pour ce ravissement Agenor fut constreint par douleur et commandes a Cadmus son filz qu’il serchastet querist sa suer Europa.553

Premierfait, like Lydgate, introduces the tale by focusing on Jupiter and uses euhemerism to identify him as the king of Crete. While Lydgate follows Premierfait’s example by beginning Cadmus’s narrative with Jupiter and his role as the king of Crete, Lydgate provides patronymics for Jupiter, adding Saturn to the narrative as a continuatio. In addition, Boccaccio and Premierfait foreground Agenor to provide the lineage of Europa, whereas Lydgate delays mentioning such familial relations by jumping from Jupiter’s family line to his relationship with her. Instead of making her the central point of the narrative as she is in other places, the English text makes her a tool for extending Jupiter’s royal line. The result of these revisions is that while Premierfait begins to move away from Boccaccio’s identification with the victim of the narrative to the aggressor, Lydgate takes this process one step further to remove Europa’s victimization entirely. *The Fall of Princes* introduces the relationship

553 *It is quite a common thing among ancient historians that Jupiter, king of the isle of Crete, ravished and took by force Europa, the daughter of Agenor—king of the city of Tyre, which is a where the country of Phoenicia is, which borders on Arabia to the East and it borders on the Red sea to the South. And because of this ravishment Agenor was compelled by sorrow and commanded his son, Cadmus, go round searching for his sister, Europa.* My translation. Premierfait, *De cas*, l.vi.1.
between Europa and Jupiter as a marriage to generate a connection to Jupiter’s lineage historically just as the narrative provides a link to his lineage rhetorically.

However, Lydgate undercuts this historical continuity offered by lines of inheritance by means of the individual rises and falls of the inheritors involved. He emphasizes these historical trends by inserting a digression not found in his sources about conquerors in general and how they are never satisfied until conquered. He introduces this sequence by writing:

For this the maner off these conqueroures: / Whan thei haue had in armis o victorie, / Thei do ther myht, ther peyne & ther laboures / With newe emprises to be put in memorie; / For ther corages, supprisid with veynglorie, / Can nat be stille content in ther estat / Til her parodie sey to hem chek-maat.554

This passage addresses conquerors’ inability to be content with the territories and goods that they amass; they are afflicted with an insatiable and unending desire to enhance their statuses. These people will not cease to use their strength and all of their energy to obtain more than they have, and only death can stop them. Rather than following the traditional model of Fortune in terms of a wheel with a top and a bottom, he presents fortune seekers as perpetual social climbers who never identify a peak. Therefore, the model of fortune for conquerors is a state of flux that brings inevitable downfalls because of their incessant pursuit of greater wealth and territory. Additionally, Lydgate claims that the source of this greed relates back to their pursuit of a space in historical records, which Lydgate just explained as being unpredictable in the Vixoses narrative. *The Fall of Princes* replaces the traditional

image of fickle and arbitrary Fortune with fickle and arbitrary fame and historical records.

Lydgate does mention Fortune in a more traditional sense at times, but only to confine its jurisdiction and redefine its role in the making of conquerors and history. The next stanza states:

Fortune off armys, in bookis ye may reede, / With a fals lauhtre on folkis thouh she smyle, / She forward euere, or thei can takyn heede, / Off hir nature will falsly hem be-gyle; / Conquest bi were lastith but a whyle, / For who bi deth doth sturdy violense, / God will bi deth his vengaunce recomepense.\footnote{Lydgate, The Fall of Princes, I.1527-33.}

Lydgate emphasizes Fortune and the fleeting successes of men, which Premierfait and Boccaccio do not do at this point in their texts. In a sense Fortune’s undercutting of rises to power seems to support the traditional medieval notion of her fickle nature; however, for Lydgate it only pertains to “Fortune off armys,” indicating that it rules battles but, when read in conjunction with the preceding stanza, conquerors select those battles. Instead of presenting Fortune as an opaque and indistinguishable force over people’s fates, its territory is confined to the field of battle where conquerors force the hand of fortune to intervene because they continually test their limits by repeatedly engaging in such unpredictable tests of physical prowess. As a result, conquests might occasionally elevate a man’s status, and might occasionally make him memorable, but they do not ensure his place in the historical record after his inevitable defeat. This passage reveals the temporary
nature of battle victories, which have no bearing on one’s afterlife. In addition, God, not Fortune, avenges conquerors by taking back what was lent to them.

Lydgate’s message about the nature of conquerors unifies this Ovidian style thematic strand of narratives about Jupiter, Cadmus, and all those inset within the Cadmus section—including Vixoses. Therefore, while the individual tales present rises and falls, the thematic connection between conquerors and the chronological unit spanning from Nimrod to Cadmus generates rhetorical and historical lineage for this section of the text. The inconstant nature of Fortune, conquerors, and empire builders are all impermanent pieces within a larger historical narrative. These individuals might as well be as unknown as Vixoses because they are only transitory figures who momentarily triumph and temporarily earn a place within historical memory. This impulse to foreground a sustained historical and rhetorical lineage is most likely the result of Lydgate’s writing for a Lancastrian patron during a troublesome time. The sudden death of Henry V in 1422 led to his infant son, Henry VI, taking the throne. Scholars such as Andrew Galloway have explained how the loss of the king prompted the royal family’s interest in historical perspectives, fearing threats to their prosperity.556

Galloway pursues an established critical tradition that analyzes Lydgate’s works according to his political position. Copeland, for example, argues that The Fall of Princes emphasizes “the value of rhetoric to enforce a state agenda,” making him a

writer for the monarch.\textsuperscript{557} Derek Pearsall also considers Lydgate’s poetry an instrument to support royal policies.\textsuperscript{558} Furthermore, Summit claims that Lydgate uses his examples to support natural hierarchy and to enforce subjection.\textsuperscript{559} Their views about Lydgate’s political position respond to the tenuous Lancastrian line of inheritance. As Anthony Goodman points out, literary attempts to create Lancastrian propaganda were a common practice throughout the fifteenth century because of the interruption to the “father-to-son succession” that England had enjoyed since 1216—except when Richard II succeeded his grandfather, Edward II, in 1377. Henry IV interrupted this direct line of inheritance when he usurped the throne in 1399, thereby introducing regal instability that questioned the legitimacy of five of the following six kings.\textsuperscript{560}

Simpson, however, contests medievalists’ use of the word “propaganda” to describe fourteenth- and fifteenth-century texts because of the multiple patrons and textual authorities that writers like Lydgate use. Simpson claims that there is no such “simplistic ventriloquism of centralized power.”\textsuperscript{561} Nonetheless, while it might not be a unified voice, \textit{The Fall of Princes} certainly responds to these tempestuous political circumstances. Galloway, Copeland, Pearsall, and Summit make valid points about Lydgate’s support of his patron’s royal lineage. Strohm similarly notices that Lydgate involved himself with this political turmoil, acknowledging that \textit{The Fall of

\textsuperscript{559} Summit, “Stable in Study,” 226.
\textsuperscript{560} Goodman, “Kingship and Government,” 192.
\textsuperscript{561} Simpson, “Bulldozing the Middle Ages,” 239-40.
Princes demonstrates “the dissolution of providential or teleological history into chaos of bloody extirpations, usurpations and dismemberments.” While undoubtedly filled by blood and regime changes, the genealogical and thematic connections in *The Fall of Princes* establish continuity and stability in the face of such violence and uncertainty. Lydgate hereby uses framing devices to extend a consolation worthy of a monk about overarching constancy within a constantly fluctuating world.

Nonetheless, Lydgate must broach his message about permanence carefully due to his unique relationship with the self-consciously unstable Lancastrian family. Strohm points out that Lydgate, while studying at Oxford, was supported by the future Henry V, who intervened in 1406-8 by writing a letter to the abbot and Lydgate’s chapter at Bury St Edmunds to support the cleric’s continued studies at Oxford. In addition, Lydgate was involved in the legitimizing efforts for the infant Henry VI—and he composed *The Fall of Princes* from 1431 to 1438-9, which falls in the middle of this period. After writing this tome, Lydgate received a royal annuity. Strohm notices Lydgate’s liminal status between Lancastrian apologist and pessimistically self-aware commentator on the apparent rifts within the dynastic family. According to Strohm, Lydgate’s was a difficult position to navigate, as any Lancastrian text would have to address the deep-seated

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563 Strohm imagines that the prince’s interest in Lydgate resulted from his awareness of this “author-intellectual’s potential usefulness.” Ibid., 651.
564 Ibid., 652.
565 Ibid., 656.
contradictions within the royal family’s political program. Lancastrians desired writers to celebrate Henry VI’s legitimate claims to the throne—but that throne was attained and maintained through murderous usurpation, the burning of its subjects as Lollards, and destruction in France. Thus Strohm argues, Lydgate’s versified arguments for loyalty and continuity repeatedly turn out not quite to fit the purposes they are invoked to serve. The very topics most disturbing to their princes constantly resurface, around and under the sign of their negation.\textsuperscript{566}

Strohm believes that Lydgate mitigates the horrors and injustice of the Lancastrian line by presenting falsely optimistic resolutions to conquests, which he circumvents by never directly addressing Lancastrian policies and embedding any strain of criticism within layers of extraneous commentary.\textsuperscript{567}

Ovid’s frame narrative lent Lydgate a circumlocutory structure that allowed him to weave subtle condemnation within hegemonic narratives. Galloway discusses Lydgate’s successes with the royal family as the result of his keen ability to use classical literature to instruct them about their particular fears of succession and monastic control.\textsuperscript{568} The concerns of the Lancastrian and Lydgatian conquerors are exclusively related to people in positions of power, not to their subjects—which scholars propose when they call the poet a public writer. The fact that Lydgate revises his sources to emphasize lines of inheritance and patrilineal connections indicates that Lydgate is shifting away from Premierfait, Boccaccio, Gower, and

\textsuperscript{566} Ibid., 659.
\textsuperscript{567} Ibid., 660.
Chaucer’s Monk’s notions about using frame narratives to criticize cunningly abuses of power to promote the interests of subjects. Lydgate instead employs an Ovidian structure of interrelated narratives to generate a political message, but the message is an anti-Ovidian concept, ignoring vitiated hegemonies to focus on the arbitrary nature of fame and its historical recorders. Those familiar with the *House of Fame* might notice that Lydgate’s point echoes Chaucer’s, which personifies Fame to demonstrate the irrational and inconsistent parameters that result in some attaining fame and fortune, while others with similar attributes suffer in obscurity.\(^{569}\)

Lydgate’s particular emphasis on capricious fame results from the precarious position of his patron, Humphrey, who was a powerful political figure of noble lineage but with no guaranteed place in historical records because he was not to be king. The insertion of conquerors in Lydgate’s framing devices probably responds to the fact that, after Humphrey was made duke of Gloucester in 1414, he spent most of his time fighting in France with his brother Henry V and some of his time acting as guardian of England during Henry V’s absences.\(^{570}\) Lucy Rhymer explains that Humphrey was often associated with Henry’s successes in France,\(^{571}\) despite the fact

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\(^{569}\) Chaucer even goes so far as to depict Fame and Fortune as sisters whose familial resemblance relies upon their irrational and capricious behaviors. Chaucer, *House of Fame*, III.1536-82.


\(^{571}\) Ibid., 55.
that, in reality, he had few personal military exploits. In fact, Humphrey was the very social climber that Lydgate is warning against. E.F. Jacob explains that Humphrey was declared protector and defender of the realm and Church of England and the king’s chief counselor during the 1422 parliament. However, these titles only belonged to him when his elder brother John, the duke of Bedford, was absent from the kingdom. Humphrey repeatedly and acridly fought against this decision because Henry V supposedly wrote an addendum to his will naming Humphrey regent during the minority of Henry VI. This social climbing led to his eventual loss of popularity and downfall in the 1440s, which Lydgate seems to predict in his framing of conquerors as perpetual seekers of advancement until their ambitions destroy them. Overall, Lydgate panders to the privileged positions of his patron and his patron’s relatives, yet he also acknowledges the unstable positions of these rulers. The structure of Lydgate’s narratives bolster and exemplify this dual-focused perspective by exemplifying how the fortunate always fall while, at the same time, he establishes a continuous line of power rhetorically and historically in the introductory framework for these tales about falls.

Lydgate’s Women

While Lydgate is clearly interested in currying his patron’s favor and in providing historical and rhetorical instruction about governance, he has other...

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interests in Book I as well. The fact that several of the narratives focus on women complicates the political purpose that most critics see in The Fall of Princes. After the series of tales about conquerors who met their demises, the majority of the subsequent narratives prominently feature female characters. The prevalence of female-centric narratives in Book I contradicts the claim that The Fall of Princes is only interested in civic politics, public writing, or satisfying Humphrey’s requests. The collection of tales about women indicates that Lydgate was writing for a larger audience than Humphrey alone. Lydgate redresses Boccaccio for mistakenly vituperating all women when he writes:

Ye women all, that shal beholde & see / This chapitle and the processe reede,— / Ye that be goode founde in your degree, / And virtuous bothe in thought and deede, / What Bochas seith, take ye noon heede; / For his writing, yiff it be discernyd, / Is nat ageyn hem that be weel gouernyd.

Lydgate distinguishes between the women that Boccaccio describes and other women who conduct themselves virtuously, claiming that their husbands determine their behavior. Not only does he exempt virtuous women from Boccaccio’s accusations, but he also accuses men in their stead. Therefore, although women figure more prominently in the second half of Book I than the first, they are merely indicators of the degree to which the men in their lives are good governors. In addition, he addresses this point directly to women in his audience, pointing out

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574 The central female characters in Book I include Isis, Liriope, Philomena and Procris, Europa, Medea, Creusa,Pasiphæa, Scylla, Ariadne, Phaedra, Jocasta, Althea, Iole, Deianira, Myrrha, Echo, Eurydice, Marpessa and Lampedo, Delilah, and Canace.

that while several historical women exemplified turpitude, some also exuded righteousness.

This incorporation of women and the corresponding emphasis on their male custodians might seem illogical in a text written explicitly for Humphrey—if it were not for Humphrey’s female dilemmas. Historians have debated the extent to which Humphrey was considered as good a duke as fifteenth- and sixteenth-century chronicles attest. The Duke of Gloucester made an unpopular decision to abandon the seemingly virtuous and well-connected Jacqueline of Hainault for Eleanor Cobham, the former duchess’s lady-in-waiting, in 1429. Scholars such as Ralph Griffiths discuss that lowly Eleanor was vilified from the moment she married Humphrey.\textsuperscript{576} The disparity between the two wives’ social classes was enough to instigate the public to criticize Humphrey as a sensual bigamist.\textsuperscript{577} Jacqueline was the only child of Duke William of Hainault and Margaret of Burgundy, sister of Duke Phillip of Burgundy. In addition to being born into such a powerful European family, at age fourteen she married the young prince who became Dauphin of France. Her father and husband both died when she was sixteen, making “the teenaged widow heir to the strategically desirable lands of Holland, Hainault, and Zeeland, a natural bridge between Burgundy and the prosperous trading network of the Low Countries”\textsuperscript{578} (the territory in which Humphrey was attempting to gain


\textsuperscript{577} Harker, “The Two Duchesses of Gloucester,” 109-10.

\textsuperscript{578} Ibid., 111-2.
sovereignty). Humphrey courted Jacqueline quickly after she received asylum from Henry V in 1421, allowing Humphrey to achieve a state of his own.\(^{579}\)

However, the duke was only married to Jacqueline for seven years, only living with her for the first two of those, and spending the last three years of their marriage in an open affair with another woman.\(^{580}\) Griffiths explains that it was controversial for Humphrey to discard his noble wife for one of her ladies-in-waiting, who was the daughter of a knight from Kent.\(^{581}\) C. Marie Harker claims that Jacqueline’s reputation as a wronged woman, which she attained when she entered English custody in 1421, increased after her husband abandoned her.\(^{582}\) Jacqueline’s un tarnished reputation cast her rival, Eleanor, in an unfavorable light. Not only was Eleanor lowly born, but she was also characterized as a shameless seductress and generally evil woman.\(^{583}\) Harker identifies the women of London’s formal complaint to Parliament against Gloucester’s affair with Eleanor as evidence of the general disfavor with which the new wife was received. Additionally, she discusses the misogynistic depiction of Eleanor as a mermaid, which is a figure of magic and female lechery in medieval literature, in “A Complaint for my Lady of Gloucester and

\(^{579}\) Jacqueline’s sizable inheritance made her an attractive marriage prospect, but also a vulnerable one, because of threats from her father’s younger brother and others to take what was hers. She was married to her younger cousin, John, Duke of Brabant; however, they were related within the second degree of consanguinity through the paternal line, which, by means of papal dispensation, made their marriage illegitimate. Brabant was also considered a spineless pleasure seeker, leading Jacqueline to flee to England. Jacqueline and Humphrey married quickly, before either the pope or the anti-pope annulled her previous marriage to Brabant. Ibid., 111-4.

\(^{580}\) Ibid., 111.


\(^{582}\) Harker, “The Two Duchesses of Gloucester,” 110.

\(^{583}\) Ibid., 110.
Holland.” Moreover, the poet of “A Complaint” claims to speak for the general public. Harker claims that the poem, potentially written by Lydgate himself, proves that Eleanor was accused of necromancy and treason even before her trial and imprisonment in 1441, vindicating (but also emasculating) Humphrey as an innocent and helpless victim of Eleanor’s necromancy and treason, although his decision to abandon Jacqueline for Eleanor was irrational and against royal interests.

Humphrey’s precarious position as the man who selected a suspected necromancer with no familial connections in the stead of his respectable and well-connected former wife explains why Lydgate decided to include a series of narratives about women framed by the disclaimer above that the sins of wives should be directed towards their husbands’ inability to govern them. Instead of presenting Humphrey as a helpless victim of Eleanor’s evil ways, Lydgate seems to advise Gloucester to discipline and control his wife. Moreover, the direct address to women within the description of evil women’s relationship to their husbands similarly warns Eleanor that their position is unstable and that they both need to beware of her unfavorable reputation. Lydgate alludes to Eleanor’s misogynistic public reception (even though he might have helped to propagate it in “A Complaint

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585 John Shirley and his modern supporter Margaret Connolly claim that Lydgate wrote this text, but Pearsall claims otherwise. Margaret Connolloy, John Shirley: Book Production and the Noble Household in Fifteenth-Century England (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 1998), 83; and Pearsall, John Lydgate (1371-1449): A Bio-Bibliography (Victoria, B.C., Canada: University of Victoria, 1997), 45 n.44.
for my Lady of Gloucester and Holland”) and of women in general when he
“corrects” Boccaccio’s similar sentiments. He writes:

But Bochas heer, I not what he doth meene, / Maketh in his book an
exclamacioun / Ageynes women, that pite is to seene— / Seith how
ther lyne, ther generacioun / Been off nature double off condicioun, /
And callith hem eek dyuers and onstable, / Beestis rassembling that
been insaciable. / He meneth off women that be born in Crete, /
Nothyng off hem that duelle in this contre.587

Lydgate claims that Boccaccio’s condemnation of women only relates to women of
Crete. This passage attempts to redeem Boccaccio from his blatant misogyny by
tempering the comments about women being innately duplicitous and insatiably
bestial, disqualifying all women who “duelle in this cuntre” from Boccaccio’s
criticism. While one might want to apply this disclaimer about some women being
virtuous to Jacqueline because of her untarnished reputation at this point, she is not
the one of Humphrey’s wives to be residing in England. Whether or not he writes to
curry Humphrey’s favor, and whether or not he is performing damage control for “A
Complaint for my Lady of Gloucester and Holland,” he presents himself as a
defender of all English women—Eleanor implicitly included.

Lydgate further bolsters his promotion of English women when he explains
why English women are blameless:

For women heer, al doubilnesse thei lete, / And haue no tech off
mutabilite, / Thei louse no chaungis nor no duplicate; / For ther
husbondis, in causis small or grete, / What-euer thei seyn, thei can nat
countirplete. / Blessid be God, that hath hem maad so meek, / So
humble and faithful off ther condiciouns; / For thouh men wolde

587 Lydgate, The Fall of Princes, 1.4719-27.
This passage shows how women in England lack the duplicity that Boccaccio claims all women have because they cannot study it in England. Lydgate states that no one teaches dissembling in England; therefore, no woman could learn it. He even goes a step further to defend English women from their husbands, saying that no man can deny the fact that English wives were made meek, humble, and faithful. By extension, Eleanor, as a wife in England with a husband in the same country, cannot be duplicitous. However, he does not go out of his way to distinguish Eleanor or her husband as particularly innocent and exemplary figures; he suggests that Eleanor and Humphrey are only blameless as members of the general English populace, which is far from a special endorsement for either of them.

Nonetheless, Eleanor appears to be referred to in the first narrative in which a woman is the focal point, the tale of Isis. Lydgate introduces her story after describing the flood in Thessaly during Amphion’s reign; he explains:

We haue eek rad in stories heer-tofforn, / How that Ysis in Egipt took hir fliht out of Grece, the trewe douhter born / Off Prometheus, a ful manly knyht; / And this Ysis in evey mannys siht / So fressh, so goodli, weddid bi hir lyue / To worthi Apis, that was kyng off Argyue.\textsuperscript{589}

Lydgate refers to Greece to transition from his narratives about the various plagues brought to the world, which conclude with the heat in Athens. Greece and Egypt

\textsuperscript{588} Lydgate, \textit{The Fall of Princes}, I.4728-39.
\textsuperscript{589} Ibid., I.1660-6.
figure prominently throughout Book I as Lydgate interrelates his tales by placing them within the same geographical region, namely the classical world for both biblical and pagan mythology. Lydgate inherits these correlated narratives from both Boccaccio and Premierfait, but the method of geographical linking comes from Ovidian commentaries. As noted above, the commentary tradition taught by and to monks encouraged writers to interpret historicized mythology typologically. However, he revises his immediate source to forge another intratextual link as well: he makes Isis the daughter of a knight. Instead of introducing her in relation to her husband, as Premierfait does, Lydgate follows the pattern that he has been using for all of his narratives—introducing characters by means of patronyms. Yet even more striking than Lydgate’s reliance upon familial lineage to introduce his female as well as male characters is his conversion of Prometheus into a knight. Of all the things for which Prometheus is known, being a knight is not one of them.

Prometheus’s new knighthood probably pertains to the fact that Humphrey’s wife at the time was the daughter of a knight. With Eleanor’s lack of courtly favor resulting from her opportunistic ascent through the ranks and her descent from a knight from Kent, Lydgate broaches the topic indirectly by emphasizing the knightly lineage of his first central female character. This fabricated identity between Isis and Eleanor also explains the sympathy for Isis that Mortimer perceives in Lydgate’s narrative. Mortimer points out that Premierfait’s version laments the downfall of

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Apis when his brother Typhon kills him, not Isis. Lydgate, however, pities Isis by focusing the narrative on her, blaming Fortune for causing her much weaker enemy to conquer her—not her covetousness.\textsuperscript{591} Using a historical lens, one could interpret this moment of sympathy as a disclaimer about Eleanor’s position being the result of Fortune instead of the product of shameless social climbing.

The knighthood motif appears frequently as an intratextual link throughout Book I after the reference to Isis’s father, and not only to introduce Lydgate’s female cast of characters. This motif reappears in the tale about Minos and Queen Pasiphae. Lydgate introduces Minos as the

\begin{verbatim}
Sone bi discent off Iubiter the grete, / And off Europa born to been heir in Crete. / Off his persone wonder delecteable, / Ful renownned off wisdam and science, / Bi dyuers titles of laude commendable / Off birthe, off blood, off knythythod & prudence; / For bi his study and enteer diligence / He fond first lawes grounded on resoun, / Wherbi off Crete the grete regioun / Gouernyd was and set in stabilnesse.\textsuperscript{592}
\end{verbatim}

Repeating his standard patronymic introduction, he employs both Minos’s father and mother to validate his inheritance, but also to identify him as a worthy knight. Lydgate even refers to Minos as being dressed as a knight again when Nissus’s daughter, Scylla, falls in love with him.\textsuperscript{593} In fact, this passage uses the distinction of knighthood as an honorable inheritance into which Minos is born. Lydgate identifies this knighthood as the means by which Minos is able to govern well and establish stability for Crete. His promotion of chivalric values might be an indirect promotion

\textsuperscript{591} Mortimer, \textit{John Lydgate’s Fall of Princes}, 199-200.
\textsuperscript{592} Lydgate, \textit{The Fall of Princes}, I.2414-23.
\textsuperscript{593} Ibid., I.2480-5.
of Eleanor’s lineage and a means for validating her place in society. However, it more specifically authorizes militaristic values to uphold order within the kingdom.

Lydgate commends the chivalric qualities of several of his characters in Book I after the Isis narrative. After chastising Boccaccio for his mistreatment of women in the De casibus, Lydgate emphasizes Theseus’s valor. He writes:

Which Theseus, for his worthynesse, / And off his knythod for the gret encre / Thoruh manly force, & for his hih prowess / Whilom was called the seconde Hercules. ⁵⁹⁴

This quotation introduces Theseus as a worthy and noble knight who uses his knighthood for the advancement of his kingdom. ⁵⁹⁵ Lydgate claims that Theseus is such a worthy knight that he is called a second Hercules. On the one hand, Lydgate seems to be disregarding the chronology that he tried to establish between the narratives about Adam and Cadmus because he is discussing the second Hercules before the first one. On the other hand, Lydgate emphasizes the thematic strand about knighthood, which eventually leads him to the actual narrative about Hercules near the end of the Book. The reference to Hercules here serves as a frame within the frame of Book I, presenting the selection of tales between Theseus and Hercules as a unit about the chivalric values exemplified by Hercules. Lydgate even uses

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⁵⁹⁴ Ibid., I.2731-4.
⁵⁹⁵ Mortimer claims that Lydgate’s version of the Theseus narrative vilifies Theseus, unlike Premierfait’s version, by removing the reference to Ariadne’s drunkenness at the time that Theseus abandoned her. Mortimer, John Lydgate’s Fall of Princes, 207. However, the introductory framework for the narrative, as cited above, indicates that Lydgate praises Theseus instead of blaming him. While removing blame from Ariadne could be interpreted as a proto-feminist agenda, it is more likely that Lydgate is attempting to remove blame from both parties because of his relationship to Humphrey, who also abandoned his first wife who appeared blameless from the perspective of the general public.
Hercules as a framing device again later in the Theseus myth when Hercules appears
to save him from Cerberus in Hell.\textsuperscript{596} Lydgate refers to this rescue as the ideal
application of chivalric values, remedying strife.\textsuperscript{597} Hercules’s knighthood thus
becomes the outline and the pivot for the tale of Theseus, which is both contained by
and driving towards the Herculean ideal.

Near the end of Book I, the chivalric archetype to which Lydgate repeatedly
refers is finally addressed explicitly. Lydgate introduces Hercules:

And Bochas after, amonges al the pres, / Sauh, as hym thouhte, with a
ful hidous cheer, / Ded off visage, Hercules appeere, / Whos fader was
Iubiter the grete, / His mooder doughter off kyng Amphitrition, / Callid
Alcumena, whilom born in Crete. / And as poetis rehersyn oon bi oon,
/ So excellent was ther neuer noon, / To speke off conquest, of
victoire and of fame, / Heer in this world that hadde so great a name. /
Dreedful of look he was, and riht terrible, / His berd eek blak, which
heeng ful lowe doun, / And al his her as bristlis wer horrible.\textsuperscript{598}

Lydgate generates textual cohesion by introducing Hercules with many of his
standard tropes, foregrounding him as a descendant of Jupiter and resident of Crete.
The passage also devotes attention to the pagan hero’s appearance, painting a more
vivid picture of him than any of the other characters by providing hair color and
style as well as grizzly facial hair. In a text that largely focuses on events instead of
characterization, Hercules stands out as a distinctly drawn figure. Lydgate uses
these physical descriptions to mark him as ominous and threatening with a body
that demands respect, claiming that poets have long attested that Hercules has the

\textsuperscript{596} Pirithous, Theseus’s brother, asks Hercules save Theseus, who was being held by
Cerberus in Hell and being persecuted by Pluto for ‘ravishing’ or seizing Proserpina.
\textsuperscript{597} Lydgate, \textit{The Fall of Princes}, I.4362-3 & I.4369-75.
\textsuperscript{598} Ibid., I.5038-50.
best of names because of his prowess. In essence, Lydgate uses distinct physical
details to illustrate Hercules’s exceptional status among exemplary historical
figures.

This version of Hercules as an archetypal conqueror and knight deviates
from the typically inconclusive medieval reception of Hercules, which struggled to
interpret his physical dominance and apotheosis. In the second chapter, we saw that
Gower deemed Hercules an immoral and effeminate historical figure guilty of cross-
dressing. Medieval writers often accused Hercules of such failings because lust
induced him to abandon his first wife for another woman, and this moral failing was
considered a feminine trait. To bypass potential accusations about Hercules’s lustful
tendencies, Lydgate, like “The Monk’s Tale,” emphasizes Deianira’s role in his
downfall. Without mentioning that Hercules abandoned Deianira for another
woman, or that she was trying to win back his love, Lydgate’s tale depicts her killing
Hercules with the poisoned shirt from Nessus. Lydgate blames the deception of
Deianira and women in general for causing Hercules’s tragedy, destroying

al noblesse & prudence, / Prowesse off armys, force & cheualrie, /
Forsihte off wisdam, discrecioun & science, / Vertuous studie,
profiting in clergie, / And the cleer shynyng off philosophie, / Hath
through fals lustis been heeraforn manacid.599

Contradicting what he wrote before about women lacking duplicity if their husbands
have proper control over them, Lydgate’s Hercules exhibits the best of nobility,

599 Lydgate, The Fall of Princes, I.5511-6.
prudence, strength, chivalry, wisdom, and clerical knowledge, while retaining vulnerability to Deianira’s deceit.

This praise for Hercules deviates from all of his vernacular sources. For example, Chaucer’s Monk presents him as courageous, but with a weakness for women. Boccaccio, conversely, only briefly mentions Hercules because he accuses Hercules of being lustful and effeminate, claiming that extending this narrative would only tarnish the reputation of the greatest poets who memorialized him. Mortimer points out that Premierfait retains Boccaccio’s criticism of Hercules, but adds a new emphasis on Hercules’s personal worth and self-aggrandizement. However, Lydgate not only exonerates Hercules; he also praises him as an educated man. This first English vernacular account of Hercules as a philosophical and clerically educated man makes him look more like Humphrey than classical Hercules. Historically, Humphrey was known as a great scholar. Summit discusses his library as bringing humanism to England, while fashioning himself a scholastic prince. Additionally, Jacob points out that Humphrey was considered both a Renaissance man because of his large library and philosophical education, which mostly focused on governance, and militant because his pursuit of power was often resisted by members of the king’s council during Henry VI’s minority. Lydgate’s

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600 Mortimer, John Lydgate’s Fall of Princes, 198-9.
602 Jacob is referring to a particular quarrel between Humphrey and the king’s council in 1424; nevertheless, Jacob’s book reveals that Humphrey was educated, especially in Roman law, but combative in that he repeatedly sought the governmental control that he imagined Henry V was bestowing upon him in the addendum to his will that declared
emphasis on Hercules’s education and prowess makes him a mirror for Humphrey and a pointed warning about being governed by women and lust—both of which were accusations being directed towards Humphrey. Despite all of the disclaimers about the virtues of women being based on those of their husbands, Lydgate uses the framing devices of this narrative to contradict his exposition about it. He appears to take a note from Ovid’s frequently ironic narrative voice, which claims to present all narratives objectively and historically while using juxtaposition to expose a more sinister underlying meaning. The Fall of Princes thereby revises the generalized moral instructions for exempla that Boccaccio and Premierfait provide to reveal an Ovidian message about misapplications of generalized morals. In essence, Lydgate contradicts the moralized approaches to Ovid’s Metamorphoses by showing that such lessons cannot be universally applied.

Lydgate places the individualized instruction for Humphrey within the frame of the narrative itself. The conclusion to the Hercules tale provides an alternative message to Lydgate’s diatribe against Boccaccio’s misogynistic moralization. He

603 For example, Ovid juxtaposes Arachne and Niobe, explicitly claiming to faithfully report the miraculous power of the gods. However, the Arachne narration depicts a woman punished for her weaving because Minerva is supposed to be the best at this art—being that she is the god of crafts and weaving. Ovid then adds the story of Niobe, about a woman punished for having more children than goddess Latona and boasting about it; he even says that Niobe did not learn from Arachne’s mistake, linking the two explicitly. Nonetheless, while the individual narratives condemn these women for pride, the combination of these tales underscore the arbitrary injustice of punishing two women for their qualities that were superior to the gods. Ovid, Metamorphoses, ed. Richard J. Tarrant (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 6.1-312.

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warns that this narrative ends in tragedy because of the lust involved, saying in the envoy:

O thou Hercules, for al thyn hih renoun, / For al this conquest and knyhtli suffisaunce, / Thou were throruh women brouht to confusioun / And throruh ther fraude thi renommed puissaunce / Disclaunderd was and brouht onto myschaunce. / I were ashamed to write it or expresse, / Except this tragedie can bere me weel witnesse. / Pryncis, Pryncessis, off hih discrecioun / This thyng enprentith in your remembranunce; / Off others falling make your proteccioun, / You to preserue thoruh prudent purueianunce; / Afforn prouyded, that your perseueraunce, / Be nat perturbid bi no fals sorceresse, / As this tragedie off other berth witnesse. ⁶⁰⁴

This passage depicts Hercules, like Sampson, as a fierce knight who can conquer all foes except for women. Lydgate uses Hercules as an opportunity to warn princes and princesses—namely Humphrey and Eleanor—that lust leads to destruction. Lydgate particularly warns about the dangers of sorceresses, a threat that was often associated with Eleanor.⁶⁰⁵ Lydgate even hesitates, saying that he is ashamed to discuss this matter, showing that he senses the need to be careful about providing these particular messages because they are personal issues for the duke and his second wife. Lydgate reveals that even the epitome of masculine strength is brought to destruction by means of female fraud. Despite his commentaries that blame Boccaccio for his antifeminism, Lydgate retains and emphasizes some of Boccaccio’s and Chaucer’s Monk’s most misogynistic tales (the Hercules and Sampson tales being among the most prominent of them because of their idolization of the

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⁶⁰⁵ Eleanor was eventually imprisoned for treasonous use of necromancy in 1441. Griffiths, “The Trial of Eleanor Cobham,” 382.
masculine heroes and the conversion of these men into powerful men-of-arms). In a sense, Lydgate’s narratives appear to follow that patristic tradition’s depiction of women. As mentioned about “The Monk’s Tale,” the use of such characteristics for wives belongs to the clerical tradition that Chaucer explicitly mentions in his “Wife of Bath’s Prologue” and which current scholars refer to as Jankyn’s *Book of Wicked Wives*.

Nonetheless, Lydgate’s treatment of evil women seems to be more than patristic antifeminism because of its place among the other narratives and in its historical context. The valor of Hercules and Sampson aligns with Lydgate’s consistent evaluation of knights as estimable figures throughout human history, redeeming even Hercules. Lydgate seemingly uses these valorous knights both to redeem Eleanor’s social standing and to redeem Humphrey’s desire for her. Hercules becomes a perfectly analogous figure for Humphrey, who also abandoned one wife for another. Instead of focusing on Hercules’s lascivious qualities, Lydgate emphasizes Hercules’s public service. In fact, *The Fall of Princes* consistently de-emphasizes the personal failings of his characters to focus on their roles within the state. Thus he introduces all of his characters according to their lineage instead of their moral characters, and according to their actions for their realms instead of their private lives. To bolster Humphrey’s position in the kingdom, Lydgate realizes that his personal life should be ignored in favor of a focus on the superior public reputation that he possessed. Lydgate appears to be taking on the age-old question
about the extent to which a privately sinful man can be a worthy public figure, a question that Alastair Minnis proclaims to be an important discussion in the Church and Chaucer’s writings as well.606

This separation between public and private roles helps to elucidate the peculiarity of Lydgate’s collection of sexually perverse narratives. After telling the tale of Narcissus, Lydgate initiates a series of incest narratives, beginning with Byblis.

Byblis appered, with teris al bespreynt, / And toward hym a gret pas she gan go; And hir brother Caunus cam also, / And off o wombe as gemellis twayne; / But she toforn hir fate gan compleyne. / She in hir loue was nat virtuous, / For ageyn God and Kyndis ordynaunce, / She loued hir brother that called was Caunus; / And whan he sauh hir froward gouernaunce, / He onto hire gaff non attendaunce.607

He devotes little space to Byblis, and he uncharacteristically introduces her without mentioning her patronymics. Her origins are described only in relation to her brother, making Caunus her only familial connection. Her lack of an explicit patrilineal descent makes her narrative seemingly irrelevant to the empire-building vein of the rest of the book because she lacks a relationship to the kingdoms discussed; instead Byblis is a blip within a fluctuating text about inheritances. This section even lacks intratextual links except for the theme of incest and female lechery. In essence, this passage suggests that this incestuous desire only affects the

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606 See Alastair Minnis’s Fallible Authors for more about the medieval separation between personal and public lives, particularly from the Church’s perspective. Alastair Minnis, Fallible Authors: Chaucer’s Pardoner and the Wife of Bath (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008).
individual woman because her brother and love object does not pay attention to her “froward gouernaunce.” Unlike the overly trusting Hercules and Sampson, Caunus shuns Byblis’s turpitude, and Lydgate’s keeps her narrative brief because he is able to contain her duplicitous female nature.

The brevity of Byblis’s tale indicates that her narrative mostly functions as a segue into the subsequent narratives, namely the series of Ovidian incest narratives about Myrrha and Canace. The Canace myth in particular seems to be an unusual choice for Lydgate because of its rampant and devious sexuality and because it is the section in which he deviates most from Premierfait and Boccaccio, adding narrative details and a long letter from Canace. To introduce how the love between Canace and Machareus resulted in her downfall, Lydgate writes:

Afftir this Pirrus cam Canace the faire, / With teres distilling from hir eyen tweyne, / And hir brother, that called was Machaire; / And bothe thei gan ful pitousli compleyne, / That Fortune gan at hem so disdeyne, / Hyndryng ther fate be woful auenture / Touchyng ther loue, which was ageyn nature. / He was hir brother and hir loue also, / As the story pleynli doth declare; / And in a bed thei lay eek bothe too, / Resoun was non whi thei sholde spare: / But loue that causith wo and eek weelfare, / Gan ageyn kynde so straugeli deuise, / That he hir wombe made sodenli tarise. / And fynali, myn autour berth witenesse, / A child she hadde bi hir owne brother / Which excellid in fauour and fairnesse; / For lik to hym off beute was non other. / But off ther loue so guyed was the other, / That Karibdis , tween wyndis ful contraire, / Hath Canace destroyed and Machaire.609

Canace appears while crying, introducing her in terms of pathos, unlike Byblis.

Instead of criticizing Canace for wanton behavior, she and her brother are

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609 Ibid., I.6833-53.
introduced in terms of their suffering. It is not until the seventh line of their story that their sin is introduced, prefacing their falls as the result of being victimized by fortune instead of their aberrant love. Nevertheless, Lydgate repeats that they behave against nature five lines later. Even though their deviant behavior is not the first thing mentioned, nor is it the first blamed for their downfall, he shows that it is inextricable from the circumstances. In addition, Lydgate provides several details about the composition of their relationship, including more sexually explicit information here than in any other of his incest narratives. The result of this licentiousness, however, is a beautiful child. Within this introduction, Lydgate presents both growth and destruction. The beautiful child of Canace and Machareus would be the successor of an empire, but instead of perpetuating the monastic line, his birth disrupts patrilineal inheritance, bringing the king's heirs to their pathetic end.

Lydgate's unusual version of this incest narrative becomes more problematic when juxtaposed with his sources. The pathos of this story results from the fact that the medieval myth originated from Ovid's *Heroides*, the epistolary poem in which mythological women write about their own grievances. Nonetheless, Gower introduces his version of this narrative in Book 3 of the *Confessio Amantis* in a drastically different manner. Gower's “Tale of Canace and Macareus” is the first narrative in Book 3, which is devoted to discussing the sin of Envy. Gower writes:

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Ther was a king which Eolus / Was hote, and it befell him thus, / That
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Gower begins by focusing on the misfortune of Aeolus as the father of the incestuous lovers. After identifying the three main characters of the narrative, his tale justifies Canace and Machareus’s love: they were placed in the same room until they grew into the lustful age of youth. Their placement together causes them to act against the laws of nature with love overcoming their reason. Both Gower’s and Lydgate’s introductions to this incest narrative emphasize the disparity between emotions and reason to explain the nature of this tragedy. However, Gower’s introduction according to lineage fits the patterns of The Fall of Princes more than Lydgate’s does: Gower begins with the father, then the son, and last the daughter—duplicating the linear stratification of succession. The fact that Lydgate begins with Canace and then the brother (waiting twenty lines before introducing the father and, even then, not by his name) emphasizes that this narrative is about Canace’s downfall, and secondarily about her brother’s. Focusing on Canace makes this narrative resemble Ovid’s Heroides 11 more than any other version of her story. Canace’s tale in the Confessio Amantis lacks the complaint-genre impulse found in The Fall of Princes and the Heroides.

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While Gower’s account lacks much of the pathos found in Lydgate’s, the *Confessio Amantis* holds more disclaimers for the behavior of the two lovers in his introduction than does *The Fall of Princes*. After describing their lineage and their inability to use reason to conquer their unnatural feelings, Gower writes:

> For whom that love hath under cure, / As he is blind himself, right so / He makth his client blind also. / in such manere as I you telle / As thei al day togedre duelle, / This brother mihte it noght asterte / That he with al his hole herte / His love upon his soster caste. / And so it fell hem ate laste, / That this Machaire with Canace / Whan thei were in a privé place, / Cupide bad hem ferst to kesse, / And after sche which is maistresse / In kinde and techeth every lif / Withoute lawe positif, / Of which sche takth no maner charge, / Bot kepth hire lawes al at large, / Nature, tok hem into lore / And tawht hem so, that overmore / Sche hath hem in such wise daunted, / That thei were, as who seith, enchaunted.611

This passage generalizes about love and its irrepresible tendencies. Gower writes that love is blind and, therefore, indiscriminate, which explains why Canace and Machareus were unable to use reason to overcome their unnatural desires.

Moreover, Gower presents this incestuous love as a slow process, beginning with Cupid bidding them to kiss and then eventually building into larger offenses against “kinde” or natural law. By making their incest a gradually growing offense, Gower makes it more intelligible. However, he presents these increasing displays of deviant affection as the result of Machareus’s actions, not Canace’s. They both kiss each other, but only Machareus’s feelings for his sister are discussed.

Lydgate, on the other hand, emphasizes Canace above all of the other characters. In addition, instead of placing the blame on unassailable fate, Nature,

Cupid, and circumstances, Lydgate does not displace any of the blame. In general, he removes the introductory material found in Gower, jumping directly to the downfall of these characters without describing the impetus. Canace and Machareus interact in bed instead of in the bedroom, and they offend nature in bed rather than beginning with a kiss. Lydgate does not say that their incest results from a natural course of action, but from something forced, inorganic, and extraneous. But why emphasize a woman’s role? Why remove patronymics in a text that seems so deeply invested in such things? Why introduce the baby produced by the incestuous union so early in the narrative? Why end the book with a tale about emotional distress and without a conqueror? In many ways, Lydgate seems to be drawing attention to this narrative by making it seem so incongruous with the rest. He takes a narrative with medieval English versions that he could rely on, but he reverts to Ovid’s reading which emphasizes the woman and her suffering. She’s the only character who writes on her own behalf, but she uses her narrative voice to tell her son’s story instead of her own. Lydgate follows Gower’s narrative structure of providing an introductory framework for Canace’s letter, but the interpretation of Canace seems to be his own.

Gower’s letter from Canace is more concise and direct than Lydgate’s, but it presents an inner turmoil that Lydgate’s lacks. In the Confessio Amantis, Canace writes to the Machareus who abandoned her:

O thou my sorwe and my gladnesse, / O thou myn hele and my

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siknesse, / O my wanhope and al my trust, / O desese and al my lust, / o thou my wele, o thou my wo, / O thou my frend, o thou my fo, / O thou my love, o thou my hate, / For thee mot I be ded algate.  

The opening of the letter constructs Canace’s complaint in oppositional terms, characterizing Machareus as the source for both of her extreme emotional states: “my sorwe and my gladnesse,” “myn hele and my siknesse,” etc. The negative impact of her feelings for Machareus is not even placed first in every line; the sentiments are constantly shifting, as is the order in which they are discussed. Each of Gower’s first seven lines for Canace’s letter is equally weighted to depict both sides of Canace’s emotional state—each sentiment existing simultaneously within the same lines and within her mind. Gower thus illustrates the variability of Machareus and of the significations for Canace; the only pattern is the multiplicity of her sentiments.

Lydgate’s version also discusses the two-sided emotions that Machareus produces for Canace, but with a less conflicted approach to her feelings. Lydgate’s approach to Canace’s letter begins in a manner somewhat similar to Gower’s, complaining about the injustice that he has committed against her. She writes:

Cause off my sorwe, roote off myn heuynesse, / That whilom were cheeff sours off my gladnesse, / Whan bothe our ioies be will were so disposed, / Vnder o keie our hertis to be enclosed. / Whilom thou were support and sekirnesse, / Cheeff reioisshyng off my worldly pelesaunce; / But now thou art the ground off my siknesse, / Welle off wanhope, off my dedli penaunce, / Which haue off sorwe grettest habundaunce / That euer yit hadde any creature, / Which mut for loue the deth alas endure! / Thou were whilom my blisse & al my

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trust, / Wouereyn confort my sorwes to appese, / Spryng and well off al myn hertis lust; / And no, alas, cheeff roote off my disese.613

The beginning of the letter corroborates Lydgate’s indebtedness to Gower. The first line of Lydgate’s letter almost directly restates Gower’s own line of “O thou my sorwe and my gladnesse.” Lydgate even uses many of the same words found in Gower’s introduction to the letter: “sorwe,” “gladnesse,” “siknesse,” “wanhope,” “lust,” and “disese.” However, Lydgate’s format for these terms is idiosyncratic; mostly because of his insertion of temporal terms like “whilom.” This Canace repeatedly distinguishes between past emotional states caused by Machareus and current ones. She shows how former positive feelings devolve into their opposite, not co-existing at the same time as they do in Gower’s version of her letter. Instead of using Machareus as the source of oppositional emotional states at the same time, this letter keeps the past and present distinct and without overlap.

As with the rest of the letter, Lydgate extends the emotional descriptions of Canace’s despair, converting Gower’s twenty-nine-line letter into a one hundred and thirty-six-line one that describes the process by which love and lust lead to their opposing conditions. On the one hand, Lydgate hereby shows his committment to inscribing the genre of tragedy onto his narratives, presenting each lament as a downfall that occurs over time. On the other hand, the epistolary introduction encapsulates Lydgate’s agenda to relay downfalls as inverted positions of favor, in which a high position (whether political or emotional) is converted into its other

613 Lydgate, Fall of Princes, I.6885-99.
extreme. Both of these points are important in relation to Lydgate’s patron because Humphrey wanted a collection of tragedies from which to glean personal instructions, and Lydgate uses both the genre of tragedy and the format of his frame narrative to instruct Humphrey to beware of lust’s control, which transforms into its opposite—as he could have learned from his first marriage. The insertion of Canace’s letter at the end anchors the main themes that Lydgate floats throughout the Book, warning his readers about governing feminine turpitude as well as one’s own sexual desire.

Lydgate’s resounding message about misplaced affection and wayward lust comes near the beginning of Canace’s letter when she presents the resolution to her demise:

But yiff my deth myht do the any ese, / O brother myn, in remembraunce off tweyne, / Deth shal to me be pleasuance & no peyne.614

Canace essentially offers herself as a sacrifice for her brother’s happiness and ease, and even conveys her death as a welcome release from her current pain. She then pleads on behalf of her son, using this rare moment of first-person narration within the tales of The Fall of Princes to speak for another. Canace’s selflessness validates her role as the central figure of Lydgate’s tragedy, enhancing the pathos of the account, and accepting the consequences of her actions. In essence, she inverts terms herself to redefine her downfall by means of self-sacrifice. She transforms tragedy to remove her personal agenda in favor of the true inheritors of the empire.

Canace’s altruism could be construed as a narrative model for either of Humphrey’s wives or Humphrey himself. First of all, Lydgate could be encouraging Jacqueline to accept the terms of her incestuous union with her cousin Brabant, sacrificing herself for the well being of the men in her life. Second of all, he could be encouraging Eleanor to be more submissive in her marriage, accepting the court’s censure of her immoral behavior. This second interpretation could then prove to be a prediction of Eleanor’s coming trial for treasonous necromancy. But third of all, he could be warning Humphrey about his lust and his ambitions, advising the duke to tolerate consequences and temper his own desires for the sake of the kingdom’s true heir, Henry VI. Whatever the historical analogy, Lydgate clearly promotes this notion of self-sacrifice, endorsing Canace’s behavior, letting her speak for herself despite her immoral personal behavior. Her tale thus becomes the antidote and logical conclusion to the collection of narratives in Book I, guiding readers to persevere in the face of ramifications and losses of power by disregarding personal states and reinterpreting them in terms of collective responsibility—including a person’s duty to the kingdom and to the proper line of monarchical inheritance.

Conclusion

In general, The Fall of Princes disregards the private and personal natures of its mythological figures, focusing on their roles within a larger system of meaning than their individual existences; that is to say, each pseudo-historical personage is
linked both to the book’s characters and to narratives throughout the book. At the same time, it uses this Ovidian framing structure to embed their personal failings within the narratives in order to foreground their public roles instead. While Lydgate might have written about his disapproval of Humphrey’s personal choices in “A Complaint for my Lady of Gloucester and Holland,” here he diminishes the importance of personal failings and even personal falls. Each mythological figure is part of a larger historical trajectory in which empires are built and sustained. In addition, Lydgate’s removal of most of the Trojan fall narratives might also be related to the fact that he chooses to focus on empire-building narratives in the face of personal falls. Even though he claims that it is because he describes these Trojan events elsewhere, the fact that he recounts some of them but not all indicates that he has other motives—namely that he prefers downfalls of individuals instead of empires to instruct Humphrey.

Lydgate uses the frame narrative structure inherited from Ovid, Boccaccio, Premierfait, Chaucer, and Gower to generate the structure of a kingdom unimpeded by the actions of its subjects and even its changing rulers. The sinful actions of people and the attempts of some evil Cretan wives fail to generate lasting consequences, as each fall becomes a self-contained process affecting one person—but one who is nonetheless linked to the sustained series of falls throughout Christian and pagan history. Lydgate thus generates a human history that is founded upon, but ultimately unaffected by demises. Just like the Adam and Eve myth, the
falls of men bring about the rise of other men. Even Hercules, whom Lydgate presents as the greatest hero in the history of the world, leads to the creation of other versions of himself, such as Theseus. The creation of high estates brings about their demise, but only in personal terms. Lydgate thus perpetuates a self-denying propaganda in which particularized goals are devalued because even the greatest exemplary figures in history, such as Hercules, are replaceable cogs within the grander cycle of history, record making, and empire building.

In essence, Lydgate uses the empire-building frame-narrative structure to build a literary empire. He adapts various rhetorical and historical genres to convert them into what he imagines to be a purely English genre. Nolan claims, “Lydgate (largely unintentionally) began to construct new forms out of old.” Nonetheless, Lydgate exhibits intentionality by carefully crafting his Ovidian framing structure to accord with the personal failures of his patron and those surrounding him, constructing a text uniquely his own. As Stephanie Viereck and Gibbs Kamath point out, “Recent scholarship on John Lydgate has focused on the prolific fifteenth-century Benedictine poet’s evident interest in valorizing the English vernacular and asserting authority for writers in English.” In other words, I am not the first to note Lydgate’s interest in generating high-art literature in the English vernacular, promoting England’s answer to the classical conventions that he saw Chaucer adapt to his native tongue. Moreover, he furthers this tradition by appropriating the texts

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of his predecessors to transform them according to his own humanist agenda of reinscribing the classics with contemporary values.

Lydgate imagines himself to be generating a literary genre that surpasses those that came before him because it mixes Ovid’s classical pseudo-epic, anti-epic, or (as later critics preferred to call it) *epyllion* with Christian clerical instruction. Lydgate focuses more on the didactic nature of Ovid’s myths, emphasizing the allegorical commentary tradition more than his vernacular predecessors, but retaining their literary interest in using framing devices to control implications and to concatenate the narratives within it. While evacuating Ovidian mythology of its original sense, Chaucer, Gower, Boccaccio, and Premierfait retained his interwoven structure. But Lydgate’s version of cohesive narration connects more than stories. He reintroduces clerical viewpoints into the vernacular versions of Ovidian poesy, blending these traditions to form a new type of English history that is self-aware of its rhetorical choices. Fashioning himself a new breed of historical poet, Lydgate uses Ovidian interrelatedness to provide historical and rhetorical continuity throughout the text.

*The Fall of Princes* is an uninterrupted frame narrative about inheritance: both the historical subjects who inherited kingdoms and empires like his patron, and the inherited poetic and historical sources that discuss these mythological figures. Like his predecessors, Lydgate presents a shared history for pagan and
Christian mythological figures alike, creating a universal history that accords with a universal literary genre of frame narrative. Lydgate follows the Ovidian clerical and rhetorical traditions presented in medieval adaptations of and critical apparatuses for the *Metamorphoses*, yet he does so to offer his own political commentary that reverses the Roman message espoused in Ovidian commentaries and appropriated by medieval writers like Boccaccio, Premierfait, Gower, and Chaucer. Instead of employing the downfalls of mythological figures to illustrate how power leads to corruption and abuse, Lydgate deemphasizes the moral quality of his characters. *The Fall of Princes* shows how Ovidian structure could be manipulated to illustrate individualized agendas instead of simply duplicating that which they inherited. In this manner, Lydgate proves to be the most aware of the rhetorical format that he inherited because he is the first to transform it fully.

While Lydgate is the natural conclusion to this dissertation due to his placement as the successor to medieval vernacular appropriations of Ovid, his text is a distinctive production that is filled with a new set of anxieties about the place of the English vernacular in literary history and the precariousness of the English nation which was watching the infant king Henry VI come of age. The English poet-historian reverses the Ovidian criticism about abuses of centralized power to focus on solutions for individual abuses and immoral acts. Instead of chastising those at the top and relishing their falls, Lydgate presents a view of universal history as being unrelated to the individuals who are the subjects and writers of it, relegating
all to a larger purpose: perpetuating the English legacy in literature and in politics. Like the mythological figures he depicts, Lydgate imagines himself to be the inheritor of an English literary tradition that adapts classical and continental works for the promotion of the English position of superiority. He thus reveals an early version of nationalism. This unusual adaptation partly results from a greater distance from the grammar-school era of Ovid than his predecessors, and the fact that he is dealing with Ovidian material that has been twice or thrice mediated through vernacular works and commentaries. Lydgate’s apt incorporation of Ovidian rhetorical techniques and frequent allusions to the auctor, even though he does not overtly refer directly to Ovidian materials, provides an impression of how Ovid had come to be viewed by larger audiences than those within school walls. Lydgate’s Metamorphoses myths and Ovidian auctoritas indicate that the Roman’s influence had permeated society beyond the confines of medieval classrooms to gain a place in common English discourse and culture.

Others have addressed the prominence of Ovid during the late Middle Ages. Secondary criticism has ranged from source studies—comparing Ovidian tales like “Tereus, Procne, and Philomena” to their medieval adaptations—to paleographical studies of Ovidian commentaries. All of this secondary criticism attests to the undeniable importance of the Ovidian renaissance during the twelfth century and the continued impact of this renaissance during the following centuries. Yet Ovid’s works were more than means for entertaining students, they helped England to
found its notions about how to construct its sense of itself as an empire and its relationship to past empires. The Middle Ages inherited no ancient Ovidian commentaries as they had for other classical writers, giving Ovid’s literature a unique place among ancient auctores: Ovid was both a writer steeped in the history of classical Rome and a writer with texts ripe for medieval exegesis. Yet there is a reason why these English pseudo-historical poems with overarching framing devices and embedded narratives emerged during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Desiring a classical genre to lend their poetry auctoritas, medieval writers returned to the familiar figure they had encountered in their Latin studies from school. While Virgil’s epic might seem to be the logical choice—since he sustained a larger readership throughout the Middle Ages—something about his glorification of the pagan past resisted full-scale adaptations. Ovid’s sharp tongue, emphasis on contingent human suffering, derision of hegemony, and covert rhetorical style was more consistent with their Christian ideals as well as their late medieval political turmoil. Medieval writers were stuck in a similarly precarious position between their desire to support the budding empire and their fear of the new accumulations of unstable power that accompanied it—thus they reimagined Ovid as a sympathetic and understandable figure in literary history.

Nonetheless, the appeal of the Metamorphoses was more than owing to its author’s classical status and pitiable exile. It is no coincidence that vernacular frame narratives emerged at the same time that English gained a prominent place in its
native land. According to A.G. Rigg, the rise of English during the fourteenth century was the most important cultural development of the century, replacing French at court, in parliament, and all official business.617 Additionally, Vincent Gillespie explains, “Many medieval discussions of epic overlap with [the] loose criteria for tragic narrative. Epic writers are often referred to as historians.”618 Although the temptation has been to look at fourteenth- and fifteenth-century frame narratives as the result of an encyclopedic impulse to collect myths, the Confessio Amantis, Canterbury Tales, “The Monk’s Tale,” and Fall of Princes point to a different impulse: the drive to incorporate and transform literary genres to exhibit rhetorical skills.

It is no coincidence that the influx of Ovidian frame narratives took place during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and not before—even though there were Ovidian commentaries floating around England long before that point. The inundation of Ovidian commentaries and vernacular adaptations aligns with the self-conscious surfacing of English as a valid language for the legal system and court proceedings, as well as the emergence of England as an empire. Roman literature appealed to fourteenth- and fifteenth-century writers and scholars in general because of its emphasis on literature as being inextricably intertwined with the self-fashioning of an empire. Furthermore, Ovidian literature began to appeal to late medieval vernacular English writers more than its Virgilian counterpart because of

the increased space that the Ovidian model leaves for cultural and political commentary. The rise of the frame narrative ultimately results from a growing interest in promoting the English vernacular for politics and high literary art.619 Thus appropriations of the Ovidian anti-epic also demonstrate that medieval writers were beginning to envision history as recordable in more than prose. By writing universal histories and using the Ovidian frame narrative—in verse—fourteenth- and fifteenth-century writers reveal that Ovidian structure allowed them to breach the gap between history and poetry, record and rhetoric, pagan and Christian, classical and contemporary, as well as sacred and secular. The combined efforts of Chaucer, Gower, and Lydgate produce a new type of universal historicism: by employing the frame narrative, they allow characters to speak for themselves, lending a reliable tone for history that is not bound by the confines of prose, Christianity, or England. In other words, the sophisticated Ovidian rhetoric that these writers learned from commentaries provided a way for them to write an inclusive version of history that accounted for what they were witnessing in their emerging empire; the Ovidian frame narrative structure, replete with a multiplicity of narrators and narratives, allowed these writers to build a counter-tradition to the chronicle propaganda being commissioned by the ruling elite, because the frame included space for subjects to express their manifold anxieties about the

619 While Judson Boyce Allen identifies a lack of definitions for poetry and literature in his extensive readings of medieval accessus and commentaries, he reveals that the lack of an explicit definition does not mean that medieval writers were unaware of literary forms. Allen, The Ethical Poetic of the Later Middle Ages: A Decorum of Convenient Distinction (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), xi-xii.
unmitigated and self-serving hegemony that accompanied these accumulations of power.
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