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RÉSUMÉ – Cet essai montre que le poète anglais de la fin du XIV^e^ siècle John Gower, auteur du *Mirour de l’Omme*, le dernier et le plus long exemple connu de poème en strophes d’Hélinand, connaissait en entier *Les Vers de la Mort*, probablement par un manuscrit issu d’un monastère cistercien. Ainsi il est possible d’envisager non seulement comment Gower a fait sienne l’efficacité moralisatrice de la strophe d’Hélinand, mais aussi les modifications rhétoriques qu’il y a apportées, en l’adaptant à ses besoins particuliers.

ABSTRACT – This essay argues that the late 14^th^-century English poet John Gower, author of the *Mirour de l’Omme*, the latest and longest known example of a poem using the *strophe d’Hélinand*, knew the *Vers de la Mort* in full, probably in a manuscript from a Cistercian monastery. Thus it is possible to consider not only how Gower absorbed the moralizing effectiveness of *strophe d’Hélinand* but also the rhetorical modifications he made to it, in re-conforming it to his own particular uses.

THE "STROPHE D'HÉLINAND" AND JOHN GOWER

Regarding the *strophe d'Hélinand*, the poet John Gower (ca. 1340-1408) bears three distinctions: he is, as far as we know, the only poet of his nation to write original poetry using it; he is also among the very latest to do so (if not indeed *the* latest, depending on how one dates his voluminous *Mirour de l'Omme*); and in that poem, of 2495 extant stanzas *hélinandien* (29,945 lines), he has far exceeded any other example, on either side of the Channel, in length[1]. When considering the influence of Hélinand on Gower, then, the *Mirour* (hereafter *MO*) must occupy our focus.

It is generally accepted to be Gower's earliest poem. Most studies place the composition of the *MO* between 1360 and 1370, although there is no hard evidence to confirm either date. It exists today in a single fourteenth-century manuscript, Cambridge, University Library, Additional MS 3035, described by its editor, G. C. Macaulay, in this way:

> Written on parchment, size of leaves about 12" x 7 ¾", in eights catchwords; writing of the latter half of the 14th century, in double column of forty-eight lines to the column; initial letter of each stanza coloured blue or red, and larger illuminated letters at the beginning of the chief divisions, combined with some ornamentation on the left side of the column, and in one case, f. 58v, also at the top of the page. One leaf is pasted down to the binding at the beginning and contains the title and the tale of contents. After this four leaves have been cut out, containing the beginning of the poem, and seven more in other parts of the book[2].

Apart from the table of contents, the manuscript is the careful product of a single, clear hand that required very few corrections. Macaulay felt

1 *The Complete Works of John Gower. The French Works*, ed. G. C. Macaulay, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1899. All quotations from the poem are taken from this edition.

2 *Gower. French Works*, ed. Macaulay, p. lxviii-lxix.

that "I have little doubt that this copy was written under the direction of the author[3]." The language is predominantly Anglo-Norman, with salient central French influences throughout. The text thus identifies Gower as a poet of insular roots, but with a sophisticated awareness of current Continental styles[4]. The quality of the manuscript, even without its missing leaves that may have contained desirable ornamentation, is high: it could not have been cheap to produce[5].

Gower's *MO* has always inspired questions. One would like to know why, for instance, there is just this single copy of the poem left to us, when of all other of Gower's works (excepting only the balade sequence, *Cinkante Balades*) multiple examples have survived. Was it merely bad luck, of the kind that overtook so many medieval manuscripts, that time has done away with copies once more numerous? The singularity of the *MO* manuscript is rendered the more curious by the evident care, and cost, involved with the making of Cambridge, University Library, Additional MS 3035; and also by the esteem in which Gower himself so obviously held the poem, esteem evinced not only in his comments on his own *oeuvre*, but also, and more materially, by his choice of the *MO* (albeit under its Latin title, *Speculum Meditantis*) as one of the three books on which to rest the head of his effigy, on his tomb[6].

For present purposes here, such questions about the single survival of the *MO* have relevance, perhaps more than tangentially. Since for the *MO* Gower adopted Hélinand's twelve-line stanza, a form which by the latter half of the fourteenth century must have struck readers as palpably antique, one must wonder somewhat as to his motives. In a sense, the

3 *Ibid.*

4 On Gower's language, see B. Merrilees and H. Pagan, "John Barton, John Gower and Others: Variation in Late Anglo-French", *Language and Culture in Medieval Britain: The French of England c. 1100-c.1500*, ed. J. Wogan-Browne, C. Collette, M. Kowaleski, L. R. Mooney, A. Putter, and D. Trotter, York, York Medieval Press, 2009, p. 118-134; R. Ingham, "John Gower, poète anglo-normand: Perspectives linguistiques sur *Le Myrour de l'Omme*", *Anglo-Français: Philologie et Linguistique*, ed. O. Floquet and G. Giannini, Paris, Garnier, 2014, p. 91-100; and R. Ingham and M. Ingham, "'Pardonetz moi qe jeo de ceo forsvoie': Gower's Anglo-Norman Identity", *Neophilologus*, 99, 2015, p. 667-684.

5 Even if its later history was rough: the manuscript seems to have passed through many hands, and as Macaulay (*Gower. French Works*, ed. Macaulay, p. lxix) notes, "it would seem that about the year 1745 it was lying neglected in some farm-house."

6 Gower's tomb rests in Southwark Cathedral. Apparently he designed his own effigy, and placed his three major works under its head, in the order (top to bottom) *Vox Clamantis*, *Speculum Meditantis*, *Confessio Amantis*.

same could be said for his choice of language. Although whether Gower was or was not a trained and practicing lawyer remains to be resolved, nevertheless he was beyond doubt someone intimately familiar with current legal trends and practices, and apparently often at Westminster. In 1362, a year in which he likely began work on the *MO*, he could hardly have missed the parliamentary passage of the Pleading in English Act (36 Edw. III c. 15). Commonly called the "Statute of Pleading," the act cited the general ignorance of French in England as a reason to establish that, from that year forward, "all Pleas (…) shall be pleaded, shewed, defended, answered, debated and judged in the English Tongue, and (…) entered and inrolled in Latin[7]." It seems unlikely that Gower would have misunderstood the larger ramifications of this. Clearly, then, Gower's choice of French as the medium for a major poem, at this moment when French was being officially de-emphasized, seems connected in some way with his decision to adopt the also-antique *strophe d'Hélinand* as its form; and both have implications for determining his preferred audience.

Evidence of such decision-making is offered by his other excursions into French: the two balade collections, *Cinkante Balades* and the *Traitié pour essampler les Amantz marietz*, the former a legitimate sequence, the latter, as its title indicates, a strikingly original experiment in argumentation using *forme fixe*. These sets of interlinked balades – the *Traitié* without envoy, in the Machauldian manner, the *Cinkante Balades* with envoy, in the subsequent currency of Deschamps – are, respectively, intellectual and aristocratic stuff, the *Traitié* designed to appeal to the best-read and most thoughtful in Gower's acquaintance, the *Cinkante Balades* probably written for young Henry Bolingbroke and his circle, in the wake of the tournament at St. Inglevert[8].

Deciding upon the target readership of the *MO*, however, is somewhat more difficult – and the use of the *strophe d'Hélinand* plays an inextricable part in that difficulty. Considered together, they raise one of the three salient questions about Gower's verse *hélinandien* to be addressed in the following pages: what was his purpose in choosing that stanzaic form? The second is: where did he discover the *Vers de la Mort*, in order to borrow its strophic pattern? And the third: how does the *strophe* fare, as it passed through his hands?

7 See *The Parliament Rolls of Medieval England*, online edition.
8 See my "John Gower's Audience: The Ballades", *Chaucer Review*, 40, 2005, p. 81-105.

It seems helpful to take up the second question as a point of departure. Continental medievalists have written extensively on the *Vers de la Mort*, amply demonstrating its wide familiarity in the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries, primarily in France, but with noteworthy influence spread more widely[9]. The poem's primary editors, Fredrik Wulff and Emmanuel Walberg, describe twenty-four manuscripts, a substantial survival indicative of significant popularity. Predictably, these are French productions and most remained evidently in France. Others, however, found their way into libraries in Belgium, Italy, Switzerland, and Spain[10]. Conspicuously absent from this list, however, is England. No manuscript of the complete *Vers de la Mort* is either extant in any English library today, including the British Library, or is mentioned in book lists from contemporary private collections, monastic libraries, or university catalogues, as having once been present, and now lost. Indeed, only three fragments of Hélinand's poem are extant today in manuscripts of English production. One – consisting of stanza XLIX – is contained in Oxford, Bodleian Library, Digby MS 86, a well-known miscellany of Latin, French and Middle English made in the Worcestershire area in the late thirteenth century[11]. It is largely the work of a single scribe, apparently a cleric, although of as-yet unidentified order[12]. A second, longer excerpt, of eleven stanzas from the *Vers de la Mort*, but in

9 On the dispersion and adaptation of the *Vers de la Mort* between 1200 and 1500, see L. Seláf, "La Strophe d'Hélinand: sur les contraintes d'une forme médiévale", *Formes strophiques simples / Simple Strophic Patterns*, ed. L. Seláf, P. Aziz Hanna, and J. van Driel, Budapest, Akadémiai Kaidó, 2010, p. 73-92. See also, in this same volume, J. van Driel, "Jacob van Maerlant's Strophic Poems and Flemish Literature", p. 109-127. On the influences of the strophe d'Hélinand in Germany, see G. Scholz Williams, "Against Court and School: Heinrich of Melk and Hélinant de Froidmont as Critics of Twelfth-Century Society", *Neophilologus*, 62, 1978, p. 513-526; and further A. Bernhardt, *Die altfranzösische Helinandstrophe*, Münster, 1912, which examines influences according to country and region. Of use also is H. R. Jauss, "La transformation de la forme allégorique entre 1180-1240: D'Alain de Lille à Guillaume de Lorris", *L'Humanisme médiéval dans les littératures romanes du XII^e^ au XIV^e^ siècle*, ed. A. Fourrier, Paris, Klincksieck, 1964, p. 107-146.

10 See *Les Vers de la Mort par Hélinant, Moine de Froidmont, publiés d'aprés tous les manuscrits connus*, ed. F. Wulff and E. Walberg, Paris, Didot, 1905. The manuscripts and early printed versions are described on p. xxxiii-lv. All quotations from Hélinand's poem are taken from this edition.

11 The manuscript can be readily accessed: see *Facsimile of Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Digby 86*, ed. J. Tschann and M. B. Parkes, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1996.

12 See M. Corrie, "The Compilation of Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Digby 86", *Medium Aevum*, 66, 1997, p. 236-249, especially p. 243.

re-arranged order (i.e., stanzas XIX, XLI, XXXIV-XXXVIII, XXX, XLIX, L, XLVIII), appears in Maidstone (Kent) Museum MS A.13. The manuscript, the work of various hands, is thirteenth century, of 252 leaves and mostly in Latin, but it includes eight items in English that suggest a Northamptonshire provenance, along with two Anglo-French pieces, one of them being the excerpt from Hélinand[13].

The third scrap of the *Vers de la Mort* is in Gower's *MO*, and it is quite unusual in several ways:

> *Qe tu morras tout es certeins,*
> *Mais au quelle houre es nouncerteins,*
> *Ou en quell lieu tu n'en saveras:*
> *Mestre Helemauns, qui fist toutpleins*
> *Lez Vers du Mort, tesmoigne au meinz,*
> *Qe mort t'ad dist comme tu orras:*
> *"Houstez voz troeffes et voz gas,*
> *Car tiel me couve soubz ses dras*
> *Q'assetz quide estre fortz et seins."*
> *Mort t'ad garny de ses fallas,*
> *Dont par droit ne t'escuseras,*
> *Si tu par luy soies attains.* (*MO* 11401-11412)[14]

Gower quotes – or misquotes – from stanza XV, 10-12, which in the original read: "Laissiez voz chiflois et voz gas! / Teus me cueve desoz ses dras / Qui cuide estre haitiez et sains[15]." That an Englishman should borrow bits of the *Vers de la Mort*, even re-arrange them to suit new purposes in a fresh context, is not unique to Gower. In fact, all three known examples in English manuscripts do this. The stanza mentioned above from Oxford, Bodleian Library Digby MS 86 is an instance of simple borrowing: it is added as the final stanza of a

13 The manuscript was first described by C. Brown, "A Thirteenth-Century Manuscript at Maidstone", *Modern Language Review*, 21, 1926, p. 1-12; and see further N. R. Ker, *Medieval Manuscripts in British Libraries*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1969-1992, vol. 3, p. 318.

14 "That you shall die is absolutely certain, but at what hour is uncertain, and you know not in what place: Master Helinand, who wrote *The Verses of Death*, bears witness that death has told you at least the following: 'Do away with your mockery and your boasting, for many a man who thinks himself sound and strong has me already hatching beneath his clothes.' Death has warned you of his tricks, so that rightly you shall not escape if you are caught by him." Translation W. Burton Wilson, *John Gower: Mirour de l'Omme (The Mirror of Mankind)*, revised N. Wilson Van Baak, East Lansing, Colleagues Press, 1992.

15 *Vers de la Mort*, ed. Wulff and Walberg, p. 15.

copy of *La Complainte de Jerusalem*, a poem by Huon de Saint-Quentin employing the *strophe d'Hélinand* and deploring papal avarice during the fifth crusade[16]. Maidstone Museum MS A.13 is an example of more complicated re-arranging. The stanzas selected there from the *Vers de la Mort* are presented in an order other than Hélinand's, and although the words are entirely his, here in isolation and reassembled they create a new, wholly individual poem, amounting to "a panegyric upon the white monks and their life of devotion[17]." That Hélinand's poem should be repurposed in this way is perhaps in one sense not surprising, given that Maidstone Museum MS A.13 is the product of a Cistercian monastery[18]. In that regard, neither would it be surprising that Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Digby 86, a heterodox *mélange* of "an astonishingly wide variety of subjects, from the literary to the decidedly non-literary – medical treatises, confessional material, charms and prognosticatory items –," should be a monastic production either[19]. Although we do not know of what order precisely was its idiosyncratic compiler – and it is possible he was also a Cistercian – the presence of the devotional and confessional pieces strongly implies his vocation; and in particular the *Complainte de Jerusalem*, with its inclusion of the *strophe d'Hélinand*, echoes the outpouring of monastic outrage at what was perceived as papal culpability for the dismal failure of the fifth crusade[20].

16 That this stanza was added from the *Vers de la Mort* was first noted by Gotthold Naetebus, *Die nicht-lyrischen Strophenformen des Altfranzösischen*, Leipzig, 1891, item xxxvi.52.

17 The quotation is from Brown, "Manuscript at Maidstone," p. 4. The passage has also been described as "a sermon or meditation": see R. J. Dean, with the collaboration of M. Boulton, *Anglo-Norman Literature: A Guide to Texts and Manuscripts*, London, Anglo-Norman Text Society, 1999, p. 335 (item 609).

18 See Brown, "Manuscript at Maidstone," p. 11; further, Ker, *Medieval Manuscripts*, vol. 3, p. 317-321, who identifies the subsequent passage of Maidstone MS A.13 into the hospital of St. John the Baptist and St. John the Evangelist in Northampton.

19 The quotation is from Corrie, "The Compilation of Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Digby 86", p. 236.

20 Although the Cistercians, and Hélinand notably, concerned themselves with the Albigensian crusades, there was also active support in the order for the retaking of Jerusalem – the ostensible purpose of the fifth crusade. It is true, however, that in general the order of Citeaux ceded the preaching of this mission to the Dominicans, and especially the Franciscans. See B. Mayne Kienzle, *Cistercians, Heresy and Crusade in Occitania, 1145-1229: Preaching in the Lord's Vineyard*, Woodbridge, Boydell, 2001, p. 210. On Hélinand's preaching in particular, see p. 174-201; and further her "Hélinant de Froidmont et la prédication cistercienne dans le Midi (1145-1229)", *La prédication en Pays d'Oc (XII^e^-début XV^e^ siècle)*, ed. J.-L. Biget, Toulouse, Privat (*Cahiers de Fanjeaux*, 32), 1997, p. 37-67.

It is thus possible to answer, with some measure of certainty, the question of where Gower may have encountered the *strophe d'Hélinand*. While clearly his source was not MS Digby 86 nor MS Maidstone A.13, since the stanza from which he quotes is found in neither of these, the probability is nonetheless very high that it was in a manuscript of monastic production, more likely than not from a Cistercian house, that he found a copy, perhaps whole, perhaps in excerpt, as in MS Digby 86 and MS Maidstone A.13, of the *Vers de la Mort*. It will be worthwhile returning to consider what he might have been looking for in such a manuscript of monastic compilation. Notable at present, however, is the manner in which his incorporation both resembles and transcends how the *strophe d'Hélinand* is used in the two known English examples.

There is clear English precedent for some part of what Gower has done in the *MO* – for, more accurately, his inclusion of the three lines he quotes directly from the *Vers de la Mort*. In both MS Digby 86 and MS Maidstone A.13, Hélinand's poem is treated in what might be described as an "authorial" fashion: that is, as material consciously to be drawn on and transformed. Since nearly all of the more than eighty texts in MS Digby 86 are copied by a single scribe, the suggestion arises unavoidably that the single stanza of the *Vers de la Mort* added in that manuscript to the *Complainte de Jerusalem* represents a purposive, "authorial" choice of one man. Even more vividly, MS Maidstone A.13 confronts us with strong evidence that, similarly, the lines excerpted from Hélinand represent conscious re-invention by an individual, unknown but purposeful, bent as we have seen on transforming an earlier poem into "a panegyric" to the Cistercian way of life.

Yet Gower very strikingly pushes far past this precedent, into fully original territory, in two most important ways. Not only does he identify Hélinand as the lines' author *within the MO text itself* (and not supralinearly, or in a note in a margin, as is his common practice in many of his other works), but he also – quite uniquely – adopts the *strophe hélinandienne* for the entirety of his voluminous poem[21].

21 Broad scholarly consensus has accepted the marginal commentaries in manuscripts of the *Confessio Amantis*, *Traitié pour essampler les amantz marietz*, and *Cronica Tripertita* as Gower's own original compositions. See, e.g., R.F. Yeager, "English, Latin, and the Text as 'Other': The Page as Sign in the Work of John Gower", *Text*, 3, 1987, p. 251-267; and further S. Echard, "With Carmen's Help: Latin Authorities in the *Confessio Amantis*", *Studies in Philology*, 95, 1998, p. 1-40.

This practice suggests several conclusions. The first applies as well to the "authorial" compilers of MSS Digby 86 and Maidstone A.13 as to Gower himself: that each of them borrowed from the *Vers de la Mort* in order to ground their own efforts in the recognized moral power of Hélinand and his poem[22]. Beyond this, it seems clear that on Gower's part this intention to claim direct descent from Hélinand was very powerful – indeed, a guiding principle in the formulation of the *MO* itself.

Looking closely at the context in which Gower names, and quotes from, the *Vers de la Mort* clarifies his intent. The reference occurs as part of the description of Paour (Fear), the second daughter of the first Virtue, Humilité (the antidote to the primary sin of Pride), and Resoun (*MO* 10837-11556). "Paour" as Gower means it here is *timor Dei* or *timor Domini*, "fear of God" or "Holy Fear[23]." As the first of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, Holy Fear is inextricably entwined with Humility[24]. The immense structural importance of the passage to Gower's larger poetic enterprise in the *MO* cannot be overemphasized. It is underscored by the conjuncture here of the *Vers de la Mort* with another primary source for the *MO*, the *Somme le Roi* (or the *Somme des Vices et Vertus*) by the thirteenth-century Dominican Laurent d'Orléans[25]. From this latter

22 This widespread exploitation of the morally powerful influence of Hélinand has been acknowledged by Paul Zumthor; see *Essai de poétique médiévale*, Paris, Seuil, 1972, p. 408-409.

23 Hélinand knows the concept no less well than does Gower; see *Vers de la Mort* IV: "Mais tu qui gieues a la chace / De çaus o Dieus paor n'a mis, / Mout fais grant bien par ta menace, / Car ta paors purge et saace / L'ame aussi com par un tamis."

24 The Biblical locus is Isaiah 11:2-3, which lists the gifts ordered as they came to Christ at the Incarnation: *sapientia*, *intelligentia*, *consilium*, *fortitude*, *scientia*, *pietas*, and *timor domini*. Humanity, in its imperfection, receives these in reverse order, beginning with Holy Fear (see Gregory, *Homiliae in Ezechielem*, II, Hom. 7, in Migne, *PL* 76, 1016-1017). The inseparability of Humility and Fear of God is succinctly expressed by Augustine: "*Sed hanc verae humilitatis virtutem nemo sine timore Dei habere potest; quia eorum neuter sine altero esse potest*" ("But no one is able to have this true virtue of humility without the fear of God; because neither of these without the other is possible"); see *Sermo* CCXCVII, *"De Humilitate et Timore Domini"*, *PL* 39, 2314. In the *Confessio Amantis*, Gower conjoins Holy Fear and Humility in Book I: see C. Banchich, "Holy Fear and Poetics in John Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, Book I" *On John Gower: Essays at the Millennium*, ed. R.F. Yeager, Kalamazoo, Medieval Institute Publications, 2007, p. 188-215.

25 The Middle English translation of the *Somme* has been edited by W. Nelson Francis, *The Book of Vices and Virtues*, London, 1942. The fact of its translation is indicative of the immense popularity of this work in England, as well as on the Continent.

work Gower took the opposition of the Daughters of Sin and Virtue that constitutes the longest third of the *MO*[26].

Viewed from within this context, several major questions become more answerable. Hélinand's invocation of Death in the *Vers de la Mort* has long been recognized as complex in both purpose and tone. On the one hand, Morz (Death) is sent as a horrific reminder to those Hélinand names, in order to frighten them into repenting sins that will bar them from a heavenly future. To accomplish this, Morz must be ghastly, threatening. Not coincidentally, it is precisely this horrifying Death ("l'orrible capitien") that Gower has Paour reveal to Char (Flesh): "Covert d'un mantelet mondein, / Deinz une chamber cordial / S'estoit muscé trestout soulein, / En aguatant la Char humein, / Quelle est sa proie natural" (*MO*, 715-720)[27]. Gower seems to have had the *Vers de la Mort* XV immediately in mind while crafting this portrayal of Death here: consider the similarity of details in Hélinand's description of Morz in the lines that Gower directly quotes ("Houstez voz troeffes et voz gas, / Car tiel me couve soubz ses dras / Q'assetz quide estre fortz et seins") and his own depiction of Death, "Covert d'un mantelet mondein, / Deinz une chamber cordial / S'estoit muscé trestout soulein, / En aguatant la Char humein" in *MO* 715-720.

On the other hand, Hélinand's stated (salvific) purpose for dispatching such a horrifying Morz to friends initially seems – at the very least – counterintuitive. Yet Death in this latter sense is identical to *timor Dei*, "Holy Fear". Both types of Death, Hélinand knows, are thus ultimately blessed gifts, because if properly understood they facilitate the advent to joy[28]. Again, it is no coincidence that Gower completes *MO* 715-720

26 On Gower's debt to the *Somme*, see in particular J. B. Dwyer, "Gower's *Mirour* and Its French Sources: A Reexamination of Evidence", *Studies in Philology*, 48, 1951, p. 482-505. Not insignificantly, the *Somme* concludes with a treatise on the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. See further the discussion by Michel Zink of what he terms "les sermons en vers", *Littérature française du Moyen Âge*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1992, p. 62.

27 Death "the horrible captain, covered with a worldly mantel, had hidden himself all alone in a chamber of the heart, lying in wait for the human Flesh, which is its natural prey."

28 Death's conflicted role in human affairs as bringer of joy and grief was keenly felt at Citeaux, beginning with St. Bernard himself: see his Sermon 26 on the Song of Songs, with its lament for his brother Gerard, in *S. Bernardi opera*, Rome, 1957-1977, vol. I, p. 169-181; and further the analysis of J. Leclerq, "The Joy of Dying According to St. Bernard", *Cistercian Studies Quarterly*, 25, 1990, p. 163-174.

with this same sentiment: "Mort t'ad garny de ses fallas, / Dont par droit ne t'escuseras, / Si tu par luy soies attains" (*MO* 11410-11412).

These quoted lines are revealing in another way as well. Gower's quotation from, and identification of, Hélinand's poem, and the poet himself, occurs in the *MO* in one of two extended passages dependent on Frère Laurent's *Somme* – where, indeed, the same lines (although in different configuration) are recorded as well[29]. Examining how Gower interpolates the two works makes clear the overlapping necessity of both within his larger plan. Hélinand's is the "voice" of the *MO*, the enforcer, so to speak, that continually via its distinctive *strophe* pushes the reader, first in the direction of confession – the enterprise of the Frère Laurent's *Somme* – and then ultimately toward repentance, an end that – given the darkness and depth of Everyman's sin – can be achieved solely with the direct intervention of the Virgin, as detailed in the *MO*'s final 2500 lines[30].

Doubtless at this point it is helpful to consolidate briefly before proceeding further. Of the three initial questions set out for investigation, two may now be answered with a degree of confidence. Gower's reading in advance of, and very likely during, his composition of the *MO* was focused on texts of strict moral didacticism that would have helped him frame, and fill out, his intended poem. This seems especially probable if, as is commonly accepted, the *MO* was his earliest poetic effort. He would have needed verse models as well as suitably didactic material. Such works were readily available and included those typical of monastic production, confessional manuals, and *artes praedicandi*[31]. His search-

29 See Dwyer, "Gower's *Mirour*", p. 496. While this overlap demonstrates Gower's use of both a text of the *Somme* and of the *Vers de la Mort*, it does not eliminate the certitude of Gower's knowledge of Hélinand's poem itself, as the *Somme* is a prose text. Only by knowing Hélinand's unique twelve-line *strophe* in original form could he have discovered it.

30 That the *strophe d'Hélinand* was a vehicle widely acknowledged for grave conveyance was noted by Zumthor (see *Histoire littéraire de la France médiévale*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1954, p. 234); and see further Seláf, "La Strophe d'Hélinand", p. 79.

31 Gower's involvement with preacher's manuals was extensive while writing the *MO*, but as an analysis of such sources is not germane to the present topic, suffice it to note that in the *MO* Gower quotes (not always accurately) and/or cites more passages from the bible, authors both classical and Christian (e.g., Gregory, and various Fathers), and proverbs than in any of his other poems by a great number (for a brief summary, see *Gower. The French Works*, ed. Macaulay, p. lvi-lx). Although Gower's reading is demonstrably extensive, it is unlikely he had studied in full all the works he cites, and must have relied on *florilegia* for some of this material.

ing must have brought him a copy of the *Vers de la Mort* (perhaps in a manuscript of Cistercian origin), from which he borrowed his poem's "voice," the *strophe d'Hélinand*, and also, as a distinctively inseparable part of that, its antique French language, always a retrospective signpost in Gower's writings, intended to direct his readers backwards in time to reflect upon the kind and purpose of Hélinand's text. This, indeed, he practices in the opening lines of the *MO* (1-12) as we have them:

> Escoulte cea, chascun amant,
> Quit tant perestes desirant
> Du pecché, dont l'amour est fals:
> Lessetz la Miere ove tout s'enfant,
> Car qui plus est leur attendant,
> Au fin avra chapeal de sauls:
> Lors est il fols qui ses travauls
> Met en amour si desloiauls,
> Dont au final nuls est joyant.
> Mais quiq'en voet fuïr les mals,
> Entende et tiegne mes consals,
> Que je luy dirray en avant[32].

Gower's intent in these lines was two-fold: first, to distance the love with which he will conclude the *MO* – the salvific sort offered humanity by the Virgin and her Son – from the secular, fleshly variety which he wanted to label especially French[33]. He had, as well, a target audience in mind, one particularly susceptible to *amour courtois*: the French-speaking court of Edward III, especially Henry of Grosmont, first Duke of Lancaster, whose moral sensibility in large part Gower clearly shared and to whose *Livre de Seyntz Medicines* Gower's *MO* also owes a debt[34]. It was mindful of this linguistic referentiality (an *intertextualité*

32 "Listen to this, every lover who seems so desirous of Sin, whose love is false: leave the mother together with her children for he who is most attendant on them will have a willow wreath in the end; therefore he is foolish who exerts himself in a love so treacherous that in the end no one rejoices in it. But whoever wishes to flee evils, let him listen to and keep my counsels, which I shall give him hereafter."

33 See my *John Gower's Poetic: The Search for a New Arion*, Cambridge, Brewer, 1990, p. 74-77. It is worth noting that in Gower's complete formulation, these lines would have been placed fully in context. As Macaulay notes (*Gower. The French Works*, ed. Macaulay, p. lxix), from the single known manuscript of the *MO*, "four leaves have been cut out, containing the beginning of the poem".

34 I have argued for the influence of the *Livre de Seyntz Medicines* on the *MO* at length: see "Gower's French Audience: The *Mirour de l'Omme*", *Chaucer Review*, 41, 2006, p. 113-137.

of keenly pointed kind) that, in the 1360-1370 period when he began work on his first major poetic endeavor, Gower selected as its language one he knew to be fading in England[35]. And certainly French was as well the language best suited for his strophic source, not simply because in French the demanding rhyming pattern of the *strophe hélinandienne* might be replicated over so vast a length as he projected for the *MO*, but also because, by casting his thoughts in the language of Hélinand himself, Gower most effectively could "ventriloquize" the distinctive, arresting poetic "voice" of the *Vers de la Mort* to address the primarily French-speaking chivalric readership of Edward's court for whom the *MO*'s message was urgently intended.

In both of these choices, then, of language and of strophic source, Gower was making deliberately reversionary moves. It remains to be seen what are the results when he verbalizes those choices in poetic practice. In general, Gower follows Hélinand quite closely. As in the *Vers de la Mort*, the stanza in the *MO* is maintained as a discrete unit of thought. There is not, in either poem, any enjambment across strophic boundaries – or better put, perhaps, no *linguistic* enjambment, strictly speaking. Both Gower and Hélinand do create ideational clusters, groups of *strophes* conjoined by rhetorical and metaphorical similarities, e.g., from the *Vers de la Mort* stanzas XXXI-XXXIII (of which XXXI offers an example):

> Morz est la roiz qui tot atrape,
> Morz est la mains qui tot agrape;
> Tot li remaint quanqu'ele aert.
> Morz fait a toz d'isembrun chape
> Et de la pure terre nape,
> Morz a toz oniement sert,
> Morz toz secrez met en apert,
> Morz fait franc homme de cuivert,
> Morz acuivertist roi et pape,
> Morz rent chascun ce qu'il desert,
> Morz rent a povre ce qu'il pert,
> Morz tout al riche quanqu'il hape.

35 I use "*intertextualité*" here following Julia Kristeva: "any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorbtion and transformation of another"; see "Word, Dialogue, and Novel", *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1980, p. 64-91.

Similarly, in the *MO* (29917-29928), where this stanza is followed by two others of like subject and strategy (29929-29940, 29941-29945)[36]:

O mere et vierge sanz lesure,
O la treshumble creature,
Joye des angles gloriouse,
O merciable par droiture,
Restor de nostre forfaiture,
Fontaine en grace plentevouse,
O belle Olive fructuouse,
Palme et Cipresse preciouse
O de la mer estoille pure,
O cliere lune esluminouse,
O amiable, o amourouse
Du bon amour qui toutdis dure.

Several observations may be made regarding these examples. In each poem, although the rhetorical types differ (*epizeuxis* in the case of Hélinand, *apostrophe* in Gower's), their strategy – emphasis through repetition – is the same. Moreover, by extending these rhetorical figures over several *strophes*, both poets create clusters of heightened, focused energy that, positioned as they are in each poem near the conclusion, present Morz and the Virgin in new levels of brilliance and intensity within their respective contexts. The effect – to describe it using an example from a visual medium – is one of figures in deeply incised bas-relief obtruding without warning from what has been a two-dimensional plane.

More common in the *MO* and in the *Vers de la Mort* than this stanzaic clustering is the more traditional sort of enjambment observable in the final two lines of Gower's stanza. While this device is comparatively infrequent in the *Vers de la Mort*, Gower evinces a looser approach to the *strophe d'Hélinand*. In Hélinand's hands, when enjambment appears, almost without exception a clear structural or causal reason is internally evident. Three examples of variant types should suffice to illustrate Hélinand's skill in this:

– XXIX: "Puis que morz tot a sa devise / Fait sor nos pluie et secherece, / Puis qu'ele a tot en sa destrece…" Here even this

36 The half-stanza 29941-29945 is short due to loss of the manuscript's final leaves.

slight gesture toward carrying a thought past line-end Hélinand contains immediately within the overriding rhetorical pattern (*paromoiosis*: "Puis… Puis")[37].

– V: "Qui en toz lieus fais verreglaz / Por nos faire verreglacier…" Hélinand's much-noted interest in puns and verbal play explains the enjambment, intended here to capture and accentuate the paronomastic impact of "verreglaz/verreglacier" (*parachesis*) through their rapid conjunction.
– XXVII: "Morz sobite est a droit nomee / Quant la vie n'est ordenee / Ançois que l'ame isse del cors…" Here the enjambment seems designed to emphasize formally the "suddenness" ("sorbite") of Morz, in the specialized form of *onomatopoeia* imitative of action rather than sound.

An important difference to note, separating Gower and Hélinand, is that in the *MO* enjambed lines appear more often than in the *Vers de la Mort*. Nevertheless, Gower cannot be said to have employed enjambment casually. Both he and Hélinand are skillful practitioners. Consider this first example:

> Pour ce, qant Sompnolence englue
> Les oels du corps, yceste argue
> Les oels du cuer, et si les fiert,
> Que vuille ou noun le corps remue,
> Plus que falcoun, qant se de sa mue
> S'en ist (…)." (*MO* 14119-14121)[38]

Here the major structuring figure is *epanaphora* ("Les oels du corps / Les oels du cuer"), a figure not unlike *paromoiosis* as used by Hélinand,

37 It should be noted that Hélinand does not always fully contain his enjambments so completely. Compare an example offered earlier in a different context, from *Vers de la Mort* IV: "Mais tu qui gieues a la chace / De çaus o Dieus paor n'a mis, / Mout fais grant bien par ta menace, / Car ta paors purge et saace / L'ame aussi com par un tamis." The first enjambment here is contained by alliteration – "Mais'/"Mout." But the second – "saace/L'ame" – is left free, probably because "L'ame" begins the twelfth and final line of the *strophe*. An interesting, but I think less helpful, assessment of Hélinand's approach to stanzaic scaffolding is J.-P. Bobillot, "La mort, le moi(ne) et Dieu: Une approche de la *ratio formae* dans les *Vers de la Mort* d'Hélinand de Froidmont", *Poétique*, 77, 1989, p. 93-111.

38 "Therefore, when Somnolence closes up the eyes of the body, Vigilance admonishes the eyes of the heart and strikes them – whether the body moves or not – harder than the falcon when it comes out of its mew."

but with a flourish Gower combines this with *polyptoton* ("remue / sa mue") and yet one more "corps," to produce a *strophe* both rhetorically rich and morally instructive.

The second example is *MO* 14425-14436:

> Mais sur trestout je truis escrit
> Q'au main oiseuse soit desdit
> Le pain, que point n'en mangera:
> Auci qant dieus ot entredit
> Au primer homme et contredit
> Son paradis, lors commanda
> Q'au labourer en terre irra
> Et en suour pourchacera
> Le pain, dont chascun homme vit:
> Dont m'est avis, cil qui serra
> Solicitous molt luy valdra,
> Car corps et alme en ont proufit[39].

In this *strophe* the enjambed lines are positioned between two mutually reflective constructions using first-person forms ("je truis escrit" / "m'est avis") – i.e., a form of *modus proferendi*[40]. The lines themselves indirectly report God's speech in Gen. 3:19, and therefore maintain, in their overrunning of line-ends, the quality of immediate utterance[41]. It is a sermonic technique, one in consequence available to Gower, yet not to Hélinand, whose range of both literary influences and – in a poem of just fifty *strophes*—narratorial space are necessarily more limited.

Gower's management of the *strophe d'Hélinand* differs in one major way from his model: that is, in the manner and frequency of his inclusion of direct speech. Perhaps to a certain degree this, like the example last discussed above (*MO* 14425-14436), is a function of the voluminous nature of the *MO*. Its 2495 stanzas so far exceed Hélinand's fifty as to

39 "I find it written than bread should be refused to the idle man, so that he might not eat of it. Also when God had refused and denied His Paradise to the first man, then He commanded him to go and labor on the earth and to seek in sweat the bread from which each man lives. So it is my opinion that if a man be industrious it will avail him much, for both body and soul have profit from it."

40 The concept is Augustine's; see *On Christian Doctrine*, IV.i.1.

41 That is: "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." The first reference may be to Proverbs 19:15: "Slothfulness casteth into a deep sleep; and an idle soul shall suffer hunger"; see also Prov. 31:27. Translation is King James Version.

render certain kinds of comparison nearly ludicrous. Nonetheless, setting one poem alongside the other in this regard has value. It calls necessary attention to the several models from which Gower drew in creating the *MO* – not merely the *Vers de la Mort*, but also the *Somme le Roi*, estates satire, and (doubtless) the *Legenda Aurea* of Jacobus de Voragine for the life of Mary[42]. So seen, Gower's far more common turn in the *MO* toward direct discourse among characters – the Devil, Sin and her daughters, Man, the Soul, the Flesh, Gabriel and Mary, Elizabeth and Mary, Simeon, etc. – is scarcely surprising. Among so many influences, he hardly had to rely on Hélinand's precedent alone, particularly since, by the end of the fourteenth century verse dialogue had become commonplace. But Gower's so frequent reliance on direct, dramatic discourse to body forth his narrative designs is an important difference between how he handles the *strophe d'Hélinand* in the *MO*, and the practices of its originator. In Gower's hands, because direct discourse is narrationally structural, he often continues a character's speech over several stanzas (e.g., *MO* 433-456, the Devil speaking to "l'omme losenger").

One should note quickly, however, that the seeds of what Gower develops to so great an extent he could have discovered in the *Vers de la Mort*. Although infrequently, Hélinand does demonstrate masterful flexibility including speech in his stanzas. Consider the voice in XV:

> Morz, crie a Romme, crie a Rains:
> "Seigneur, tuit estes en mes mains,
> Aussi li haut comme li bas.
> Ovrez voz ieuz, ceigniez voz rains,
> Ainçois que je vos praigne as frains
> Et vos face crier Hé las!
> Certes je queur plus que le pas,
> Si aport dez de deux et d'as
> Por vos faire jeter del mains.
> Laissiez voz chiflois et voz gas!
> Teus me cueve desoz ses dras
> De cuide estre haitiez et sains[43]."

42 See, for Gower's life of Mary, *Legenda Aurea*, September 8, the Feast Day of the Virgin, with details of her biography. On his many sources in general, see especially K. Olsson, "The Cardinal Virtues and the Structure of John Gower's *Speculum Meditantis*", *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 7, 1977, p. 113-148.

43 These lines take on even greater interest when one recalls that, as we have seen earlier, Gower quotes the final three of them, citing Hélinand, in the *MO*. Here the *intertextualité*

This particular *strophe* is intriguing for its vocal complication. Although presented as the direct speech of Morz, what is actually quoted is the poet's voice, prompting Morz on what to say[44]. This is, strictly speaking, *ethopoeia*, *indirect* discourse – a technique Hélinand polished, perhaps, during his first career as a *trouvère*, before he joined the Cistercians[45]. Though infrequent, it is always comfortably accommodated within the twelve-line *strophe*.

Direct discourse, however, is also present in the *Vers de la Mort*. The *Vers de la Mort* on initial glance would seem to contain several types of it, in fact. One sort we may eliminate immediately, however, as exemplifying quotation rather than speech, e.g., from XXXVII:

> Car certes, si com dit sainz Pous,
> Cil qui set dire les bons cous:
> "Qui bien que puet avoir ne prent,
> Ainz suefre por Dieu les durs cous,
> Mout est maleüreus et fous
> S'il autre bien de Dieu n'atent[46]."

In this Gower and Hélinand have much in common, as the *MO* is in many ways a vast pastiche of quotations drawn from a congeries of *florilegia*[47].

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especially rich, and resultantly suggestive.

44 It is interesting to consider how a passage like this one may have influenced the later dramatic rendering of the *strophe d'Hélinand* by Adam de la Halle. On this see in particular Seláf, "La Strophe d'Hélinand", p. 80-81.

45 On Hélinand's early versifying career see *Les Vers de la Mort*, ed. Wulff and Walberg, p. vii-xxvii. See also W. D. Paden, "Documents Concerning Hélinant de Froidmont", *Romania*, 105, 1984, p. 332-341; W. D. Paden, "*De monachis rithmos facientibus*: Hélinant de Froidmont, Bertran de Born, and the Cistercian General Chapter of 1199", *Speculum*, 55, 1980, p. 669-685; J. Deschamps, "Un Moine poète du XII[e] siècle: Hélinant de Froidmont," *Studies in Romance Philology and French Literature Presented to John Orr*, no ed., Manchester, Manchester UP, 1953, p. 45-50. Some helpful primary material is also assembled by E. Smits, "Editing the *Chronicon* of Hélinand de Froidmont: the Marginal Notes", *Sacris Erudiri*, 32, 1991, p. 269-289. For comparative background on the *chanson courtoise* as Hélinant knew it, see R. Dragonetti, *La technique poétique des trouvères dans la chanson courtoise: Contribution à l'étude de la rhétorique medieval*, Geneva, Slatkine, 1979.

46 The passage Hélinand has in mind is probably Philippians 3:8: "Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ". But hypocritical faith is always a prime subject for Paul; *cf.* e.g., Galatians 2:13.

47 Indeed, as Macaulay has remarked, "one of the characteristic features of the *Mirour* is the immense number of quotations" (*Gower. The French Works*, ed. Macaulay, p. lvi).

True direct discourse can be found in the *Vers de la Mort* nonetheless. Morz himself speaks in his own right once (and only once) in the poem, in stanza XXX: "Morz dit a totes aises 'tprot'." As brief as this is (and it could hardly be briefer!), this near-inarticulate, monosyllabic utterance is illuminating in its directness in what it reveals about Hélinand's approach to discourse. Clearly, his use of it is both highly conscious, and entirely rhetorical. Essentially, it is *ethopoeia*, but reserved exclusively for sinners as yet unaware of, and consequently resistant to, their need for repentence. There are two examples:

> Morz, qui est a veüe escrite
> En la vieille face despite,
> Se repont bien es jovenciaus,
> Et plus entor çaus se delite
> Qui par fierté li dient: "Fui te!" (XXIV)

> Mais li fol dient: "Nos que chaille
> De quel eure morz nos assaille?
> Prendons or le bien qui nos vient!
> Aprés, que puet valor si vaille:
> Morz est la fins de la bataille
> Et ame et cors noient devient." (XXXIV)

It has been posited that Hélinand wrote the *Vers de la Mort* for oral presentation[48]. If so, it could be accomplished in a relatively brief period – drastically unlike Gower's *MO*, which quite obviously he did not intend for reading aloud.

What, then, ought we conclude about John Gower's many-faceted involvement with the *strophe d'Hélinand*? We can say with near-certainty that he knew the *Vers de la Mort* in full, not in excerpt, and that he probably came across it while reading preparatory to beginning his long French poem, perhaps in a manuscript yet to be identified, of Cistercian manufacture. Moreover, as Gower absorbed the difficult twelve-line stanza from Hélinand, he learned as well its viability, its flexibility, for capturing and conveying the moral urgency of repentance and redirection

48 F. McCulloch, "The Art of Persuasion in Hélinant's *Vers de la Mort*", *Studies in Philology*, 69, 1972, p. 38-54, argues for an underlying strophic arrangement designed to facilitate such reading aloud. In partial support, she cites Vincent of Beauvais, *Speculum historiale*, l. 30, cap. 108: "*His temporibus in territorio Beluacensi fuit Helinandus monachus Frigidimontis vir religiousus, et facundia disertus, qui et illos versus de morte in vulgari nostro, qui publice leguntur, tam eleganter et utiliter, ut luce clarius patet, composuit*."

of living with which, even in England in the late fourteenth century, the *Vers de la Mort* had retained synonymity. In consequence, while Gower's much larger, and later, poem draws on many sources other than Hélinand for its final form, the *MO* at its most basic is inconceivable without his close reading of, and dependence on, the *Vers de la Mort*. In that sense, truly, the legacy of Hélinand's powerful strophe has made its mark on one of the major poems of late Anglo-Norman England.

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