JOHN GOWER'S IBERIAN FOOTPRINT: THE MANUSCRIPTS

Abstract

The English poet John Gower (d. 1408), unlike his close friend Geoffrey Chaucer, seems never to have visited Spain. Yet it is Gower's great poem *Confessio Amantis*, and no work of Chaucer's (or of any other English writer for two centuries more) that was translated into not one, but two, Iberian languages—and very likely during the poet's lifetime. The evidence for Gower's "footprint" is the presence of two fifteenth-century manuscripts, one Portuguese and one Castilian, now in the collections of, respectively, the libraries of the royal palace in Madrid, and El Escorial. Somewhat surprisingly, these manuscripts have been little discussed by either Spanish- or English-speaking scholars. Even from among those who know of their existence—a relatively small number, compared to the many who read and teach Gower's work—one would be hard put to name more than a half-dozen who have even viewed them, let alone studied them with any systematic care.

The paper has two parts: first, a brief physical description of each manuscript; second, some conclusions that the physical elements of the manuscripts, and their idiosyncratic content, suggest about the probable identities of the Castilian and Portuguese patrons of the translations, and their likely motivations for having the translations made.

Keywords: John Gower, *Confessio Amantis*, *Cinkante Balades*, Escorial MS g.II.19, *Confisyión del Amante*, Juan de Cuenca, Huete, MS Real Biblioteca II-3088, *Livro do amante*, João Barroso, Ceuta, John of Gaunt, Philippa of Lancaster and Portugal, Katherine of Lancaster and (Catalina) of Castile, João I, Henry (Enrique) III of Castile, Roberto Paym (Robert Payne), Dom Duarte I, *Leal Conselheiro*, Christine de Pizan, Henry IV of England, Henry V of England, *L'Avision de Christine*.

Resumen

Parece que, al contrario que su buen amigo Geoffrey Chaucer, el poeta inglés John Gower (†1408) nunca visitó España. Sin embargo fue el *Confessio Amantis*, el gran poema de Gower, y no una obra de Chaucer (ni de ningún otro autor inglés durante los siguientes dos siglos) el que fue traducido no en una sino en dos lenguas ibéricas—y muy posiblemente en vida del autor. La prueba de la huella de Gower es la presencia de dos MSS del siglo XV, uno portugués y otro castellano, que hoy están respectivamente en la biblioteca del Palacio Real de Madrid y en El Escorial. De manera algo sorprendente, estos manuscritos han sido poco estudiados por investigadores hispano- o angloparlantes. Incluso entre los que conocen de su existencia—un número relativamente pequeño, comparado con los muchos que leen y enseñan la obra de Gower—sería difícil nombrar a más de media docena que los hayan visto, y mucho menos que los hayan estudiado con alguna atención.

Este artículo tiene dos partes: primero una breve descripción física de cada manuscrito; y segundo, algunas conclusiones que los elementos físicos de los MSS y su idiosincrático contenido sugieren acerca de las identidades probables de los patronos castellano y portugués de las traducciones, y sus motivaciones para ordernar que se hicieran.

Palabras clave: John Gower, *Confessio Amantis*, *Cinkante Balades*, Escorial MS g.II.19, *Confisyión del Amante*, Juan de Cuenca, Huete, MS Real Biblioteca II-3088, *Livro do amante*, João Barroso, Ceuta, Juan de Gante, Philippa de Lancaster y Portugal, Catalina de Lancaster y de Castilla, João I, Enrique

III de Castilla, Roberto Paym (Robert Payne), Dom Duarte I, *Leal Conselheiro*, Christine de Pizan, Enrique IV de Inglaterra, Enrique V de Inglaterra, *L'Avision de Christine*.

Unlike his friend and fellow-poet Geoffrey Chaucer, the English poet John Gower, who died in 1408, seems never to have visited Iberia. Chaucer apparently was dispatched by Edward III into Castile via Navarre in 1366, ostensibly as the king's emissary to Pedro I of Castile just prior to the latter's overthrow by Enrique Trastámara.[1] Gower, on the other hand, has left us no indication that he ever traveled farther from London than Kent during his seventy or so years of life—and scant evidence even of that. Yet despite Chaucer's documented trip, it is not his literary "footprint"—but Gower's—that we find in late medieval Portugal and Castile. Indeed, for several more centuries Gower remains the sole English writer with a textual presence on the peninsula, the result of his great Middle English poem *Confessio Amantis* being translated into not one, but two, Iberian languages. Very likely, this translating, at least in its initial stages, took place while Gower was still alive.

That it should have been Gower who thus became familiar to readers in the courts of Portugal and Castile has, over the years, stood out as something of an oddity—even a significant surprise—to those few English-speaking medievalists and early modernists who knew about it. For it was only in 1909 that Escorial MS g.II.19, with a title *Confisyión del Amante*, was revealed to be a translation of Gower's poem into Castilian prose.[2] Subsequently this Castilian version was shown to have been rendered, not from Gower's Middle English, but from an intermediary Portuguese translation which apparently seemed lost. For decades the discovery has attracted little interest, save for occasional speculation about who the self-announced translator, one Juan de Cuenca, "vesino de la ciodad de Huete" ("householder in the city of Huete"), might have been (Russell 1961). The manuscript was not fully edited until 1990, by the

[1] Chaucer and three companions were granted permission to travel through Navarre in 1366; for the document, now in the archives of Navarre, see Crow & Olson (1966: 64 and facing plate). For a full discussion, see Yeager (2007).

[2] An edition, with a modern Spanish glossary, was published by Adolf Birch-Hirschfeld (1909).

team of Elena and Manuel Alvar (Alvar & Alvar 1990), but it has largely been overlooked, both by Spanish and English-speaking scholars.[3]

For many reasons, this neglect is unfortunate, to say the least. Escorial MS g.II.19 is shrouded in mystery, traceable ultimately to the originary narratives of both Spain and Portugal, and it—along with a second manuscript housed in Spain, Madrid MS Real Biblioteca II-3088—underscores their linkage as nation-states (and even as nascent world powers) in several important ways. Rebound in modern times under the title *Livro do amante* and mistakenly catalogued as the work of João Barroso, who seems to have been its copyist, MS Real Biblioteca II-3088 was properly identified in 1995 (Santano 1991) as a long-sought-after translation of Gower's *Confessio* into Portuguese prose (Cortijo Ocaña 1997a: 1–9, 1997b). That a Portuguese prose version of the *Confessio* once existed was inferred from linguistic evidence: the Castilian of the Escorial MS g.II.19 contains remnants of what could only have been a Portuguese, not an English, exemplar. Thus apparently Gower's *Confessio* was first translated into Portuguese, and thence into Castilian, for a Spanish audience.[4]

The existence of both Portuguese and Castilian translations, and their sequence, suggests part of the story of how Gower's poem came to Iberia. In 1386 John of Gaunt led an invasion force of several thousand troops into Spain to press his claim to the crown of Castile and León through that of his second wife Constanza, daughter to Pedro I ("The Cruel" or "El Justiciero"), deposed and killed by Enrique II Trastámara, en route to the latter's seizure of the throne in 1369. Ultimately Gaunt's quest failed, in that he was unable to gain control of Castile by force. He and Constanza eventually relinquished her right to rule in 1387, in exchange for a large sum of money and a contract of marriage in 1388 between their daughter Katherine (Catalina) and prince Henry (Enrique) III, then the nine-year-old son and heir of Juan I of Castile. Since Gaunt's elder daughter Philippa had married king João I of Portugal in 1387, the duke—while not himself

[3] See also the study of Bernardo Santano Moreno (1990).

[4] The Portuguese basis for the Castilian translation was established by Karl Pietsch in two important articles, (Pietsch 1923, 1926).

a monarch—became father-in-law and progenitor to the two foremost Iberian royal lines (Russell 1955).

Although other possibilities exist, it can be reasonably assumed that Gaunt's invasion, and the subsequent marriages of his daughters, brought Gower's *Confessio Amantis* into Portugal and Spain (Yeager 2005). Gaunt had styled himself king of Castile and León since gaining Edward III's permission to incorporate the royal arms into his in 1372, and he traveled across the Channel fully intending to establish and maintain permanent residence. He thus came accompanied not only by his wife and daughters, but with a full court and complement—even staff and wherewithal to mint coins bearing his and Constanza's images for use in their new realm. Apparently part of the baggage was books. Philippa especially was a great reader, with documented tastes that we know included romances (Coleman 2007). Catalina, whose more conservative, less intellectually curious bent inclined toward religion, nonetheless was as well-educated as her elder sister. Like Philippa, she must have read (or been read to) as a way of passing the long hours and days while their father's army, slowed by its more numerous noncombatants and a mountain of baggage, crawled forward, or sat for weeks while negotiations dragged on.

That the *Confessio Amantis* was one of the books the sisters brought along to read is very likely. Although generally Gower is said to have completed the *Confessio* ca. 1390–1393, hard evidence for these or any other dates is non-existent and there is no reason to rule out a date three or four years earlier. Gower's own connections to the house of Lancaster are well known, and substantial. The near-lifesized effigy on his tomb in Southwark Cathedral displays a version of an "SS" collar, originally of silver, with a pendant swan, he received from Henry IV, Gaunt's son and younger brother of Philippa and Catalina (Hines, Cohen & Roffey 2004), and Gower probably composed his French sequence the *Cinkante Balades* with then-duke Henry in mind (Yeager 2005b). Indeed, Gower's Lancastrian affinity may extend backward to Henry of Grosmont, first Duke of Lancaster and father-in-law to John of Gaunt (Yeager 2006). A significant likelihood exists that Gower knew Philippa, Catalina and Henry, at the very least in passing, as children in London. And we know the *Confessio* was a popular poem among the extended Lancastrians: the so-called Stafford manuscript (San Marino, [California], Huntington

Library, MS EL 26.A.17) has a frontispiece replete with Lancastrian arms that could identify its original owner as John of Gaunt, his brother Thomas of Woodstock, duke of Gloucester, or Henry IV himself, while still earl of Derby. Most importantly, perhaps, the mixture of varietous narratives long and short, bumbling Confessor (and even more bumbling lover Amans), lightly pointed humor and thoughtful, instructive moral framework that Gower managed in the *Confessio* seems precisely suited to what—as far as we know—Philippa and Catalina liked to read.

And thence, presumably, the *Confessio* spread from the English queens to their Portuguese and Castilian husbands,—but definitely to their courts. In Portugal the case is easier to make. Philippa and João I apparently shared a love of literature, and it seems inarguable that Gower's *Confessio* was turned into Portuguese for him, Robert Payne the acknowledged translator having served in Philippa's retinue since her arrival with her father's army (Russell 1961: 26–32).[5] The literary itch—and knowledge of the *Confessio Amantis*—was passed on to their son Dom Duarte I, who succeeded his father as king of Portugal in 1433. Duarte became an author himself, of the *Leal Conselhiero*, an essayistic examination, structured around the seven sins, of moral and spiritual necessities for living—and governing—well. In his prologue, Dom Duarte promises to name his sources, as did John Gower in the *Confessio Amantis*, a copy of which is, presumably, the book *O Amante* mentioned in a list Dom Duarte had made of Portuguese royal holdings (Alves 1982).

How the Castilian translation came to be made is a bit more obscure. Although its translator, Juan de Cuenca, identifies himself as a resident of Huete in a headnote to his translation, and notes that he works from the Portuguese rendering of "Roberto Paym, a canon in the city of Lisbon," nothing more has been discovered about him (Alvar 1990: 141). Obviously we should like to know what—or who—prompted Juan de Cuenca's labor. We can only surmise that by the first third of the fifteenth century, judging from the hand, Gower's poem had developed a following in Castile as well as Portugal, and that a readership for the *Confessio* extended outside of immediate royal circles. For this assumption Escorial MS g.II.19 is our best physical evidence. Whoever was Juan de Cuenca's intended reader, it seems unlikely to have been a royal personage. The manuscript is a plain

[5] On Payne, see also Yeager (2005a: 507–08).

book of average size, 292 × 205 mm (roughly 11 ½ × 8 inches), containing 411 numbered leaves, of which 410 and the numerals are in the same early fifteenth-century hand. There are a few sketchily ornamented capitals, in red ink only—but spaces were left for capitals which were never added by the scribe. It is the sort of object, in short, that might have been bespoke by a courtier, but hardly a presentation copy for a queen.

Precisely such a courtier's book is Real Biblioteca MS II-3088. Although its rather careless modern rebinding makes it impossible to judge its original covers, at 260 × 195 mm (10 ½ × 7 ½ inches, trimmed), with 251 paper folios of translation and variously filled and unfilled capitals, the Portuguese manuscript resembles Escorial MS g.II.19 in nearly every way. In a colophon the copyist identifies himself as João Barroso, noting that "this book I have written at the command of Dom Fernando de Castro the Younger in the city of Ceuta in forty days in the year 1430."[6] Dom Fernando "o moço" was the son of the governor of Ceuta, a city taken from the Moors in 1415 as the first step in Portugal's imperialist expansion into North Africa. For Barroso to have made a copy of the Portuguese translation of Gower's poem (he could hardly have actually translated it from English in just forty days) in Ceuta, then, means that he was provided in Africa with a Portuguese exemplar. One assumes the exemplar's provider was the younger Dom Fernando de Castro, and that—reasonably—he acquired it at the court in Lisbon. Certainly Dom Duarte's reference, noted earlier, to "Joan Goer" in his *Leal Conselheiro*—a book written apparently during 1436 and 1437—is supportive of the conclusion that the *Confessio* was preferred reading in the Lisbon court in the 1430's. Corroborative as well—not to say intriguing, in its link to Gower and Barroso's colophon—is the belief of many scholars that Dom Duarte wrote the *Leal Conselhiero* in part to stiffen support for an impending attack on Tangier, by way of heading off a consolidated Moorish effort to re-capture Ceuta.[7]

[6] "Liber est scriptus./ Laudatur senper xpistus./ Este lyuro por graca do muy alto S.or./ deus screueo por mandado de dom fern-/ ando de castro o moco na cidade de/ cepta em xxxx. ta dias no ano de 1430 Joham barroso." Text printed by Cortijo Ocaña (1997b: 3). English translation is my own.

[7] On the *Leal Conselhiero* as conquest propaganda, see Blackmore (2009: 9–10).

Real Biblioteca MS II-3088, then, would seem a text an aspiring young Portuguese nobleman, especially Dom Fernando de Castro with familial ties to Ceuta, would go to some pains to own and read himself, even to the extent of having a copy sent to Africa for reproduction. Gower's English poem, which entered Iberia as property of two English-born queens, thus passed into the tongues of their Portuguese and Castilian husbands, in translations made (presumably) first for them and their children (e.g., Dom Duarte), and then later by and for courtiers with an eye out for what the powerful were reading. Unfortunately, until these royal copies turn up—and the 1995 discovery of Dom Fernando's copy, mis-identified for years in the Real Biblioteca as a tract original to Barroso, holds out hope that someday they might—their existence can only be inferred. Should Philippa's copy, or Catalina's, surface, it would of course be wonderful. But in one extremely important way, the workaday versions we have may be of greater scholarly value. Precisely because they are not royal presentation manuscripts, Escorial MS g.II.19 and Real Biblioteca MS II-3088 provide tangible evidence that the *Confessio Amantis* was known, was read, and was in demand outside of the royal families, beyond Castile and Lisbon even to Africa, by lower-ranking Iberian readers in some numbers. In terms of determining Gower's peninsular "footprint," this recognition indicated by these manuscripts is very significant indeed.

One exercise such a recognition invites (along with a full, scholarly edition of the Portuguese to match the Alvar's of the Castilian translation) is, quite obviously, seeking out connections between the *Confessio Amantis* and late medieval and early modern Iberian literary production (Cortijo Ocaña 2000).[8] To date very little real work has been devoted to this question, although one or two scholars have proffered unsubstantiated speculation. Antonio Cortijo Ocaña, who is currently editing Real Biblioteca MS II-3088, has for example variously detected Gower's potential influence on Juan Rodríguez del Padrón's *Siervo libre de amor*, the Portuguese *Sátira de infelice y felice vida*, the Archpriest of Talavera's *Corbacho*, as well as the *Libro de buen amor*. Beyond certain broad structural similarities—they all have to do with love, and include elements of confession—Cortijo offers

[8] Partial editions of Real Biblioteca MS II-3088 have been completed, jointly by Antonio Cortijo Ocaña and Maria do Carmo Correia de Oliviera (Cortijo Ocaña-Correia de Oliveira 2007) and by Manuela Faccon, as part of her doctoral dissertation (Faccon 2007).

little by way of evidence, pending a more detailed exploration (Cortijo Ocaña 2000). Yet his suggestions are interesting, and could prove worthy of pursuit by—one hopes—Cortijo himself.

Another interesting and potentially fruitful direction has been posed by Joyce Coleman of the University of Oklahoma, in a 2007 essay asserting the centrality of Philippa of Lancaster to the Portuguese translation. Coleman portrays Philippa as actively promoting the Anglicization of Portugal via the importation of "English liturgy, exempla, alabasters, architecture, and purses;" but the greater strength of her argument derives from its lightly-veiled feminist agenda. Because of her sex, Coleman asserts, Philippa has been afforded short shrift by modern, predominantly male, scholars. It is a group into which, I should point out in the spirit of transparency, she has included me alongside others—not, perhaps, without some justification. Yet I think her points are all of them entirely well taken and telling, especially in a later context—i.e., following Philippa's death, during the first thirty or so years of the fifteenth century, when Escorial MS g.II.19 and Real Biblioteca MS II-3088 are most likely to have been produced. Accurate dating is always a challenge, but based on what evidence we have it would seem these decades form a moment when the widest proliferation of *Confessio Amantis* translation took place. What interests me about those years is the work, not only of Gower, or of Iberian writers *per se*, but of the French poet Christine de Pizan as well. Her name and perhaps some of her early compositions I feel confident Gower knew, and Christine probably was aware of Gower's sequence the *Cinkante Balades*, dedicated in the single extant manuscript to Philippa's and Catalina's brother Henry IV. It was of course this same Henry who, Christine tells us in her autobiographical *L'Avision de Christine*, immediately following his coronation attempted unsuccessfully to coerce Christine into becoming poet-in-residence in London (Reno & Dulac 2001: 112–13). Christine's later work in prose and verse provides a nexus for an emergent recognition and exploration of feminine power and autonomy among late medieval aristocratic women. It has deservedly received significant recent discussion in France, and is increasingly foregrounded in recent English and American scholarship too. Hence I find suggestive that, at the court at Lisbon during the 1430's, not only the *Confessio Amantis* but also Christine's *Le Livre de trois virtues* was translated into Portuguese as the *Espelho de Cristina*. A presentation

of the virtues of empowered women, it is a book Philippa (I think) would have appreciated, along with her royal Portuguese descendants who commissioned it and Castilian relations (La Católica comes to mind), and like Gower's *Confessio* (and the *Leal Conselhiero*) it has as its center the notion of the speculum, and the anatomy of virtues. Speculum literature has, it seems to me, a greater likelihood of being the underlying cause of the fifteenth-century interest specifically in Gower—more than a fascination with the confession form as pattern for longer poetry fostered by the presence of the *Confessio Amantis* in Portuguese and Castilian. While it is true that a proliferation of longer works built upon confession format occurs in both Portugal and Castile at roughly this same time, and some have attributed this to familiarity with the *Confessio Amantis*, it would be difficult, given the universal familiarity with confession form, to tie such work exclusively to Gower.

Nonetheless, such speculation is valuable. It draws attention to how little we know, or have carefully considered, the possible centrality of the translations of Gower's work contained in Escorial MS g.II.19 and Real Biblioteca II-3088 to a broad range of late medieval Iberian literature. Indeed, these two manuscripts themselves, having received scant study, undoubtedly have much to tell us about their production, their owners, their history as objects that brought them into these two libraries' protection. Such fields of interest open our eyes to an expanse of possibility for research into the multi-leveled interconnections of England and Iberian in the late middle Ages—and should serve as a challenge to Spanish, Portuguese and Anglo-American scholars of the period to do the research that has waited so long to be broached.

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