A Devil of a Coincidence?
Study on Milton and Gower

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John Milton's *Paradise Lost* and John Gower's *Mirour de l'Omme* share two very strikingly similar personifications of Sin and Death. Surely it can be no coincidence that two authors, writing three hundred years apart, were able to craft such nearly identical portrayals. Either Milton must have read Gower or both Milton and Gower must have used similar sources for inspiration. Yet most scholars disregard any possibility that Milton had read the *Mirour* because a) it was written in a language Milton may not have known and b) the manuscript was thought to be lost until 1899, well after Milton's death. However, no connection source has yet been found to explain the large similarities between Milton and Gower's works. Therefore is the goal of this project to determine how *Paradise Lost* and *Mirour de l'Omme* are connected.
Acknowledgements

This project began almost entirely by accident. I was assigned to lead class discussions on a little known work by John Gower entitled the *Mirour de l'Omme*. Gower's rich language and imagery immediately drew my interest. I was particularly intrigued by the violent, gory sections where Sin and Death were personified. But I realized I had heard such personifications somewhere before. It took some time to finally make the obvious connection back to John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, but when I compared the two side-by-side the similarities were too hard to ignore.

So I begin by thanking my thesis director, Dr. Charlene Eska, for giving me the spark to begin this project and for keeping me constantly motivated, even when I ran into constant dead ends. Her tireless efforts and abundant patience have proved invaluable to my growth as a student and scholar.

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I consider myself fortunate to have assembled such a diverse and brilliant thesis committee. They each contributed different areas to the final product and I will never be able to thank them enough.

I also want to thank Jessica Cheek. Without her well-timed interest in *Paradise Lost*, this project would have never began. Lastly, to my parents and family for their constant love and support through the process. Gower wrote that "It hath and schal ben everemor / That love is maister wher he wile" (*Confessio Amantis*). Indeed, love shall endure forevermore.
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Study on Milton and Gower

The seventeenth-century epic poem *Paradise Lost* is one of the most widely studied texts in all of literary history. The work, written by John Milton, depicts Satan's fall from Heaven and subsequent deeds on Earth and in Hell. One of the more remarkable and, often, most overlooked scenes in the story involves the distinctive personification of Sin and Death. Milton depicts Sin as the daughter of Satan, with no mention of a mother, born through a process of spontaneous generation. Satan then becomes so captivated by his daughter's wickedness that he forces himself upon her, causing Sin to bear a son, Death. This illustration is striking, especially given that it also appears in the opening pages of the fourteenth-century *Mirour de l'Omme* (c. 1376) by John Gower. In both Milton and Gower's poems, Satan, Sin, and Death are personified as having this familial, incestuous relationship which ultimately creates the world's evils. Their depictions are not merely reminiscent of one another, but rather, often match up in nearly identical fashions. John S. P. Tatlock was the among the first to notice these similarities, but was also quick to express his hesitation to say with any sort of assurance that Milton had read Gower: "Since only one manuscript of the *Mirour* is known, and that was never published until seven years ago [1899], the chance is infinitesimal that Milton ever heard of the poem. But that his and Gower's sources are ultimately the same seems to me highly probable."¹ Yet to date, no studies have been conducted to determine which shared sources could possibly lead Milton and Gower to construct such similar personifications of Sin and Death. Indeed, John Fisher notes that

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currently "the influence of the *Mirour* upon *Paradise Lost* remains an open question." It is upon this open question that I now attempt to help fill this century-old void in literary research.

(I) THE AUTHORS

The issue here centers on how two English authors, living three hundred years apart, drafted two very similar depictions of Sin and Death in each of their poems. If Milton truly never came into contact with the *Mirour*, it stands to reason that both authors were influenced by similar sources. To that end, it is important to understand the time period in which each lived and wrote, studying the political and literary climates for clues to connections between the two poems and their personifications of Sin and Death.

(a) John Gower (c. 1330-1408)

Much of what could be known about John Gower has been lost to time and circumstance. His life must be assembled like a puzzle with the knowledge and acceptance that several pieces may never be found. Gower's biography has therefore been constructed based loosely on inferences made from personal and public records. Until recently, little, if anything, was known about Gower's background prior to the beginning of his writing career. Then, in his 1964 study of Gower, John Fisher urged literary scholars to bring Gower back to life, writing that "no English poet is more badly in need of such resuscitation than John Gower." Fisher added to the work of G.C. Macaulay to produce perhaps the first full-length attempt at composing Gower's biography. According to Fisher, from what may be inferred from legal and landownership papers, Gower was most likely born into a wealthy family sometime around 1330. There are

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3 Ibid, 1.
records of a John Gower purchasing property in Kent and in London, which may be assumed to be the poet. Gower surely had an early career in the legal profession; his writing career did not truly begin until the mid-1370s when the poet would have been in his forties. Gower completed *Mirour de l'Oemme*, his first major work, sometime around 1376, although as we shall see, it would have little impact upon literary history until several centuries later.

Gower continued to write long after the *Mirour de l'Oemme* had been completed. Perhaps his most successful work, *Confessio Amantis*, was completed in 1390 and dedicated to Richard II. In *Confessio*, Gower even excuses Richard's mistakes, claiming the King had fallen victim to poor counsel. At the heart of nearly all his great works, John Gower demonstrates such political awareness, dealing often with sensitive issues between the classes in society. The poet's constant support of whichever King was in power, prompted Fisher to wonder: "How is Gower's changing political allegiance to be understood, and what relation does his political involvement bear to his writing?" Fisher would try to come to an answer to his own question throughout his work, but perhaps the solution is a simplistic one: Gower knew that the support of the English crown could lead to commissions and writing success. Beyond that, the reasons behind his motives remain his own. As Sian Echard notes: "Gower's poetics and his politics are intimately linked. He engaged in a life-long search for the place from which, and the voice in which, to speak. That search involved different languages and different genres, and involved Gower in choices which later were not always well understood." Therefore it would be fair to see that Gower's writings changed not merely because the crown changed hands but, rather, because he was searching for a voice that fit into the new political climate.

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In his day, Gower was as well known as any of his contemporaries, including his good friend Geoffrey Chaucer. Thomas Warton wrote in 1774 that "if Chaucer had not existed, the compositions of John Gower, the next poet in succession, would alone have been sufficient to rescue the reigns of Edward III and Richard II from the imputation of barbarism." Yet it is curious to discover that while Chaucer found a lasting place among those with literary fame, his equal in Gower, today, is virtually unknown. John Fisher notes that this is most likely due to the "low estimate in which Gower's writings have fallen" through each passing generation, while Chaucer's writings have only become more popular. It is, however, interesting to note that many depictions in the works of Chaucer and Gower correspond directly with one another. Both Chaucer and Gower deal with themes of love, politics, and deliver strikingly similar estate satires throughout their writings and often they appear to borrow entire scenes from one another. This can readily be explained by the close personal connection between the two authors. So close was their relationship at one point that Chaucer entrusted to Gower his power of attorney and dedicated his *Troilus and Criseyde* to "O moral Gower." Gower, too, returned the favor in an early version of *Confessio Amantis* in which Venus addresses Chaucer with high praise. Although Gower later removed the text, the *Dictionary of National Biography*, published in 1890, summarizes the account: "Venus calls Chaucer her disciple and poet, who filled the land in his youth with ditties and glad songs, and bids him in his old age write a "Testament of Love." When they were not praising one another in writing, the two authors were borrowing ideas from each other. In *The Development and Chronology of Chaucer's Works*, John Tatlock

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8 Echard, *Companion to Gower*, p. 3
highlights one specific example of how Chaucer's familiarity with foreign sources may have influenced Gower's writings. In lines 3831-3834 of *Mirour de l'Omm*, Gower writes:

Sicomme ly sages la repute,
Envie est celle peccatrice
Qes nobles courtz de son office
Demoert et est commune pute.

This, as Tatlock notes, bares a striking resemblance to book XIII of Dante's *Inferno*:

La meretrice, che mai dall' ospizio Di
Cesare non torse gli occhi putti, Morte
commune, e delle corti vizio”

Given the fact that Gower could not read Italian, Tatlock concludes that "we can hardly avoid believing that Chaucer read or repeated the passage to Gower." Such a possibility greatly increases the possible sources Gower utilized in his writings. If we expand Gower's library to include works known to Chaucer, essentially anything available during the fourteenth century, in nearly any language, would have been accessible to Gower.

In 1398, Gower married Agnes Groundolf, presumably to care for the aging poet in his final years. Two years later, after finalizing his last great work, *Vox Clamantis*, Gower wrote of himself as "old and blind, infirm of body, decrepit and totally miserable." He would be dead by 1408. His body was laid to rest at the St. Mary's Overie, now Southwark Cathedral, where his tomb still stands today.

(b) John Milton (1608-1674)

The life of the second author in this study allows for considerably greater insight. This is as much a reflection of Milton's perceived greater importance as it is of the substantial advances in written record keeping from one century to the next. Stephen Dobranski points out that eight

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biographies were written on Milton's life within sixty years of his death. Today, there are hundreds paying homage to Milton's life and works, highlighting even the smallest of details in Milton's life. Indeed while the exact year of Gower's birth is difficult to determine, the exact minute of John Milton's entry into the world has been scrupulously recorded. Milton was born in Cheapside, London on December 9, 1608 at 6:30 in the morning. By all accounts, the future poet's official name should be John Milton, Jr., as he was given his father's name at birth. The elder John Milton was a scrivener and fairly successful musical composer who instilled in his son a love for writing and composition, not only in English but several other languages as well. By the time he entered St. Paul's School at the age of twelve, the younger John already held a high level of competency in Latin, Greek, Hebrew, and French. John excelled during his adolescence at St. Paul's, continuing to read and study from a wide variety of sources. His schoolmasters taught from the perspective of St. Augustine, that "if one has a keen and fervid talent he will more easily acquire eloquence by reading and hearing the eloquent than by following the precepts of eloquence." Imitation of the greats, therefore, was a cornerstone of Milton's education. In his Preface to Logic, Milton writes in verse:

Experience by varied practice has wrong art,  
The example pointing the way.  

While following the examples of his predecessors, Milton began to compose from an early age. He is said to have written poems from the age of ten, though few of these early works still exist today. At age fifteen, he translated several verses of the Bible from Latin into English, demonstrating his early fascination with theology. Milton enrolled at Christ's College at Cambridge in 1625 where he would obtain both a Baccalaureate and a Masters of Arts degree. It

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15 Ibid, p.158. Milton was quoting from Manilius.
was at Christ's College where Milton became highly invested in the works of Ovid, Virgil, and Horace. Through imitation of their verse and meter, Milton composed a series of letters and verses which became known as the *Elegies* (*I-VII*). His thirst for knowledge pushed the young poet to develop a wide array of writing styles, in several different languages. Biographer Barbara Lewalski points out: "His graduate years saw a decisive turn to the vernacular: Petrachan sonnets in Italian, and in English some epitaphs and lovely lyrics as well as three English masterpieces: the hymn *On the Morning of Christ's Nativity*, and the companion poems *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*."\(^\text{16}\)

Milton married soon after the completion of his education and eventually had four children, one of whom died before the age of two. Like Gower in his final years, Milton, too, was stricken blind, but continued to compose through the means of dictation. By 1667 when he completed his epic poem *Paradise Lost*, Milton was known for his religious writings which had sparked much controversy in England. So much so, in fact, that the English government had twice called for the suppression of his works and on more than one occasion had even demanded that he be hanged.\(^\text{17}\) Milton's writings had voiced condemnation for Charles I and support for Oliver Cromwell and the Reformation. When Charles II restored the monarchy in England, however, Milton was forced into hiding to protect his life.\(^\text{18}\) He was eventually pardoned by the crown and allowed to return freely to London. After all, as A.N. Wilson observed: "The prospect of putting Milton on trial is not one which any government would have undertaken lightly. His replies from the dock would have been terrifying; besides which, God had already punished him by striking him blind."\(^\text{19}\)


\(^{18}\) A. N. Wilson, *Life of Milton*, p. 204.
Through the years of chaos and upheaval, Milton had been named to, and removed from, a post as Latin Secretary, a sign of the rapidly changing political climate in England. Two wives had died during childbirth, and his relationship with this daughters had become strained. Milton therefore spent his final years in quiet, producing *Paradise Regained* and *Sampson Agonistes* in 1671. He died in November of 1674. Though his writings had often spurred controversy, Milton was never truly noted during his lifetime for his genius. Eventually, however, it would be impossible to deny the merit of Milton's work. In 1796, William Hayley—a writer and biographer himself so prominent he was offered the laureateship in England—wrote that "it is by the epic compositions of Milton alone that England may esteem herself as a rival to antiquity in the highest province of literature."20 Thus with the death of a poet was born a legacy that still survives today.

(II) THE WORKS

(a) Gower's *Mirour de l'Ommme* (c. 1376-1378)

In the preface to the first edition of *Confessio Amantis*, Gower claimed to be the author of three major works, all given Latin titles: *Confessio Amantis*, written in English, *Vox Clamantis*, written in Latin, and *Speculum Hominis*, written in French. The first two of these works were reproduced and distributed to some of London's most influential men during Gower's lifetime. The French work, however, appears to have become lost at some point following the poet's death. Although the reasons for the work's disappearance may never be discovered, there are some clues as to what happened. In the third edition of the *Confessio*, Gower again listed his three great works but had noticeably edited the title of his French poem to *Speculum Meditantis*.

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Macaulay posits that Gower made such a change "in order to produce similarity of termination with the titles of the other two books." Regardless, this quickly became the accepted title for the work, even becoming immortalized on Gower's tomb at the Southwark Cathedral in London. The vault features a carving of the poet resting his head upon his three major works, and the title of *Speculum Meditantis* may be found wedged between golden copies of *Confessio* and *Vox Clamantis*. For decades, scholars searched for the French poem under this name but found no traces of the work, leaving many to suspect that all known copies had been forever lost or destroyed.

In 1895, Macaulay wrote that he had been searching at Cambridge for original copies of Gower's *Confessio Amantis* when he accidently uncovered a manuscript with the French heading "Mirour de l'Ommne" but with no mention of an author. By comparing the prose, language, and style of this newly discovered manuscript to *Confessio*, Macaulay was able to determine he had discovered the lost French work. His findings were strengthened by a description by the poet himself, detailing the composition of his *Speculum Meditantis*. In the prologue to *Confessio Amantis*, Gower writes:

> Because anything should be shared with others in proportion as one receives it from God, John Gower, desirous of lightening somewhat the account for the intellectual gifts God gave to his keeping, while there is time, between work and leisure, for the knowledge of others, composed three books of instructive material as follows:

> The first book, written in French, is divided into ten parts; treating of the vices and virtues and the various classes of this world, it undertakes to teach by what right path the sinner who has transgressed ought to return to a

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recognition of his creator. The title of this book is *Speculum Hominis*.\(^3\)

With this description, penned by Gower's own hand, Macaulay found the necessary evidence to support his contention that he had uncovered Gower's lost manuscript. Macaulay wrote of his discovery: "We are told [by Gower] that the book is in French, that it is divided into ten parts, that it treats of vices and virtues, and also of the various degrees or classes of people in the world, and finally that it shows how the sinner may return to the knowledge of his Creator."\(^{24}\)

This breakthrough, which J.H. Fisher commented was one of the "most important landmarks in English medieval scholarship," gave the world their first glance at Gower's poem in roughly five hundred years.\(^{25}\) Finding the work in French instead of the Latin *Speculum Meditantis* came as a surprise to Macaulay, although admittedly one that should have been anticipated. The original Latin title of *Speculum Hominis* may be translated into the French language as *Mirour de l'Homme*.

Gower's decision to write in French rather than Latin or English has become a major source of debate over the years. Yet it most likely explains why the manuscript was never widely published. It is likely that Gower chose to write in French (or Anglo-Norman to be more precise) due to his belief that the language would best reach the largest and most important audience. At that time in history, French served as the Greek equivalent of Latin—the elitist language of the nation which all educated and well-to-do English citizens should know. It was, after all, also the language of discourse in King Edward III's court. Quite simply put: Latin had begun to fade in importance and English was the language of the common citizen, but French

\(^{23}\) This quote appears in the prologue of the first edition of John Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, originally composed in Latin verse. The translation is by John Fisher in *John Gower: Moral Philosopher*, p. 89.


\(^{25}\) Fisher, *Gower: Moral Philosopher*, p. 91. The librarian actually found the work, technically, when she purchased it for her library collection at auction. But at the time, she had no idea what it really was until she showed it to Macaulay.
was the language of the powerful in England who could afford to purchase and preserve his work. Gower may have thought these wealthy individuals would have been more likely to desire his poem if he composed it in their elitist language. Indeed, R. F. Yeager notes that at the time of Gower's composing the *Mirour* "there may not have seemed a moment more auspicious for the durability of French poetry for an English audience...Gower exchanges a certain simplistic patriotism—unquestioning support of the French war and Edward III's leadership." When cast in this light, Gower's decision to write in French seems rather astute. He likely assumed King Edward would appreciate and perhaps even commission such a work. The future likewise seemed secure as Gower was in the favor of Edward's son, the Black Prince of Wales who was next in the line for the English throne. Well known to be a fan of French poetry, the Black Prince would have likely appreciated a copy of the *Mirour de l'Omme*.

Unfortunately for Gower, however, the Black Prince died shortly before the *Mirour* had been completed. One year later, King Edward III passed away as well. This allowed the Black Prince's son, Richard II, to take the throne. Though only a minor at the time, Richard and his advisors valued their mother tongue and despised all things French. England's relationship soon became strained with France, making it unpatriotic to elevate French above English in any facet. The boy king even returned English as the official language of discourse. Essentially, as Yeager points out, "the years after 1377 left the *Mirour* linguistically without an audience, out of step politically, and poetically without a clear target. In such a climate, Gower had little reason to prepare many copies of the *Mirour de l'Omme.*" Much like Gower's window of opportunity, the *Mirour* would soon disappear.

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Today the *Mirour* exists only in fragments with several pieces lost to time and mismanagement. At least four leaves are missing from the beginning of the manuscript with even more missing from the conclusion. What remains of the work can be divided into three sections. In the first, we find Gower's personification of Sin and Death as well as an overview of the vices and virtues. The second section can be described as an estate satire in the same vein of Gower's contemporary, Chaucer, and his *Canterbury Tales*. Here, Gower even forewarns of a peasant uprising:

Mais certes c'est un grant errour
Voir l'estat seourier
El danger d'un vilein estant.
   Me semble que la litargie
Ad endormi la seignourie,
Si qu'ils de la commune gent
Ne permont garde a la folie,
Ainz souffront croistre celle urtie
Quelle est du soy trop violent.
Cil qui pourvoit le temps present Se
peut doubter procheinement,
Si dieus n'en face son aie,
Que celle urtie inpacient
Nous ponidra trop soudainement,
Avant ce q'om la justefie.
   Trois choses sont d'une covyne,
Qui sanz mercy font la ravine En
cas q'ils soient au dessus: L'un est de l'eaue la cretine,
L'autre est du flame la ravine, Et la tierce est des gens menuz
La multitude q'est commuz:
Car ja ne serront arrestuz
Par resound ne par discipline\(^{29}\)

(But certainly it is a great error to see the higher class intimidated by the peasant class. It seems to me that lethargy has so put the nobility to sleep that they do not guard against the folly of the common people, but permit that nettle to grow which is so violent in its nature. He who observes the present time may soon fear that, if God does

not give help, this impatient nettle will very suddenly sting us, before it can be brought to justice.

There are three things of such nature that they perform merciless destruction when they get the upper hand: One is flood water, another is wild fire, and the third is a mob of common people led by instigators—
For they will not be stopped by reason or discipline.)

The Peasant's Revolt would occur in England only a few short years later. This prediction not only signifies the astuteness of Gower's estate observations, but also allows scholars to track the timeframe for which he completed the work. Because the revolt occurred in 1381, the language in this section suggests Gower finished the *Mirour* at some point between 1376 and 1378. In the final section, Gower changes pace to chronicle the life of the Virgin Mary and plead with her to intercede on his behalf that he may be forgiven of his sins.

Truly, the *Mirour de l'Omme* is a work of considerable merit, leaving one to wonder what kind of impact could have been made upon literary history had it not disappeared. Before Chaucer, Gower had in his *Mirour* written of various English estates. Before Spenser and his *Faerie Queene*, Gower had given faces and deeds to the Seven Deadly Sins. Before Milton, Gower had envisioned Lucifer's fall from grace and subsequent offspring. Had history played out as Gower expected, it becomes highly probable that more copies of the *Mirour* would have been produced. Perhaps if the *Mirour* garnered the same level of publication of *Confessio Amantis*, Milton scholars would be unable to overlook his influence on the epic poem written by their chosen author.

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In stark contrast to the *Mirour's* unavailability is *Paradise Lost*, the epic poem by John Milton often called one of the greatest English works of all time. Here, Satan is portrayed as a sympathetic character, sharing almost heroic qualities, rebelling against his unjust expulsion from Heaven. There have been countless critical works written to date which have analyzed and praised *Paradise Lost*. Yet it is interesting to note that during his own lifetime, Milton received mostly controversy and criticism from his writings, enjoying only a modest level of success considering the merit of his work. Although he slowly began to gain praise, Milton still nevertheless continued to be the source of controversy even in the years following his death. In 1747, William Lauder gained notice by writing a series of articles alleging *Paradise Lost* to be nothing more than a series of large plagiarisms—stealing from the Latin works of *Adamus Exul* (1601) of Hugo Grotius and the *Poemata Sacra* (1633) of Andrew Ramsay. Lauder's argument was a matter of semantics dealing with the difference between "imitation" and "copying." For Miltonists, the careful use of imitation was part of their author's educational background; it was part of what separated him from lesser authors. His ability to borrow from classical thinkers in order to create modern works is unparalleled in his time period. But Lauder claimed that Milton covered up his sources not in an effort to imitate the Ancients but, rather, to conceal his indebtedness to the Moderns. Milton, Lauder alleged, even went so far as to copy passages from the Latin works in their entirety. Eventually, Lauder was disproven and forced to recant his allegations in a statement dictated to Samuel Johnson. A group of literary scholars found he had garbled translations, falsified sources and forged documents to add support to his claims. He

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34 Ibid.
would live in shame for the rest of his life, trying hopelessly to salvage his reputation. Yet as we will see later, Lauder might not have been entirely false in his opinion. While Milton certainly had never been a plagiarizer, the great poet certainly borrowed ideas from some of the very writers mentioned by Lauder.

Apart from the Lauder controversy, *Paradise Lost* remains one of the most widely read and admired tales in all of literature. Lewalski had such praise for the work that she elevated Milton to greater heights than even his classical sources: "His epic is in fact a more daring political gesture than we often realize, even as it is also a poem for the ages by a prophet-poet who placed himself with, or above, Homer, Virgil, Ariosto, Tasso, and the rest. It undertakes a strenuous project of educating readers in the virtues, values, and attitudes that make people worthy of liberty." Milton invested in his great work all the knowledge and experience he had obtained through his many years as a political activist and government official, as well as the years spent preparing for life as an Anglican priest. The poem is, at its heart, a tale of man's sin with hints at the coming of our ultimate retribution in Jesus Christ, a connection which it shares with John Gower and his *Mirour*.

(III) THE SIMILARITIES

In order to make the case for a connection between Milton and Gower, one must first look with some detail at the striking similarities in their works. In each, the story begins with Satan's removal from Heaven. Milton gives a voice to Satan while Gower merely summarizes the events, but the story remains essentially the same. It is Satan's excessive pride that leads to his expulsion, a mortal sin which sets in motion a tragic tale in Gower:

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36 Also called Lucifer. The name Lucifer means "light bearer" and is used typically by Christian writers during his time in Heaven. The switch to Satan, which means "adversary" in Arabic, usually denotes the time after the fall. For clarity, I will consistently refer only to Satan.
Primer quant dieus ot fait les cieux,
Des tous angers espiritieux Un
Lucifer fuist principals;
Mais du pecché q’estoit mortieux
Chaoit de les celestieux
Au nient devers les infernalx.

Cil Lucifer nounpas solein
Chait du ciel, ançois tout plein
Des autres lors furont peris Par
pecché, dont ly soverein
Leur fist chaoir, siq’ en certain
Du pecché vint ce que je dis,37
Dont l’angre furont anientiz.

(When first God made the heavens, a certain Lucifer was
principal of all the angelic spirits; but by reason of mortal
sin he fell from the heavens into the nothing towards hell.

This Lucifer did not fall alone from heaven; rather a great
many others then perished through sin by which their ruler
made them fall, so that surely from sin came what I have
said, by which the angels were brought to nothing.)

Milton, too, begins with Satan and his rebellious angels being cast from heaven into the
nothingness of hell:

Th’ infernal Serpent; he it was, whose gile
Stirred up with envy and revenge, deceived
The mother of mankind, what time his pride
Had cast him out of heav’n, with all his host
Of rebel angels, by whose aid aspiring To
set himself in glory above his peers,
He trusted to have equaled the Most High,
If he opposed; and with ambitious aim
Against the throne and monarch of God
Raised impious war in heav’n and battled proud
With vain attempt. Him the Almighty Power
Hurled headlong flaming from the’ ethereal sky
With hideous ruin and combustion down
To bottomless perdition, there to dwell

37 Macaulay, Complete Works of Gower, pp. 2-3. From lines 61-66 and 73-79. For this section, Gower's quotations will appear in two formats. The first is from Macaulay's version of the original French text. What follows will be the English translation provided by Burton Wilson.
38 B. Wilson, Gower's Mirour, p. 4.
In adamantine chains and penal fire.\textsuperscript{39}

As Satan begins to cope with his new life as an outcast, he struggles with feelings of remorse and a thirst for revenge. He targets Adam and Eve, God's perfect human creations on Earth, in a bid to destroy mankind and consequently, destroy God's hold on Earth. He tempts Eve to eat from the forbidden tree which God had warned her against. This was the "Original Sin" as man first succumbed to Satan's temptations. Adam and Eve are expelled from the Garden of Eden, much in the same fashion that Satan and his followers had been cast out of heaven. By their sin, mankind is doomed to live apart from God. Yet both works also foretell of the coming of Christ, who will redeem the sins of man. Gower writes:

\texttt{Pour ce tantost Adam fuist fait
Et Eve aucun tout nu a nue; Siq'
en après de celle issue
Que de leur corps serroit estrait,
Soit restore q'estoit perdue
Amont le ciel, a la value \textsuperscript{40}
Que Lucifer avoit sustrait.}

(He soon created Adam and Eve also, naked man and naked woman in Paradise underneath the sky: so that afterwards from the seed that would come from their bodies there might be restored what was lost above in heaven, to the value that Lucifer had taken it away.)\textsuperscript{1}

The same Biblical foreshadowing may be seen in Milton:

\texttt{Of man's first disobedience, and the fruit Of that forbidden tree, whose mortal taste Brought death into the world, and all our woe, With loss of Eden, till one greater Man\textsuperscript{42} Restore us, and regain the blissful seat.}

\textsuperscript{40} Macaulay, \textit{Complete Works of Gower}, p. 4, lines 89-96.
\textsuperscript{41} B. Wilson, \textit{Gower's Mirour de l'Omme}, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{42} Elledge, \textit{Milton's Paradise Lost}, p. 5, lines 1-5.
To this point, both Gower and Milton readers would be correct to attribute the story to the book of Genesis in the Bible or to common Christian philosophy. In fact, neither author has thus far presented anything original, save for how they chose to present such old material. But it is when Satan is away from God, away from Heaven or the Garden, that Milton and Gower begin to create something not seen in the Bible. In Book II of *Paradise Lost*, Sin springs fully grown from Satan's head the moment he plots evil against God:

In bold conspiracy against heav'n's King,  
All on a sudden miserable pain  
Surpris'd thee, dim thine eyes, and dizzie swumm In darkness, while thy head flames thick and fast  
Threw forth, till on the left side op'n'ing wide,  
Likest to thee in shape and count'nance bright,  
Then shining heav'ny fair, a Goddess arm'd Out of thy head I sprung: amazement seized  
All th' host of heav'n; back they recoiled afraid  
At first and called me Sin.43

Tatlock notes of this passage that: "One of the most grimly impressive passages in Paradise Lost is somewhat un-Miltonic in its elaborate allegory and grotesque horror."44 That is likely because the depiction is more Gowertonian in nature, as the *Mirour* too portrays the Devil as giving spontaneous birth to Sin through evil intentions:

Ly deable, qui tous mals soubtile  
Et Trestous biens hiet et revile,  
De sa malice concevoit  
Et puis enfantoit une file,  
Q'ert tresmalvoise, laide et vile, La quelle Pecché noun avoit.  
Il mesmes sa norrice estoit,  
Et la gardoit et doctrinoit  
De sa plus tricherouse guile ; Par quo quoy la file en son endroit  
Si violente devenoit,  
Que riens ne touche que n'avile.45

43 Elledge, *Milton's Paradise Lost*, p. 48, lines 751-760. Tatlock,  
44 "Milton's Sin and Death," p. 239.  
(The devil, who contrives all evils and who hates and reviles all good, in his malice conceived and gave birth to a daughter, who was very evil, ugly and vile, who had the name of Sin. He himself was her nurse, looked after her and indoctrinated her in his most treacherous guile;

Whereby the girl in turn became so fierce that she touched nothing without vilifying it.)

Here, Gower likewise depicts Sin as a product of Satan's mind; Satan being one who "contrives all evils" and whose "malice conceived" Sin. Not long after Sin is born, both poems feature the attraction of Satan to his creation. He is seduced by his daughter's dark "beauty" which in turn leads to the incestuous affair between Satan and Sin as seen first in Gower:

Tant perservoit le deble a gre
Sa jofne file en son degre
Et tant luy fist plesant desport,
Dont il fuist tant enamoure,
Que sur sa file ad engender
Un fils...⁴

(The devil was so enamored of his young daughter, who kept him in so agreeable a mood and gave him such pleasant entertainment, that he engendered upon her a son...)

Milton presents a similar image:

Thyself in me thy perfect image viewing
Becam'st enamour'd, and such joy thou took'st
With me in secret, that my womb conceiv'd
A growing burden.⁹

It is remarkable to think that two authors living in vastly different time periods could construct such a similar depiction. What is more striking is that both Gower and Milton chose to use the exact same words to describe such a hideous event, as evidenced below:

⁴⁷ 5.
⁴⁸ B. Wilson, Gower's Mirour de l'Ommne, p. 6.
⁴⁹ Elledge, Milton's Paradise Lost, p. 48, lines 764-767.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Gower's wording</th>
<th>Milton's wording</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How Satan Feels Towards Sin:</td>
<td>Enamouré</td>
<td>Enamour’d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How Sin Keeps Her Father:</td>
<td>Sa jofne file en son degré</td>
<td>Kept in such joy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satan's View of His Daughter:</td>
<td>Plesant desport</td>
<td>Perfect Image Viewing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcome:</td>
<td>Engender un fils</td>
<td>Conceiv’d a growing burden</td>
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</table>

Both Gower and Milton portray Satan as enamored with his daughter. Satan so enjoys Sin's physical appearance and the pleasant entertainment she provides that he ultimately forces himself upon her. Their incestuous affair leads to Sin becoming pregnant with a child. These are identical depictions, right down to the word choice. The sole difference in the two versions is the point of view from which they are told. Milton relates his tale from Sin's perspective while Gower has the narrator depict the gruesome act. The child created by such an encounter is named Death. As Gower portrays:

> Que Sur sa file ad engender
> Un fils, que l'en appella Mort. Lors ot le deable grant confort, Car tout quidoiit par leur enhort
> De l’ome avoir sa volenté;
> Car quant ils deux sont d’un acort,
> Tout quanque vient a leur resort Le deceble tient enherité.

> Pecché sa file et Mort son fils, Car trop luy furont resemblant;
> Et pour cela par son devis,
> Pour plus avoir de ses norris, 50
> La miere espousa son enfant…

(Satan engendered upon her a son, who was named Death. Then the devil had great comfort for by their persuasion he expected to have his will with man; For whenever both of

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them are in agreement, whatever comes in their power the devil has inherited.

Sin his daughter and Death his son were dear to their father, for they resembled him very closely; and therefore, by his plan, in order to have more offspring, the mother espoused her child...)

Milton writes a more gruesome version of a similar story:

At last this odious offspring whom thou seest
Thine own begotten, breaking violent way
Tore through my entrails, that with fear and pain
Distorted, all my nether shape thus grew
Transform'd: but he my inbred enemie
Forth issu'd, brandishing his fatal Dart
Made to destroy: I fled, and cry'd out Death;
Hell trembl'd at the hideous Name, and sigh'd
From all her Caves, and back resounded Death.
I fled, but he pursu'd (though more, it seems,
Inflam'd with lust then rage) and swifter far,
Me overtook his mother all dismaid, And
in embraces forcible and foule
Ingendring with me, of that rape begot
These yellings Monsters that with ceaseless cry
Surround me. 2

For Milton, Death's entry into this world is not of a peaceful nature as he tears and claws his way through Sin's womb. Yet Death is still the product of an affair between father and daughter; he compounds such an incestuous relationship by forcibly raping his own mother as well. Though in Gower it is Sin who seduces her son and in Milton the opposite holds true, the scene and outcomes remain largely the same. The affair between Sin and Death, in each poem, spawns some of the worlds most dangerous and deadly creatures. In Gower, their intercourse is what spawns the Seven Deadly Sins: 53

Si vont sept files engendrant, Qui
sont d'enfern enheritant

53 Yeager, *Companion to Gower*, p.140.
Et ont le mond tout entrepris;  
Come je vous serray devisant,  
Des queux noums om leur est s-momant  
Et du mestier dont sont apris.

(They engendered seven daughters, who are the heirs of hell and have complete possession of the world as I will describe to you, telling by what names people call them and of the office in which they are instructed.)

In Milton, hell hounds burst forth through Sin's womb, tearing and clawing their way into being:

Me overtook, his mother, all dismayed,  
And, in embraces forcible and foul  
Engendering with me, of that rape begot  
These yelling monsters, that with ceaseless cry  
Surround me, as thou saw'st, hourly conceived  
And hourly born, with sorrow infinite  
To me; for, when they list, into the womb  
That bred them they return, and howl, and gnaw  
My bowels, their repast; then bursting forth  
Afresh with conscious terrors vex me round,  
That rest or intermission none I find.

Milton clearly paints much more violent images, but the structure remains fluid throughout these depictions: Satan conceives of an evil, vengeful plan to strike against God. As a result of those thoughts, Sin springs fully grown into being. Satan then forces himself upon his daughter, Sin, to produce Death. In turn, Death and Sin have an incestuous affair to produce the most evil of offspring.

At this point, the two poems begin to diverge. Gower proceeds to discuss how the Seven Deadly Sins affect the world before shifting pace into a lengthy estate satire. Milton, on the other hand, continues with Satan's story. It therefore becomes important to reiterate that the works presented here are not completely similar, but rather, it is the scenes between Sin, Death and Satan that serve as the base for comparison. This kind of personification in early literary

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history, in this exact pattern and language, occurs only in the *Mirour* and in *Paradise Lost*. The similarities, it would seem, speak for themselves, and certainly to date, would be the only real "conversation" on the matter as the connections seem to continually be widely unaddressed by scholars.

(IV) THE POSSIBILITIES

There has been little real debate on the overlap of Milton and Gower's work, despite the fact that the above comparisons make it obvious that some connection must surely exist. The probability of two authors, living in very different time periods, independently constructing nearly identical personifications of Sin and Death seems remarkably low. So, then, what are the possibilities? There seem to be only two: that Milton had direct contact with Gower's work or that Milton and Gower share a string of common sources. I will deal first with the former.

(a) Direct Contact

It is the assertion of this study that Milton had read Gower's *Mirour de l'Homme*, despite the fact that such an occurrence is often regarded as highly unlikely since the *Mirour* a) had disappeared soon after Gower composed it and was only rediscovered at the end of the nineteenth century and b) was only, at the time, written in a version of French thought to be unfamiliar to Milton. When dealing with the possibility that Milton had read Gower's *Mirour*, it would be unwise to use words such as "never" or "impossible." By 1667, when *Paradise Lost* was first published, Milton was well-known, well-funded, and well-connected. There is evidence that Milton was aware of Gower and had read his work. In *An Apology Against a Pamphlet Call'd A Modest Confutation of the Animadversions upon the Remonstrant against Smectymnuus* (1642), Milton references Gower as an authoritative source:
I shall allege a reputed divine authority, as ancient as Constantine, which his love to antiquity must not except against; and to add the more weight, he shall learn it rather in the words of our old poet Gower than in mine, that he may see it is no new opinion, but a truth delivered of old by a voice from heaven, and ratified by long experience.

Milton then proceeds to quote from Gower's *Confessio Amantis* in which Gower writes:

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{This Emperour, which hele hath founde,} \\
&\text{Withinne Rome anon let founde} \\
&\text{Tuo cherches, whiche he dede make} \\
&\text{For Peter and for Poules sake, Of} \\
&\text{whom he hadde avisioun;} \\
&\text{And yaf thereto possessioun} \\
&\text{Of lordschipe and woldes good.} \\
&\text{Bot how so that his will was good} \\
&\text{Toward the Pope and his Franchise,} \\
&\text{Yit hath it proved other wise,} \\
&\text{To se the worchinge of the dede:} \\
&\text{For in Cronique this I rede;} \\
&\text{Anon as he hath made the yfte, A} \\
&\text{vois was herd on hih the lifte,} \\
&\text{Of which al Rome was adrad,} \\
&\text{And seith: "To day is venym schad} \\
&\text{In holi cherche of temporal,} \\
&\text{Which medleth with the spirial."} \\
&\text{And how it stant of that degree} \\
&\text{Yit mai a man the soothe se:} \\
&\text{God mai amende it, whan hesswile,} \\
&\text{I can ther to non other skile.}
\end{align*}
\]

We therefore know from Milton own quotations that he had read and admired Gower's *Confessio Amantis*. Moreover, because it is in the *Confessio* that Gower first claimed to have written his three great works—*Mirour de l'Omme* among them—it stands to reason that Milton certainly knew of the work's existence. For a fervent reader like Milton, who would soon embark upon writing a religious epic, Gower's "voice from Heaven" would have served as a perfect source of

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inspiration. However, Diane Watt claims that Milton may have been influenced strictly from *Confessio*. Here, she draws an interesting parallel between the relationship of Satan, Sin and Death in the *Mirour* to that of Venus, Jupiter and cupid in *Confessio*: "In portraying Venus as having sex with the child born from a union with her own brother, Jupiter, Gower also implicitly compares her to Sin in his earlier Anglo-Norman work *Mirour de l'Ommme*...in anticipation of Milton's *Paradise Lost*." The passage Watt is using in her analysis comes from Book V of the *Confessio* in which Gower writes:

```
Whan he that sche sих ther was non other,
Be Jupiter hire oghne brother
Sche lay, and he begat Cupide.
And thilke Sone upon a tyde,
Whan he was come unto a tyde,
Whan he was come unto his Age,
He hadde a wonder fair visage, And
fond his Moder amourous,
And he was also lecherous :
So whan thei weren bothe al one,
As he which yhen hadde none To
se reson, his Moder kiste;
And sche also, that nothing wiste
Bot that which unto lust belongeth, To
ben hire love him underfongeth. Thus
he was blind, and sche unwys:
Bot natheles this cause it is,

Why Cupide is the god of love,
For he his moder dörste love.
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While it may be a bit of a stretch to imagine Milton using Venus and Cupid to envision his personification of his Sin and Death, he certainly could have been intrigued enough by this portrayal to continue reading from Gower's work—perhaps enough to search for Gower's *Mirour de l'Ommme*.

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From Milton's praise of Gower, it is obvious he held a certain fondness for Gower's writings. Milton's thirst for knowledge somehow, either by his own good fortune or through the kind referral of a close colleague, could have led him to come into possession of one unknown surviving copy of the *Mirour* at that time. Certainly Gower did not compose one lone copy of his work and bury it in a crypt for three hundred years. For many centuries, copies of the *Mirour* could have easily changed hands from various private collectors, unbeknownst to the literary community. We have no way of knowing how many copies of the *Mirour* exist in the world today. Until 1899 scholars could not have known that even a single copy had survived, either.

Fisher notes that the binding around the manuscript Macaulay discovered would "seem to indicate that it lay in some manor house about 1745, perhaps near Gloucester." If this were true, it would mean that indeed some private collector had owned the manuscript, perhaps without even knowing the significance of having it in his possession. In this way, Gower's lost poem traveled around, who knows how it started its journey, from location to location until it was finally purchased at auction by the librarian of Cambridge and later discovered by Macaulay. Certainly it is not unfathomable to imagine that the manuscript had once lived in London along its travels, less than a hundred miles from Gloucester, before 1745 and could have been known to Milton in his studies. Granted, this is largely speculation and would perhaps be impossible to prove. But to disregard this possibility would be entirely unwise and it must be the first scenario dealt with in considering the similarities between Gower and Milton. In fact, in his foreword to Burton Wilson's 1992 translation of the *Mirour*, R.F. Yeager writes: "Gower's poem seems to have found, across the years, 'fit audience, though few,' numbering Spenser and Milton alongside Chaucer as its probable readers." For Yeager, a renowned Gower scholar, to

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have made such a passing claim adds credibility to the possibility of direct contact between Milton and Gower's work.

In 1914, John Livingston Lowes put forth the idea that Edmund Spenser had borrowed his procession of sins directly from Gower's *Mirour de l'Omm*. Since that time, this notion has been challenged and supported by various literary critics, and to date no satisfactory answer has given to solve this age old question. Yet following a lengthy comparison between *Faerie Queene* and *Mirour de l'Omm*, Lowes concludes the only logical explanation for such a large number of similarities between the two works is that Gower must be the source of Spenser's inspiration. He writes: "For the chances of [Spenser's] acquaintance with a work of Gower—a writer of distinction in precisely the period where his own linguistic interests chiefly lay—are overwhelming in comparison with the chances that he had and drew upon two or more separate documents of the date and character of Gower's sources." Later, Morton Bloomfield claimed that indeed "Gower's little procession is the first elaborate English version of this Continental theme and was to be surpassed in English literature only by Spenser." Although Bloomfield rejects Lowes' connection between the *Mirour* and *Faerie Queene*—mostly on the basis that other similar versions of the sins have existed between the time of Gower and Spenser—he acknowledges that Spenser may owe some form of debt to Gower's work. The question revolves around how significant is that debt. The Spenser-Gower debate is relevant, here, because it raises an entirely different question within my study. If it may be accepted by many scholars that Spenser had read Gower's *Mirour* at the time of writing his *Faerie Queene* (1598), then why could the same thing not be said of Milton a few decades later? Are we to believe copies of Gower's poem were available at the end of the sixteenth century but somehow disappeared at the

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beginning of the seventeenth? Whether Spenser had read Gower is not relevant to Milton, but the fact that such a possibility exists certainly continues to erase the doubt that the *Mirour* could have been available to Milton.

The second problem facing this scenario is the belief that Milton could not read the language in which Gower wrote, and therefore could not have drawn inspiration from the *Mirour* even had he managed to come into contact with it. But this may not be entirely true. Biographers tend to agree that Milton was a polyglot, a man with the ability to speak many different languages. John Hale, for example, claims that Milton knew ten languages, wrote in four, and translated five, among these known to include Latin, French, Italian, Dutch, English, German, Greek, Hebrew.65 Barbara Kiefer Lewalski quotes Milton, himself, who gives credit to his father for helping him learn various languages including French, Italian and Greek:

> It was at your expense, dear father, after I had got the mastery of the language of Romulus and the graces of Latin, and acquired the lofty speech of the magniloquent Greeks which is fit for the lips of Jove himself, that you persuaded me to add the flowers which France boasts and the eloquence which the modern Italian pours from his degenerate mouth--testifying by his accent to the barbarian wars--and the mysteries uttered by the Palestinian prophet. 6

Milton clearly was fluent in French; but how different Gower's Anglo-Norman was from anything Milton was likely to have studied at that point in his life remains uncertain. However, scholars like Lewalski are quick to point out that Milton may have been knowledgeable of a few languages which are less known to history, such as Aramaic and Syriac.67 It may be possible too that biographers simply lump his knowledge of Anglo-Norman into the collective "French"

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67 Ibid, p. 551. Lewalski notes that Aramaic and Syriac were languages needed, along with Hebrew, for Biblical study at the time of Milton, and most likely these were languages which he would have eagerly learned.
category. Had Gower come into contact with the *Mirour*, he certainly could have been able to translate enough to read the poem's contents. Even if Milton himself were unable to read the work, he had enough money and connections to ensure that ultimately he could understand what Gower had written. Therefore it is practical to assume that had Milton truly laid his eyes upon a forgotten manuscript of the *Mirour*, he most certainly would have read and have drawn inspiration from the work. Ultimately, this seems to be the most probable solution to explain the similarities in Milton and Gower's works. Lowes' comments in regards to Spenser apply here to Milton as well. It seems infinitely more likely that Milton had read Gower than the possibility that Gower and Milton had drawn inspiration from a collection of sources. However, for the purposes of this study, it becomes necessary to explore the potential that Milton had never come into contact with Gower's work. If that is to be the case, then there must then be a common thread—a source or series of sources that inspired both Gower and Milton and link their two works together.

(b) Similar Sources

The concepts of Satan, Sin, and Death date back countless centuries and vary widely from culture to culture. Both Gower and Milton were well-traveled men with wealth and connections, meaning they could have come into contact with any number of sources. Milton's library is easier to reconstruct thanks largely to the discovery of his *Commonplace Book* in 1874, which featured notes and observations made by Milton himself. It may very well be easier to ask what Milton did not read. If a manuscript was available in England, France, Italy or even Germany, then Milton is likely to have come across it. What Gower could have been reading during the composition of the *Mirour* remains quite a bit more uncertain. His personal possessions were scattered in his will and many of his books were sold or lost to fire or
mismanagement.\textsuperscript{68} Still, it is a necessary step to piece together possible influences upon both Gower and Milton at the time of their respective writings, searching for similar portrayals of Satan, Sin, and Death.

The Devil, or Satan, serves as the ultimate leading character in both poems, as has been the case with many works throughout history. In fact, Maximilian Rudwin makes the case that the Devil is essentially the cornerstone of all creative writing:

Lacking the Devil, there would simply be no literature. With the Devil eliminated, there would be no plot, no complication, and consequently no story. Syllogistically stated, the idea may perhaps be expressed as follows: All real stories depend upon plots; all plots depend upon the intervention of the Devil; consequently, all real stories depend upon the Devil.

While this may certainly be a true enough statement, it also represents the vast impact the concept of a dark influence (read: antagonist) has had upon literature and various cultures throughout the ages. As the work \textit{A History of the Devil} by Gerald Messadié demonstrates, the details of the Devil vary widely from place to place around the globe. For instance in the Yakut tradition of India, Satan was believed to be the evil brother of Jesus and it is their constant sibling fighting which created the Earth. Here Satan is portrayed as a being of superior intelligence and malice. He challenges God's authority and is ultimately defeated by his brother:

\textsuperscript{68} See Fisher, \textit{John Gower: Moral Philosopher} pp. 64-68. Fisher notes that he left several personal items to various churches and to his wife, Agnes. As to his library, Fisher notes only one instance of a book being bequeathed to a particular location. Gower left “a large book” to the care of the St. Mary's Ovarie, now Southwark Cathedral. Through my own contact with Southwark, they point me only to a single Latin translation from Gower's will: "...Also, I leave to the Prior and Convent, a certain large book, lately composed at my own expenses which is entitled "Martyrologium," so that I ought to have a special written memorial in it, according to their promises, for its preservation." It is possible that several other books and Gower's own papers were donated to the Priory after his death. However, various circumstances have made these contents difficult to track. St. Mary's was rebuilt on several occasions after devastating fires. In 1539, St. Mary's was surrendered to Henry VIII to repay debt and the library contents were scattered.

Satan was the older brother of Jesus, but he was bad while Jesus was good. When God wanted to create the earth, he said to Satan: "You brag that you can do everything and that you're greater than me. Well then, see if you can bring back a bit of sand from the bottom of the ocean." So Satan dived down to the bottom of the sea, but when he came back up again he noticed that the water had torn the sand out of his grasp. He dived down twice more, always in vain, and on the fourth time he transformed himself into a swallow and managed to bring up a bit of ooze in his beak. Then Jesus blessed the ooze, which became the Earth. And the Earth was beautiful and flat and smooth. But wanting to create a world of his own, Satan had kept a bit of mud hidden in his beak. Jesus saw through his trick and hit him in the neck. Then Satan spat out the mud, and when it fell it made the mountains.\textsuperscript{7}

Here in these, among the earliest known stories of Satan and Jesus in the world outside of the Bible, we find the predecessor to the Miltonic Satan. His efforts to prove himself as an equal to God and superior to Jesus leave Satan likewise demoralized and defeated.

Elsewhere in the world, many cultures recognize the existence of several evil spirits, rather than just one Devil. But in monotheistic ideologies, the concept of one supreme evil being remains fairly fluid. Satan, Lucifer, or Beelzebub, whichever name he happens to be called, failed in an attempt to take over Heaven from God. He was banished to Hell and remains there, awaiting his chance to manipulate and tempt individuals to break God's commandments.\textsuperscript{71} For Milton, the Bible is the first place most scholars reference in his portrayal of Satan. Certainly the book of Genesis played a great role in shaping and inspiring much of what is written in \textit{Paradise Lost}. But this is much less true in the case of the poem's portrayal of Sin and Death. When asked to explain this particular portion of the work, Milton scholars almost always, without hesitation, point to James 1:15 from the Bible:

\textsuperscript{71} TJ Wray and Gregory Mobley, \textit{The Birth of Satan: Tracing the Devil's Biblical Roots} (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 120.
Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.\textsuperscript{72}

While it is easy to see the basic inspiration which may have presented itself from this verse, it is more likely that scholars have attempted to fit the verse to the situation, as the Bible certainly leaves the parentage of Sin in doubt. No where does it specify that Satan is the father of Sin, nor does the passage state that Sin sprang fully grown from Satan's anatomy. Satan having an incestuous relationship with his daughter is certainly a stretch to imagine from the book of James, and absolutely no where in the Bible does it even remotely hint to the fact that Death rapes his own mother to introduce true evil into the world. Because of this, it seems highly unlikely that both Milton and Gower found enough inspiration from this simple verse to compose nearly identical pieces of allegory. While it is possible that one person may take this verse and interpret the rest of the allegory from it, the fact remains that for two individuals, three hundred years apart, to achieve such a nearly identical feat remains virtually impossible.

(i.) Classical Sources

The most fitting starting point in searching for common resources is with an examination of the Classical writers. Both Milton and Gower were learned scholars with at least some familiarity with nearly every Classical writer imaginable. I present the sources, in tabular data for easy reference, which I suspect have most influenced Milton and Gower in the writing of their epic poems:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Work</th>
<th>Gower</th>
<th>Milton</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aristotle</td>
<td>\textit{Politics}</td>
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<td>\textit{Rhetoric}</td>
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\textsuperscript{72} James 1:15, King James Bible.
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<th>Topics</th>
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<td>Cato</td>
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<td>Ovid</td>
<td>Satires</td>
<td>V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metamorphoses</td>
<td></td>
<td>V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plato</td>
<td>Heroides</td>
<td>V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apology</td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gorgias</td>
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<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laws</td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Republic</td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Theaetetus</td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virgil</td>
<td>Aeneid</td>
<td>V</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Key:**
- V = Verified Source
- * = Considered Highly Likely
- ? = Possible, but Unknown

Certainly Gower and Milton owe much to the works of Virgil. Without imitating the style and form of the latter, the former poets may not have so cleverly created their own epic structures. Gower was perhaps most influenced in his entire career by the writings of Ovid. So too did Milton and Gower study Plato through derivative sources. Wilson calls Milton a known Platonist in his development of Heaven and the angels, believing Paradise to have been heavily influenced by Plato's writings. Plato was known to have written on a wide array of topics, including Gnosticism, which could be of a particular interest to the Gower-Milton connection. In

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73 To determine Milton's sources, I have relied heavily upon Milton's Commonplace Book translated by Ruth Mohl in Volume 1 of the Complete Prose Works of John Milton, 1953. Often Milton quotes from, or makes direct reference to one of my "verified sources." For Gower, the preface to Mirour de l'Omme by G.C. Macaulay has uncovered several likely sources. Likewise the work of Fisher and Yeager have greatly added to my data. Sources deemed as possibilities are those which would have been widely available and common to each of Milton and Gower's respective time periods. Certainly there may be others not listed in my study, but these are the most relevant to my purposes.


75 Wilson A.N, Life of Milton, p. 205.
The Satanic Epic, Neil Forsyth makes the case that Milton's Satan shares a connection to the Demiurge of Gnosticism, a creator deity who traps souls in a materialistic, almost evil, world. Gnosticism had been written on and criticized by several major early Christian authors such as St. Irenaeus (c. 115-202 CE) and Epiphanius of Salamis (c. 315-403 CE), the works of which would have been easily accessible to both Gower and Milton. Forsyth writes: "The Gnostic Sophia, for example, is a kind of divine mother of all, but she manages at first to generate only a blob, like Milton's death." Forsyth's reference to Sophia is worth mentioning because like Sophia, Sin is painted by Gower and Milton as a mother-type figure (albeit a destructive one) who gives birth to the world's evils. But perhaps most astutely, Forsyth notes that the Demiurge, who again he compares to Milton's Satan, can create life to spawn from his own being, a fact of which Sophia is quite envious. He writes:

In one version of the Valentinian Gnostic myth, Sophia perceives that the father generates out of himself without consort, and is spurred by a desire to emulate him. But since such parthenogenesis is the power only of the most high, all she produces is a formless entity. He must remain frustrated and incomplete unless the father can give him new life, in the way that Milton's Satan manages to feed Deaths by finding a continuous source of nourishment for him.

Although it is quite the stretch to deem this the decisive shared source between Milton and Gower, it continues to add to the already growing number of common threads uniting their work. The Classical writers Plato and Hesiod may have given Gower and Milton inspiration for taking a Biblical verse and turning it into an epic. But the incestuous relationship in each poem still remains to this point largely unaccounted for, that is, until one considers the argument presented

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76 See the two versions of Adversus Haereses (Against Heresies), one written by Irenaeus and the other by Epiphanius on the Christian reaction to Gnosticism. Both are known to have been read by Milton.
7 Forsyth, Satanic Epic, p. 48.
78 Ibid, pp. 49-50.
by Noam Flinker in his essay "Cinyras, Myrrha, and Adonis: Father-Daughter Incest from Ovid to Milton." In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Myrrha seduces her father, Cinyras, which ultimately results in the birth of Adonis. Many scholars have associated Myrrha as evil and her nurse as the devil urging her to give birth to an incestuous spawn. Thus, as Flinker comments, "Milton's allegory of Satan's incest with his daughter Sin to beget Death in *Paradise Lost* can be seen as parallel to this Ovidian tradition." As already established, both Gower and Milton were greatly influenced by the works of Ovid, including *Metamorphoses*. This parallel draws us a bit closer to the incestuous personification of Sin and Death, yet still requires perhaps too great a stretch.

Elbert Thompson believed that Milton's *Paradise Lost* borrowed most from the work of Hesiod and his *Theogony*: "Between the old and the new generations of gods in Grecian mythology existed the same antipathy as between God and Lucifer, and Zeus ordained 'that whoso of the gods would fight with him against the Titans, none of them would he rob of his rewards.'" This draws a parallel with the book of Revelations in the Bible which depicts God sending Michael and his angels to do battle with the Dragon. Thus, the entire battle between God's angels and the followers of Lucifer continued to draw from the Bible for material, but Hesiod in epic execution. Just as the Titans were defeated and cast out of Mount Olympus, Lucifer and his minions were cast out of Heaven. Sin's spontaneous generation from Satan's mind likewise draws a parallel in Hesiod, as Athena sprung fully grown from the head of Zeus.

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81 See King James Bible. Beginning with Revelations 12:7 which says "And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels."
(ii.) Christian Sources

The Bible without question served as a primary source for both Milton and Gower in their epic poems. Yet for some classic Christian tales, the Bible is not the ultimate source. Many concepts in Christian theology, such as the title "Trinity" or concept of Satan as a serpent in the Garden of Eden, originated from the writings of Church Fathers and other Christian authors. Milton and Gower were likewise connected by many of these authors as well:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author: 82</th>
<th>Work:</th>
<th>Gower</th>
<th>Milton</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ambrose, Saint Bishop of Milan</td>
<td>* De Dignitate Conditionis Humane * De Paradiso Hexaemeron Libri Sex</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aquinas, Thomas</td>
<td>De Regimine Principum</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Augustine, Saint Bishop of Hippo</td>
<td>* De Civitate Dei * De Genesi Ad Litteram</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avitus of Vienne</td>
<td>De Spiritalis Historiae Gestis</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basil of Caesarea</td>
<td>Opera * Homilies in Hexaemeron * Moralia</td>
<td>V</td>
<td>V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caedmon</td>
<td>Hymn</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epiphanius of Salamis</td>
<td>Adversus Haereses * Anchoratus * Panarion</td>
<td>V</td>
<td>V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gregory I the Great, Pope</td>
<td>Epistolae</td>
<td>V</td>
<td>V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irenaeus, Saint Bishop of Lyons</td>
<td>Adversus Haereses * Martyrdom of Polycarp</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jerome, Saint</td>
<td>Against Jovinian * Vulgate Bible</td>
<td>V</td>
<td>V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prudentius</td>
<td>Hamartigenia * Peristephanon * Psychomachia</td>
<td>V</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voragine, Jacobus de</td>
<td>Legenda Aurea Sanctorum</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Both Milton and Gower make reference or draw allusions to the works of several Church Fathers including the Saints Jerome, Gregory, and Ambrose. Likewise, their treatment of Satan suggests

82 See M.I. Corcoran, Milton’s Paradise with Reference to the Hexameral Background. Chicago, 1945. Many of the Latin works available here for comparison were proposed by Sister Corcoran and her fascinating study. Also sources verified in Milton’s Commonplace Book.
connections to the writings of several early Christian authors. For example, the sympathetic Satan is not a unique concept in literature, as Rudwin observed: "Nearly all the great minds of Christendom have attempted to treat this theme. Beginning with the account of the Creation by the Spanish monk Dracontius in his work *De laudibus Die* (5th Century), the Latin poem of Avitus, Bishop of Vienne…and the transcript of the biblical text of Creation by the old English poet Caedmon of the seventh century." Among these authors, the work of Avitus stands out most prominently in comparison to Milton. Avitus of Vienne wrote *De spiritualis historiae gestis* sometime near the beginning of the sixth century, but it did not appear in wide publication until 1507. In *The Celestial Cycle*, Watson Kirkconnell contends that Milton most likely studied Avitus while studying as a boy at St. Paul's. Kirckonnell points to the strong plot and character similarities, but hinges his study on three eerily similar passages in Milton that correspond directly with Avitus.

1) **Milton**
   All is not lost; the unconquerable will,
   And study of revenge, immortal hate,
   And courage never to submit or yield

   **Avitus**
   Non tame in totum perit; pars magna retentat
   Vim propriam summaque cluit vitute nocendi.

2) **Milton**
   And heav'nly Quirest the Hymenaean sung...

   **Avitus**
   Festivum dicebat hymen castoque pudori
   Concinit angelicum iuncto modulamine Carmen.

3) **Milton**
   Greedily she ingorged without restraint,
   And knew not eating Death

---

83 Rudwin, 9
While such similarities are striking, and would seem to indicate Milton had at least been familiar
with Avitus, it serves only to advance the possible sources of Milton's Satan. However, Avitus
does little to personify Sin and Death.

Beyond Satan, Gower invests a large amount of time in Sin and her daughters who
eventually become the Seven Deadly Sins. Gower's portrayal of Sin could have come from an
old source. In *Hamartigenia*, the ancient Christian poet, Prudentius, wrote of sin's origins in
modern society. Here, Prudentius leads a long line of Christian thinkers who wrote that Cain's
sinful murder of his brother which created Sin and Death into being, rather than the disobedience
of Adam and Eve in the Garden:

\[
\begin{align*}
  &\text{Mors prima coepit innocentis vulnere,} \\
  &\text{Ceesit deinde vulnerator innoxio.} \\
  &\text{Per crimen orta dissolute est crimine,} \\
  &\text{Abel quod ante perculit, Christum dehine;} \\
  &\text{Finite et ipsa est finis exsortem pentens.}
\end{align*}
\]

(Death first began with the wounding of one that was
innocent, and passed away by the wounding of one that was
guiltless. Through Sin it arose, by Sin it was done away, in
that aforetime it smote Abel, and then Christ; it was
brought to an end in aiming at one who is without end.)\(^{85}\)

Like Gower and Milton, here Prudentius attributes Sin to be the creator of Death and claims that
ultimately, Christ will triumph (and has triumphed) over them both. Prudentius concludes his
poem with a plea to God to forgive him of his sins:

\[
\begin{align*}
  &\text{O Dee cunctipares, animae dator, O Dee Christe,} \\
  &\text{Cuius ab ore Deus subsistit Spiritus unus,}
\end{align*}
\]

\(^{84}\) Watson Kirkconnell, *The Celestial Cycle: The Theme of Paradise Lost in World Literature with Translation of the

Te moderante regor, te vitam principe duco, 
Judice te pallens trepido, te judice eodem 
Spem capio fore quidquid ago veniabile apud te, 
Quamlibet indignum venia faciamque loquarque.

(O God, the Father of all and giver of the soul, O God 
Christ, from whose mouth proceeds the Spirit, God in 
unity, by thy governance I am directed, under they 
leadership do I live my life, under thy judgment I pale and 
tremble, under they judgment too I take hope that what I do 
will find pardon withThee, however unworthy of pardon 
be my act or speech.)

This draws immediate similarities with how Gower chose to conclude the Mirour with a plea to 
the Virgin Mary, and to God above, to forgive him of his transgressions:

O dame, pour tes grandes Joyes, Que 
lors des tantes partz avoies Molt plus 
que je conter ne say, 
Je te pry, dame, toutes voies Par 
ta pité que tu me voies; Car s'ensi 
faiss, je guariray 
Des griefs pecchés dont langui ay, 
Et vers ton fils m'acorderay, 
O dame, a qui sit u m'envoies 
A sa mercy rescue serray, Du 
quelle faillir ne porray, Si tu sa 
mere me convoies.

O Jhesu, je te cry mercy, 
Si te rens grace et grant mercy, 
Qe tu deignas poour nous souffrir; 
Dont s'il te plaist, beal sire, ensi, 
En ton honour je pense yci 
Conter, que l'en le doit oir, La 
passioun dont vols morir 
Pour nous du male mort guarir: Sur 
quoy, Jhesu, je t'en suppli 
Sique j'en puisse ove toy partir, 
Dont m'alme soit au departir 
Sanz paine et sanz dolour aucii.

(O Lady, for thy great Joys, which thou then hadst everywhere I pray thee more than I can tell always to look upon me with thy pity. If thou dost this, I will be saved from the grievous sins in which I have languished, and I shall be on good terms with thy Son, O Lady, by Whom (if thou send me) I shall be received, in His mercy. In this way I cannot fail if thou, his mother, escort me.

O Jesus, I beg mercy of Thee, and I render Thee great thanks that Thou hast deigned to suffer for us. So, if it please Thee, Lord, I think to recount in Thy honor for people ought to hear of it, about the Passion, in which thou wert willing to die for us, in order to save us from an evil death. Whereby I beg Thee, Jesus, to let me depart with Thee, so that my soul in the end may be without pain and without sorrow.)

The similarities continue in other works by Prudentius as well. In Psychomachia, for example, Prudentius talks about the Sins battling with the Virtues for man's soul, much in the same tradition that Gower's Sins attempted to destroy Virtue at the time of their creation. The writings of Prudentius were common readings amongst the educated in the Middle Ages, so certainly Gower would have been familiar with these sources and would have been well versed to read the Latin passages. Indeed, Prudentius seems to be a heavy source of inspiration upon which Gower could have constructed his Mirour de l'Omme.

In the vein of possible Classical sources, a more recent argument suggests Milton may have put a new spin on an old Christian concept. Robert White makes the case that Milton's personification derived from the old Augustinian tradition of the Trinity. Under Augustine's claim, the Holy Trinity comprises the Father (God), the Son (Jesus), and the Holy Spirit. According to White, Milton developed Satan, Sin and Death as the inversion of this Trinity. Satan is the dark equivalent to God. Indeed Milton's Satan had considered himself as God, and it was this sin of pride that cast him from Heaven in the first place. Springing forth from Satan's

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88 B. Wilson, Gower's Mirour, p. 708.
mind, Sin creation is said to parallel the birth of God's son. Sin, too, is born without two parents, White writes, a twisted inversion of the Immaculate Conception: "Her generation from the mind of a single "parent," Satan, should, I believe, be regarded primarily as an analogy of the generation of the Son as wisdom in the mind of the Father and only incidentally as a classical allusion to the birth of Athena." Finally, the love created by the union of God the Father with the Son is personified in the form of the Holy Spirit. The lust created by the union of Satan and Sin is then personified in the form of Death, completing Milton's version of the Unholy Trinity. Whether or not such an argument has merit is ultimately not at issue. Even if Milton meant for his depiction of Satan, Sin and Death to reflect a twisted version of the Holy Trinity, the fact remains that Gower had done it first. To suggest that both Gower and Milton were able to independently develop concepts of an Unholy Trinity seems, at Tatlock might say, beyond infinitesimal.

In the sources considered thus far, none have completely matched the personification of Sin and Death in Milton and Gower. The most likely possibility, at least that I have encountered, for such a common source is found in the *Sixth Homily on the Hexameron* (c.370) by St. Basil of Caesarea. St. Basil's Homilies explore the creation of the world from the Fall to the Flood. In his Sixth Homily, St. Basil depicts the Original Sin and the resulting burden that befalls society:

Et illam quae nos statim apprehendit mortem [thanaton]:
quam peperit peccatum [hamartia], primogenitus ille
daemonis malorum auctoris partus.

(There you will see man's first origin and his immediate seizure by death, brought forth by sin, the first born of the evil spirit.)

---

In this simple verse, St. Basil references Sin as the first born of Satan (the evil spirit) and mother to death. This is most fitting of Milton and Gower's personification of Sin and Death and serves as the closest parallel to date. The work of Basil would have been easily accessible to both authors at the time of their writings. As John Steadman notes: "The importance of Basil's homilies for the development of hexaemeral literature is well known, and it is quite possible that Milton read or reread this influential work before embarking on the composition of *Paradise Lost.*"  

Basil would have been equally important to Gower as a fervent student of religious texts. Therefore, if scholarly endeavors continue to maintain the unlikelihood of Milton having read Gower, Basil would serve as one of the best examples in only a handful of sources to tie the two works together. Yet even then, nowhere does St. Basil mention incest or name Satan as the father of Death. It is also important to note that the references to sin (peccatum) and death (mortem) are placed in the lower case. Clearly Basil intended no such personification as we find in Gower and Milton.

(iii.) Contemporary Sources

As we continue to explore possible sources for Satan, Sin, and Death, it is important to also detail similar portrayals in some of Milton and Gower's contemporaries:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author:</th>
<th>Work:</th>
<th>Gower</th>
<th>Milton</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alighieri, Dante</td>
<td><em>Divine Comedy</em></td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andreini, Giovanni</td>
<td><em>L'Adam</em></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Du Bartas, Guillaume</td>
<td><em>La Sepmaine ou Creation du Monde</em></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grotius, Hugo</td>
<td><em>Adamus Exul</em></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Machiavelli</td>
<td><em>Tutte le Opere Di Nicolo Machiavelli</em></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tasso</td>
<td><em>IL Mondo Creato</em></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Allegory of the Jerusalem Delivered</em></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serafino della Salandra</td>
<td><em>Adamo Caduto</em></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vondel</td>
<td><em>Adam in Ballingschap</em></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Lucifer</em></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

91 Steadman, "Milton and St. Basil," p. 84.
This also allows for more detailed consideration of possible alternatives—that is, if Milton had not read Gower, where else might he have taken his portrayals of Satan, Sin, and Death? John Carey notes that beyond the Fall, the Bible is quite lacking in depictions of Satan but "scores of literary Satans [have] evolved, and some of them - notably those created by Du Bartas, Andreini, Grotius, and Vondel - possibly influenced Milton."\(^{92}\) Indeed it is likely that Milton also drew inspiration for his characterization of Satan largely from non-Christian sources. In Joost van den Vondel's play, \textit{Lucifer} (1654), Satan fits into Milton's model of a sympathetic character, using reason and logic to explain his expulsion from Heaven. Vondel's Satan likewise stands defiant to God:

\textit{Is it fate that I will fall, robbed of honour and dignity,}
\textit{Then let me fall, if I were to fall, with this crown upon my head}
\textit{This sceptre in my fist, this company of loyals, And}
\textit{as many as are loyal to our side.}
\textit{This fall would honour one, and give unwilting praise:}
\textit{And rather [would I be] foremost king in any lower court,}
\textit{Than rank second in most holy light, or even less}
\textit{Thus I justify my revolt, and will now fear pain nor hindrance.}\(^{93}\)

This scene invokes similarities with one of Milton's most famous quotes:

\textit{Here at least we shall be free; th'Almighty hath not built}
\textit{Here for his envy, will not drive us hince:}
\textit{Here may we reign secure, and in my choice}
\textit{To reign is worth ambition, though in Hell.}
\textit{Better to reign in hell than serve in heaven.}\(^{94}\)

Perhaps here we have found Milton's source for the characterization of his Satan. Or at least, we may have found one of the many sources Milton would have utilized in crafting his main character.

John Steadman notes that Milton owes much to several Italian sources. He claims that Milton commonly referenced and studied Petrarch, Tasso, Machiavelli, and most notably, Dante and his *Divine Comedy*, written sometime between 1308-1321. Both Milton and Gower were known to have been familiar with the *Divine Comedy*, and Milton relied on Dante heavily in several of his works, including *Lycidas*. Dante developed a groundbreaking version of Satan and Hell, ones with which Gower and Milton would have been familiar and could have also played a role in the development of their poems. Elbert Thompson mentions that although this connection most likely had little to do with Milton's development of Sin and Death, it may have been an small influence nonetheless and is therefore worth mentioning in this paper.

Interestingly, when Thompson discusses the influence of earlier English works upon Milton, he lists Spenser, Chaucer and Shakespeare, but of course, makes no mention of Gower. It may be, also, that Lauder was partially right in his accusations against Milton—that is to say, Milton certainly must have been at least familiar with the authors Lauder claimed to be so staunchly defending. While trying to trace back the sources that inspired *Paradise Lost*, William Hayley observes: "[Milton] seems to have read, in different languages, authors of every class; and I doubt not but he had perused every poem collected by Lauder." In the cases of Grotius and Ramsay, Milton would have known their work. But neither are so vastly different from all

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69 John Steadman also notes that Milton alludes to the *Comedy* in a sonnet addressed to Henry Lawes.
the works on the Fall in subsequent generations that they should warrant accusations of plagiarism. Neither seems to have impacted Milton or Gower to any substantial degree. I pause for consideration of the *Adamus Exul* by Grotius, only momentarily, to highlight the scene that follows the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden. Once Satan has successfully seduced Eve into biting the apple, the parents of mankind are escorted out the gates of paradise and handed over to Sin and Death who are waiting on the outside. But the Sin and Death of Grotius seem to be more symbolism than personification. The meaning behind their brief depiction here is simple: Satan has led man away from God and is responsible for introducing them to previously foreign concepts like sin and death. Also, although Milton was known to have met with Grotius while visiting Paris, it was several years before *Adamus Exul* had been finished. Whether Milton found his source here for Sin and Death, seems to be less likely than borrowing from Gower.

The great French writer, Voltaire, echoed the familiar tones of William Lauder. Voltaire, of course, did so more carefully than his predecessor. He began by admiring Milton's work, granting it heavy praise during one of his trips to London:

> What Milton so boldly undertook, he performed with a superior strength of judgment, and with an imagination productive of beauties not dreamed of before him. The meanness (if there is any) of some parts of the subject is lost in the immensity of the poetical invention. There is something above the reach of human forces to have attempted the creation without bombast...to have brought probability and reason amidst the hurry of imaginary things belonging to another world, and as far remote from the limits of our notions as they are from our Earth; in short to force the reader to say, 'If God, if the Angels, if Satan would speak, I believe they would speak as they do in Milton.'

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Yet concealed within this acclaim were subtle criticisms:

I will not dwell upon some small errors of Milton, which are obvious to every reader... I lay aside likewise his preposterous and awkward jests, his puns, his too familiar expressions so inconsistent with the elevation of his genius, and of his subject.¹

On the allegory of Sin and Death—which he calls a "filthy abomination" that "would be disliked in France"—Voltaire, like Lauder, points us towards another source utilizing a similar personification, in the Adamo Caduto, a tragedy written by the Italian Serafino della Salandra.¹⁰²

Here, while Adam and Eve are in the Garden of Eden, Sin and Death appear to and converse with them. When Adam questions Sin as to his origin, he claims to be the son of Adam and Eve:

Sin: Thou hast begotten me. Dost thou not know me? And this shape so deformed (pointing to Death) is my dear daughter Engendered in the world by me but now.

Adam: How is that from bodies not united There comes an offspring that is born of both?

Sin: It yet is true that without mating flesh Thou at my father and fair Eve my mother.

Sin and Death then proceed to taunt Adam, claiming man cannot escape their grasp. This type of personification and symbolism certainly is reminiscent of Milton and Gower. However, there are several key differences. First, Sin and Death are in the reverse gender. Sin, here, is the male figure and Death is the female. In Milton and Gower, the opposite is true. Also, nowhere do we see Satan as the father of Sin, nor are Sin and Death the product of incest. But this situation still raises an interesting question: If Milton could be accused of copying more obscure writers like

¹ Ibid.
Salandra or Grotius, why could the same not be said of John Gower, one of the most known of all fourteenth century writers and a man whom we know Milton had read and admired?

(V) CONCLUSION

Overall, *Paradise Lost* and *Mirour de l'Ommne* are far from being considered similar. Their messages often vary greatly. Whereas Milton leads the reader to feel a sense of compassion for his Devil, Gower often depicts Satan as contemptuous and vile. The purposes, too, were meant to be different. Milton claims to be writing to "justify the ways of God to man," while Gower notes his intent is to warn mankind against its folly before Judgment. Yet the striking similarities between the personification of Sin and Death in each should not continue to be overlooked by scholars. It remains the contention of this study that Milton had been able to come into possession with the *Mirour de l'Ommne*, whether by his own doing or simple good fortune. For all the reasons outlined above, the possibility should at least enter into consideration. Had he in fact read Gower's work, then there would remain no question as to the *Mirour's* impact upon *Paradise Lost*. Milton had been taught during the most important years of learning that imitation was the sincerest form of mastery. Moreover, imitation was a challenge, to take the ideas of past generations and adapt them into original, modern works. It certainly stands to reason that Gower's "voice from Heaven" would be such a worthy challenge to imitate.

If the contentions of this paper be proven true, then such revelations have the potential to both change what is known and shed light on what is unknown. We would certainly be forced to rethink the composition of *Paradise Lost*. For if Gower is proven to be the prime source for Milton's personification of Sin and Death, then Gower is not merely an influence on Milton.

Rather, Milton would have essentially copied the translation of Gower's work directly into his *Paradise Lost*. This revelation would, and rightfully so, help to return Gower to a prominent place in English studies alongside the likes of Milton and Chaucer. Either way, certainly by sharing such strong similarities with *Paradise Lost*, considered one of the greatest English works of all time, Gower's *Mirour de l'Oemme* deserves comparable merit.

If, however, it cannot be proven\(^\text{105}\) that Milton had read the *Mirour*, then the source connecting it to *Paradise Lost* must be uncovered. Yet in over a century no such source has been found to strongly mirror Gower and Milton. It stands to reason then that perhaps a source once existed, known to both authors, that has since been lost. If this is the case, we must uncover this missing link. Regardless of the ultimate answer, the selections on Sin and Death in both Gower and Milton share similarities which deserve consideration when discussing the merits of each work. To make the argument that no possible connection exists between the two would be largely unwise. That would truly be a *Devil* of a coincidence, would it not?

\(^{105}\) The only way to prove without question would be to find that Milton himself referenced the *Mirour de l'Oemme* in one of his writings. Yet even if such a reference was never made, that alone should not be enough to preclude the possibility that such a connection exists.
Timeline of Significant Dates

c. 370  St. Basil composes *Hexameron*

c. 405  Hymns of Prudentius composed

c. 1330  John Gower born near Kent

c. 1376  *Mirour de l'Omm* published

1390  *Confessio Amantis* published

1399  Gower finishes *Vox Clamantis*

1408  John Gower dies

1601  Hugo Grotius produces *Adamus Exul*

1608  John Milton born in Cheapside, London

1620  Milton enrolls at St. Paul's School

1625  Milton registers at Christ's College, Cambridge

1642  Milton writes of Gower as a "voice from heaven"

1647  *Adamo Caduto* by Serafino della Salandra printed

c. 1654  Milton begins *Paradise Lost*

1667  *Paradise Lost* published

1671  *Paradise Regain'd* and *Samson Agonistes* published

1674  John Milton Dies

1747  Lauder accusations are made

1874  Milton's Commonplace Book discovered

1895  *Mirour* discovered by Macaulay

1964  Fisher writes first major study of Gower
Bibliography


