

JOHN GOWER IN SPAIN... ANEW.
REPORT OF THE II CONGRESS OF THE INTERNATIONAL
JOHN GOWER SOCIETY
(VALLADOLID, 18–21 JULY 2011)

SINCE THE INTERNATIONAL JOHN GOWER SOCIETY ORGANIZED its first Congress in London in 2008—and did so with such a success—there were high expectations for the next Congress. That foundational conference had been an unique occasion to commemorate the anniversary of Gower's death as well as a great opportunity to bring together the increasing number of scholars devoted to study his figure and works. It was then considered appropriate that the second Congress should celebrate other relevant circumstances in Gowerian studies as well, namely the translation of the *Confessio Amantis* into Portuguese and Spanish at the beginning of the fifteenth century. The venue chosen was the University of Valladolid, Spain, where the Second Congress of the International John Gower Society was held last July (18–21 July, 2011) under the name *John Gower in Iberia: Six Hundred Years*.

The International John Gower Society has considered this Second Congress a similar success. About a hundred specialists were in attendance, coming from eleven different countries (Spain, Portugal, Canada, Holland, Israel, Hungary, France, Northern Ireland, Italy, the United Kingdom and the United States). They had the opportunity to participate in panels dedicated to a variety of Gowerian topics, most prominently among them those about the reception of the *Confessio* in the Iberian Peninsula. This is an exceptional case, as the Portuguese *Livro do Amante* and the Castilian *Confesyon del Amante* are not only the first translations of an English work in the Iberian Peninsula, but the *Confessio* is also the first English poem known to have been rendered into any Continental vernacular language during the Middle Ages. Other panels focussed on the Classical background of Gower's poems, the manuscript tradition, further instances of reception, the legal and economic elements involved in his texts, the relations with other arts, the female figures, proposals for teaching Gower, etcetera. There was also a panel in memoriam Alan Deyermond, the great Hispanist-medievalist who edited a section of the Spanish *Confessio*. Our plenary speakers enlightened us about the glosses to Gower (Alastair

Minnis, Yale U.), the epic elements (Winthrop Wetherbee, Cornell U.), the historical context of the Iberian translation of the *Confessio Amantis* (Fernando Galván Reula, U. Alcalá de Henares), the manuscripts as collection objects (M. Luisa López Vidriero, Real Biblioteca), and their paleographical features (Mauricio Herrero, U. Valladolid).

The two manuscripts of the Iberian translations of the *Confessio* extant in Spanish libraries were also focus of attention in the II Gower Congress. Thanks to the generosity of Patrimonio Nacional, a virtual exhibition of both manuscripts was available, a unique occasion to see and compare the two only copies of these texts. This exhibition was also supplemented by a Workshop on Iberian Paleography in which Prof. Mauricio Herrero explained the codicological features of these manuscripts in the context of Iberian scribal traditions, opening up a fruitful exchange of knowledge between paleographers specialized in medieval English manuscripts and those working on Iberian material.

Besides the academic sessions, the delegates took an excursion to the Castle of Peñafiel—a good opportunity to know not only the residence of another great medieval storyteller, Don Juan Manuel, but also the wineries of “Ribera de Duero”. A similar combination of cultural and gastronomic experience was the outing to the medieval walled city of Uruña, which bears the honour of being the first “Book Village” in Spain. The delegates, after visiting the museum dedicated to the history of the book, tasted some local delicacies. The highlight of the day was, however, an event celebrated at the twelfth-century Romanesque church of the village: a trilingual reading of the *Confessio Amantis* in the original medieval English, Spanish and Portuguese versions, with musical accompaniment by the musician Luis Delgado. It was a delightful experience transporting the audience to the late middle ages, when the Gowerian poem was written and translated. This reading, newly done and professionally recorded, will be soon published as a CD/book entitled *Royal Entertainments - The Poetry of John Gower in the 15th-century English, Portuguese and Castilian Courts*.

The academic results of the II Gower Congress will also appear in two forthcoming publications based upon papers presented at the Congress. One of them will be edited by Ana Sáez-Hidalgo and R. F. Yeager, as a volume of the John Gower Society Series (Boydell and Brewer); the other

one will be edited by Laura Filardo, Brian Gastle and Marta Gutiérrez, to be published by the University of Valladolid.

The II Gower Congress has received very positive feedback from participants for the high quality of the papers as well as for the organization of the Congress and the way the academic program was supplemented with other cultural activities. The organizing team did an excellent work. Thanks to all of them, Marta Gutiérrez Rodríguez, Laura Filardo Llamas, Berta Cano Echevarría, Tamara Pérez Fernández, Patricia San José Rico and to the assistants. The II Gower Congress could not have been run without them. Neither would it have taken place without the support of several institutions: University of Valladolid, Ministerio de Ciencia e Innovación, Junta de Castilla y León, Diputación de Valladolid, Ayuntamiento de Valladolid, and last but not least, SELIM. Please allow us to take advantage of this forum to express our gratitude in particular to the latter, the Spanish Society for Mediaeval English Language and Literature, not only for the financial support given to the II Gower Congress, but also for its resolve to foster Medieval English Studies in Spain, which deserves both praise and gratitude.

The third Congress is now under preparation. The dates are not fixed yet, but it will be sometime in July. Hope to see you in Rochester 2014!

Stay tuned for updates using the International John Gower Society website: www.johngower.org.

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