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# The Expression “as he which” in Gower’s *Confessio Amantis*

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Anyone who has read Gower’s *Confessio Amantis* may notice that the expression “as he/sche which” is very frequently used by the author. An idiom like this, which is made up of function words, is rather difficult to deal with. Even the all-embracing *Oxford English Dictionary* is silent on this combination of small words, although it gives a detailed description of each item, *as*, *he*, *she* and *which*. The *Middle English Dictionary*, which is still incomplete, does not touch upon this expression under the entry *as*. Macaulay regards it as equivalent to a participial construction and suggests that it is a calque on Old French *com cil qui* (*The English Works of John Gower*, Vol. 1, p. 469). Neither Mustanoja (*A Middle English Syntax*, p. 190) nor Kerkhof (*Studies in the Language of Geoffrey Chaucer*, p. 278) gives any further information. This short article inquires into how the idiom is used in Gower’s *Confessio Amantis*. For comparison’s sake, Chaucer’s usage is also taken into consideration.

## 1. Constituent Elements

It is true that *as he/sche which* is most frequent, but *which* may be often replaced by *that*. Chaucer, on the other hand, never uses *which*.

He goth him forth with hevy chiere,  
As *he that* not in what manere  
He mai this worldes joie atteigne:  
(I, 1619-21)

This ladi tho was crope aside,

*As sche that* wolde hirselves hide  
For sche ne wiste what thei were:

(II, 1141-43)

"Gret is my wo", quod she, and sighte soore,  
*As she that* feleth dedly sharp distresse;

[*Tr* IV, 897-8]

The personal pronoun may sometimes be plural.

Among the whiche thre ther were  
That most service unto him bere,  
*As thei which* in his chambre lyhen  
And al his conseil herde and syhen.

(VII, 1795-98)

The Cites stode of him doute,  
*As thei that* no defence hadde  
Ayein the pouer which he hadde.

(V, 5252-54)

For pitouly ech other gan byholde,  
*As they that* hadden al hire blisse ylorn,  
Bywayling ay the day that they were born;

[*Tr* IV, 1249-51]

First and second person pronouns are rare (4 examples).

As of lachesce I am beknowe  
That I mai stonde upon his rowe,  
*As I that* am clad of his suite:

(IV, 25-27)

Forthi unto thi myhtes hyhe,  
*As thou which* art the daies yhe,  
Of love and myht no conseil hyde,

(IV, 3213-15)

For I have in you such a trist,  
*As ye that* be my soule hele,  
For I schal telle you the trowthe.

(III, 2754-56)

'O ye, to whom nothing asterte

Of love mai, for every herte  
Ye knowe, *as ye that* ben above.  
The god and the goddessse of love;  
(V, 5821-24)

And fareth wel, goodly, faire, fresshe may,  
*As ye that* lif or deth may me comande!  
[Tr V, 1412-13]

The personal pronoun may be in the oblique case (2 examples).

This construction is not attested in Chaucer.

I have restreigned everemore,  
*As him which* stant under the lore  
Of reson, whos soubgit he is,  
(III, 1275-77)

And leith him drunke be the wal,  
*As him which* is his bonde thral  
And al in his subjeccion.  
(VI, 72-75)

The relative pronoun may also be in the oblique case (3 examples).

We find no examples in Chaucer.

And thurgh fortune it fell him so,  
*As he whom* love schal travaile,  
He made an ymage of entaile  
Lich to a womman in semblance  
(IV, 376-9)  
And bad him telle that he wiste,  
*As he to whom* he mochel triste,  
And seide he wolde nocht be wroth.  
(I, 2873-75)

With queinte wordes and with slyhe  
Blente in such wise hir lady yhe,  
*As sche to whom* that Juno triste,  
So that therof sche nothing wiste.  
(V, 4593-96)

The relative pronoun may be preceded by *the*. No examples are found

in Chaucer.

The Moder, whom withoute gesses  
The folk Payene honoure and serve,  
*As thei the whiche* hire lawe observe.

(V, 1136-38)

And whanne he hadde hem so forlein,  
*As he the which* was al vilein,  
He dede hem out of londe exile.

(VIII, 205-7)

So that for love of mariage  
The worthi Princes come and sende,  
*As thei the whiche* al honour wende,  
And knewe nothing hou it stod.

(VIII, 352-55)

The antecedent may be a demonstrative (2 examples). This construction is not found in Chaucer.

The ferste, which is the conserve  
And kepere of the remnant,  
*As that which* is most sufficient  
And chief of the Philosophie.

(VII, 54-57)

And in his forme is schape round,  
Substantial, strong, sadd and sound,  
*As that which* mad is sufficient  
To bere up al the remnant.

(VII, 225-28)

The antecedent may be a noun (6 examples, of which 5 have *thing*). In Chaucer *man* is used twice.

So that upon a morwetyde,  
*As thing which* scholde so betyde,  
Whan he was set ther as him liste  
(III, 1221-23)  
And was among hem bore and fedd,  
*As men that* wolden noght be spedd

Of goddes Sone, with o voice  
 Thei hinge and slowthe upon the crois  
 (V, 1719-22)

This Troilus, withouten reed or loore,  
*As man that* hath his joies ek forlore,  
 Was waytyng on his lady evere more

[*Tr* V, 22-24]

The number of occurrences of each construction is given below.

	Prol.	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	Total
as he which	1	1	15	10	8	11	7	16	6	75
as sche which		3	1	1	3	7	1	3	2	21
as thou which					1					1
as thei which							1	1		2
as he that	2	8	10	6	2	10	3	5	4	50
as sche that			3	2	2	6	1	1	3	18
as thei that		2	2	2		4	1	1		12
as ye that				1		1				2
as I that					1					1
as he whom					1					1
as he to whom		1								1
as sche to whom						1				1
as him which				1			1			2
as thing which				1	1	1		1	1	5
as he the which									1	1
as thei the which						1				1
as men that						1				1
as that which								2		2

#### Chaucer

	CT	HF	PF	Tr	LGW	Bo	RomA	Total
as he that	8	1	1	18	1			29
as she that	1		1	10	4		2	18
as they that	2			1		1		4
as ye that				1				1
as man that				1			1	2

## 2. Choice of the Relative

The foregoing figures tell us that both *as he/sche which* and *as he/sche that* are used by Gower, the former being a little more frequent. It does not seem at first sight that there is any factor that determines the choice of the relative. Indeed, the following pairs of examples suggest that the choice is more or less arbitrary.

And wende most in his Empire,  
*As he which* was hol lord and Sire,  
In honour forto be received.

(III, 2453-55)

Bot al the Marche of thoccident  
Governeth under his empire,  
*As he that* was hol lord and Sire,

(Prol., 720-22)

Alceste his wif goth forto preie,  
*As sche which* wolde thonk deserve,  
With Sacrifice unto Minerve,

(VII, 1920-22)

Unto the kyng the Gregois seiden,  
Be weie of love and this thei preiden,  
*As thei that* wolde his thonk deserve,

(I, 1117-19)

*As he which* was chivalerous,  
It fell him to ben amerous,

(V, 653-4)

The worthi Sone of themperour,  
Which wolde ben a werreieur,  
*As he that* was chivalerous

Of worldes fame and desirous,

(II, 2515-18)

Fro which he hath with strengthe prived  
The pietous Justinian,

*As he which* was a cruel man,  
His nase of and his lippes bothe  
He kutte...

(VII, 3270-74)

"Wher is mi Soster?" And he seide  
That *sche* was ded; and Progne abreide,  
*As sche that* was a woful wif,  
And stod betuen hire deth and lif,

(V, 5715-18)

There are, however, two points to be noted. First, when the relative is directly followed by *was/were(n)* or *wolde/wol*, *that* is far more frequent than *which*. Out of the 72 occurrences of *as he/sche that*, approximately 60 per cent follow this pattern; on the other hand, out of the 96 occurrences of *as he/sche which* only about 20 per cent behave this way. Secondly, *that* is predominant when the antecedent is *thei*.

### 3. Meaning

As Macaulay points out (op. cit. p. 469), this idiom is on the whole equivalent to a participial construction. It can thus express various meanings such as time, cause, concession, condition and so forth. In most cases, however, it has a causal colour as may be detected in the following examples.

That he his fader in desdeign  
Hath take and set of non acompte,  
*As he which* thoghte him to surmonte;

(II, 1714-16)

Bot Nestor, which was old and hor,  
The salve sih tofore the sor,  
*As he that* was of conseil wys:

(III, 1801-3)

The Cites stode of him in doute,  
*As thei that* no defence hadde  
Ayein the pouer which he hadde

(V, 5252-54)

As of lachesce I am beknowe  
That I mai stonde upon his rowe,  
*As I that* am clad of his suite:

(IV, 25-27)

As ye have herd, swich lif right gan he lede,  
*As he that* stood bitwixen hope and drede.

[*Tr* V, 629-30]

In some cases, this idiom seems to be simply equivalent to *which*.

Bot now hierafter thou schalt hier  
What god hath wroght in this matiere,  
*As he which* doth al equite.

(II, 3325-27)

To thilke lord in special,  
*As he which* is of alle thinges  
The creatour, and of the kynges  
Hath the fortunes uppon honde,

(VIII, 2980-83)

In the two examles above, the relative clause simply describes the attribute of God, as do the following examples.

'O thou divine pourveance,  
*Which* every man in the balance  
Of kinde hast formed to be liche,

(II, 3243-45)

For ther is bot o god of alle,  
*Which* is the lord of hevene and helle.

(V, 732-3)

And, if we compare the following two examples, we may well suspect that Gower used either *as sche which* or *which* depending on the dictates of rhythm.

And tok the Skulle, and what hire liste  
Sche drank, *as sche which* nothing wiste  
What cuppe it was...

(I, 2553-55)

This yonge wif was sory tho,

*Which wiste nothing what it mente;*

(VII, 5342-43)

In a few cases it means *like one who*, being equivalent to ModE *as one that* (e.g. 1590 Spencer *F.Q.* I.i.29 And often knockt his brest, *as one that* did repent.) or *as who* (e.g. 1551-6 Robinson tr. More's *Utopia* 35 *As who* should sai it were a very dangerous matter). This meaning is evident when the subject in the main clause is different to that in the subordinate clause.

That thurgh the conseil of you tuo

I stonde in point to ben undo,

*As he which* is a king deposed.

(II, 1015-17)

Bot of this point, lo, thus I fare

*As he that* paith for his chaffare,

And beith it diere, and yit hath non,

So mot he nedes povere gon:

(V, 4521-24)

We faren *as he that* dronke is as a mous.

[*K<sub>n</sub>T* 1261]

Again in a few cases, *as* seems to mean 'in the character, capacity, or role of'. The following examples may belong to this category.

With al myn hole besnesse

Ordeigne me for thilke office,

*As sche which* schal be the Norrice."

(VII, 2715-17)

Bot al the Marche of thoccident

Governeth under his empire,

*As he that* was hol lord and Sire,

(Prol., 720-22)

Thei have here epitaph write,

*As thing which* scholde abide stable:

(IV, 3670-71)

#### 4. Summary

The expression *as he/sche which* or *as he/sche that* is used by Gower mainly as an equivalent to the ModE participial construction. It has causal meaning except for some cases where it means 'like one that' or 'in the capacity or role of one that'. Sometimes it means nothing more than *which*. In most cases the antecedent is a third person pronoun; first and second person pronouns or nouns are rather rare. In a few cases the antecedent of the relative may be in the oblique case. The relative is preceded by *the* as rhythm requires. Overall, Gower is more given to this expression than Chaucer, who, in terms of both frequency and variety, uses it more sparingly.

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