HOLY BLOODSHED: VIOLENCE AND CHRISTIAN PIETY 
IN THE ROMANCES OF 
THE LONDON THORNTON MANUSCRIPT 

DISSERTATION 

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ABSTRACT

Graphic violence dominates the three romances in the opening section of the London Thornton Manuscript: *The Siege of Jerusalem, The Siege of Milan* and *Duke Roland and Sir Otuel of Spain*. In this dissertation I argue that these romances individually use graphic violence as a means of coping with late medieval English anxieties about Christian failures abroad and rising English heresy at home; together, along with the devotional texts surrounding them, they become examples of violent devotional expression. Whether studied alone or as a group, in these romances violence in the name of Christian devotion is imagined as both necessary and praiseworthy.

Each romance fundamentally employs violence to reveal Christian and, at times, specifically English Christian dominance over a threatening group or ideology. At the same time, by repeatedly using violence as a marker of devotion, but portraying it as at the service of Church orthodoxy, these romances create boundaries, containing and directing the violence towards real political and ideological goals: the perpetuation of the orthodox Church in England. Finally, I argue that the graphic violence that so marks the three romances found in the opening section of the London Thornton manuscript is normalized and contained by the orthodox religious boundaries provided by the
devotional texts surrounding them. The instances of graphic violence in the romances become one in a series of many; each is simply another in a string of variant manifestations of devotion.

*The Siege of Jerusalem, The Siege of Milan* and *Duke Roland and Sir Otuel of Spain* are all fourteenth century romances that contain heroes whose violence is fundamental to their displays of piety. In the fifteenth century, for compiler Robert Thornton, these romances fit neatly into a series with devotional texts, suggesting that he might have read the heroes’ violent religious displays as an extension of popular meditative devotion.
Dedicated to my father
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation is a study of the three romances in the opening section of Robert Thornton’s fifteenth century manuscript (BL Add. 30142): The Siege of Jerusalem, The Siege of Milan, and Duke Roland and Sir Otuel of Spain.1 Brought together some fifty to seventy-five years after their original composition in the fourteenth century, the culture in which each was specifically created differs from the culture of Robert Thornton. In this dissertation, I examine each romance in its own original context in turn, discussing the particular cultural considerations at its composition and they ways that each romance becomes a location for debate on various subjects. These three romances all have at stake the justification of chivalric violence. Each of these romances, I argue, suggests that violence is fundamentally viable and honorable when done in the service of the Church. With a surprising lack of women in these romances—not one of them is a love story of any kind—they function as a kind of male fantasy of permissible violent retribution. All of the heroes—Titus and Vespasian; Roland, Charlemagne and Turpin; and the Christian

convert Otuel—are defined as, or become, heroic because of their participation in violence in the service of God. Furthermore, I argue that these fantasies of violence are not merely abstract; these romances engage in real cultural concerns: fourteenth century popular devotion, heresy, and troubled chivalric masculinity. Finally, I argue that for the mid-fifteenth century compiler Robert Thornton, a member of the gentry who would be neither hermit nor knight, these romances function as part of a fantasy of violent devotion. The romances are found in the London Thornton manuscript with classic medieval texts of the Passion, allowing him to vicariously participate in both *imitatio Christi* and *imitatio militis*. In sum, I argue that these romances are about the integration of violence and religion; all three offer ways for people—via the chivalric feats of the heroes—to elide the contradictions between the two.

The romance genre itself is one that tends towards repetition of themes, characters and plots, and romance tends towards the predictable and patterned. The romances of the late fourteenth century take as their guide romances composed centuries earlier, and the stories of Arthur, Charlemagne and others are re-written or translated from continental originals. Such repetition speaks to the staying power of the romance genre:

- Romance is a genre particularly resistant to becoming out-of-date.
- Longevity is a consequence of its nature, it makes a virtue out of archaism.
- If the mores and ethics of twelfth-century tales are carried forward into fourteenth-century versions, the patina of archaism becomes exotic, not
old-fashioned. In this respect, it is a conservative form, although any genre with an inclination to celebrate youth, energy and change will have an inbuilt tendency to challenge authority, secular or spiritual.\textsuperscript{2}

While the romance might be used as a form to challenge authority, exactly how it challenges such authority will vary over time. A single romance recopied and reread, even exactly, a generation later might have very different connotations and overtones:

> Even successive recopyings of a single text record a process of shifting interpretations and significances, and those shifts become more marked as traditional elements are re-used in stories and new contexts. Such differences are intensified as stories and motifs move across authors, periods, readership groups, and changing political and linguistic conditions.\textsuperscript{3}

This notion of re-created and shifted meaning is central to the arguments of this dissertation. All of the romances considered in this dissertation are examples of later considerations of their subject matter or characters. While \textit{The Siege of Milan} has no known original, the characters of Roland, Charlemagne and Bishop Turpin are all well known. Both \textit{Jerusalem} and \textit{Otuel} have numerous predecessors in English, Latin, French or some combination of the three. The moments of recopying and rewriting (often with innovations on the new author’s part) are significant. These “unoriginal” texts are not reproduced without consideration and change.


Romances are often repetitive and seemingly generic, and from this, a discussion of romance as a genre has emerged. Maldwyn Mills, in his study of six Middle English romances, gives “chivalrous,” “heroic” and “edifying” as the three categories of romance and explains:

[“Chivalrous” romance is] dominated by stories in rhyming couplets that told, at considerable length, of the interaction between love and chivalry. […] In a “heroic” romance, the dominant ethos will be masculine, with the stress placed upon communal battle […]. In an “edifying” romance, the mood will be primarily one of suffering and endurance […]. At the end of the story, the hero or heroine may even achieve a measure of sanctity.

This breakdown that might, at first, appear useful, breaks down and, as Mills admits, “will often prove more useful to describe parts of romances […] than wholes.” Generic projects attempting to classify romances in different categories often result in more of a justification of the category choices than a useful means of discussing romances themselves. Alternatively, Helen Cooper offers the possibility that romance is comprised of a variant number of motifs:

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6 Mills vii.

Drawing up a list of the common features that cumulatively indicated family resemblance, generic identity, for romances presents few problems, so long as one bears that caveat in mind: no single one is essential for definition or recognition taken individually.8

What appears to be universally true is that the writers of romance, particularly in the late fourteenth century, knew and acknowledged that they were writing within the genre. Picking up a Charlemagne romance of one sort or another and rewriting it is a tacit acknowledgement that one is writing in a definitive genre.

Furthermore, the degree to which these romances do or do not interact with their own cultural ideals is a matter of contention in both previous and current scholarship. W. R. J. Barron notes that romance was a means of accessing an ideal world:

Though its idealism can express itself on many social levels, romance is inherently aspiring, often aristocratic; yet in values as in setting it aims not at pure escapism or fantasy, but at the conviction of reality. It is not satisfied with the trappings of realism but strives for the conviction that the world it projects has existed in some past golden age, or will be in some millennium to come, or might be if men were more faithful to their ideals than experience suggests them capable of being. The romance

8 Cooper 9.
mode, indeed, cannot ignore reality since its idealism is constantly
challenged in readers’ minds by their knowledge of the imperfect world in
which they live.9

Barron’s idea of “real” comes from the way romance interacts with the world of the
audience. He sees some “golden age”—either a previous one from which society has
fallen, or a potential one to which society should aspire—as a governing force for a real
change or progress in the contemporary world of the romance’s author. Rather than a
discussion of the “now” (whenever that may be), romances opt for a vision of idealism
meant to positively influence the “now.” Dieter Mehl finds that fourteenth century
romance always had a “fairy tale” quality to it:

With very few exceptions, [romances] were not in immediate
confrontation with the present. They did not aim at a faithful
representation of present-day reality, […] but at the illustration of moral
truths by way of an exemplary story. They are, for the most part,
homiletic in intention rather than courtly and topical.10

Both Barron and Mehl share a vision of romance as an idealized vision of the world.
Romances may display values and ideals to which an audience may aspire, but they do
not come in contact with actual controversies present in the moments of composition.
Alternatively, more recent critics see romance as a means of accessing actual cultural
issues and difficulties. Susan Crane finds that Anglo-Norman “[insular romances] share

poetic concerns and techniques that respond forcefully to issues of their time and place.”

Though the Anglo-Norman romances predate those discussed in this dissertation by centuries, my argument is similar. The romances of the late fourteenth century share a concern for issues directly related to their own time and place, deliberately and noticeably engaging with present-day controversy.

In the romances, critics find an emerging picture of England as a nation and so read romance as a genre of the nation. They articulate ideas about what it means to be English, even if the heroes are not themselves English. Diane Speed argues that the English discourse of the nation “could reasonably be taken back to the literature of the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, especially to the early romances.”

For Geraldine Heng, romance also is a genre of the nation: a literary medium that solicits or invents the cultural means by which the medieval nation might be most productively conceptualized, and projected, for a diverse society of peoples otherwise ranged along numerous internal divides. Romance, she argues, “performs as a historical actant. By intervening, persuading, influencing, judging, innovating, and deciding, romance has a hand in the shaping of the past and the making of the future.”

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14 Heng 8.
conception of English nationhood itself. Furthermore, I argue that, for the specific romances in this dissertation, romances are a location for debate over issues specific to the late fourteenth century in England:

Debate lay at the heart of much medieval culture, across most of the civil institutions invented in the Middle Ages: in the law courts, in the king’s council, in Parliament, in the universities. Romance could provide a secular forum analogous to academic debate. Their audiences expected to respond actively to them, and the writers encouraged such a response.\textsuperscript{15}

The concerns of nationhood, as well as devotion and violence, emerge in the romances studied in this dissertation. The authors of these romances do not address issues of devotion, heresy and masculinity—either individually or as connected—without the intention of engaging their audiences. \textit{The Siege of Jerusalem, The Siege of Milan} and \textit{Duke Roland and Sir Otuel of Spain} all offer didactic direction for their audiences, either implicitly through the praise and success of their heroes, or explicitly through statements made by characters. The London Thornton Manuscript, in its layout and choice of texts, shows an awareness of the debate or didactic purpose of romances. In terms of recent critical scholarship I argue, like Helen Cooper, both that romances—derivative or not—were read in unique ways in their own times, and that romances were locations for intense debate about very real and current issues.

The influence of romances on medieval ideas of chivalry, and particularly chivalric violence, has been repeatedly articulated by critics. C. Stephen Jaeger notes:

\textsuperscript{15} Cooper 13.
[... ] the romance had a pedagogic function to fulfill. It put forward an ideal model of the civilized warrior. The courtly romance was the single most powerful factor in transmitting ideals of courtesy from the courtier class in which they originated to lay nobility.¹⁶

This assessment of the function of early romance offers the possibility that through an understanding of romance we can discern the idealized patterns of chivalry so crucial to the knightly class. Jaeger again notes:

Chivalric narrative represents courtliness as a sublime ethical code. This lofty vision of courtesy is closely connected with one purpose of the chivalric romance, the civilizing of the knightly class. The authors of romance […] represented the deeds of heroes of bygone days as beginning with—or entirely comprised of—a process of education. Not only was the hero’s mature conduct of life an example for the reader, but also the steps by which he arrived at maturity.¹⁷

Early chivalric romance idealized chivalry and the knights who participated in it. The behaviors of the heroes represented not only patterns of action, but also an internalized ethical code that governed all aspects of their lives from battle to religion and back again. Such chivalric codes have been examined as a way of not only expressing idealized

¹⁷ Jaeger 242.
values, but also controlling the violent tendencies of a very real and very threatening class: the medieval knights. Unfortunately, the ideals of chivalry represented, either in romance or in any literature from the Middle Ages, are neither entirely coherent, nor unambiguously positive. The word *chivalry* conjures an image of an ethical and behavioral system including loyalty, courtesy, generosity, piety and, of course, prowess, either as a knight for a lord or lady or in the crusades. Still,

[...] moving beyond a core of beliefs [...] there is no single theory, no detailed code agreed upon by all. Royal administrators, monks, bishops, scholars, and the knights themselves all had plans for what chivalry should ideally be.\(^\text{18}\)

Even as chivalry was a system from which readers of romances could draw values and ideals, it was still a matter of contention:

Among its contemporaries, chivalry won high praise as one of the very pillars of medieval civilization, indeed, of all civilization. At the same time the practitioners of its great virtue, prowess, inspired fear in the hearts of those committed to certain ideals of order. As they worried about the problem of order in their developing civilization, thoughtful medieval people argued that chivalry (reformed to their standards) was the great hope, even as they sensed that unreformed chivalry was somehow the great cause for fear.\(^\text{19}\)

While the values expressed in it and performed by chivalry’s greatest heroes were lauded by most of medieval society, at the same time, the violence—manifested in the form of prowess—so endemic to the romances was a source of anxiety and fear to both audiences and authors. This tension between powerful knights and the governing forces that prevent them from turning that violence against the society they serve is at the heart of the romances in this dissertation.

The crusades were crucial to the development of the chivalric codes as a means of curtailing the potential for inappropriate violence by defining a knight’s relationship to God. This relationship of chivalric prowess to piety became a framework that ultimately sanctioned certain types of violence. In his study of religion and war, including the various crusades, David S. Bachrach discusses the crucial moment when violence—particularly homicide—and piety would become almost synonymous:

The crusading movements of the late eleventh, twelfth, and early thirteenth centuries had a dramatic effect in shaping a new Christian mentality toward war while at the same time confirming the importance of traditional religious rites in the lives of individual soldiers and their non-combatant supporters. The efforts of church leaders to establish a new paradigm for understanding the sinfulness of killing in war helped to lay the foundation for the routine grant of remissions of sin to crusaders fighting against Muslims, and then later against the Christian enemies of
the papacy. The crusades were instrumental in popularizing the view that under some circumstances killing itself could constitute an act of penance and therefore serve as a positive good.\textsuperscript{20} 

As the crusade persisted, the mentality of knighthood changed to accommodate the notion of homicide. It became possible to view the killing of a non-Christian in battle—and in a religious crusade specifically—as an act of pious heroism and even as penance for sin, rather than as a sin itself. Such manifestations of violence as piety became increasingly compatible with and useful to chivalric codes. Knightly codes of chivalry absorbed and appropriated religion when it was convenient for the knights themselves—especially the elements of piety that were compatible with prowess.\textsuperscript{21} Furthermore, religion became a way to sanction the actions and existence of the knightly class. Through piety, knights could justify the social aspects of chivalry:

Through the practice of chivalry, the heroic life and ideals, which carried a strong sense of independent moral standards, combined with selected principles of medieval Christianity; through chivalric ideas and practices, warriors fused their violent way of life and their dominance in society with the will of God.\textsuperscript{22}

Romances showed killing Christian enemies as both prowess and as an extension of the will of God. For real, living knights, killing moved from a sin of war to an act of penance. By the late fourteenth century, in some English romances the murder of non-


\textsuperscript{21} Kaeuper, \textit{Chivalry and Violence} 47.

\textsuperscript{22} Kaeuper, \textit{Chivalry and Violence} 50.
Christians, or Christian enemies becomes a demonstration of faith and evidence of divine sanction. This change is manifested in the romances considered in this dissertation; knightly prowess followed with a declaration of faith is not sufficient proof of piety in any of the romances. Instead, such declarations must be followed with action and that action always includes violence.

The early crusade romances, on which both *Milan* and *Otuel* were undoubtedly based, were staples of crusade propaganda. However, by the late fourteenth century, confidence in the entire crusade project was waning. Though most English (and indeed most Europeans) wanted to see the Holy Land back in the hands of Christianity, the enthusiasm for violence and war—whether Christian Crusade or nationalist war—was being replaced by a desire for peace. Poets like Gower and Bishops like Brinton, while supporting knights and knighthood “to protect the rights of the Church; to foster the common good; and to defend the orphan and the widow,” also “discovered a gap between the chivalric ideal as they understood it and the behavior of the second estate. They were consequently dismayed by what they considered to be the decadence of the knights of their day.” The gap between the perceived duties, responsibilities and behaviors of knights, so often idealized by the heroes of romances, and the realities that the poet and bishop saw in the late fourteenth century in England caused disillusionment with the entire knightly class.

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23 For a discussion of crusade propaganda in the form of romance, see Chapter Two on *The Siege of Jerusalem.*
The discrepancy between the real and often tainted knights and the portrayals of them in romances was not the only impetus for a desire for peace.

There can be little doubt that an increasing number of Richard II’s subjects favored peace, even if they frowned on the excesses of his francophilia and disapproved of his government at home. […] By 1390 [many noblemen] turned their thoughts more and more to peace, and it is significant that the usurper Henry IV was mostly widely praised for the blessing of peace which it was hoped he would bestow upon the realm.25

The people of England were growing tired of war, both of war with the French and the now seemingly failed crusades. “One of the scandals of the age was the Norwich Crusade of 1383 in which Christian fought Christian under the pretence of waging a holy war.”26 The pretense extending the war for the Holy Land to attacking Christians was an utter failure, leading to Bishop Norwich’s disgrace and the population’s further disillusionment with the crusade endeavor. Philippe de Mézières, in his Letter to King Richard in 1395, attempted to convince both the Kings of France and of England to embark on another crusade for the Holy Land. He describes Charles and Richard as “two kings, as true champions of the Faith, [who] are now prepared to present [themselves]

26 Barnie 124. For a discussion of the Norwich Crusade in relationship to The Siege of Milan and the Lollard heresy, see Chapter Three.
before […] God, ready to avenge his wrongs." Such idealism would never turn into a reality and, eventually, England along with the rest of Europe was forced to admit defeat in the crusades.

Romances, however, offer a space in which the defeat need not necessarily be acknowledged. Christine Chism, in her study of the *Wars of Alexander*, notes how such a poem would have been exactly what a fourteenth century English audience was looking for:

[The *Wars of Alexander*] reimagines the political and ideological conflicts of a whole late-fourteenth-early fifteenth-century generation of British nobility haunted by the specter of their military ineptitude during recent crusades—and ferociously refusing that knowledge. The sense of futility that plagues Alexander […] reflects and reconfigures the misgivings of a late-fourteenth-century audience increasingly aware of the necessary connections and complex debts between themselves and their numerous eastern adversaries.28

Romances became a location where the English could indulge in associations with and triumphs over the various eastern adversaries to whom they had lost in the recent and distant past. Like the *Wars of Alexander*, which has a non-English, and indeed non-European hero, the romances in this dissertation use non-English heroes as well.


Jerusalem has the Roman soldiers Titus and Vespasian at its center, while Milan has the classic French heroes Roland and Charlemagne, and Otuel along with Roland and Charlemagne uses the Saracen convert Otuel as the central heroic figure for most of the text.

All three of the romances in this dissertation, despite their exotic locations or distance in time, concern themselves as much with the present moment in England as they do the real or fictitious past they portray. They were all composed around 1400, with The Siege of Jerusalem composed earliest, probably between 1370-1380. As such, all of these romances were written by men who found themselves in the era that saw the rise of Wycliffite heresy, the end of Richard II’s reign, the continued war with France and the ultimate failure of the crusades to reclaim Jerusalem. It is no coincidence that such an era would produce texts concerned with affective piety, heresy and kingship, and masculinity, nor that, in the following generation, Robert Thornton would keep these texts as still relevant to his own time.

In my second chapter, “Violence, Piety and Christian Knighthood in The Siege of Jerusalem,” I examine the ways in which the heroes, Titus and Vespasian, use violence to support their Christianity as they raze Jerusalem to avenge the crucifixion of Christ forty years after the event. In particular, I discuss the various ways in which Christ’s body—particularly the mocked and abused body—is the inspiration for heroics in battle in the text. The meditation on Christ’s Passion performed by Vespasian resembles devotional affective piety, until it turns at the last moment from meditation to action. Titus and

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29 For a full discussion of the historical moments of each of the poems, see Chapters Two, Three and Four.
Vespasian’s move from meditation on the body of Christ to violence is portrayed as a natural progression in the poem. Meditation on Christ does not make knights passive. Indeed, the opposite is true: true Christian knights use the suffering of Christ as a motivation to slaughter.

In my third chapter, “Religion and Politics in Late Fourteenth Century England: the Lollard Saracen, the Heretic King and the Warrior Priest in The Siege of Milan,” I discuss the ways that the poem could potentially be read as an argument against the blossoming Lollard heresy in the late fourteenth century. The figure of the Sultan Arabas uses Lollard language, burns icons and finally ends up burned in a miraculous fire, perhaps in anticipation of, or response to, the burning of William Sawtre in 1401. Charlemagne, reluctant to fight against the Saracens, is berated and almost excommunicated for heresy by Bishop Turpin, suggesting the author’s firm view that the protection of the Church from her enemies is a crucial responsibility of a Christian King. Finally, Bishop Turpin, not Charlemagne, is the martial hero of the romance, donning armor and leading knights into battle against the Saracen army at the walls of Milan. His zealous devotion paired with near unstoppable prowess makes literal the clergy’s fight against Christian opposition. Taken as a whole, the romance suggests that piety not only justifies violence, but that a willingness—or even eagerness—to take arms is a crucial element of piety, no matter what your class or station in life.

In my fourth chapter, “Retracing Steps: (Re)Performed Violence as Masculinity in Duke Roland and Sir Otuel of Spain” examines the ways in which violence reinforces the already well-known faith of Roland and then demonstrates the newfound faith of Otuel after his conversion. After his conversion, Otuel will neither marry nor accept the
benefits of converting—in the form of land, camaraderie with other knights and wealth—until he has demonstrated his faith. He demonstrates his faith by taking on the role of Roland and facing Clariel, a Saracen opponent. Unlike Otuel, Clariel does not convert, and so becomes a location for Otuel to demonstrate not only his faith, but also the divine sanction of his prowess as he kills Clariel and many other Saracens in battle. This re-performing of Christian violence enforces the fact that piety is something to be repeatedly performed. It is not simply an act to be done once and then forgotten. Otuel had demonstrated his prowess long before he reached Charlemagne’s court. He has to re-perform his feats of prowess and faith as a Christian before he can be secure in his role as a Christian knight.

In my fifth chapter “(Re)Reading Texts and Contexts: The London Thornton Manuscript,” I discuss the ways in which the three romances, when read together with Cursor Mundi, A Discourse between Christ and Man, The Northern Passion, and two religious lyrics by Lydgate, O Florum Flos and Passionis Christi Cantus provide an overarching narrative of religious devotion. The position of these romances, along with their content and the content of the surrounding material suggests that Robert Thornton was concerned with creating a vision of Christian history and piety that supports both absolute orthodox faith through Marian devotion, saint and relic veneration, affective piety, rejection of heresy and iconoclasm, and the establishment of Christian masculinity. Robert Thornton blends affective piety and chivalric violence, creating a fantasy of orthodox devotion that allows for the contemplative meditation on Christ’s Passion and an active display of violence through prowess for a man who led neither a hermit’s life, nor a heroic knight’s.
In conclusion, I argue that piety drives the violence in three romances of its late fourteenth century, defining the relationship between those elements for its audiences, both in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The chivalric fantasy operating in all four chapters is that heroic, prowess-defining acts of violence, no matter how graphic or gruesome, are justified and sanctioned when done in the service of God. Violence can be read as an expression of pious devotion.
CHAPTER 2

VIOLENCE, PIETY AND CHRISTIAN KNIGHTHOOD
IN THE SIEGE OF JERUSALEM

Dubbed the “chocolate covered tarantula of the alliterative movement” by Ralph Hanna, the late fourteenth century romance *The Siege of Jerusalem* is indeed, as he also notes, full of “cheerfully sanctioned violence.”

This beautifully presented violence, performed by the newly converted Christian heroes Titus and Vespasian, is repeatedly equated with their desire to be pious Christians. The heroes of *The Siege of Jerusalem* repeatedly return to the idea of Christ’s life and suffering, and their response to this suffering is a piety-affirming violent attack on Jerusalem. With such massive violence created as a display of piety, the poem raises its fair share of questions. What are we to make of the construction of and violence towards the Jews in the text? How do we interpret the presentation of knighthood and kingship? And finally, how does Christ’s body and life motivate this poem’s action? In this chapter I will argue that *The Siege of Jerusalem* is a poem obsessed with the symbolic power of Christ’s suffering body and those who either act on, or on behalf of it. The heroism displayed by the Romans is both

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spiritual and secular: these men lead in the formation of the Church and the Roman state. The poem brings together violence and affective piety so that the heroes’ contemplation of Christ’s passion drives Titus and Vespasian to a violence of their own.

**Manuscript History**

The popularity of *The Siege of Jerusalem* is demonstrated by its survival in nine manuscripts, “more … than any unrhymed alliterative poem but *Piers Plowman.*”\(^{31}\)

Ralph Hanna and David Lawton explain in the introduction to their edition of *The Siege of Jerusalem* that “[o]f these, six are more or less full copies […] two quite substantial fragments, and one a piece of a single leaf,” and they also note that “[n]o surviving manuscript presents *The Siege* as an isolated ‘literary text’ […]. I]n every case, the poem has been contextualized through juxtaposition with other works.”\(^ {32}\) Since each manuscript containing *Jerusalem* includes different texts and each presents a different context in which the poem may be read, it is worth looking at the various interpretive possibilities of the poem created by the manuscripts in which it is included. Such variation suggests that there were multiple readings of the poem by the time it was copied into the manuscripts we see today.\(^ {33}\) David Lawton notes, “[*Jerusalem’s*] various codicological contexts provide a spectrum of reader reception that ranges from heresy

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33 Lillian Herlands Hornstein gives dates for eight of the nine manuscripts of the poem (not including the single leaf) in *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English 1050-1500: Romances,* ed., J. Burke Severs (New Haven: The Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1967) 144-74. All have been dated to the fifteenth century, with the Huntington HM 128 being the earliest, (1400-1425) and Cotton Caligula A.ii, part I being the latest (1475-1500).
hunting through salvation history to romance.”

Bonnie Millar comes to similar conclusions: “almost every manuscript of The Siege of Jerusalem provides a context in which multiple readings of the poem are possible.”

The Bodleian Library MS Laud Misc 656 contains Piers Plowman, various Biblical excerpts and an exposition of the Creed, while the Huntington Library MS HM 128 contains the Pricke of Conscience and the B-text of Piers Plowman. In both of these contexts, the poem seems to be included for the purpose of religious edification: Titus and Vespasian are heroes with religious identities, perhaps like Piers, to be appreciated and maybe even imitated. The Princeton Library MS Taylor Medieval 11 includes the Pseudo-Bonaventura Meditaciones passionis Christi along with Jerusalem, demonstrating that the poem was perhaps also viewed as a kind of meditation on, and response to, Christ’s life. British Library MS Cotton Vespasian E.xvi and Lambeth Palace Library MS 491 part 1 both contain other romances and the Lambeth also includes the Brut. These suggest that Jerusalem can be read as a kind of historic adventure romance. The Cambridge University Library MS Mv.v.14 contains just two other texts, Guido delle Colonne’s Historia destructionis Troie and Historia de preliis Alexandri Magni, placing the poem in the context of classic Latin historical texts. British Library MS Cotton Caligula A.ii, part I contains other alliterative poems, including Susannah and Chevalere Assigne, marking Jerusalem as a part of the alliterative canon. Finally, in British Library MS Additional 31042 (also known as the Lawton, “Hunting and Hawking” 105.

London Thornton Manuscript). *Jerusalem* is accompanied by several short religious lyrics, other crusade romances, and a version of *The Northern Passion*. Such a placement allows *Jerusalem* to be read as a religious poem specifically concerned with Christian encounters with non-Christians through the romances, and with the suffering of Christ through the Passion.\(^{36}\)

The multiplicity of possible readings comes in part from the author’s ability to use, blend, and manipulate several sources. There are five primary sources for *Jerusalem*: the *Vindicta Salvatoris*, Roger D’Argentueil’s *Bible en François*, Josephus’s *The Jewish War* (though probably not directly), Higden’s *Polychronicon*, and Jacobus de Voragine’s *Legenda Aurea*.\(^ {37} \) Hanna and Lawton describe the poet as a historian of sorts, who “might be described as [an] encyclopedist […] who] strove to produce exhaustive records of human knowledge,” combining with general success multiple sources “into a single account, more extensive than that offered by any [of his sources] in isolation.”\(^ {38} \) Millar suggests that the poet used his sources to give authority to his work and […] to teach his intended audience salvation history, while at the same time entertaining them with historical matter. His use of several sources […] indicates that he does not wish to produce a simple paraphrase, that he has a specific

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\(^{36}\) Hanna and Lawton xiii-xxvi. For a full discussion of the London Thornton Manuscript and the romances examined in this dissertation discussed in that context, see Chapter Five.

\(^{37}\) For a complete discussion of the passages culled from D’Argenteuil’s *Bible* see Phyllis Moe’s “The French Source of *The Siege of Jerusalem*,” *Medium Aevum* 39 (1970): 147-54. For a detailed discussion of the sources see Bonnie Millar, 42-75. For further discussions of sources see also Kölbìng and Day’s introduction to their 1932 *Siege of Jerusalem* as well as Hanna and Lawton’s introduction.

\(^{38}\) Hanna and Lawton xxxviii.
purpose and wishes to communicate certain ideas. The resulting poem is neither history, nor religion, but a combination of both, presented through the medium of poetry.\textsuperscript{39}

Like Millar, David Lawton suggests that “The Siege of Jerusalem may well be the earliest example of the context hypothesized by Derek Pearsall for the poems of the alliterative revival: the production of a monastic house, perhaps compiled there for the entertainment or edification of aristocratic lay patrons.”\textsuperscript{40} Ralph Hanna argues that the poem was composed in the 1380s or early 1390s in “the extreme west Yorkshire region.”\textsuperscript{41} In their edition of Jerusalem, Hanna and Lawton expand on Hanna’s original discussion of the poem’s composition, proposing that of all the monastic houses in the area, “Bolton would seem to be the most likely site for composition.”\textsuperscript{42} The author was probably a learned cleric living in a monastic house and writing for a lay audience.

\textbf{The Figure of the Jew in Late Medieval England}

Hanna also suggests that the poem’s content makes Bolton a likely place for composition because of the violence directed at a Jewish community in nearby York in

\textsuperscript{39} Millar 75.
\textsuperscript{40} Lawton, “Hunting and Hawking” 105. He cites Derek Pearsall’s “The Origins of the Alliterative Revival,” eds., Bernard S. Levy and Paul E. Szarmach, The Alliterative Tradition in the Fourteenth Century (Kent, OH: Kent State UP, 1981) 1-24. While the idea of an “alliterative revival” has come into question in recent scholarship, the notion of texts for both edification and entertainment is a useful one to keep in mind, especially with The Siege of Jerusalem.
\textsuperscript{41}Hanna, “Contextualizing” 113, 114. For a full discussion of the dialect and date of the poem, including its relationship to The Geste Hystoriale of the Destruction of Troy, see Lawton and Hanna xxvii-xxxvii. Lawton and Hanna’s composition location and date are most fully explained in their introduction to The Siege but are also discussed in their other articles and books listed in the bibliography. Further critics including Bonnie Millar, Christine Chism, Elisa Narin Van Court and Roger Nicholson all support the location of composition, though Chism and Nicholson suggest a composition date as late as 1400. See the bibliography for specific references.
\textsuperscript{42} Hanna and Lawton liv.
The violence continued in October 1198 when Richard I became king and declared his intention to participate in what would be known as the Third Crusade. Despite Richard’s attempts to protect the Jews in England, violence inspired by crusade furor broke out in several places. The worst was in York, where the palatial estate of a local Jewish community leader was sacked and his family killed. Following this, several Jews fled to the castle at York where the warden would be expected to protect them. They barricaded themselves in and were besieged by the mob and the sheriff’s men. In the end, after several days, the Jewish men killed their own wives and children, set fire to the tower, and killed themselves. Hanna’s assumption that the author’s choice of subject matter could have been influenced by a horrific act of violence from 200 years earlier seems extreme, but it brings to the forefront one of the biggest challenges facing a modern reader of the text. Since the expulsion of the Jews from England in 1290, what role did the Jews play in the English imagination? Did the author of Jerusalem have to reach back 200 years to find both an image of, and an attitude toward, Jews in general, and toward those who were involved in the crucifixion in particular? The simple answer to this question is no. Though there were few, if any, living in England, the presence of the Jew in English literature and art in the late fourteenth century is well documented.

When the Jews were expelled from England in 1290, they may have left physically, but they remained in the imaginations of the English people through literary,

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43 Hanna, “Contextualizing” 114.
theological and visual representations. Elisa Narin Van Court argues that “[n]umerous narratives concerned with Jews and Judaism demonstrate the extent to which, despite a marginal status, Jews become culturally central in the late Middle Ages.” For her, the response to Jews is never entirely stable because of the “ambivalent nature of Christian doctrine towards the Jews.” The Siege of Jerusalem is, in her mind, one such ambivalent literary text, as its violence is paired with a focus on the suffering of the Jews and “an implicit invitation to the reader to sympathize with the Jews.” Other literary portrayals of Jews include those in the Prioress’ Tale, contemporary to the composition of the poem, and The Croxton Play of the Sacrament, a mid-fourteenth century drama, contemporary to many of the manuscripts in which Jerusalem is found, as well as in other cycle dramas and stories of the miracle of the Virgin. The figure of the Jew was also present in sermons in the fourteenth century. Denise L. Despres notes that two English sermons for Easter, found in the British Library Manuscript Royal 18 B. xxiii and dated to the fourteenth century, “address the doubts of Christians through stories about Jews, but one sermon does so specifically by evoking images of communal purgation, transubstantiation, and ritual murder.” Far from expressing the “ambivalence” suggested by Van Court, some sermons clearly clung to the traditional model of Jew as

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47 Van Court, “Representing” 300.
48 Van Court, “Representing” 313.
50 Despres, “Cultic Anti-Judaism” 418.
villain and as a particular threat to Christians. Finally, artists’ renditions of the Jews appeared in manuscripts. Despres again argues that the presence of Jews in lay devotional works, especially books of hours, suggests that “Jews were not merely symbols of alterity in English culture, whether general or specific, but rather that their presence was a necessary element in the devotional world of later medieval English laity.” The illustrations of Jews are located near host desecration stories and Marian miracles in these manuscripts, and often Jews are depicted with pagans and heretics. These depictions of Jews across literature, theology and art offer no one distinct picture, but rather confirm the idea that the figure of the Jew was neither unknown, nor even rare, in the lives and imaginations of late fourteenth century England.

Critical Responses to *The Siege of Jerusalem*

For many critics, understanding the poem means seeing the Jews as something other than what they are. *The Siege of Jerusalem* has been consistently read as connected to contemporary politics and/or theology through the substitution of another group for the Jews. As a result, while Titus and Vespasian may be valiantly slaughtering “the Jews” in *Jerusalem*, scholars argue that its medieval readers would have associated the Jews with some other group, such as Saracens or heretics. Indeed, this scholarly displacement of Jews for some other kind of late medieval “other” has been practiced upon other texts as well. Most notably, *The Croxton Play of the Sacrament* has been the subject of such discussion, including Cecilia Cutts’ 1944 article “The Croxton Play: An Anti-Lollard

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52 Despres, “Immaculate Flesh” 50, 56.
Piece,” in which she suggests that the Jews in the text could be, and were at the time, read as Lollards.⁵³ The multiple readings of Jews, whether in sermons, plays, poetry or art, reveals that the readings of the Jews in any kind of text were unstable. David Lawton suggests that this kind of persistent variability is inherent in The Play of the Sacrament for the audience because the Jews look like the Christians and “that is why the sign Jew is so slippery […] the fear is that they are not [easy stereotypes], that there is no real or at least visible difference between Jewish and Christian merchants.”⁵⁴ Four essays concerning The Siege of Jerusalem discuss potential readings of the Jewish characters in the poem. The first two essays are Ralph Hanna’s “Contextualizing The Siege of Jerusalem” and Mary Hamel’s “The Siege of Jerusalem as a Crusading Poem.”⁵⁵ Both Hanna and Hamel suggest that the poem could be read, either in its own time or by the audiences of the manuscripts recopied later, as supporting the expansion of European (and perhaps specifically English) Christianity through violence. In the third discussion of the poem, Christine Chism links Jewish bodies with gold.⁵⁶ Finally, Roger Nicholson reduces the Jewish characters to bodies alone.⁵⁷

Hanna argues that the sanctioned violence in the poem celebrates an attempt to bring under Christian control both Jerusalem and Pagan Rome and resonates differently.

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with a later audience than it would have with the original one.\textsuperscript{58} Hanna concludes his article with the suggestion that Richard Frampton copied the poem in the 1410s for a Lancastrian audience and that the poem may have been read as anti-Lollard by that audience because of the poem’s violence towards those characters who harm Christ’s body. For Hanna, it seems possible that the Jews who crucified Christ came to be reread as Lollards who attacked the Eucharist in the reign of Henry IV.\textsuperscript{59}

Hamel, on the other hand, discusses a reading possible for the audience at the time of its original composition. She compares the poem to crusade romances, attempting to demonstrate that the poem falls into the genre of crusade romance. Though the poem is set in 70AD, and the enemies of the Christians are Jews and not Saracens, she notes that the poem “shares both its cruelty and bigotry with narratives of the Crusades, both chronicle and fiction” and “is symptomatic of a peculiar fervor on the subject of crusading” that characterized the last decade of the fourteenth century.\textsuperscript{60} Van Court notes that readings such as Hanna’s and Hamel’s can ultimately suggest that “Jews as [the] unknown and absent ‘other’ are of no particular concern either to authors or audience, or that Jew \textit{qua} Jew is a less compelling reading than Jew \textit{qua} Lollard or Saracen or Lancastrian.”\textsuperscript{61} By merely displacing, rather than dealing with the Jews as Jews in the text, we lose a vital aspect of potential audience readings.

\textsuperscript{58} Hanna, “Contextualizing” 112.
\textsuperscript{59} Hanna, “Contextualizing” 117-20.
\textsuperscript{60} Hamel 179.
\textsuperscript{61} Van Court “Representing.” 294.
Christine Chism’s article, “The Siege of Jerusalem: Liquidating Assets,” asserts that the point of the poem is primarily nation building and specifically the unification of European nations against the East. Literally converting the Jewish bodies into gold, “the poem reworks the ideas of Jerusalem, the Jews, and the Orient, transforming them from possible equals and rivals of the new Christian Roman Empire into pure, movable wealth.” The Jews are extended to represent all non-Christians and they become the figures upon which all English and European anxiety about any possible “other” is placed.

Roger Nicholson applies Kristeva’s theory of the abject to Jerusalem. For him, the violence and bodily corruption, flayed bodies, stinking corpses, and cannibalistic mother all point to the “abject as object … as other” in the poem, clarifying the “providential and haunted history” of Christendom. While the abjection makes the poem both intriguing and repellent to modern audiences, the poem is more political than anything else, and part of a crusading polemic designed to unite England and France to take back the Holy Land. By eliminating the complexity of the Jews in the text by insisting that it is only the horrors of the violence done to Jewish bodies that gives them meaning for audiences either then or now, once again, they are a stand-in for the whole East and all those against whom the Christians might fight.

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63 Nicholson 484.
The question of how to read the Jews in the text is bound tightly together with the importance of both Jerusalem / the Holy Land and the relationship of Jews to Saracens in the European mind. Because the Jews and the Holy Land / Jerusalem did play a significant role in crusade propaganda and in English ideology about the crusades at the time when Jerusalem was written, the possibility of reading the poem as some kind of crusade propaganda must not be ignored, especially since there is a precedent for connecting Jewish figures to Saracens in England by the late fourteenth century. From the time Pope Urban II proclaimed the first crusade at the Council of Clermont in November of 1095, the crusades introduced Europe, and England in particular, to Islam. The religion and those who practiced it became linked with the only other race from the Middle East with which the crusaders were at all familiar: the Jews:

[A]s the only religious minority which the Latin West knew and tolerated during the early Middle Ages, the Jews inevitably provided Christendom with a paradigm for the evaluation and classification of the Muslim ‘other,’ a springboard for formulating a deliberate response to him and his faith. [...] As the crusades broadened the horizons of the Christian mentality, the world of the non-Christian assumed nuance and complexity; the Jews, who for centuries had functioned as the prime enemy in Christian religious polemic, began to share center-stage with Muslims (and heretics), such that the polemic against them developed in new
directions and such that the singularity of their function—and, as a result, their power—in the discourse of Christian theology were reduced.\textsuperscript{64}

Though Cohen speaks here of the changing role of the Jews in Christian theology, I believe the same can be said for the Jew as a symbol in art and literature in the late fourteenth century. There are several examples of the Jew connected to the Saracen in the English literary imagination contemporary to \textit{The Siege of Jerusalem}. Chaucer sets the \textit{Prioress’ Tale} in Asia and, of the previous or contemporary versions of the story, none is set in that region.\textsuperscript{65} Furthermore, a tradition of “Muslim-Jewish linkage appears in English and continental drama and other literature, in treatises, in canon law, and in the visual arts.”\textsuperscript{66} The author of \textit{The Siege of Jerusalem} does bring to mind the current perceived Saracen threat. Rather than simply placing the story in a Saracen occupied location, or having Jewish characters swear by Muslim gods (as Herod or Pilate do in the mystery plays), the \textit{Jerusalem} author makes this connection via clothing and battle weaponry. The Jewish army first emerges from the city with “An hundred þousand on hors […]/ With-out folke vpon fot” (446-7). Then, however, they also ride on “fyf and twenti olyfauntes defensible bestes,/ With brode castels on bak” and “[…] dromedaries […] with harnays of mayle” and “Camels closed in stele […] & on back hadde/ Echon a toret of tre” (449-50, 453, 455, 457, 460). A similar description is given in the \textit{Alliterative Morte Arthure} when the Roman emperor rides to battle with his giants,

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{65} Delaney, “Chaucer’s Prioress” 43.
\textsuperscript{66} Delaney, “Chaucer’s Prioress” 49.
\end{flushright}
witches and warlocks: “Might no blonkes them bere, those bustous churles, / But covered cameles of towrs, enclosed in mailes” (615-6). Both the romances, which are dated to the last quarter of the fourteenth century, offer similar depictions of villains. The Arthure author clarifies that among the host riding with the Roman king against Arthur are “Sarazenes ynow,” linking the tower-topped camels with an image of a Saracen enemy (624). This example of another popular alliterative poem provides evidence that the traits of the Jews in Jerusalem could be recognized as familiar traits of Saracens as well. The Jews also have a war machine which echoes the exotic quality of strange animals while blending it with iconography from the Jewish culture:

An olyfaunt y-armed came out, [vpon] l[of]te,
Keuered myd a castel was craftily ywroʒt,
A tabernacle in þe tour atyred was riche,
Piʒt as a pueloun on pileres of seuere,
A which of white seuere wal[w]ed þerynne
On four goions of gold þat hit fram the grounde bare,

68 Also, Chaucer’s satire of the romance genre, Sir Thopas, contains hints of the standard representation of Saracen romance villains with the giant that Sir Thopas faces named “Olifaunt” who swears “by Termagaunt” a supposed Saracen god. The Riverside Chaucer, ed. Larry D. Benson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987) 807, 809.
69 Ethnic identification using strange animals is also made in the romance The Sultan of Babylon, where the Sultan Laban makes his army drink the blood of wild beasts, tigers, antelopes and giraffes. Alan Lupack, ed., Three Middle English Charlemagne Romances, TEAMS (Kalamazoo, Medieval Institute Publications Western Michigan University, 1990) 1007-8. Joinville explains that one Saracen leader, the Old Man of the Mountain, gave gifts including a figure of an elephant and a giraffe made of crystal. Joinville and Villehardouin both repeatedly reference huge armies of Saracen knights arrayed in armor and riding on horses or charging on foot. Joinville and Villehardouin: Chronicle of the Crusades, trans. M.R.B. Shaw (New York: Penguin Books, 1963) 278.
A chosen chayre þerby [an] ch[aun]dele[r]s twelfe
Betyn al with b[ou]rn[d]e gold with brennande sergis. (465-72)

The evidence of “Jewishness” is the presence of a “tabernacle,” on the back of the elephant. A “tabernacle” is the tent in which the Jews originally placed the Ark of the Covenant, but it also could be known as a place of worship, or simply as a container for consecrated items including, in a Christian context, the Eucharist. The elephant is carrying an entire place of worship, ornately decorated to blend both the Jewish and the Saracen elements into a formidable enemy. In the contemporary poem *Sir Launfal*, similar finery is displayed, if for a radically different purpose, in Dame Tryamour’s pavilion:

The pavyloun was wrouth, forsothe, ywys,
All of werk of Sarysynys,
The pomelles of crystall;
Upon the top an ern ther stod
Of bournede golde, ryche and good,
Ylorysched with ryche amall.
Hys eyn wer carbonkeles bryght— (265-71)70

Both structures are pavilions and both are decorated with jewels, precious metals and finery. Tryamour’s pavilion is described as being made by Saracens and the similar language and imagery of Caiaphas’s tabernacle and pavilion-topped elephant falls into the same genre. Such passages as the one from *Sir Launfal* make it possible to expect

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70 Anne Laskaya, and Eve Salisbury, eds., *The Middle English Breton Lays* (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications Western Michigan University, 1995).
that the audience for *Jerusalem* could easily have made the connection between the
descriptions of the Jews and the typical descriptions of Saracens and Saracen finery in
other romances. The villains in Jerusalem are the perfect enemy blending the “now” of
the story with the “now” of the audience. The threat to Christendom is twofold—Saracen
and Jew—so the author paints the historic Jewish enemy, in such a way as to remind his
audience of the current threat to and in Jerusalem: the Saracen.\(^{71}\)

The animals-cum-battle machinery link the Jewish figures with Saracens not only
as a religious enemy of Christendom, but also as a figure drawn from the romance genre.
The next lines describe the battle armor of Caiaphas, the leader of the Jews:

\[\begin{align*}
\&e \text{ chekes of } \&e \text{ chayre \ were cha[r]bokles fine} \\
\&ber, couered myd a riche cloþe, \ Cayphas was sette. \\
\text{A plate of pulsched gold \ was piʒt on his breste} \\
\text{With many preciose perle \ and pured stones. (473-76).}
\end{align*}\]

In the figure of Caiaphas is the historic enemy of Christ dressed like a king or knight.
Though his chair is never called a throne, the jewels and finery on it suggest his position
as a king as much as a head priest. The presence of gold and jewels in his clothing is
another romance feature, and the pearl was also an emblematic jewel for Richard II at this
time, making it a marker of royalty and aristocracy.\(^{72}\) Similar accounts can be found in

*Sir Ferumbras*, a mid-to-late-fourteenth century romance. The knight Ferumbras is

\(^{71}\) The heroes of *The Siege* also have crusade weaponry. They have a war machine that is a dragon made of
gold (393-6), and the text mentions dragons and eagles covered with jewels as war instruments (329-32).
Joinville describes the real crusade weapon, “Greek fire,” as “like a dragon flying though the air” (216), so
dragons and eagles or elephants with churches on their backs were well within the realm of possibility.

\(^{72}\) For a discussion of the pearl’s role in late medieval England, especially in relation to the poem *Pearl*, see
described as wearing a coat of armor “Of cloþ of gold it was mad & enbrouded with perles schene” (553). Arthur’s armor in the Alliterative Morte is also adorned with finery. He puts on a “aketoun with orfrayes full rich […] a bacenett burnish of silver […] [and a diadem] with claspes of clere gold, couched with stones; […] and] gloves gaylich gilt and graven at the hemmes / With graines and gobelets, glorious of hew” (902, 906, 909, 912-3). Historically, Villehardouin tells us that booty from the second siege of Constantinople in 1204 yielded jewels, silver, gold, silks, ermine and other precious items. Thus in the figure and army of Caiaphas, the author makes use of the common Jew-Saracen trope to draw the attention of the reader to multiple enemies of Christendom. To lose sight of the Jew as a Jew and substitute for him only the Saracen diminishes the force of the subtextual argument presented by the author: the good knights, Titus and Vespasian, come out not only to fight the Jewish threat to all Christianity, but also their Saracen counterparts in the late fourteenth century. Thus, knights reading this, seeking to follow the heroes, would be encouraged to see multiple threats to Christianity. By recognizing the Jewish and Saracen presence, it becomes much more difficult to dismiss this piece purely as a crusade romance or as simple crusade propaganda.

The poem falls into the time period prior to the final crusade attempt of the 1380s, when, in England, as in the rest of Europe, the crusades were controversial. At a time

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74 Shaw 92.
75 In particular, crusades against Christians drew a great deal of criticism. As Christopher Tyerman notes: “English peers doubted the wisdom or respectability of Bishop Despenser’s crusade in 1383 and Thomas Walsingham condemned the persistent campaigns of the Teutonic Knights against the Poles and Lithuanians.” “The Holy Land and the Crusades of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries,” Crusade and Settlement, ed. Peter W. Edbury (Cardiff: U College Cardiff P, 1985) 107.
when enthusiasm for the crusades, both in terms of philosophical and monetary support, was waning, it was “still possible to observe in the grumblings against certain crusades the obvious feature of the continued primacy of the Holy Land which provided an emotional and theoretical, if not practical, context for the crusade and anti-crusade propagandist alike.”

Philippe de Mézières, in his Letter to King Richard in 1395, attempted to convince both the Kings of France and of England to embark on another crusade for the Holy Land. He describes Charles and Richard as “two kings, as true champions of the Faith, [who] are now prepared to present [themselves] before […] God, ready to avenge his wrongs.”

First, it is clear that it is the job of a leader or a king to avenge the wrongs not only done to his nation, but to God. Philippe asks that the two kings establish an “Order of Chivalry of the Passion” so that they can go and reclaim, with battle, the Holy Land. Though it is unlikely that this letter was written before Jerusalem, it nevertheless makes clear the persistent importance of the Holy Land in the minds of both the French and the English. Philippe also makes clear that the role of the leaders, as champions of the faith, is to embark on such crusades.

Yet another of the ways in which the Holy Land and the Jews appear in English culture is through the sermon. Christoph T. Maier, in his study of crusade sermons, notes:

> [t]he contribution of propaganda, and in particular sermons, to creating a public image of the crusade cannot be underestimated. By the thirteenth

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76 Tyerman 107.
78 Philippe de Mézières 31, 104. “Nouvelle chevalerie de la passion Jhesu Crist.”
century, crusade propaganda had come to play a considerable public role throughout most parts of Europe.\textsuperscript{79}

Collections of crusade sermons and model sermons from various preachers, including Jacques de Vitry and Gilbert of Tournai, exist today. Fourteen manuscripts from Jacques survive and between sixty and seventy from Gilbert.\textsuperscript{80} Though all of these predate \textit{The Siege of Jerusalem} by at least 100 years, their popularity, coupled with the fact that the author of the poem likely knew Latin, suggests that these sermons, or ones like them, would have been available to the author. Crusade sermons focused on the taking of the cross, and their symbolism focused on the person of Christ and on the idea of following Christ into battle.\textsuperscript{81} Jacques de Vitry, in one of his many sermons, explains that Christ wanted to be given the sign of the cross first “so that he may sign his soldiers.”\textsuperscript{82} Later in the same sermon, he refers to those who “[defend] the faith with the sword” as “soldiers of Christ.”\textsuperscript{83} In \textit{Jerusalem}, Vespasian uses the notion of being a solider of Christ when he calls his men to the fight saying “And we ben diʒt today Driʒten to serue—/ Hey Heuen-kyng, hede to [þyn] own!” (521-2). The notion of service to God here takes on the military language that was familiar to those listening to crusade sermons of the thirteenth century. After hearing their leader call on God to watch over them, the men emphasize their own devotion: “Þe ledes louten hym alle and aloude sayde,/ ‘Today þat

\textsuperscript{79} Christoph T. Maier, \textit{Crusade Propaganda and Ideology}, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000) 51

\textsuperscript{80} Maier 3, 14

\textsuperscript{81} Maier 54

\textsuperscript{82} Maier 86, 87 “…ut signet millites suos.” Latin original and all translations from Maier.

\textsuperscript{83} Maier 90, 91. “alia que fidem deffendit gladio sicut Christi milites.”
fleþe any fote  þe fende haue his soule’!” (523-4). Jacques de Vitry also comments on fear and timidity in soldiers of Christ:

[…] they who are so weak and rotten that the cross cannot be sewn onto them; like old pieces of cloth that are worn out by age and are no longer useful for anything, they cannot hold a seam. They are fearful people who are not suitable for war and they will be condemned by the Lord.84

Though not quite so blunt as Vespasian’s troops, Jacques makes clear that cowardice in the service of God has damning consequences. The passages from Jacques de Vitry offer insight into the crusade-like displays of faith from Vespasian’s troops. Like the real-life crusaders, Jerusalem’s heroes are ready, willing and able to die for God.

**The Siege of Jerusalem and Chanson de Geste**

Crusade sermons may offer a source for the ideology espoused by the author of Jerusalem, but much of the language bringing to mind the crusades may also find its source in the chansons de geste and other heroic and/or crusade romances. Translated, adapted, rewritten from or loosely based on French originals, the English Charlemagne romances chronicle the heroic adventures of the French king and his twelve peers. As stated above, the Jewish villains resemble Saracen counterparts in chansons de geste and other Romances. Vespasian’s language is inspirational: “And we be diȝt today  Driȝten to serue—/ Hey Heuen-kyng, hede to [þyn] own!” (521-2). Three English Charlemagne romances have similar examples: Sir Ferumbras, dated to the third quarter of the

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84 Maier 124,125. “qui ita pusillanimes sunt et putridi quod crux illis non potest assui, qui tamquam panni vetustate consumpti et nulli usui apti suturem retinere non valent. Hii sunt formidolosi qui ad bellum non sunt ydonei, sed a Domino reprobentur.”
fourteenth century and _The Sultan of Babylon_ and _The Siege of Milan_, both dated to the end of the fourteenth century. In _Ferumbras_, Charlemagne asks for Christ’s help in Sir Oliver’s battle with Ferumbras: “…god help þe, dere herte, / þat þou mote ouercome our fo” (324-5). In _Babylon_, Charles asks for aid for his knight as well.

O Lord God in Trinite,
That of myghtis Thou arte moost,
By virtue of thy majesté
That alle knoweste and woste,
Lete not this hethen man
Thy servaunte overcome in fyght,
That on The bileve ne kan,
Jhesu Lorde, for Thy myghte!
But graunte Thy man the victorye,
And the paynym skomfited to be,
As Thou arte Almyghty God of glorye!
Nowe meekly, Lorde, I pray to the. (1311-22)

Charlemagne’s call for God to aid the knight is similar to Vespasian’s, though the emphasis by Vespasian is on the knights coming to do a task for God rather than emphasizing the need for God’s aid in completing the task. The authors of both texts consistently repeat tag lines which reinforce the idea of God’s might, particularly in Christian warfare. Finally, in _Milan_, Bishop Turpin gives a speech similar to the speech Vespasian gives, not only reminding his troops of the sacrifice of God, “He tolde the

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85 Lupack 1,105.
hoste with lowde steven / How brede and wyne was sent fro heven” but also assuring them of their reward if they do die in battle: “And whoso endys in this felde / In His byggynge sall he belde, / Evermore in blysse to bee” (901-2, 907-9). In all three examples, the primary function is the same: the men invoke God for a literal and/or physical victory over their enemies. Furthermore, *The Alliterative Morte Arthure* also uses similar language. Arthur declares that victory is in the hands of God: “Destainy and doughtiness of deedes of armes, / all is deemed and delt at Drightenes will!” (1563-4). Finally, the proliferation of such phrases in romances is confirmed when they are satirized. Chaucer’s *Sir Thopas* is a romance to satirize all romances and the other pilgrims think it is so bad that they do not allow Geoffry to finish it. However, in the just over 200 lines given, Thopas calls “O Seinte Marie,” swears “par ma fay,” escapes “thurg Goddes gras” and the narrator hopes that “God shilde his cors fro shonde!” (784, 820, 831, 908). Calling to Mary, swearing by his faith, referring to God’s grace and God’s power to protect are all elements that appear in various romances, some of which also appear in *Jerusalem*. The influence of both crusade sermons and popular romances can be seen in *Jerusalem*, and this blending is part of what makes the poem so interesting. Unlike Arthurian romances and, to a large extent, Charlemagne romances, *Jerusalem* retells the story of an actual historical event with which much of the audience could have been familiar. The poem’s enemies (both actual and implied) occupied a land that remained a focus of contention for hundreds of years in the minds of the English. The

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86 For a full discussion of *The Siege of Milan*, see Chapter Three.
87 *Duke Roland and Sir Otuel of Spain* also has multiple instances of heroes invoking God. In particular, Charlemagne prays through Roland’s entire single-combat with Otuel. His prayers are answered and Otuel converts. For a full discussion of this poem see Chapter Four.
heroes of such crusades were to be found both in the poetry and the pulpit. The author of *Jerusalem* draws the poem’s heroes and villains and its ideology from multiple sources, both literary and religious, in much the same way as he drew its multi-sourced plot.

Finally, the Roman heroes themselves take on the traits of romance genre heroes. The author of *Jerusalem* identifies the heroes’ prowess as knights through their appearances and knightly behavior. In the midst of the siege on the city, while the heroes are attempting to starve the Jews, they entertain themselves in the most proper of aristocratic medieval ways: hunting and hawking. Vespasian explains:

For we wol hunten at þe hart þis heþes aboute
And hure racches renne amonge þis rowe bonkes;
Ride to þe reuer and rere vp þe foules,
Se faucouns fle, fele of þe beste— (889-92)

David Lawton notes, “[h]ere hunting and hawking go together with jousting as appropriate recreation for warriors, and, since they go toward establishing Titus’s kingliness and Vespasian’s qualifications to rule Rome, form part of the profile of kingship and courtly life.”

Just as the author called to mind the Saracens in the costuming and arming of the Jews, here he calls to mind the medieval hero-knight by having Titus and Vespasian participate in the same kind of recreation that knights of the later Middle Ages might enjoy. Vespasian’s arming is also described in great detail. Taking up twenty lines, the hero’s full armor includes fine gold clothes, a breastplate of grey steel, a coat of arms, a belt of gold, a sword with a gold pommel and hilt, a bright

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89 Numerous medieval English romances, including *Sir Orfeo, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and *The Sultan of Babylon*, have knightly figures who participate in the hunt.
shield, grey steel gloves trimmed with gold, a gold helm and finally a crown of clean gold with rich stones including pearls and sapphires (745-65). The richness of his attire, with its focus on steel and gold, not only demonstrates his own wealth, but signals his power and prowess as a knight. As Roger Nicholson argues:

the poem touches reality not by its recovery of past events, but by the familiar romantic intensity with which it imagines them as present adventure. Virtue in such lines resides first in the “gold,” “perles,” and “saphyres,” laying about the hero the garment of romance invincibility and validating his mission, not now by reference to the imperative will of God, but by recourse to the powerful semiotic system of chivalric fiction.  

The audience can recognize the knights as heroes, and even more importantly, as heroes to be emulated in their own time, partly because of the patterns which resemble other common and easily recognizable tropes.

**Christian Acts: Conversion, Relics and Promise Keeping**

Before the heroes can avenge Christ, they first must become Christians. Titus and Vespasian both experience miracles wherein they are marked as blessed. In a narrative so focused on the body of Christ, it is fitting that the miracles associated with their conversions be fundamentally bodily in nature. Both Titus and Vespasian are healed from illness as result of their new-found faith and devotion.

The proper knightly response to Christ in *The Siege of Jerusalem* is also demonstrated in the way Titus and Vespasian convert and then fulfill their conversion promises. Titus hears the story of Christ from Nathan, and the author uses this

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90 Nicholson 460.
opportunity to recount for his audience the basic tenets of Christianity, including the
virgin birth (104-8) and the nature of the Trinity (113-20). However, the true lesson of
the poem is not found in this didactic section; instead, the audience finds the author’s
main point in Titus’ reaction:

“[A] Rome renayed!” quod þe kyng. “[a] riche [emperour],
Cesar, sinful wreche, þat sent hym fram Rome,
Why nadde þy lycam be leyd low vnder erþe
Whan Pilat provost was made such a prince to jugge?” (173-6)

Titus’ response focuses on the bad governance that must have been present in Rome in
order to allow such a holy man to suffer. Titus’ message is clear: the ruler of a nation is
responsible for the evils that go on in that nation. Titus recognizes not only the
immediate problem, Pilate, but also the corrupt government that put him in that role. For
his recognition of the injustice, Titus is immediately healed: “And or þis wordes were
wonne to þe ende,/ Þe cankere þat þe kyng hadde clenly was heled” (177-8). His
response to the miraculous healing is to vow revenge on the Jews:

Bot now bayne me my bone, blessed lord,
To stire Nero with noye and newen his sorowe,
And Y schal buske me boun hem bale [for]to wyrche
To do þe deueles of dawe and þy deþ venge. (185-8).

The poet combines the ideals of civic and Christian duty. For the knights reading this,
vioence on behalf of the Church is not only acceptable, but also a necessary part of any
government. Titus completes his conversion and dedication to Christ by being baptized and participating in the official rites of the Church (191-2) and by the end of the poem he has conquered Jerusalem.

Vespasian’s conversion involves similar themes, but a different means of participating in and protecting Christian interests. He becomes the founder and protector of the Church. Vespasian’s first act in response to conversion is the establishment of the Catholic Church in Rome with his acceptance and housing of Veronica’s veil. Upon hearing the story of Christ and the healing veil, Vespasian has twenty-two knights fetch Veronica so that she can be reunited with Peter, who is already preaching in Rome.

Before the healing can occur, however, another miracle happens:

Bot a ferly byfelle, forþmyd hem alle:
In her temple bytidde tenful þynges.
Þe mahound and þe mametes tomortled to peces
And all tocrased as þe cloþ þroʒ þe kirke passed.
Into þe palice with þe prente, þan þe pope þede;
Knỳʒtes kepten þe cloþe and on knees fallen.
A flauour fla[w]e þerefro— þey fellden hit alle:
Was neuer odour ne eyr vpon erþe swetter. (237-44)

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91 One can see how Titus’ reaction would fit nicely into Hanna’s argument in “Contextualizing The Siege of Jerusalem” that by the early fifteenth century Lancastrian-supporting audiences might read this poem as a justification for the interest of the government in heretics.
The pagan idols are destroyed, but the knights are capable of recognizing, participating in, and converting to the new religion. The sweet odor emitted from the veil comes after the knights kneel, confirming the propriety of the knights’ actions and the power of the veil. Furthermore, the behavior of the knights reminds the audience that Christian knights respect relics.⁹²

Vespasian continues to demonstrate proper religious belief as he follows his conversion and healing with the construction of a reliquary:

Þe vernycle after Veroynk  [V]aspian hit called,
Garde hit gayly agysen  in gold and in seluere.
ʒt is þe visage in þe vail  as Veronyk hym broʒt;

þe Romaynes hit [te]ldeþ a rome,  and for reylk holden. (261-4)

Vespasian’s establishment of Veronica’s veil as an official relic makes him the founder of the Roman Catholic Church. He establishes Peter as the Pope (though the poem gives him this title long before he meets Vespasian) and leaves the veil ornately encased for the world to see. Vespasian’s role as a founder of the Church then expands to protector/avenger of the Church when he vows to go to Nero and ask to avenge Christ’s death. In determining who will go to this war, the assembled senators:

[…] sone vpon haste
To iugge who iewes myʒt best  vpon þe Iewys take.

And all demeden by dome  þo dukes to wende
Þat were cured þrow Crist  þat þey on croys slownen. (269-72)

⁹² This respect for relics may also be read by later audiences as an anti-Lollard moment.
Vespasian’s devotion makes him the obvious leader of the siege, and makes him, like Titus, a role model for a Christian leader. His piety is obvious to all of those around him, marking him as fit for military service in the name of Christ.

While Titus sees the siege through to the end, avenging Christ in battle, Vespasian is set up as a different kind of Christian hero. Rather than staying and razing Jerusalem with his own hands, Vespasian is called back to be the new emperor of Rome. Nero has become intolerable and is attacking the Christians in Rome:

In Rome Nero haþ now mychel noye wroʒt,

To deþ pyned þe pope and mychel peple quelled,

Petre, apostlen prince and seint Poule [boþe],

[...]

Combred Cristen fele þat on Crist leued. (897-9, 902)

Once again, government in Rome has proven itself hostile to Christianity and those who follow Christ. In killing both the rock of the Church (Peter) and one of the most prolific writers of the New Testament (Paul), Nero is attacking both the primary Christian institution and text. In contrast, Vespasian is called to replace him. When he receives the letter, Vespasian voices his concerns:

How Y myʒt sauy myself and I so wroʒt;

For Y haue heylych heyʒt here forto lenge

Tille I þis toured [t]oun ha[ue] taken at [my] wille

And me þe ʒates ben ʒet and ʒolden þe keyes
And sulp honshed on hem þat þis hold kepyn,
[B]etyn and brosten doun þis britages heye
Þat neuer ston in þat stede stond vpon opere. (976-982)

The message here is that a Christian knight must consider the promises to Christ above the desires he has for his own life. As much as Vespasian would like to be emperor, he cannot simply abandon his promise. Vespasian once again lingers on violence here, reminding the audience of his earlier motivational speech. The solution to this problem, according to his general, Sir Sabyn, is simple:

[…] semelich lord,
We ben wyes þe with þy worschup to furþer,
Of long tyme bylafte and ledes þyn Owen:
Þat we don is þy dede, may no man demen elles. (985-8)

Sabyn’s assurance that Vespasian’s men are but an extension of himself details the relationship between a ruler and his people. Vespasian is able to both become the emperor of Rome and conquer Jerusalem because what his soldiers do, he does. The message here is clear: a Christian leader is one who protects and defends Christ and/or the Church while at home, abroad or both.

**Affective Piety: The Body of Christ and Violent Inspiration**

With all of the connections between Jews and Saracens in the late fourteenth century and the connection between Vespasian and crusade / romance heroes, can *The Siege of Jerusalem* be read as a crusading poem? The answer is unquestionably, yes. It also must be understood that, as a crusade text, it finds at its center, like *chansons* and sermons, the crusaders—the knights themselves. There is no simple one-to-one
correspondence in which the Jews and Vespasians of the past are the Saracens and Charlemagnes of the present, but rather the poem is a more complicated attempt to blend the past and the present as a demonstration of how knights ought to function now. To return to my opening assessment of the poem: The Siege of Jerusalem is fundamentally a story about two heroic responses to Christ’s suffering. By reading the poem as a proper response to Christ’s life in general, and, in particular, to the suffering of Christ, we can see that while it reflects crusade propaganda ideology, more importantly, it also may reflect the late medieval practice of affective piety, though not the affective piety most common to the late fourteenth century. Instead, this poem demonstrates the same kind of affective piety found in crusade sermons: a piety whose emphasis on Christ’s suffering inspires and encourages violence.

Affective piety is the form of Christian worship which asks the worshiper to visualize, have compassion for, meditate on, and imitate the suffering Christ, and in doing so, eventually imitate his passivity in the face of such suffering as well. The suffering Christ, however, was neither the first nor only depiction of Christ to be described in the Middle Ages. Giles Constable notes that early medieval theology in general focused on Christ as the all powerful king of heaven; the cross represented his triumphant second coming rather than suffering and death.93 He goes on to note that in the twelfth century, “most crucifixes […] still showed Him with only a slight curve in his arms and legs and wearing a royal crown which was not generally replaced by a crown of

thorns until the thirteenth century.\textsuperscript{94} For much of the early Middle Ages the image of Christ not suffering, but bearing crucifixion as though he was in no pain was the most common representation.

Rosemary Woolf describes another kind of Christ figure in \textit{The English Religious Lyric in the Middle Ages}:

\begin{quote}
[I]n Arthurian romance a knight might by brave endurance and heroic encounters save the lady whom he loved from treacherous capture, hoping thereby to gain her favour, or he might joust brilliantly in front of her with the ambition of winning her love by his prowess. Fighting thus became a display of love and also an appeal for it. Within this literary tradition Christ the warrior-bridegroom became transformed into a medieval knight and lover, and the emphasis shifted from the pattern of the action, which symbolized the Redemption, to the emotional content which fitted so well with the principles of affective meditation.\textsuperscript{95}
\end{quote}

Christ as knight suffers for his beloved (the sinner) and must fight to win “her” back from sin. Such a construction embodies both the power of the early crowned figure and the later wounded and passive one. The thirteenth century religious guide the \textit{Ancrene Wisse} contains such an example in part seven:

\begin{quote}
Ant [Christ] as noble wohere efter monie messagers ant feole god-deden com to pruvien his luve ant schawde thurh cnihtschipe thet he wes luve-wurthe, as were sum-hwile cnihtes i-wunet to donne—dude him i
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{94} Constable 164.
turneiment ant hefde for his leoves luve his schelde i feht as kene cniht on
euche half i-thurlet. His scheld, the wreah his Godd-head, wes his leove
licome thet wes i-spread o rode, brad as scheld buven in his i-strahte
earmes, nearow bineothen as the an fot—efter monies wene—set up-o the
other. (83-9) ⁹⁶

Here, Christ is depicted as the ultimate knight and his tournament is transformed into the
crucifixion. ⁹⁷ Though the details about being pierced in the side and stretched across the
cross are included, this passage does not contain the intense focus on Christ’s suffering
seen in later examples of affective piety, including the Meditations. Ellen M. Ross notes
in The Grief of God that “by the fourteenth century depictions of the suffering Jesus were
predominant.” ⁹⁸ Ross goes on to suggest that whether in art, literature, or sermons the
suffering Christ was meant to be a focus of empathy and that through that empathy the
sinner could first see his own sin and hence his own fault in the crucifixion and through
that fault find his way to confession. ⁹⁹ These changes from the heroic king-Christ to the
suffering Christ, though not absolute or without exception, also show a shift in the
response of the observer. The kingly Christ was “one who wore a crown, sat on a throne
and held the orb, which was used by kings in the tenth century as part of the royal
imitatio Christi, but was also taken as one of the royal accoutrements of Christ.” ¹⁰⁰ Early

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⁹⁶ Robert Hasenfratz, ed., Ancrene Wisse (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications Western Michigan
University, 2000).
⁹⁷ The lyric “Quia amore langueo” (“Because I Languish for Love”) also depicts Christ as a king and
focuses on Mary as a queen (93). Middle English Lyrics, eds. Maxwell S. Luria and Richard L. Hoffman
⁹⁸ Ellen M. Ross, The Grief of God: Images of the Suffering Jesus in Late Medieval England (Oxford:
⁹⁹ Ross 24-5.
¹⁰⁰ Constable 162.
kings patterned themselves, including the symbols of their office, after this powerful figure. In contrast, the later model required an internalization of the vision and a personal decision to confess, rather than mere outward repetition of kingly symbols. Furthermore, the later images mark a change in the perception of Christ as well. The heroic king on the cross is not depicted as suffering; he is seemingly unharmed by the crucifixion. In contrast, the wounded Christ not only suffers, but suffers passively, willingly and often excessively.

By the late fourteenth century, though not the only way to view Christ’s body, the suffering Christ was the most common, as David Aers explains in *Powers of the Holy*:

> The humiliated, tortured, whipped, nailed-down, pierced, dying but life-giving body of Christ, the very body literally present in the eucharist—this body became the dominant icon of the late medieval church and the devotion it cultivated and authorized.¹⁰¹

Aers’ description of the gruesome, but commonplace, figurations of Christ’s body reminds us of how very passive the figure had become. Dwelling on this passivity in the face of great torture and death becomes a way to connect to God in the later Middle Ages.

One such example, profoundly influential in the later Middle Ages, is the *Meditations on the Life of Christ* (*Meditationes Vite Christi*). Sarah Beckwith notes that “it is hard to underestimate the importance of the *Meditationes*, for it was the text that literally translated the life of Christ for his followers, and itself became a work that was developed

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in several vernaculars.”

The proliferation of the work, along with the fact that The Siege of Jerusalem appears at least twice with the Meditations, suggests that the audiences for the poem and perhaps even the author himself were familiar with the work. It is therefore useful to look at a few passages from that text. In the Meditations, the author advises the reader on how to meditate on the Passion and participate in affective piety: “Now we must treat of the passion of our Lord Jesus. A person who wishes to glorify the passion and cross of the Lord should persevere in earnest mediation on it.”

The immediate connection between receiving the benefits of Christ’s sacrifice and dwelling on the suffering needed for that reward is obvious here. Further, the author clearly explains the parts of the Passion upon which the devout should meditate:

“Therefore because he was truly human, it was as a man that he was placed in great agony. Contemplate and watch carefully all the actions and each and every affliction of your Lord. As closely as you can, suffer together with him.”

The highly personal nature of this study guide is revealed in the author’s use of imperatives. Literally, the author tells the reader to “be as intimate as possible” (intime) with Christ and to consider and watch him. Clearly the person meditating on Christ is to be witnessing the moment

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102 Sarah Beckwith, Christ’s Body: Identity, Culture and Society in Late Medieval Writings (New York: Routledge, 1993) 64.


of the crucifixion and to be experiencing it with Christ. The heart of medieval affective piety is the moment in which, through imagination, Christians are able to feel the pain of and with Christ.

Along with the *Meditations*, *The Siege of Jerusalem* also appears with a version of *The Northern Passion*, which recounts the Passion of Christ in vivid detail. The poet explains that Christ was taken naked to the cross and his hands stretched to the holes so that he was “layed wyd open.” When his arms and legs did not reach the holes, a rope was tied to one hand from which “the blod braste owet for the strengthe stange” because of the strain. The men had no mercy and drew the ropes tightly so that “the synowes braste all in twaa” (1601-23). The blood and sinews bursting are certainly graphic enough to draw the heartstrings, and perhaps turn the stomach, of even the stoutest of the devoted. Though the style is different, the purpose of *The Northern Passion* is similar to that of the *Meditations*. Dwelling on the suffering of Christ encourages the audience’s imaginative participation in Christ’s suffering.

Both *The Northern Passion* and the *Meditations* bear a resemblance to the first crucifixion image that opens *The Siege of Jerusalem*:

\[
A\ pyler\ paʒt\ was\ doun\ vpon\ þe\ playn\ erþe
\]
\[
His\ body\ bonden\ þerto\ [and]\ beten\ with\ scourges:
\]
\[
Whyppes\ of\ quyroyle\ [vm]bywente\ his\ white\ sides
\]
\[
Til\ al\ on\ rede\ blode\ ran\ as\ rayn\ [i]n\ þe\ strete.
\]

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Suþ stoked on a stole with styf mannes hondis,
Blyndfelled as a be and boffetis hym raʒte;
‘ʒif þou be prophete of pris, prophecie’, þey sayde,
‘Whiche [berne] hereaboute bobbed þe laste’?
A þrange þornen croune þraste on his hed,
Umbecesten with a cry and on croys slowen. (9-18)

Again, the violence of the moment is at the forefront. The author spends a great deal of
time not only on the physical sufferîng of Christ, but also on the emotional torture and
mockery inflicted by the soldiers. For the readers of this poem, especially those
experiencing it in tandem with the Meditations or The Northern Passion, this image of
Christ could easily be read as a part of the affective piety genre. The Passion of Christ is
the opening image of the poem, setting the stage for the response and violence to come.
The author gives the audience a visceral reminder of what Titus and Vespasian will
avenge. However, unlike the central heroes of the text, Christ himself remains passive
and forgiving:

For al þe harme þat he hadde hasted he noʒt
On hem þe vyleny to venge þat his veynnys brosten,
Bot ay taried on þe tyme ʒif þey tourne wolde;
ʒaf hem space þat hym spilide, þey hi spedde lyte,
xl. wynter as Y fynde and no fewere ȝyrys

Or princes pressed in hem þat hym to pyne wroȝt. (19-24)

The mercy Christ showed by his waiting for forty years will quickly be overshadowed by the violent narrative of the destruction of Jerusalem to come. The passivity of Christ here is significant because, like the worshipper reading the Meditations or The Northern Passion, Christ does not fight, but instead suffers quietly and is willing to forgive.\(^{106}\) This passivity is fundamental to most discussions of affective piety. Yet, in this narrative the heroes, who are themselves moved by the life story of Christ and the miracles received upon their conversion, are not passive. Indeed, they do not show some of the traditional affective piety as delineated by texts such as the Meditations. As Christine Chism notes in reference to the passage above:

This forty-year grace period places a severely limited Christian mercy in a context of impending vengeance. The poem’s next passages pump up this muscular Christianity even further, translating it from private to public domains, from provincial to international fronts and from martyred endurance to vital fury.\(^ {107}\)

The move from passive contemplation—Titus’s hearing of and internalizing Christ’s story and then converting—to violent war is a rapid one. How can a text whose author refers multiple times to the Passion of Christ, but whose heroes completely fail to imitate

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\(^{106}\) Another example of Christ’s passivity can be found in the York Crucifixion play, in which the character of Christ is silent for most of the action as the guards nail him to the cross.

\(^{107}\) Chism, Alliterative Revivals 164.
his passivity in suffering, be a part of the affective piety movement of the late fourteenth century? The answer is found in the different kinds of representations of Christ and in the different potential responses to and meaning inscribed upon the suffering body of Christ.

While worship based on the Passion in the late Middle Ages could inspire passivity and/or contemplation, critics have noted that such a response was not always what actually took place. Historically, the Passion has been a source of inspiration for great violence, and particularly for violence, as in the poem, directed at Jews. Allen J. Frantzen points out that not every image of the suffering Christ is meant to inspire passive contemplation: “Most medieval authors did not see Christ’s death as an event meant to bring an end to violence. Instead, they seized on the Passion as an occasion for further violence, using the language of vendetta.” Frantzen’s claim is very broad, but historically, violence directed against Jews did occur as a result of the crusades. In England, the violence in York in 1190 is an example. On the continent, pogroms and massacres of Jews were much more common, occurring during every major crusade. Crusade propaganda, like the sermons discussed above, often linked the recovery of Jerusalem with Christ’s Passion and his suffering. This link sometimes led to the persecution of local Jews in areas where crusade fervor was high because the local

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109 Examples include the deaths of many hundreds of Jews in Neuss, Cologne, Trier, Mainz, Regensburg and other places at the hands of Christians in community-based mob violence in the late 1090s. Some eight hundred Jews died in Worms in the same period (Hindley 26-7). Similar events happened in the Second Crusade in France and Germany as well, where locals were encouraged to avenge Christ by killing his “enemies in their own neighborhood” (Hindley 74).
Christians saw attacking the Jews as a way of avenging Christ. This violence does not reveal an immediate connection between images, both in literature and art, of Christ’s suffering and violence done to Jews, but the ideological connection—the link established between Christ’s suffering at the hands of Jews and the need to recover Jerusalem—certainly was used to sanction, and even promote, such anti-Jewish violence in Europe during the First and Second Crusades and after. Titus and Vespasian, a rhymed romance using the same heroic characters as Jerusalem and dating to the same period, focuses on the vengeance element of the story. Finally, as I argued above, the invocation of Christ is typical in chansons de geste and other romances. Charlemagne and his knights repeatedly call upon Christ as their reason for acting, or as an aid to their cause. The passage following the recounted crucifixion of Christ in Jerusalem cited above is a clear example of the use of Christ’s body as an inspiration to violence. Christ, at first, patiently awaits an apology. Then, knowing repentance will not occur, he predicts the vengeance to come. In this moment, Jerusalem suggests that violence is an equally possible response to the Passion.

Further, as depictions of the Passion grew more intense and meticulous in the detailing of the violence done to Christ, the focus expanded from just gruesome depictions of Christ’s wounds to include discussions of those who delivered them.

110 Such vendettas persisted in literature too. Early tales of Jewish host desecration and child murder inspire Christians in those tales to murder or convert the Jews involved. For a thorough discussion of such literary tales across Europe, see Miri Rubin’s Gentile Tales: The Narrative Assault on Late Medieval Jews (New Haven: Yale UP, 1999).
111 Though the two poems tell stories of the same events, they are radically different. Particularly relevant to my argument is the almost complete lack of focus on Christ’s suffering in Titus and Vespasian. Though the death of Christ is the inspiration for the siege on the city, the poem does not use repeated and specific accounts of Christ’s suffering as the inspiration for Titus and Vespasian.
Thomas H. Bestul, in his study of Latin devotional literature, explains the connection between the increased suffering of Christ and the focus on those who tormented him:

The heightened devotion to the Passion, with its greater attention to the physical sufferings of Christ, had as its by-product an inevitable attention to the perpetrators of the torments, showing them to be exceptionally cruel or depraved as a means of increasing the emotional response of readers to their reality. ¹¹²

Though he is speaking primarily of Latin narratives, the same can be seen in late medieval English Passion narratives as well. Indeed, the opening crucifixion scene cited above offers ample evidence. While much emphasis is given to Christ’s suffering and the blood flowing like rain, we are reminded of the men’s hands which hurt him and then given a direct quote by those who torment him, in which they challenge him to demonstrate his omniscience and name the man who last hit him. This focus on the tormenters of Christ is also noted in the Meditations:

The Lord Jesus reached the reeking locale of Calvary, led there amid deep shame. You can get a view of evil men all around, laboring for an evil end. With total mental absorption, place yourself in their presence and observe carefully all the atrocities committed against your Lord, as well as all that is said and done by him and through him. ¹¹³

¹¹³ Taney, Miller and Stallings-Taney 253. Cavlibvs, 270: “Cum igitur Dominus Iesus ductus ad Calvariæ locum fetidum uituperabiliter peruenit conspicere potes operarios malos undique nequiter operari. Hīs autem toto mentis intuitu te presentem exhibeas et intuere diligentem cuncta que fuint contra Dominum tuum, et eciam que dicuntur et fiunt ab ipso et per ipsum.”
Even the *Meditations* suggest dwelling not only on the suffering of Christ, but on the evil of those who tortured and crucified him. The presence of and focus on the tormenters of Christ is a distinct part of many late medieval Passion narratives, including ones whose express purpose is meditation and not physical action. The multiple responses to Christ’s wounded body and to those who wounded it demonstrate the significance of Christ’s body.

Christ’s body is a complicated symbol in the later Middle Ages both in general and specifically in *The Siege of Jerusalem*. Both culturally and within the poem it is not only the means into the system of affective worship, but it also offers the possibility of a means to acts of violence. Sarah Beckwith describes the symbolic workings of Christ’s body in late medieval England:

> [T]he body, and the symbol of Christ’s body in particular, is actually a basic metaphor for pre-modern theorizing about the social order, one nuanced through the specific articulations of that metaphor to consider the urgent question of who was to be included in that social order and on what terms.\(^{114}\)

It is through this understanding both of Christ’s body and affective piety that the use of Christ’s body in *Jerusalem* becomes clear. The balance between passivity and action, between forgiveness and violence, and between Christ and the heroes Titus and Vespasian reflects the crucial difference between those whose response to Christ’s suffering is imitation through empathy, and those whose response must be violence. The display of Christ’s body in *Jerusalem* does lead to an articulation of the social order, as

\(^{114}\) Beckwith 27.
Beckwith suggests it can, as Titus and Vespasian ultimately fill the different roles of conquering general and devout emperor respectively. Through the heroes’ paths to these roles, *The Siege of Jerusalem* offers a piety that is violence. The knightly piety of the poem is the duty to defend and avenge the passive Christ, not to participate in his passivity. The author of the poem seeks to motivate those reading it to action via both the figure of the suffering Christ and the emphasis on Christ’s tormentors who must be punished.

Though neither the image of Christ as a king who feels no pain as he hangs on the cross nor as a knight wooing his lady from sin is the primary image by the late fourteenth century, there does exist an image of an active Christ. This possibility of action, if not violence, as a response to or part of the crucifixion is found in the most popular of all alliterative poems in the later Middle Ages: *Piers Plowman*. Found in multiple manuscripts with *Jerusalem*, the two poems have similarities in their “knightly” response to the passion. David Aers suggest that far from encouraging the kind of *imitatio Christi* that focuses on Christ’s wounds, “[in *Piers Plowman*] an imitation of Christ is based in the maintenance of justice in the community. The emphasis here [is] on a socially embodied and collective imitation of Christ, grounded in justice […]”115 Further, Langland “integrates Crucifixion with creation, harrowing of hell, and the power displayed in and through the resurrection.”116 Langland describes Christ’s crucifixion in Passus Sixteen:

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115 Aers 59.  
116 Aers 61.
In a Thursday in thesternesse thus was he taken
Thorough Judas and Jewes—Jesus was his name
That on the Friday folwynge for mankynde sake
Justed in Jerusalem, a joy to us alle.
On cros upon Calvarie Crist took the bataille
Ayeins deeth and the devel, destroyed hir botherers myghtes—
Deide, and deeth fordide, and day of nyght made. (160-6) 117

This image of Christ as a jouster and one who saves humanity, not through suffering but through battle with death and the devil, suggests an alternate response to the crucifixion from texts like the Meditations and The Northern Passion. That this text is paired multiple times with Jerusalem suggests that the similarities between Titus and Vespasian and their heroic violence and Christ’s harrowing of Hell may have been noticed by the compilers of those manuscripts and their audiences.

The violent response to the crucifixion comes to a climax in Vespasian’s speech to motivate his troops and inspire them to battle:

[…] lordlynge, a loude, lestenyþ my speche:
Here nys kyng noþer k[ny]ʒ comen to þis place,
Baroun ne b[achele]re ne burn þat me folweþ,
Þat þe cause of his come nys Crist forto venge
Vpon þe faiþles folke þat him fayntly slowen.
Byholdeþ þe heþyng and þe harde woundes,

Vespasian uses the trope of Christ’s suffering body to inspire his troops to violent battle. The reminder at the beginning that vengeance is the sole purpose of their action is telling. The direct link between the broken body of Christ and the violence of the poem is perfectly clear in this moment. Christine Chism sees the poem’s violence as not participating in any kind of affective piety:

From the outset, then, Christian initiative is directed away from remembrance, affective piety, and submission and toward military prowess. The poem weds Christian belief to Christian violence, taking it from the hands of women and obscure prelates and entrusting it to the vengeful provincial captains. This incident […] shows the poem’s interest in constructing a masculinized Christianity that inspires its proponents with a purgatory anger.  

While I agree with the military result of the piety she notes, I disagree that the author of Jerusalem would view this as an entire abandonment of affective piety. If affective piety is the meditation on the wounded body of Christ as a means of worship and devotion, then Vespasian’s language is that of affective piety. He commands his troops to “behold” the body, just like the author of the Meditations above and, just as above he also

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118 Chism, Alliterative Revivals 165. She also makes the similar point that “Christian initiative is directed away from private contemplation, prayer and submission toward imperial, military prowess” in “Liquidating Assets” 32.
encourages his troops to move beyond the suffering body of Christ to a focus on the “lawless men” who “laughed” at Christ. The similarity between the structure of the speech and the examples of affective meditation above is striking. That the purpose of each text is so different is what makes *Jerusalem* such an interesting study in affective worship. Rather than moving from “beholding” to empathy, contrition and passivity, Vespasian demands a move from “beholding” to enacting retribution. The move from passivity to action is the soldier’s—the Christian knight’s—means of accessing affective piety. No, Titus and Vespasian do not remain passive, but Christ’s passivity is the key to their actions. *The Siege of Jerusalem* offers a means of blending affective piety with martial prowess. Devotion manifests itself as, to use Chism’s phrase, “purgatorial anger” inspired by a traditional moment of affective piety. The poem does not direct away from affective piety but *through* it to action.

The inspiration to violence—whether accurately responding to affective piety or not—is explicitly linked to theology and, in *Jerusalem*, to the contrast between Christian and Jewish theology, which is heightened when Vespasian’s speech is compared to that of Caiaphas who has a strikingly different approach to motivating his troops:

*Cayphas of þe kyst*  kipped a rolle

And *radde* how þe folk ran  þro ðe wat[er]

*Whan Pharao and his ferde*  were in þe floode drowned,

*And myche of Moyses lawe*  he mynned þat time. (481-84)

Where Vespasian lectured his troops, emotionally recalling suffering, Caiaphas reads to them. The word “*radde*” is a version of the Middle English “*reden*” meaning “to engage
in reading,” and also carried the connotation of reading aloud. In contrast to Vespasian, Caiaphas is concerned with the written law of Moses. “Mynned” comes from “minnen” meaning either “to remind” or “exhort or urge.” Caiaphas reads aloud to remind his troops of the success of Moses. The contrast between the two leaders is based in their opposing rhetorical styles. With his focus on law, emphasized by his reading rather than speaking, Caiaphas fails to be as moving as Vespasian, who moves his troops with his own emotional devotion. This picture of the Jewish leader reading Moses, often viewed as a prefiguration of Christ, hints at the inability of Jews to recognize Christ as the messiah. This inability is also present in the well known theology of the church fathers, including Saint Augustine, who notes that the failure of the Jews to adequately read and see the truth in their own scriptures in his work *The City of God*:

> [the Jews] do not think that the one whom the law and the prophets proclaimed is our Christ, but some other messiah of their own, a product of their imagination who is exempt from suffering death. That is why, with astounding inanity and blindness, they insist the words we have quoted [the New Testament] do not betoken death and resurrection.

This view from Augustine is similar to the presentation of Caiaphas in this moment. His reliance on the Old Testament as inspiration to fight the Christians not only highlights the

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<http://ets.umdl.umich.edu/m/mec/index.html>

120 Middle English Dictionary, *Middle English Compendium*, U of Michigan P, 4 November 2006
<http://ets.umdl.umich.edu/m/mec/index.html>


65
contrasting emotion of Vespasian’s speech, but also the Christians’ abilities to recognize Christ. Through Vespasian’s recent conversion and his zealous desire to avenge Christ, he shows more understanding than Caiaphas, who is a scholar, but who cannot recognize the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies when he sees them. The narrative’s structure further emphasizes this discrepancy between the two leaders by ensuring that Caiaphas’ triumphant reading of Moses’ victory with the death of Pharaoh is trumped by Vespasian’s heartfelt plea for retribution for Christ’s murder. The contrast here between what is read and what is recalled is the contrast between the Old and the New Testaments. Van Court comments on this passage:

This is a striking textual moment of oppositions: the Jews and their texts are superseded in the chronology of the poem by the Christians and their texts; but, of course, the supersession is not limited to the temporality of the narrative. … But more to the point are the two competing narratives offered here: the Jews tell the story of the Exodus and Vespasian tells the story of Christ’s passion. These are, of course, the foundational tropes of these two religions.

Vespasian’s tale is, for the Middle Ages, the conquering one, just as Vespasian is the conquering emperor, but the parallels do not stop there. The clerical books of the Jews and the impassioned affective piety of Christians are also compared. This contrast serves to define the role of the Christian knight and his piety. Emotionally based and

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empathetically driven by the memory of Christ’s wounds, the Christian hero will attain victory in battle. Paradoxically the reminder of victory for the Jews only serves to emphasize their coming defeat, while the brutal death of Christ, often represented as a paradoxical victory over death through death, is a fitting precursor to the victory of Titus and Vespasian and their Christian army.

Vespasian finishes his speech by declaring his absolute devotion as a Christian knight, and once again echoing crusade ideology:

\[
\text{[Y] quy[t]e-clayme þe querels of all quyk burnes}
\]
\[
\text{And clayme of euereche kyng saue of Crist one,}
\]
\[
\text{þat þis peple to pyne no pite ne hadde}
\]
\[
\text{[As] preueþ his passioun, whoso þe pass redeþ.}
\]
\[
\text{Hit nediþ noʒt at þis note of Nero to myn[n]e}
\]
\[
\text{Ne to trete of no trewe for tribute þat his askeþ:}
\]
\[
\text{[His] querel Y qui[t]-clyme, [whe]þer he wilneþ}
\]
\[
\text{Of þis rebel to Rome bot resoun to haue. (501-508)}
\]

The ultimate expression of affective piety for Vespasian is his own public renunciation of his loyalty to his own earthly king, Nero. Like Philippe de Mézières’ suggestion to Richard II that he and the king of France put aside their differences for a crusade for the Holy Land, so Vespasian participates in a trans-national devotion to Christ. The truly pious knight, inspired by Christ’s suffering, will devote himself fully to the cause. Vespasian even moves from the generalization of “every king” to his own ruler Nero, denying that he will sack Jerusalem for the tribute Nero claims he is owed.
Conclusion

*The Siege of Jerusalem* is a difficult poem filled with complicated signs. The Jews figure as the historic people of Jerusalem, as the people responsible for Christ’s death and as representatives of the current crusade enemies. Titus and Vespasian are at once historic figures and contemporary Christian knights. The body of Christ is consistently a location for the inspiration of piety and there is no question that the broken, bleeding, tormented and mocked body of Christ is the impetus for action in this poem. Vespasian’s impassioned speech instructing his troops to use Christ’s wounds as their justification for righteous violence as they charge into battle is a startling use of the affective piety trope so common in literature, art and devotionals of the time. A seemingly confused morass of conflicting symbols, *The Siege of Jerusalem* becomes clearer when it is read as integrating the violence of crusade ideology with the emotion of affective piety. In *The Siege of Jerusalem* knightly piety is expressed by using vivid imaginings of Christ’s suffering as the impetus for violence. For Titus, Vespasian and the author of the poem, a Christian knight’s devotion to Christ is manifested in action and one such response to Christ’s suffering is violence.
CHAPTER 3


_The Siege of Milan_ is a poem about the display of Christian piety. As the plot of the poem proceeds and the Christian heroes struggle to take back Milan from the Saracens, the connection between piety and violence is highlighted and the heroes enforce their piety with violence. The heroic knights Roland, Oliver, Guy and Gowther display unwavering faith in the face of the Sultan Arabas’ misdirected anger at the Christian God and Christian icons. Charlemagne is saved from his own potential heresy by fighting Saracens rather than staying safe on the sidelines. Finally, Turpin shows the power of nearly unchecked passion for religion by exchanging his miter for a helmet, taking the field, and leading the French army. _The Siege of Milan_ explores the role of violence as an inherent element of masculine Christian piety: violence is justified as the protection of Christianity, in the form of a nation, an icon or an orthodox ideology.

**Manuscript and Critical History**

The poem itself has seen minimal investigation over the years, but it has been published in three modern editions with various other romances.\(^{124}\) The poem is found in

only one manuscript, the London Thornton Manuscript (BL Additional 31042) and is missing at least one leaf in the middle and one or more at the end. Because of this, we unfortunately never know just quite how the siege goes or what ultimately becomes of Charlemagne, Roland and Turpin.

The general consensus of critics places the composition date of the poem in the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century. Sidney Herrtage, in the introduction to his edition of the poem, states that he believes Milan “to have been written in the end of the [fourteenth] century.” Anna Hunt Billings declares that the poem belongs, more generally, to “the second half of the fourteenth century” based on the likelihood of a Northern author who used “old words, [...] which, in the North at the beginning of the fifteenth century, were already probably obsolete” and based on the meter, stating “[f]urthermore the fourteenth century was the golden age of the tail-rhyme stanza.”

The poem also lacks a definite source. Unlike *The Siege of Jerusalem*, which has multiple sources that an author has distilled into one poem, or *The Sultan of Babylon*, with its clear connection to *Sir Ferumbras* and the Fierabras group, *The Siege of Milan* has no such continental analogue. Sidney J. Herrtage assumes that there is a French original, noting that the poem “is evidently a translation of a French poem,” but qualifies his assertion, saying “but no copy of the original is known to exist, nor is there in the other romances even the slightest reference to the events here narrated.”¹²⁸  A.M. Trounce in his study of tail-rhyme romance declares that both *Milan* and *The Romance of Duke Roland and Sir Otuel of Spain* must have had French sources.¹²⁹  Dieter Mehl noted that *Milan* “does not occur in any French poems on Charlemagne and evidently originated in England.”¹³⁰  Maldwyn Mills, in his 1973 edition of the poem, argues for a French original because,

[… the author consistently identifies both himself and his audience with the fortunes of the heroes by alluding to them in the first person instead of the third: they become *oure knyghtis, oure folke, oure worthy men*, etc.

These are presumably taken over directly from phrases such as *nos Crestiens or nos gens* in the lost French source […]”¹³¹

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¹²⁸ Herrtage ix.
¹³¹ Mills xii.
W.A.J. Barron acknowledges Mills’ argument, but goes on to suggest that while this might imply a French source, another possibility exists:

Perhaps, like the carbon-copy movies made as sequels to box-office success today, the compiler, French or English, was merely imitating a proven formula, reusing familiar situations and locations and an established hate-figure whose improbable survival need not be explained.  

S.H.A. Shepherd argues that there might be no lost source at all, or if there is a Continental original, it may have been a late composition with little popularity.

Herrtage dryly comments “although the absurdness of some of the episodes remind us strongly of Sir Thopas, and amply justify Chaucer’s ridicule, [the poem cannot] be set down as bad.” This faint praise reminds us that the romance genre was well known, often imitated, and easily recognizable, making separation from convention noticeable and thus a potential tool for an author to use to make a political, social or religious point.

Much of the early critical discussions surrounding Milan are concerned with how to classify the poem in terms of romance genres. W.J.R. Barron argues:

The vague outline of geste du roi still supplies the background to action; Charles is still the champion […] against the power of Islam, Roland his chief lieutenant in the field, Ganelon the traitor motivated by hatred of his stepson. But the focus of interest has shifted so that the religious theme of

\[\text{References:}\]

132 Barron 96.
133 Shepherd 113. Shepherd goes on to argue that while there may be no direct Continental source for the poem, there is an analogue which is a likely influence for the poem: the Descriptio. This work contains a story of Constantine, in which he is called by the Patriarch of Jerusalem to defend the city against Saracens. The plot generally matches that of Milan. 120-1.
134 Herrtage x.
defense of the faith dominates almost to exclusion of the feudal theme of conflicting loyalties, while the rare miraculous interventions of the early chansons now rival the military action in importance.¹³⁵

Barron’s argument implies that there is a distinction to be made between romances whose concern is primarily feudal versus those that are primarily religious and Milan is an example of that shift. Maldwyn Mills, in introducing his Six Middle English Romances, divides the romance genre into three parts: chivalric, heroic, and edifying and views Milan as a heroic romance wherein the protagonists must take on an enemy and defend Christendom.¹³⁶ The arguments of both Barron and Mills, though twenty years apart, serve to demonstrate the persistent desire to keep The Siege of Milan bound in very specific genre categories—the poem is either heroic or edifying—and often in large discussions of romance, such discussions of the poem are used, in a circular fashion, to justify the categories used to define it.

Alternatively, more recent criticism has shifted to view romances as sites in which the authors define and discuss issues of nationhood. English romances, then, become locations for the defining of England as a nation—including the use of its own language and connections to its own culture—sometimes even through French characters.¹³⁷ Diane Speed argues that “[the discourse of the nation] could reasonably be taken back to

¹³⁵ Barron 96-7.
¹³⁶ Mills vii.
¹³⁷ Furthermore, English romances focus both on the establishment of England as a nation and, later, on the defense of that nation. Such defense often comes as a support of older values (whether they actually existed or not) and orthodox piety. Helen Cooper argues: “Romance in this period […] acquires a new significance in promising to preserve the old values of high chivalry and orthodox piety against the dangers of theological and political innovation. Much of the material may be old; the uses to which it is put serve the exigencies of a new and particular historical moment.” “Romance after 1400,” The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature, ed David Wallace (Cambridge: Cambridge, UP, 1999) 690.
literature of the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, especially to the early romances […]"

Geraldine Heng also sees significant nation-building tendencies in romances:

> Among [medieval romance’s] objects of attention are crises of collective and communal identity—the identity of the emerging medieval nation of England, or of pivotal racial groups, or even of Latin Christendom—as well as pressing economic, military, religious, and social conundrums of different kinds.¹³⁹

The ways in which these various crises are negotiated ultimately suggest “that romance is, in fact, a genre of the nation: a genre about the nation and for the nation’s important fictions.”¹⁴⁰ Such crucial fictions are found in *The Siege of Milan*.

Current scholarship specifically focusing on *The Siege of Milan* similarly works to understand how the poem relates to the general climate of the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, including its relationship to crusade and nationalism.¹⁴¹ S.H.A. Shepherd argues “that specific attitudes, themes and motifs can be seen to characterize propagandistic crusade literature […] *Milan* possesses several of these specific features” and that its heroes display what he calls “medieval militant Christianity.”¹⁴² Robert Warm argues that *Milan* is primarily concerned with Christianity above and beyond

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¹⁴⁰ Heng 113. Christine Chism has also studied the use of classic stories or genre as a way of discussing the present in late medieval alliterative poetry: “[the] larger generic enterprise of late medieval alliterative poetry is] to constitute and perform the past as an arena both of spectacular worth and restless questioning for the present.” *Alliterative Revivals* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2002) 20.

¹⁴¹ S.H.A. Shepherd has a thorough summary of previous criticism on *The Siege of Milan*, 114-17.

¹⁴² Shepherd 124, 117.
nationhood and that while it certainly is a crusade romance, “what is being ‘sold’ to the reading public is the idea of the crusade rather than the crusade itself;” he concludes that the poem is among a number of Charlemagne romances that “were produced in order to counter the increasing obsolescence of unitary Christendom by fostering a sense of metanational authority.” For Warm, the poem can be read as an idealized portrayal of an international Christian community where figures like Charlemagne respond to the needs of all Christians, not just the French, and all Christians fight together against a Saracen enemy, rather than fighting each other. Phillipa Hardman reads the poem as an orthodox romance, “primarily affirmative of the reader’s Christian faith in the terms both of orthodox doctrine and of popular devotion.” All of these readings seek to locate Milan in the greater genre of romance, both English and continental. Few, however, locate the romance within its own time and place, considering how the author of the poem might be responding to the specific religious climate of England in that particular moment.

In the moment of the poem’s composition, there was no dearth of religious controversy to be discussed, since the religious climate was far from calm at this time in England. Though not considered a heretic when he died, Wycliffe’s ideas had become increasingly controversial since his death. In 1382 Archbishop Courtenay wrote to the bishop of London concerned about unauthorized preachers, suggesting that “just as sacred canon law institutes that in each city and diocese there should be an inquisitor into

\[143\] Warm 95, 99.
\[144\] Hardman 86.
heretical depravity, ‘so should you [...] inquire and proceed against heresy.’”\(^{145}\) Such a comment suggests that the religiously powerful in England were both recognizing this Wycliffite movement as at least a potential heresy and seeking ways to deal with it as such. This stance against the fledgling heresy was not necessarily supported by some of the gentry. John of Gaunt was a supporter of Wycliffe, and the existence of the so called “Lollard Knights” has been well documented.\(^{146}\) The degree to which these men were heretics or simply supporters of ideas concerning Church reform that had been in existence since as early as the seventh century is still a matter of debate.\(^{147}\) Regardless, the movement that would come to be known as heresy by the early fourteenth century saw both support and detraction from the clergy and the gentry at the time of \textit{The Siege of Milan}’s composition.

In its presentation of conflict over religion, \textit{The Siege of Milan} has two storylines. The first deals with the Sultan Arabas and his attack on Milan and the difficulty Charlemagne has deciding whether or not to come to Milan’s defense. The second occurs after Charlemagne has declared his involvement, but instead of focusing on his prowess in battle and his defense of Christianity, the poem focuses on Bishop Turpin, allowing him to be, in an unusual choice, both the religious \textit{and} military focus of the


\(^{147}\) Jill Havens notes that of the “most famous of the so-called Lollard Knights, some [...] were knights of the king’s chamber: Sir John Clanvowe, Sir Lewis Clifford, Sir Thomas Latimer, Sir John Montagu, Sir William Neville, and Sir Richard Stury. As early as 1387, several of these chamber knights and men connected to the Ricardian court were implicated in heresy [...]” but ultimately concludes that these men were “merely curious [about the] reforming movement that embodied some ideas and assumptions that they already shared.” “A Curious Erasure in Walsingham’s Short Chronicle and the Politics of Heresy,” \textit{Fourteenth Century England II}, Chris Given-Wilson ed. (Woodbridge: The Boydell P, 2002) 95, 106.
Both of these sections deal with the involvement of the crown and the clergy in the fight to save Christianity from some kind of conflict and both storylines focus on the attitudes and emotional responses of the characters to Christianity, its trappings and demands. In each half, the conflicts, that is, the danger the heroes fight, differs, but the basic solution remains the same. For the author of *Milan*, both the king and the clergy are responsible for protecting the Church both physically and ideologically from its detractors. The poem is, as Shepherd described it, about military Christianity, about the role of violence in the protection of the Church. This representation of Christianity is not without real world resonance in England. At its core this poem is about piety and the manifestations of that piety in the knightly class even as the issues of Lollardy, kingship and the Church in the late fourteenth century are all important. In this chapter I will explore the various ways the heroes and villains of *The Siege of Milan* perform piety and discuss the ways the author resolves all of these issues, one way or another, through heroic, pious violence.

**The Lollard Saracen**

In this section I will argue that the poem does not deal with piety only in theory, but instead uses the romantic heroes as a means of addressing, or at least alluding to piety specific to a late fourteenth century audience: the figure of the Sultan Arabas could be read as part of an anti-Wycliffite discussion by the author. The lesson consists of simple contrast: the penitence, prayer and righteous rage offered by the four surviving

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148 *Turpines Story*, a narrative of Charlemagne’s successes supposedly penned by the Archbishop Turpin himself, has the figure of Turpin as the narrator of the story and an occasional character, but he is not in any way the centerpiece of action that *Milan*’s warrior-priest Turpin is. The most recent edition of the story is edited by S.H.A. Shepherd, ed., *Turpine’s Story*, Early English Text Society Original Ser. 322. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004).

149 For the purposes of this chapter, I am using “Wycliffite” and “Lollard” interchangeably.
French prisoners exemplify proper knightly behavior, while the misguided rage of the Sultan demonstrates anti-Christian wickedness. The hints at Wycliffism move the moral of the story out of the realm of pure fiction, and because of the Lollard hints, there is more at stake than an abstract discussion of Christianity.

The primary difficulty in discussing whether or not something is a reference to Wycliffite thought is that so many aspects and major tenets of early Wycliffites or Lollards coincide with traditional iconoclastic and anti-papal rhetoric. Steven Justice notes that “iconomancy in the [fifteenth] century would be an almost universal Lollard attitude. Even by the 1390s several notorious incidents had implicated Lollards in iconoclasm.” Just as iconoclasm has a wide and diverse following throughout church history, so does it for the Lollards. There was a range of criticism including those who “attacked images […] for misrepresenting Christ […] by luxury and the pursuit of riches. Such critics were […] quite prepared to accept that the right sort of images had a permissible role as teachers.” However, despite a fairly wide spectrum of opinion, the consideration of images held by most Lollards had a certain degree of consistency:

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150 Iconoclasm and the presence and role of images in worship had long been a point of discussion and controversy in the Church by the time the Lollards came upon the scene in the late fourteenth century. Margaret Aston notes: “the decisions taken at the second Council of Nicaea in 787, defending images against eastern iconoclasts, became the key to all subsequent discussions of imagery. At Nicaea the church finally accepted the veneration of images as part of official dogma, and it did so by enunciating the idea of relative degrees of worship. The distinction between latria, the worship due to God alone, and dulia, the respect owed to the creature, was central to the entire medieval theology of images.” England’s Iconoclasts Volume I: Laws Against Images (Oxford: Clarendon P,1988) 47. The discussion of the degree to which icons were or were not dangerous and should or should not be worshipped continued in England through Wycliffe and beyond.


It is true that Lollard thought on ecclesiastical imagery (as on other matters) was far from uniform or clear-cut. It was uncoordinated and confused, but one can nevertheless discern a central consistency and (this is important) the main strands seem to have continued throughout the history of the movement.\footnote{Aston 97.}

There are, therefore, certain aspects of iconoclasm repeatedly associated with Lollardy that are distinctive and were often seen, at the time, as cultural markers of participation in, agreement with or sympathy for the heresy. If \textit{The Siege of Milan} was written in the 1390s or later, then an iconoclastic character would be one way of bringing anti-Wycliffite ideas to the minds of the audience.

One of the easiest ways to discern the kinds of language that would or could have been recognized as Wycliffite, with respect to iconoclasm, is to turn to the writings of Lollards themselves. The twelve conclusions of the Lollards were affixed to both the doors of Westminster Hall during parliament and to the doors of St. Paul’s Cathedral in early 1395.\footnote{Anne Hudson, \textit{Selections from English Wycliffite Writings} (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1997) 150.} The eighth conclusion deals directly with imagery:

\begin{quote}
\text{Þe viii conclusin nedful to telle to þe puple begylid is [þat] þe pilgrimage, preyeris and offringis made to blynde rodys and to deue ymages of tre and ston, ben ner of kin to ydolatrie and fer fro almesse dede. And þow þis forbodin ymagerie be a bok of errour to þe lewid puple, þet ymage usuel of Trinite is most abhominable.} \footnote{Hudson, \textit{Wycliffite Writings} 27.}
\end{quote}
Such a conclusion is clearly going beyond simple concern with the potential misunderstanding of images into the suggestion that representations of, and pilgrimages to such images are idolatrous.

From these examples it is clear that clergy and members of parliament could easily be aware of the Wycliffite movement and its specific beliefs by the middle of the last decade of the fourteenth century. A clerical author like that of *The Siege of Milan* could be familiar enough with Wycliffite language to imitate it. The question remains, was it possible that the laity that made up his audience shared such recognition? The answer is yes. Most relevant to my point is a case that happened in 1389 and is recorded in *Knighton’s Chronicle*. Two Lollards, White and Waytestathe, burned a wooden statue of Saint Catherine, claiming that “if her head should bleed when we strike it, then we will worship her as a saint. On the other hand, if no blood flows, she will make fire to cook our stew and thus our hunger will be abated.” Though an image of St. Catherine is certainly not a crucifix, the attack on the statuary was well known and represents the literal enacting of a definite belief. In short, it is entirely possible for the both the writer of *The Siege of Milan* and his audience to have been familiar enough with the iconoclasm of the Wycliffite movement, both in physical action and in writing, to recognize it when imitated.

Other beliefs besides iconoclasm held importance for Lollards. The question of who should preach and what power those preachers had, along with their relationship to the Pope were all matters of concern. The power of the Pope is addressed in *The Thirty-seven Conclusions of the Lollards*:

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This belief that the Pope could not possibly be the head of the Church leads Lollard belief further to the idea that true preachers of the Gospel do not need the sanction of the Pope or of bishops and high members in the church. According to one Lollard sermon, the duty of the priesthood is clear:

[These friars say]… no prest schulde preche to þe peple but if he hadde leue of þe bischop or leue of the pope. Þis gospel telliþ þe falsenesse of þis freris lesyng, siþ Crist sente þese disciplis to preche comunli to þe peple wiþoute letter o[r] axynge of leue of seynte Petir. […] And, if þei prechen þus truli þe gospel as Crist biddiþ hem, Crist is amyddis hem and þe peple þat þei techen. 158

True priests are preachers whose authority comes not from the Pope or bishops, but from Christ himself and from the true expressing of the messages of the Gospel. Such an attitude, of course, is dangerous to an institution (either secular or religious) which seeks to control and regulate the dissemination of information. All of these factors, the

157 Hudson, Wycliffite Writings 122.
158 Hudson 120. She explains that “text derives from the standard sermon-cycle […] here taken from BL Royal 18 B.” She gives no date for the cycle, but points out “that the preoccupations of the English homilist are […] frequently stated in Wyclif’s other writings,” 196-7.
iconoclasm, the refusal of the power of the Pope, the preaching their own version of the truth and the desire to get out and preach to the people are manifested in the Sultan Arabas, the main villain of the first half of *The Siege of Milan*.

Iconoclasm, or at least iconoclasm against Christian icons, is a signature characteristic of the Saracen Sultan Arabas in *Milan*. The introduction of this villain renders him fairly conventional:

> The Sowdane, Arabas the stronge,
> Werreyde appon Crystyndome with wronge
> And ceties brake he downn,
> Robbyde the Romaynes of theire rent,
> The Popys pousty hase he schente
> And many a kynges with crownn. (13-8)

A crusade romance villain, the Sultan Arabas terrorizes cities, destroyes the Pope’s control and steals the power of many Christian kings. With the violence, iconoclasm quickly follows: “The emagery that ther solde bee,/ Bothe the Rode and the Marie free,/ Brynnede tham in a fire” (25-7). Such iconoclasm begins to set up the possible anti-Wycliffite reading, not only because such burning of icons had actually occurred in England, but also because of some of the specific language used. Note the use of the word “imagery” in line 25; the same word is consistently used by the Lollards in their own tracts against images. In addition to the *Twelve Conclusions* cited above, *The Lantern of Light*, an early fifteenth century Lollard tract, declares “The painter maketh an

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159 For examples of relic stealing Saracens, see the poems of the Ferumbras cycle including *Sir Ferumbras* and *The Sultan of Babylon*. In the former, the crown of thorns and the nails from the crucifixion are stolen, in the latter, the main Saracen character deliberately challenges the power of the pope.
image forged with diverse colours till it seems in the eyes of fools like a living creature."  

Sixteen Points on which the Bishops Accuse the Lollards is another Lollard tract and declares in point twelve: “Þat neiþer crosse ne ymages peynted or grauen in þe worship of God or any oþer seyntis in þe chirche schuld be worschipid, [...] for, as it is seid, al þat worschipen þe crosse or ymages ben cursed and done mawmentri.”  

Somewhat later in the fifteenth century, Thomas Hoccleve, a critic of Lollards, comments on their beliefs in his Regement of Princes:

Yit sum men holde oppinioun, and seye  
That noon ymages sholde ymakid be.  
They erren foule and goon out of the weye;  
Of trouthe have they scant sensibilitee. (5006-9)  

Arabas also does not merely shatter or break the representations; he burns them, and doing so will come back to haunt him later in the poem. However, the potential anti-Wycliffite readings are not the sole purpose of the poem, and never completely overshadow or displace the elements of romance conventions. Thus Arabas is a romance Saracen villain with Lollard or Wycliffite overtones, not a Lollard preacher stuck in the middle of a Charlemagne romance.

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161 Hudson, Wycliffite Writings 19.  
In one instance typical of romance, he goes on to demonstrate that his purpose is neither iconoclasm nor the wealth and power of other lands, but to take over the churches: “And than his mawmettes he sett up there/ In kirkes and abbayes that there were,/ Helde tham for lordes and syre” (28-30). The setting up of his own idols marks him as typical of Saracen villainy. This Sultan has conversion on his mind as well:

The Sawdane sent [the lord of Milan] messangers free
And bade hym torne and hethyn bee
And he solde have his awenn:

Melayne, that was the riche cité. (49-52)

Once again there are generic conventions that do not necessarily point to an anti-Lollard reading. Conversion was not a significant Lollard platform, as they viewed themselves as a part of the church, not as a different religion. However, conversion of the local Christian population is a classic element of romances containing Saracens, as Diane Speed notes in her own study of *King Horn*:

The Saracens [in *King Horn*] thus define their target as Christians and intend to destroy them. When they have killed the king and his companions, they set about killing the populace and wrecking the churches; no one is allowed to live unless he abandons Christianity and accepts pagan practice.\(^{164}\)

*The Siege of Milan* is clearly in the school of romance that holds conversion of the local Christian populace is a part of the campaign goals of the invading Saracens. The people of Milan are to convert to his pagan religion and then they will be rewarded with wealth.

\(^{164}\) Diane Speed, “The Saracens of *King Horn*,” *Speculum* 65 (1990): 582.
In fact, the sultan offers the rule of the entire city to the lord of Milan if only he will convert. It is probably worth noting that he follows his “carrot” promise with a “stick” for persuasion as well: he threatens to hang the lord and slaughter the lord’s children and wife if he fails to convert (55-6).

Though Arabas is a traditional romance villain in many ways and, up to this point, only hints at the kind of iconoclasm that would allow an eager audience to read him as a potential Lollard, the author then makes a clear connection between the Sultan and Lollards. The Sultan uses burning again to reaffirm his lack of belief in icons when he captures Roland and three others knights who stand fast in their support of icons as locations of power for Christianity. In the first of many battles in Milan, forty thousand Frenchmen are killed and only Sir Oliver, Sir Gowther, Sir Guy and Sir Roland survive and are captured. The knights have seen thousands of French soldiers slaughtered by the Saracen army and stand to die soon themselves, when Roland recounts articles of faith not only for the benefit of his men, but also in an attempt to get the Sultan to see the truth:

For sothe, thou Sowdane, trowe thou moste
One the Fader and the Sone and the Holy Goste.
Thire thre are alle in one
That borne was of Marye free
Sythen for us dyede one a tree;
In other trowe we none. (409-13)

This simple statement recounts some of the fundamental teachings about the Trinity and the origin of Christ. It not only reassures the audience of the right beliefs, but also puts
the Sultan in the position of hearing the truth. The Sultan hears the basic tenets of Christianity and in doing so is completely culpable for both his rejection of them and his response to Christian iconography. He responds to the declaration of faith by claiming he will prove the inadequacy of Roland’s beloved God through the inadequacy of his icons:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Thane loughe the Sowdane withe eghne full smale} \\
\text{And saide, ‘Ane hundrethe of youre goddis all hale} \\
\text{Have I garte byrne in firre with bale} \\
\text{Sen firste I wanne this wone.} \\
\text{I sawe at none no more powstee} \\
\text{Than att another rotyn tree} \\
\text{One erthe, so mote I gone.’ (415-420)}
\end{align*}
\]

The Sultan assumes that the success he had destroying previous relics demonstrates that the Christian God is powerless, conflating the icon and the Christian God. The demand for a visual confirmation of power is followed by his referring to the relics as equal to “rotten trees.” This phrase is particularly interesting because of its use by Lollards in their anti-imagery statements. In the passage from the twelve conclusions of the Lollards cited above, the author referred to the problem of worshiping a “tree.” Further use of language similar both to that passage and the Sultan’s lines above can, again, be found in the language of Lollards themselves. From the British Library MS Additional

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165 The recitation of the articles of faith here also may bring to mind similar behavior in heresy trials. A heretic on trial was presented with the orthodox views and given a chance to affirm his or her belief in them. Though the Lollard heresy trials occurred much later than this poem, the similarity at this point in the narrative is interesting, especially since eventually the “heretic” Saracens will be burned.
24202, of the early fifteenth century, comes a Lollard discussion of images and pilgrimages. The anonymous author asks “Dere Lord! What almes is it to peynte gayly deede stones and rotun stokkis [while poor people starve]?” Furthermore, throughout the treatise on images and pilgrimages, the author refers to wooden images of Christ on the cross as “rotun stok,” “false stokis,” “olde stones and stokkis” and “rotun stokkis.” The sultan’s “rotten tree” is very similar in tone and language to the “rotten sticks” against which the Lollard author rants in his treatise. Similar language (also using the word “image” to refer to icons) appears in a Lollard Sermon:

[Also in this blindness of belief, people run from country to country] to

\[ymage \dot{3}oten or grauen wiþ mannès hondes, of gold or seluer, of tree or stone \] wenynge and tristynge þat þer be any dyuyne vertu in hem.\]

The Lollard satire entitled The Plowman’s Tale, dated to around 1400, uses similar language in criticizing the clergy’s use of wooden icons:

Yet they mote have some stocke or stone Gayly paynted, and proudly dyght, To maken men levyn upon, And saye that it is full of myght.

Aboute suche, men sette up great lyght;

166 Hudson, Wycliffite Writings 85.
167 Hudson, Wycliffite Writings 85, 87, 88. She glosses “stok” as “piece of wood.” Clearly, “stok” and its variations and “rode” and its variations refer to the wooden crucifixes in both the Lollard texts and The Siege of Milan.
168 Gloria Cigman, ed., Lollard Sermons. Early English Text Society Original Ser. 294 (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1989) 114. (My emphasis.) At least one of the manuscripts from which this edition is drawn is dated to the late fourteenth century. The author of the sermon goes on shortly thereafter to equate image worship with “mawmetrie,” the same word often used in romances in description of the Saracen religion.
Other such stockes shull stande therby
As darke as it were mydnyght:
For it maye make no mastry.  (894-900)\(^{169}\)

The critic of the church uses the same language as Arabas, calling the icons sticks and stones. He goes even further to insist that clergy inspires belief in these things as objects of power, a myth he wishes, much like Arabas, to dispel. Finally, in *Friar Daw’s Reply*, another Lollard late fourteenth century clerical satire voicing an ignorant friar’s attempted defense of the Church in response to *Jack Upland*, the speaker uses the word “rotyn:”

\[
\text{Jak, thou seist at the last that charite is chacid,}
\]
\[
\text{To vengyn our defaultis and mende us of our mysse,}
\]
\[
\text{Levynge oure rotyn ritis, folowinge Goddis lawe.}
\]
\[
\text{Jak, oure ritis be noght rotyn, her rootis ben al freishe,}
\]
\[
\text{Plantid in the Gospel, as I seide biforen.}\(^{170}\)
\]

Though not as obviously similar in language and content as the previous examples, this moment demonstrates the persistent association of rotting wood (here roots) with the Church by Lollards. Given that *The Siege of Milan*, the Lollard treatise on images and pilgrimages, the Lollard Sermon, and the two satires are all late fourteenth century texts, and all use such similar language, an audience could have read Arabas’ words in such a context.

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The iconoclasm continues, leading to the ultimate punishment of Arabas and his followers for their lack of faith. The Sultan proposes an experiment that will prove the powerlessness of the icons: “Goo, feche one of theire goddis in / And if he in this fire will byrne / All other sett att noghte” (421-3). This is, of course, similar to the attitude expressed by White and Waytestathe. Like his previous deed of attacking Milan, the Sultan will forward his religious goals though the destruction of Christian relics. When the crucifix depicting the bleeding Christ is brought out, Roland prays for a miracle: “[…] Thou that was borne of a may, / Schewe thou, Lorde, Thi meracle this day, / That with Thi blode us boghte” (430-2). In this opportune moment, the prayer is answered. As the Sultan has the crucifix placed in the prepared fire, he again repeats his assertion that this will show “What myghte es in a rotyn tree / That youre byleve es in” (436-7). This reassertion of a phrase that echoes Lollard ideology and language serves to emphasize yet again the connection between the Sultan and late medieval English iconoclasm. In answer to the Sultan’s declaration, the crucifix does indeed demonstrate its power as it lays in the fire:

Thay caste one it full many a folde;

The rode laye still ay as it were colde.

No fire wolde in hym too.

All if the crosse were makede of tree

The fire yode owtt that come ther nee. (445-9)

The first miracle is the cross’s refusal to burn. No matter how many burning brands are applied, the wooden crucifix refuses to catch fire and remains cool. Rather than
appeasing the Sultan and convincing him of the power of Christ and his icons, the miracle only serves to anger him:

‘And yif the devell,’ he sayde, ‘be hym within, 
He sall be brynt or ever I blyne’;
Of hert he was full throo.
‘Theis cursede wreches that are herein 
Has wethede thaire goddis that thai may not byrn;
I wote wele it es soo.’ (451-6)

This passage serves as an example of the extent to which this character cannot be explained only as a representation of Wycliffite ideas, even as he does come near to them. The clearest display of this fact is Arabas’ rage. As with his conversionary desires expressed earlier in the poem, the rage here is not a trait commonly ascribed to Wycliffites. Rather, like the conversionary tactics and the vehement rage (in this case, the assertion that he’ll burn that cross if it is the last thing he ever does) are very common to Saracen villains. Once again, as before, the genre conventions of the Saracen villain exist along with the potential anti-Wycliffite reading. However, the unique moment in *The Siege of Milan* is, of course, that the anger is directed solely at a crucifix, and it is that difference that makes the anti-Wycliffite reading compelling. This rage expressed at the now obvious truth is crucial to the issue of piety in the poem. Villains of Christianity, either Saracens or heretics, display their ignorance through rage and violence at the

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171 For example, in a particular moment of anger, the Sultan Laban in *The Sultan of Babylon* berates and destroys his own gods: “In a moment of particular anger, “… he smote Mahounde/ That was of goolde fulle rede,/ That he fille down to the grounde/ As he hade bene dede” (2507-10). The combination of anger towards a particular failing situation and the physical violence against icons is a common one in romance. Cited from Lupack’s *Three Middle English Charlemagne Romances.*
wrong things. The truth, rather than comforting them as it does the captive French
knights, only serves to elicit more rage. Both the emotion and the violence towards its
object in this moment are misdirected.

The second important element to note in this episode is the Sultan’s conflation of
the crucifix with God. This is a mistake he makes multiple times throughout the text and,
like “rotyn wood,” is worth noting partly because of the consistency with which Arabas
holds this belief.\textsuperscript{172} This is a conflation cited often in medieval theological discussions
and arguments over images: \textit{latria} versus \textit{dulia}. In this case, the Sultan is clearly
confusing \textit{latria}, the worship due to God alone with \textit{dulia}, the reverence shown to icons.
The Sultan’s conflation possibly resonates with this controversy. One Lollard argument
against images was that the unlearned would confuse the images with the real, and
believe either that the image is what the real looked like (in the case of displays of wealth
on statues of Christ and/or his disciples) or would give the worship due only to God to
these images. Clearly, the Sultan is not aware enough of Christianity’s tenets, (or
perhaps not smart enough to understand) that the God is neither the wood itself, nor in the
wood itself. The confusion of the Sultan serves to show the Saracen misunderstanding of
Christianity, while at the same time setting up a reading that, given the other elements of
the surrounding passage, could encourage readers to associate that ignorance with the
budding heretical movement in England.

The final climax comes when the Sultan, convinced that worldly measures can be
taken to aid his cause, demands increased fire:

\textsuperscript{172} See lines 416-7, 421-2, and 436-7, cited above for examples. He also makes a similar conflation of his
own gods and their images, in lines 28-30, when he sets up his own “mawmettes” in the churches, treating
them as “lordes and syre.”
Than bromstone that wele walde birn
And pykke and terre mengede therin
Thay slange in the fire full bolde.
Torches that were gude and grete
For to helpe that mekill hete
Thay cast in many a folde. (457-62)

The fire is brought to the temperature of an inferno, and still the crucifix will not burn. The repeated attempts to burn the icon and the stubborn disbelief of the Sultan might recall for the audience recalcitrant Wycliffites who refused to give up their heretical beliefs, even in the face of absolute proof. The fire goes out and the crucifix remains unburned. The four knights offer prayers to Christ one more time (463-5), and the final miracle then occurs:

The rode braste and gaffe a crake
That thamm thoghte that alle the byggynge brake
That was within that holde.
A fire than fro the crosse gane frusche
And in the Sarasene eghne it gaffe a dosche,
Ane element als it were,
That they stode still als any stone.
Haundis nore fete myght thay stirre none
Bot drery wex in chere;
Thay wyste nother of gude ne ill. (466-76)
The thunderous crack given by the crucifix may be an echo of the rending of the veil at the crucifixion. The noise is the first marker that another miracle has occurred. The earthquake that follows, threatening to bring down the building, also brings to mind the moments after Christ’s death on the cross. The Sultan, in payment for his figurative blindness to the first miracle, is rendered literally blind and in payment for his inflexibility, and possibly echoing the explosion of St. Catherine’s wheel, he is frozen in place. Such an echo would further emphasize the author’s respect not simply for images of Christ and the Trinity, but also of the saints. Ultimately, Arabas and all of his Saracens are paralyzed, but remain conscious and disconsolate, though the last line suggests that even in this moment they fail to recognize good or evil.

The Christians then take matters into their own hands and violence becomes the pious order of the day:

Than Rowlande sais his felawes untill,

‘Sirs, hy us alle hethyn in fere.

This meracle es schewed thorowe Goddis grace,

For alle the Sarasenes in this place

May nother see nore here.’

Sayde Sir Gy of Burgone, ‘Yitt or I goo

The Sowdane sall have a stroke or twoo

That glade sall hym no glee.’

He ferkes owte with a fawchon

And hittis the Sowdane one the crownn

Unto the girdyll welle nee. (477-86)
Two points are important to note here. First, Roland as the leader of the Christians acknowledges the whole series of events as a miracle by God. Then, Sir Guy decides to kill the leader, noting that it won’t bring him any joy, unlike the Sultan’s burning of the icons before. This repayment, with the rather dry humor of Sir Guy’s comment, serves to remind the audience of the presence of pious violence in this moment. If the Sultan Arabas delighted with a kind of evil joy at the destruction he experienced, he most certainly will feel that joy no longer, while Sir Guy, though willing to use violence, does not experience sadistic delight in it. The reminder of faith, followed by violence, sets up the appropriate pattern for Christianity in the poem. Proper Christianity contains a recognition of faith and, when necessary, a violent response to those who oppose that faith.

The slaughter of the multitude of Saracens by the four remaining prisoners would be typical of such a story, if it weren’t for the twist at the end. It is not enough for the Christian heroes to slaughter the enemy with swords; they burn them as well: “Thay tuke the grete lords with ire / And brynte tham in that bale fire;” (487-8). Such an event is out of place in romance, even with all of the traditional violence and swordplay that runs through them. While bodies are sliced, diced, beaten, bruised and maimed in romance, they are very rarely burned. Here, also, it is unclear whether they are burned alive or the heroes are simply burning the bodies. Given the rabid glee with which the heroes are acting, it is entirely plausible that they are simply pushing the living-but-paralyzed

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173 I have come across no romance where the heroes burned their enemies as in this case: either alive or en masse. The one exception is The Siege of Jerusalem in which the Christians burn the already dead by execution bodies of Caiaphas and his priest and scatter the ashes to the wind. The wind takes the ashes to Jerusalem, thoroughly disheartening the Jews barricaded inside.
Saracens into the fire. Also, the righteous ire of the heroes as they watch the burning Saracens stands in contrast to the fury expressed by Arabas earlier in the face of the cross’s refusal to burn. The violence of the Sultan toward the cross is, perhaps, a proper response for him, and demonstrates the rage of the non-believing in the face of miracles. On the other hand, the heroes also display significant anger, especially in the enraged glee of the violence of Sir Guy when he splits the sultan in half from crown to belt. The moral of the story, whether one chooses to read anti-Wycliffite sentiment in it or not, is that righteous indignation followed by violence is piety in the face of a threat to the Church, its members, or even its icons.

The possibility that the iconoclastic Sultan, with his refusal to acknowledge an obvious miracle and his subsequent punishment, could be viewed as an anti-Wycliffite moment seems clear, but the question then becomes whether the violence is a suggested solution to the rising heretical problem. Is the burning suggestive of a real potential response in that moment? While there is no real way to know for sure, the flames that consume the Sultan and his followers bring to mind a roughly contemporary event. In 1401 William Sawtre was the first Lollard to be burned for a relapse into heresy. Though Prince Henry pleaded with him publicly to recant, Sawtre refused and was burned at the stake. Even though the poem was almost certainly written before the burning, it is possible that such a text could contribute to the culture that would allow such an event.

In his discussion of the burning of Sawtre, Paul Strohm argues:

>[A]nother precondition for public burning was its rehearsal in speech and writing. Aided by learned rhetoric, pulpit invective, and everyday talk, a society that had not customarily burned heretics somehow found itself
imaginatively able to contemplate so extreme a practice. […] Sawtre] could probably not have been burned were it not for a period of some twenty years in which anti-Lollard sentiments were consolidated and burnings emerged as a natural and even inevitable penalty for lapsed heretics among the clergy and, ultimately, for all categories of Lollard believers among the laity of the land.\textsuperscript{174}

The creation of burning as a viable penalty for heretics was not lost on some Lollards themselves. Again, it is the satires \textit{The Plowman’s Tale} and \textit{Friar Daw’s Reply} where the idea of burning comes up. First, in \textit{The Plowman’s Tale} the speaker takes the position that Christ would suffer a fate similar to Lollards, were he in England at the time:

\begin{quote}
Were Christ on erthe here efte sone,
These wolde dampne Hym to dye;
All Hys hestes thay han fordone,
And sayne His sawes ben heresy.
And ayenst His commanundementes they crye,
And dampne all Hys to be brende; (629-34)
\end{quote}

For the Lollard writer, being on the side of Christ is risking the fire, and even Christ himself could not have moved the corrupt Church. Friar Daw, on the other hand, notes that heretics are “Worthi to noon other good but in the fire to brenne./ And so forto pursue an heretike to fire or to prisoun” (636-7). Whether before or after William Sawtre was burned at the stake for heresy, it is possible to read the construction of the Sultan

Arabas and his demise as participating in this anti-Wycliffite culture. The poem certainly participates in the presentation of violence and burning as an acceptable, possibly even heroic, response to threats to Christianity. The violence of the poem becomes even more appropriate for an audience who sees the Sultan as at least a potential Wycliffite and heretic. The signs that point to the Sultan as potentially representative of Lollards are clear enough to at least bring such issues to the minds of some of the audience members, and the consequences for his beliefs are absolutely clear: in the world of *Milan*, those who stand outside the Christianity of the heroes die, and sometimes they burn.

**The Heretic King**

After the burning of the Sultan, the poem’s attention then returns to Charlemagne and his behavior. At this point, the poem leaves the intensely resonating anti-Wycliffite moments behind in favor of a discussion of the relationship between a king and the Church. Once again, the poem’s subject matter proves highly relevant to contemporary history. Richard II was deposed in 1399 by Henry Bolingbroke who went on to fortify his legitimacy, in part, by constructing himself as a protector of the Church. In this section I will argue that Charlemagne’s struggles with how to best serve both his people and his church reflect the similar issues of piety and governance in late fourteenth century England.

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176 The use of poetry serving as a commentary on, or criticism of kingship and/or the church has, of course, a long history. M.E.J. Hughes notes, “we find that much late fourteenth century verse is generated by a desire to marry contemporary political grievances, on the one hand, with the most general notions of the function performed by a king, on the other. In other words, references to the political situation were fused with rather aphoristic expressions of theories of kingship in order to bring a moral dimension into specific complaint literature” in “Counseling the King: Perceptions of Court Politics in Poetry of the Reign of 97
Both Richard II and his wife were known for their demonstrations of piety. Throughout the 1380s Richard visited several shrines:

As was common in the middle ages, whenever possible, [Richard II] sought the favor of saints by visiting their shrines. It is striking how often his longer itineraries accommodated visits to churches well known for their shrines. In 1383, when in East Anglia, he visited Bury St Edmunds, Ely, Norwich and Walsingham. In 1387, on the “gyration” he fitted in Lincoln, Lichfield, Chester and Worcester. In 1393 he went to Rochester, Canterbury and Winchester, and four years later to Gloucester, Hereford Worcester, Evesham and again Lichfield; before leaving for Ireland in 1399 he made a point of visiting Becket’s shrine at Canterbury.\footnote{Evidence also suggests that in the 1390s he became active in his defense of orthodoxy. In 1393, when thanking the archbishop of Canterbury for telling him about a miracle at the shrine of Becket, he emphasized its ability to combat heresy.\footnote{Richard G. Davis notes: Richard’s record is a sure-footed one. This comes out particularly in the matter of heresy. Richard II’s response to the spread of Wycliffite ideas}}

Richard II’s response to the spread of Wycliffite ideas...
and evolution of a distinct dissenting movement was firmly orthodox. Whatever else was cast at him, especially after 1399, of this no one had any doubt.”

Clearly Richard II was concerned about the possibility of heresy in his kingdom, and this, coupled with his devotion to saints and their shrines, suggests his orthodoxy.

The culminating piece of evidence, though, suggesting Richard’s distaste for the Lollards and his subjects’ awareness of that distaste comes from a text written specifically for him: Roger Dymmok’s treatise *De Duodecim Errores et Heres Lollardorum* (Against the Twelve Errors and Heresies of the Lollards). The text is dedicated to the king and clearly was a presentation copy for him, given the initial on the first page depicting Richard II on his throne and the representation of his badge, the white hart, at the bottom of the page. The text is a step-by-step refutation of the twelve conclusions posted on the doors of Parliament and St. Paul’s in 1395 and argues for a strong monarchy. As Patricia Eberle notes:

[...] Dymmok is clearly advocating a strong monarchy as the safeguard of the realm against enemies both within and without the kingdom. And, just as clearly, he sees the Lollards as enemies of the Crown as well as the Church.

For Dymmok, and presumably for Richard II as well, the rejection of Lollards, to the point of legal action against them, is an affirmation of a strong king.

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181 Eberle 174.
The emphasis on strong kingship in the face of a religious enemy is also present in *The Siege of Milan*. Charlemagne has long been the literary scourge of the Saracens, delightedly hacking his way through thousands upon thousands of them through the pages of various romances in multiple languages. In *Milan*, however, he starts out very slowly and with much reluctance. Rather than being delighted at the prospect of beating the Saracens out of Milan, the vision from God brings indecision. Not only does the king experience a dream, but in confirmation of its message, “...when he rose, the swerde he fande/ That the angelle gaffe hym in his hande/ Appon his bedde syde” (136-8). This evidence is not enough to steel his resolve, and when “Genyenn” the traitor (typically called Ganelon) suggests that he remain behind, even though Bishop Turpin thoroughly supports the crusade, he agrees.

The justification that Ganelon gives for Charlemagne remaining behind is relevant in terms of Richard II’s own actions against the French and in dealing with potential crusades. Ganelon warns:

‘Sir,’ he sayde, ‘that ware a synfull chaunce.
What solde worthe of us in France
And thou in the felde were slayne?
Thyselfe and we at home will byde
And latte Rowlande thedire ryde,
That ever to bekyre es bayne
With batelle and with brode banere.’ (181-189)

A similar situation arose with Richard against the French. Had he been killed, there was no heir present at home, like Charlemagne. Indeed, Richard himself did not ever
participate physically in the wars against France, though he did go to battle against the Irish. Similarly, he did not participate in the crusades, though he was personally asked to do so more than once. Philippe de Mézières in his 1396 *Letter to Richard* asked both the king of England and the king of France to participate in a crusade to reclaim the Holy Land.\(^{182}\) Henry Despenser, Bishop of Norwich, with Richard II’s permission but not participation, also took on a crusade in Flanders. The reasons for Richard’s lack of participation in the “Norwich crusade” are similar to Charlemagne’s; as May McKisack notes: “[…] whereas Gaunt and the lords … wished the expedition to be led by the king or by some responsible layman, the commons expressed nervousness at the prospect of either Richard or his uncles leaving the country […]”\(^{183}\) McKisack does not make clear that it was a concern for personal safety that kept the king and his uncles home, but it is a possible argument. In *Milan*, the result of Charlemagne’s decision not to go to battle is that Roland is sent off with forty thousand knights and almost all of them are slaughtered; only Roland and three others survive to be captured and brought to Arabas, where the miracle of the exploding cross occurs.

The response of Bishop Turpin to this tragedy is two-fold. First, he himself laments the loss, calls on Mary and resolves to be involved in the battle himself and not return to the duties of the clergy until the battle is won. Second, he turns to address the king himself. He is so upset at the loss of men and so angry with Charles that he cannot even maintain common courtesy: “He wolde noghte say ‘Gud mornynge’/ Ne ones his browes blenke” (568-9). He gathers for himself an army of clergy and heads off to war.

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Once again, Ganelon counsels Charlemagne to stay behind and let the priest fight the battle for him. Again, the moment begins to look like the Norwich crusade in which the king remained behind. However, far from accepting this and heading off to war, the Bishop decides to call Charles on his decision:

‘For I will kepe my ryke.’

The Bischoppe saide, ‘By Goddes Tree,
Or that Charls doo so with mee
Full ill it sall hym lyke!
I sall hym curse in myddis his face.
What! sall he nowe with sory grace
Become ane eretyke?’ (666-72)

Turpin sees fighting the Saracens as keeping his kingdom safe. The fact that Charlemagne refuses to fight and uses his kingdom as an excuse is, for the bishop, a sign of potential heresy. The point that the author is making here is clear, and aligns with Dymmok’s suggestion in his response to the Lollards: the defense of the realm from both external and internal religious threats is crucial to the kingship. That Charlemagne cannot cast off the ill advice of the traitor Ganelon and fight the Saracens demonstrates that he is not protecting his kingdom, and Turpin sees that lack of protection as, at best, failing to protect the Chruch, and at worse, equal to becoming a heretic.

Turpin takes his cursing to the king himself and, in full illustration of the proper (if a bit forward) role of the Church as the guide to the monarchy, gives the king a piece of his mind, and the threat of excommunication:
He saide, ‘Allas, Sir Charllyone,
That thou thus sone becomes a crayon!
Me thynk thi body full dym.
Alle the false counsell that touches the crown
Here gyffe I tham Goddis malyson,
Both in lyfe and lyme.
And Cristis malyson myghte he have
That fyrste to the that concell gaffe;
And here I curse the, thou Kynge!
Because thou lyffes in eresye,
Thou ne dare noghte fyghte one Goddes enemy.’

[...]
‘Nowe arte thou werre than any Sarasene,
goddes awenn wedirwyne;
Of sorrowe now may thou synge.’ (679-89, 694-6)

The point could hardly be clearer than it is here. The king who does not battle the
enemies of Christianity is in fact worse than those enemies. Charlemagne, through what
Turpin calls cowardice rather than caution, has made himself the ultimate enemy of God.

Turpin’s cursing of bad counsel, obviously referring to Ganelon—a plot point
common to most all Charlemagne/Roland romances—also resonates with Richard II’s
kingship. The so-called Merciless Parliament of 1388 used the excuse of bad counsel to
remove several of Richard II’s favorites from court. In the late 1390s, Richard II would
take his revenge. The theme of bad counsel followed Richard II throughout his reign and
after. The late fourteenth century political poem, “There is a Busch that is Forgrowe,”
criticizes Sir John Bushy, Sir Henry Green and Sir William Bagot, three of Richard’s
ministers, with Bushy being a particular favorite. The contemporary poem, “Truthe,
Reste, and Pes,” from around 1401 cautions:  

What kyng that wol have good name,
He wol be lad by wys counsayle
That love worschip and dreden shame,
And boldely dar fende and assayle. (82-85)

These two poems, both in the genre of political satire and commentary, suggest an acute
awareness of the relationship between a king and those he chooses to keep close and from
whom he chooses to take advice. The bad advice taken by Charlemagne leads him
almost to excommunication. Though not in any way a new part of the Charlemagne
romance standard plot, Turpin’s point would have resonated with his audience.

The fact that this follows so closely after the iconoclastic Arabas and his
exploding cross, along with the use of the word “heretic” and the explicit conflation of
Charles with the Saracens, suggests that the author might have been concerned with the
role of the king (either explicitly Richard II, the role of the monarchy in the abstract or
both) in relation to heresy at home as well as the crusades abroad. Turpin’s radical
indignation and blatant anger leading him to disrespect and threaten the king to his face
are never criticized and he stands as a figure in contrast to the king, an example of
righteous passion.

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184 See McKisack, Goodman, Gillespie and Saul for full discussions.
185 James Dean, ed., *Medieval English Political Writings* (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications
Western Michigan University, 1996.)
Though highly critical of monarchs who do nothing, and laden with similarities between Richard II and Charlemagne, the poem is likely not an ultimate condemnation of Richard II or his attitude towards the church. In terms of the plot of the poem, Charlemagne becomes a powerful warrior for Christ in the crusade to reclaim Milan, even if he is not the sole, or even main heroic focus of the poem. Also, such a direct attack on the king would have been dangerous and as such, especially in a poem so in favor of a strong kingship like the one Richard II attempted to cultivate, is unlikely. The stance that Richard II had already taken by the mid-1390s against heresy in general and against Lollardy in particular is fairly well documented:

The king’s ‘zeal for the catholic faith, whereof he is the defender’ manifested itself in the more vigorous deployment of the secular arm against heresy in the final decade of the reign. While it is true that no new legislative initiatives were taken, the existing legislation was enforced more thoroughly.\(^{186}\)

Instead, Turpin’s vehement reaction, far beyond his commentary or involvement in many of the other Turpin stories, could be read as a press for kingly involvement in general and a kind of roundabout praise for the activities that Richard II had already taken. Furthermore, the remainder of the poem sees Charlemagne repentant and fully devoted to driving the Saracens from Milan. It is possible that the incident between Charlemagne and Turpin is a kind of parallel to Richard II becoming actively involved in the fight against heresy. Early in his kingship he was surrounded by knights who, in some

\(^{186}\) Saul 302.
capacity, supported Wycliff or were at least interested in Wycliffite ideas. Later in his reign this was not only no longer the case, but his reign had seen him turn directly against the heresy and make moves to stop it.

Ultimately, Charlemagne is moved by Turpin’s passion and he repents, returning to the Saracen-slaying hero of old, rather than the armchair general Ganelon wants him to be. Through the struggles faced by Charlemagne, ones that could definitely be faced by Richard II or other late medieval English kings, the author of the *Siege of Milan* articulates the tension between the Church and the State. Not surprisingly, the author sides with a defense of the church. If a king wants to be a true Christian ruler and not, as was un-subtly hinted by Turpin, a raging heretic, he must always defend the Church, even at risk to not only his person, but also his kingdom. Though it takes place in the long ago and far away of crusade romance, the simmering piety-based violence and anger reflects the same ideas of piety surfacing in the 1390s in England. Though Richard II himself would never have had heretics executed, the literalizing of the verbal violence found in *Milan* was not far off and would become reality in the reigns of the next three kings.

**The Warrior Priest**

Returning to Bishop Turpin, the heart of the action in the last two-thirds of the poem, returns to the idea of piety as violence. The persistent emphasis on emotion attached to displays of faith is found at the heart of both Bishop Turpin and the poem itself. Critics of the poem have consistently read Turpin, and not Charlemagne, as the most interesting and important character in this romance. Perhaps the most positive critic of Turpin is A.M. Trounce. In his study of English tale rhyme romances, he praises Turpin as
[...] the finest piece of characterization in Middle English literature, with the exception of Chaucer’s best, and, possibly, of Gawayne in *Gawayne and the Grene Knyght*. He is primarily the vigorous ecclesiastic, champion of the church; but the poet delights in him as a personality, paints him with individual touches, and shows us his power of unflinching endurance [...] his stern integrity.\(^{187}\)

Lupack also notes the attention to personality the author gives Turpin saying “Although the term may seem alien to medieval romance, *The Siege of Milan* borders on being a character study. Turpin is pictured as being an unswerving defender of the faith.”\(^ {188}\)

Dieter Mehl views him as uncharacteristically unique in medieval romance:

> The portrait of Turpin is perhaps the most remarkable contribution of the English adapter. There is hardly anything in the other English romances to compare with the passionate and domineering character of the Bishop. Not for him the meek and passive humility of many a romance-hero.\(^ {189}\)

Less flattering is Mills’ view, contrary to that of Trounce, suggesting that “[...] the impression that [Turpin] is likely to make upon the modern reader is one more comic than serious.”\(^ {190}\) Comic or not, W.R.J. Baron notes, “in Turpin the *geste du roi* has a new hero, moral and military, who dominates the action for the latter two thirds of the poem’s 1600 lines.”\(^ {191}\) Echoing this assertion of Turpin as the dominant character, Janet M. Cowen notes that “Turpin’s role in this text is remarkable. He drives the action to an

\(^{187}\) Trounce, A.M. “Middle English Tail-rhyme Romances.” *Medium Aevum* 1 (1932): 100-1.

\(^{188}\) Lupack 106.

\(^{189}\) Mehl 154.

\(^{190}\) Mills xii.

\(^{191}\) Barron 97.
unparalleled extent, and his behavior is extreme.” Robert Warm sees him as a figure whose “major function in the world of the poem is to re-establish the primacy of religious authority, and forcefully reassert the importance of religion in a world increasingly guided by secular powers.” Finally, S.H.A. Shepherd concludes his article with the assertion that Bishop Turpin is “a model for an aggressive approach to life and faith.”

In any case, Turpin is the driving force of the last half of the poem and the center of the poet’s attention. If the author was seeking any kind of didactic purpose in his poem, then the lesson to be learned from Bishop Turpin is that in the defense of Christianity, there is no such thing as too much emotional passion for God. Turpin’s rampant emotion, sometimes bordering on hysteria, is never criticized, and indeed it is that passion which allows him an almost super-human capacity to enact violence and endure suffering. The emotional display coupled with the violence he both inspires and perpetrates allows him to remain throughout the text a dual character: he is both knight and cleric, both the warrior and the wounded for whom the other warriors fight. This dual role brings together the point of the poem: the defense of Christianity, whether by the church or the nobility, must combine both the religious elements found in Turpin’s vestments and his relationship with Mary and the violence found in Turpin’s actions and the actions of those he inspires. The zealotry in both the matters of the spirit and of the war are equally praised, and equally necessary in the eyes of the poet if the Church is to survive and be safe. In this section I will argue that Turpin’s vehemence and violent passion, either alone or in contrast to Charlemagne, is represented as fundamental to

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192 Cowen 158.
193 Warm 90. See also Dieter Mehl 154.
194 Shepherd 131.
Christianity. I will also argue that in some moments the specter of anti-Wycliffism—manifested here as a connection between Lollardy and pacifism or non-violence—rises again.

As Turpin and Charlemagne approach their climactic confrontation, the king’s passive response to the struggle going on in Milan is manifested in his two decisions to stay home and let other people handle the problem, even after he’s been obviously called by God to the task. This indifference is replaced by near hysteria on hearing of the deaths of his knights: “Be Rowlande had his tale tolde,/ The Kynge myghte noghte a tere holde./For bale hym thoght he brynt” (574-6). Charlemagne could not hold back his tears but they are still not enough to move him to actually participate. The cursing from Turpin does move the king to violence, but it is misdirected, both physically and spiritually: “At the Byschopp was so tene,/ A fawchone hase he drawen” (710-1). He first attacks the bishop with a sword, and Turpin, not surprisingly, responds in kind and the two must be separated: “grete lordes yede tham bytwene” (721). Still, the fight doesn’t end and Turpin moves from threatening the king’s person to his whole army declaring:

I calle the Goddes foo.
I sall gerre buske my batelle bowyn
And hald the, Charls, within this townn:
Withowt thou sall noghte goo.
Was never kynge that werede a crown
So foule rebuytede with relygyon;
Thou sall sone witt of woo. (738-44)
Turpin is going to use his army of clerics to hold Charles at Paris and not let him free until he sees the error of his ways. Such house arrest is a radical move for the bishop. The reassertion of Charles as God’s foe, along with the charge that there was never a king who was so rebuked by his own religion, marks the passage with significant emotional charge. It also serves to complete the redirection of the audience’s attention from Charles to the Bishop Turpin. Suddenly he is not only the religious center of the poem, but also the martial one as well. This move serves to cement the connection between passion and action. The king’s well meaning hysterical grief is useless as he still does not desire to replace it with violence. Turpin, on the other hand, is the very soul of passionate action, as his house arrest of the king demonstrates.

More radical still is Turpin’s next move. The mere detaining of the king is not enough; Turpin declares war:

Goddes byddyng hast thou broken;
Thurghe the traytour speche spoken
Alle Cristendom walde thou schende.
When Criste sent the a suerde untill,
Thou myghte wele wiete it was His will
That thiselfe solde thedir wende.
Therefore I sall stroye the,
Byrne and breke downn thi cite
If thou be never so tene.
Then to yone Sarasenes wende sall I,
Fighte with tham whils I may dry,

In Goddes servyce to ende. (745-56)

Just in case Charlemagne has forgotten, Turpin recaps for him that God himself sent the sword with the intent that it be used against the Saracens. Here, for Turpin, there is no grey area. If a person is against God, as Charlemagne seems to be, then Turpin will destroy him. This is far beyond the response of Roland and the other knights who go on to fight in place of the king. Turpin not only will fight the Saracens, but he will also fight the apparent enemies of Christ at home.

The emotional power of this scene is entirely in the hands of Bishop Turpin. The anger and rage he expresses, though excessive, is always reinforced and supported by the author. The author rarely inserts his own commentary, instead letting the plot play out to justify Turpin’s behavior. The result of his declaration of war is the unconditional surrender and capitulation of Charlemagne. Turpin proves himself serious, amassing an army outside the gates of the city:

Charls over the walles bihelde
And sawe the hoste come in the felde
And drawe towards the town.
Bot then said Duke Naymes unto the Kynge:
‘Sir, yonder comes us new tythynges
With baners buskede all bown.
I rede ye praye yone clergy sesse
And aske the Bischoppe forgynnesse
And absolucioun.
And graunt hym graythely for to goo
For to feghte appon Goddis Foo,
Or loste es thi renownn.’ (768-80)

The appearance of this great religious host, coupled with the wise words of the Duke serve to convince the king to surrender. Not only does Charlemagne grant the Bishop what he wants, but he also sees the error of his ways and repents:

The Kynge undid his hede alle bare—
The Bischopp wele hym knewe—
And appon his knees he knelid down
And tuke his absolucyoun.
Theire joye bygane to newe. (785-89)

Charles kneels and then asks for forgiveness, giving the clergy / army a place to rest and agreeing to raise a power of his own and go to war against the Saracens. Turpin suffers no ramifications, and no comment about either the impropriety or uniqueness of such action is made by the author at all.

A clear contrast in anger between the righteous Turpin and possibly heretical Charlemagne is drawn. Like the difference between Sir Guy and the Sultan Arabas, violence on behalf of a righteous cause is supported. In both cases, the characters’ anger begets violence, or at least the threat of violence. The author never rebukes Turpin for his threats to the king and the city. Instead, these threats, along with the very real appearance of the Saracens, are what ultimately bring the king back to the right path. The
author of *The Siege of Milan* creates a story in which a call to Christian violence abroad could bring up images of Christian heresy at home, and the ruling king who fails to take on such a challenge is failing in his duties both to his own kingdom and to God.

Turpin displays a different kind of piety from violent rage, though no less emotional, in response to Roland’s news that forty thousand French soldiers have died in battle. Shocked and grieved both by the loss of life, and also the military loss, Turpin is understandably filled with sorrow and anger, and responds by joining the fight:

The Bischop keste his staffe hym fro,

The myter of his hede also.

‘I sall never were the more,

Ne other habite for to bere,

Bot buske me bremly to the were

And lerene one slyke a lore.’ (541-5)

The decision to cast off his priestly robes marks Turpin’s move from cleric to knight. This is hardly a permanent state, and indeed he will deliberately move between the two for the rest of the poem, but his devotion to religion, no matter what his garb, remains constant. Even though he is a priest, he is willing to defend the faith with his own body. He goes on, however, to demonstrate that this change in clothing is representative of a kind of crisis of faith. The defeat of the army and the death of all of the soldiers he brings to Mary herself:

A, Mary mylde, whare was thi myght

That thou lete thi men thus to dede be dighte

That wighte and worthy were?
Art thou noghte halden of myghtis moste,

Full conceyvede of the Holy Goste?

Me ferlys of thy fare. (546-52)

The response of bewilderment ends with an admission that he doesn’t understand the way Mary is doing things. The last line of the stanza is not so much a criticism, as a genuine declaration of the lack of human capacity to see the bigger picture and understand why things happen the way they do. However, the grief so apparent in his plea for understanding rapidly gives way again to anger:

‘Had thou noghte, Marye, yitt bene borne,
Ne had noghte oure gud men thus bene lorne.
The wyte is all in the.
Thay faughte holly in thy ryghte
That thus with dole to ded es dyghte.
A Marie, how may this bee?’

The Bischoppe was so woo that stownnd
He wolde noghte byde appon the grownnd
A sakerynge for to see;
Bot forthe he wente—his handis he wrange—
And flote with Marye ever amange
For the losse of oure menyee. (553-64)

Against the backdrop of the fourteenth century, this passage, with the declaration from Turpin that it might be better if Mary had never been born, seems almost blasphemous to
a modern audience. Various critics have attempted to explain what the poet was doing and why Turpin, in this moment, is or is not a subversive figure. In particular, Maldwyn Mills’ interpretation has held ground for some time:

[Turpin] reviles a statue of the Virgin in a manner hardly fitting to an archbishop. And here it is very difficult to avoid the feeling that he is being presented as pagan rather than Christian. A stock scene in the *chansons de geste* and the heroic romances was that in which a sultan, after hearing of the rout of his forces, did physical violence to the images of his gods, and while Turpin does not quite go as far as laying hands on the statue, it seems an uncomfortably near thing.195

The first problem with this reading is its presupposition of location in proximity to a statue. The poet only tells us that Turpin has headed, with a procession to “Seynt Denys [...] for thiese lorde for to pray/ That was in Lumbardy at the were” (524-6). The poet never tells us that he meets Roland and hears of the death of the troops in a church or in front of a statue. The rant from Turpin is not in the presence of the statue, making the possibility of him actually “laying hands” on one far from “an uncomfortably near thing.” Instead, while the language does echo the common trope of a sultan attacking his failing gods, there is a distinct difference. While the sultans are repeatedly addressing mere

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195 Mills xiii. S.H.A. Shepherd mostly agrees with Mills, and sees Turpin’s anger as reflecting the crusade notion of a negotiable relationship with God: the knights fight for him, and God (or Mary) protects them from harm and ensures their victory. Therefore, the decimation of the troops is a kind of violation of that relationship. Turpin is angry because, in a sense, Mary has not upheld her end of the deal. Phillipa Hardman, on the other hand, sees the incident as a part of the genre of Marian miracle stories. Her reading suggests that the poem likely followed the pattern of many Mary miracle stories wherein early on Mary fails to intercede and is petitioned again, and then provides a miracle to end the story. Hardman goes on to suggest that the culminating event of the poem may have been some sort of miracle in which the Virgin Mary intercedes possible to help the wounded Turpin (81-83).
figures who lack any kind of power at all, in Bishop Turpin’s address is to the Virgin Mary he never suggests that Mary is powerless—rather that her choices and existence cause the problems. For Turpin, Mary is the same as for the audience: a figure that is utterly real and often included in their own daily devotions and prayers. In that sense, Turpin’s invocation, as critical and disturbing to modern audiences as it may be, is a point of connection for the audience, and even for Richard II himself, as Nigel Saul notes: “by 1381, for example, [Richard II] was already devoted to the cult of the Virgin.”

The Bishop Turpin calling out to her in a fit of grief and anger is not, as suggested by Mills, aligning himself with pagans, but instead is a moment that shows the very essence of difference between the pagan and the Christian. Earlier in the poem, the Sultan Arabas refused to see the truth, even as it stood before him in the non-burning crucifix. Unlike him and others without real faith, Turpin turns to Mary in his dismay. His anger in this moment, like so many of his other emotional outbursts and declarations in this poem, serves not to undermine his faith, but to reinforce it. It does not divide him from his audience, but rather connects them. In the face of great tragedy, he casts aside his vocation and picks up a sword and then begs Mary for an explanation, chastises her, and wanders off still engrossed in his grief, complaining to her.

Turpin is not, in this moment, in danger of being a Saracen, or indeed anything other than a devoted and zealous follower of God. If we read this passage with the earlier potentially Lollard Saracen Sultan in mind, this becomes not only a moment of devout passion, but also one of blatant orthodoxy. Lollards, in addition to their dislike of images, were often though to be critical of Mary worship: “þat it is not leful to preye to

196 Saul 304.
seint Marie neiþer seientis, seying þe latanye or oþer orisouns, but onli to God men owne to preie."\(^{197}\) That the heroic priest turns to Mary, praying aloud to her in times of crisis, suggests that he is entirely orthodox. Furthermore, Turpin seems to bear no grudge against Mary, and the incident is never mentioned again. In fact, Mary remains the central object of petition in the poem. When we next see Turpin, he is preparing to say a mass for those who are going to die on the field of battle:

\begin{quote}
He dide his messe forthe to the ende
And thankede Gode that it hym sende
And Marie, His modir bryghte.
The Bischopp in his hert was fayne
And thankede God with all his mayne
And Marie, his modir free. (895-900)
\end{quote}

Twice, in six lines, Turpin invokes Mary and thanks her. We are told that he is very glad to be there, happy in his heart, and thankful for his opportunity. This hardly seems the same man who was devastated earlier. Later, in another example of Turpin’s devotion to Mary, when Charles finds himself tempted, Turpin suggests that he call on Mary for strength. In a fairly common crusade romance moment, Charlemagne is offered multiple realms by a valiant Saracen warrior, if only he will give up his Christianity. Turpin’s response is swift: “Bot the Bischoppe Turpyn than cryes on heghte,/ ‘A! Charles, thynk appon Marie brighte,/ To whayme oure lufe es lentt’” (1039-41). Not only does he suggest that Charles turn to Mary for strength, but also petitions Mary himself:

\(^{197}\) Hudson, \textit{Wycliffite Writings} 19.
'And if that thou hade any myghte,
Latt it nowe be sene in syghte
What pouste that thou hase.
Latte never oure Kynge with dynt of brande
B[e] slayne with yone Sarasene hande
Ne ende, Lady, in this place. (1042-1047)

It is almost unnecessary to add that, of course, Charlemagne defeats the Saracen he is
fighting. Turpin’s plea reveals his continued belief in the power of Mary and in the
propriety of addressing prayers to her. Turpin goes on in this passage to request help
from God the creator as well. Ultimately, the poet offers no explanation, nor ever
addresses the original outburst against Mary as anything unusual, and follows it up with
Turpin back to thanking, praising, and beseeching Mary. All of this suggests that the
outburst should not be read as something inappropriate or out of character. Instead, as all
of these passages demonstrate, Turpin’s fiery outbursts are not displays of doubt but
displays of pious passion. The Christian hero and driving force of this poem, Bishop
Turpin, is a man who wears his emotions on his sleeve and is never taken to task by
anyone in the poem, or even the narrator, for his behaviors.

Looking back on Charlemagne’s refusal to go to battle, discussed above, we can
see the acute contrast. While Turpin rails against Mary and is never criticized,
Charlemagne is almost excommunicated for his lack of participation—for his lack of
emotion—in the cause. Turpin’s faith is displayed in his calls to / at Mary, while
Charlemagne’s lack of faith and duty is displayed in his cautious, passionless inaction
and later his misdirected anger. Only when Charles bows in humility, as, arguably,
Turpin does by declaring his lack of understanding, is he recognized as behaving correctly. Faith, even when it comes out in the form of anger, is better than passivity.

Turpin’s success in the poem is not limited to his display of emotions. He makes good on his declaration to strip himself of the clothing of his office and take to the field.\(^\text{198}\) After giving mass Turpin puts on his armor:

\begin{verbatim}
The Bischopp than keste of his abytte
And aftir armours he askede tytte;
For egernesse he loughe.
A kirtill and a corsett fyne,
Therover he keste an acton syne
And it to hym he droughe
An hawbarke with a gesserante;
His gloves weren gude and avenaunte.
And als blythe asl birde one boughe
He tuke his helme and sythen his brande,
Appon a stede, a spere in hande
Was grete and gud ynoghe. (910-21)
\end{verbatim}

Such an arming passage would be standard in most any romance. The interesting point about this passage is that it is the arming of a cleric, and not a typical knight. That Turpin is being clothed in the trappings of knighthood in ways similar to the motif of arming in

\(^{198}\) Clerics taking to the field of battle is not entirely unusual in romance. In *Sir Ferumbras* the Pope himself heads to battle. Ferumbras, when he encounters the Pope, refuses to kill him noting that he is a cleric and has no business being on the field of battle. Thus the Pope survives, but the point that warriors should do the saving is made fairly clear. This is certainly not the case for the fighting clerics in *Milan*. 

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other romances points to the fact that the author wants his audience to see him as blending the zealous cleric with the heroic knight. He also laughs with excitement at the upcoming battle, yet another outward emotional display that reveals his Christian enthusiasm, which also stands in contrast to the Sultan Arabas’ beady-eyed laughter as he declared that he had already burned several Christian gods (line 415, cited above). Fully armed he prepares to lead his troops. However, his troops are not the typical knights. In keeping with his role as a bishop, Turpin guides members of the clergy:

Sayse, ‘I praye yow, all my cleregy here,
Assembles undire my banere;
That vawarde will I have.
Charls and his knyghtis kene
Let erles and barouns with hym bene,
Both sqwyers and knave
I beseke freschely for to fyghte
That the [le]wede men may se with syghte
And gud ensample have. (922-30)

He creates his own assembly of clerics under his banner. Under Turpin the church itself arms to defend the faith. Here, the poet steps out of the fiction of the fighting cleric for a moment to have Turpin tell the other soldiers to fight well so that the “learned men,” the clerics, will have a good example to follow. In short, it seems that Turpin is taking a bunch of militarily un- or ill-trained clerics into battle based only on faith. This small moment of reality, as it is unlikely that many members of the clergy in England at the time would be trained enough to just pick up and leave for the battle, adds even more
emphasis to Turpin’s faith. Not only did he raise an army of clerics when Charles refused to fight, but he believes that the cause is great enough that they will succeed against the well trained Saracen force. This, once again, is the triumph of faith in the poem. Turpin’s zealous belief makes him a compelling figure that reminds the audience that faith is most powerful when followed with a willingness to act.

The decision to model Turpin as a hero for his blending of cleric with knight has other ramifications as well. As he clothes himself in the armor of battle, marking himself as a doer of violence, in this moment, like the Marian moment above, the audience could read anti-Wycliffite sentiments. Part of the Wycliffite / Lollard polemic (if or when there was one consistent one) was the idea of non-violence. Walter Brut was a layman and an early Wycliffite called before both the Bishop of Canturbury and Bishop John Gilford of Hereford. Brut’s arguments are consistently in support of non-violence, criticizing religious wars and declaring that Christ came to save mankind encouraging men not to hate their enemies:

\[
\text{sed Romanus pontifex approbat bella et hominum occisiones in bello tam contra inimicos nostros, videlicet infideles, quam eciam contra cristianos pro temporalibus bonis. Hec autem doctrine Cristi contrariantur [...]}
\]

[but the Roman pope approved the wars and the killings of men in war]

both against our enemies, clearly infidels, and even against Christians for the good of the temporal powers. This, however, is in contradiction with the doctrine of Christ.\textsuperscript{200}

As David Aers says of Walter Brut:

Brut’s approach is to focus on the Christ’s teachings about love, non-violence, and self-sacrifice in the Gospels.\textsuperscript{[... A]} Christocentric practice of charity makes the wars of Christians illicit: illicit for \textit{all} Christians. Whoever approves the killing of Christians or “infidels” justifies that which is contrary to Christ’s law.\textsuperscript{201}

That Brut’s opinions on issues of non-violence made it into Church record helped to mark this kind of anti-crusade (or what could easily be read as anti-crusade) sentiment as a Wycliffite or Lollard position. By the 1390s, the Lollards had included it in their \textit{Twelve Conclusions}:

\begin{quote}
\begin{center}
Þe tende conclusiun is þat manslaute be batayle or pretense lawe of rythwysnesse for temperal cause or spirituel withouten special reuelaciun is expres contrarious to þe newe testament, þe qwiche is a lawe of grace and ful of mercy. [...] And knyhtis þat rennen to hethnesse to geten hem a
\end{center}
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{201} Aers, \textit{Signifying Signs} 69-70. His discussion of Walter Brut primarily focuses on his ultimate understanding of the sacrament of the altar.
name in sleinge of men geten miche maugre of þe King of Pes; for be mekenesse and suffraunce oure beleue was multiplied, and fythteres and mansleeris Iesu Cryst hatith and manasit.\textsuperscript{202}

The anti-crusade sentiment is clear here. The Lollards are not approving of a war fought in the name of Christ because Christ himself taught non-violence. Finally, by the early fifteenth century, Lollards were aware that their critics saw them as anti-crusade, as the warning tract “Sixteen Points on which the Bishops Accuse Lollards” notes:

\[ ðe fifteenete: þat it is not leueful to sle any man, neiþer in dome neiþer ouȝt of dome, neiþer Sarsines, neiþer paynemes, be batel as knyttis done wane þei asailen þe hooli londe, for it is seide in þe gospel þat þou schalt not sle.\textsuperscript{203} \]

From these passages it is clear that by the late fourteenth century, non-violence could be viewed as a typically Lollard idea. If the \textit{Siege of Milan} is anything, it is most certainly violent and violent in a way completely in contrast to the Wycliffite anti-killing sentiment. The very centerpiece of the poem, Bishop Turpin, not only endorses crusades for knights and kings, but becomes a knight himself. The figure of the warrior-priest not only endorses violence for Christian ends, but blends the Church and the knight so that violence is performed equally by and on behalf of the Church. Such a character, especially when taken with the rest of the violence-for-Christ sentiments expressed in the poem, and the other anti-Wycliffite suggestions, can be read as the climax of the anti-

\textsuperscript{202} Hudson, \textit{Wycliffite Writings} 28.
\textsuperscript{203} Hudson, \textit{Wycliffite Writings} 20.
Wycliffite sentiment in the poem. Violence is not merely an occasionally necessary part of protecting the Church; in *The Siege of Milan*, it becomes the ultimate expression of piety.

Finally, even in the face of deadly wounds, Turpin uses his faith and emotion to drive the French army to victory. Turpin turns his motivation strategy to *imitatio Christi*. In the midst of the Christians’ apparent coming victory over the Saracen army, the narrator notes:

> We may thanke Gode that is in heven  
> That lent us myghte and mayne.  
> Thay sloughe tham downn with swerdis bright.  
> The Cristynnd faughte in Goddis righte;  
> The Bischopp loughe for fayne. (1097-1101)

Turpin, in the midst of a victory, laughs for joy, not unlike the Sultan Arabas’ laughter above at the burning crucifixes. Immediately after this joyous response to the slaughter of the Saracens, the narrator reminds us also of his fate:

> Bot, als the cronakkill yitt will telle,  
> Ther come a Sarasene fers and felle  
> And to the Bischoppe glade,  
> And stroke hym righte thorowe the thee  
> And agayne to the hethen oste gane flee;  
> And Turpyn after hym rade. (1102-7)

Turpin’s joyous laughter is quickly silenced by a wound through the thigh. It is important to note that at first this wound seems to matter very little and Turpin charges
after the man responsible, wounding him so that he won’t ever heal (1112-3). He then succeeds in escaping and continuing the battle, wherein many Saracens are killed. Later, upon seeing the wound, Charlemagne tries to get Turpin to have it tended to, but to no avail:

Bot the Bischoppe saide, ‘A vowe to God I make here:

There sall no salve my wonde come nere
Ne no hose of my thee
Ne mete ne drynke my hede come in,
The cité of Melayne or we it wyn
Or ells therfore to dye. (1186-91)

The definitive refusal of medical care until victory is attained displays both his faith and his determination. He is willing to put his own body on the line as a display of faith, and in that sacrifice of his body, he brings attention to his Christ-like actions, once again refusing to allow Charles to get him treatment for his wounds:

‘What! wenys thou, Charles,’ he said, ‘that I faynte bee
For a spere was in my thee,
A glace thorowte my syde.
Criste for me sufferde mare.
He askede no salve to His sare,
Ne no more sall I this tyde.
I sall never ette ne drynke
Ne with my eghe slepe a wynke,
Whate bale als ever I byde,
To yone cité yolden bee
Or ells therfore in batelle dye—
The sothe is noghte to hyde.’ (1342-53)

This furthers his response, declaring that not only that he will not get medical attention, but he won’t eat, drink or even sleep until the city is won or he is dead. With the wounded thigh and the small wound in his side, Turpin could be read as a Christ-figure, but this example is not only for the audience reading the poem. Turpin brings attention to his imitatio Christi himself. He declares that Christ suffered more for him than he is suffering now, and so he won’t be helped. This display of pious endurance continues until Charlemagne is sure that Turpin will die and begs him yet again to receive help, but this time it isn’t for his own personal life, but for all of Christendom:

The teris rane over Charles chynn
That sorowe it was to see:
‘And thou dy, than dare I saye
The f lure of presthode es awaye,
That ever hade schaven crownn.
For there is ne is kynge ne cardynere
In Cristyndome may be thi Pere
Ne man of religiownn.’ (1580-7)

The pleas in this case are interesting. By calling him the “flower of the priesthood” Charles takes chivalric language and applies it to the clergy. Many great knights of romance, especially Charlemagne and Roland, were each called “the flower of
chivalry. The chivalric and clerical are blended to produce a man who stands as the highest example for all Christendom, not just the clergy. Charlemagne takes time to remind him that there is not a cleric nor a king who is Turpin’s equal in religion. Further, the whole of the army mourns him: “Our oste for the bischoppe mournes alle/ And graythes tham to Melayne walle/ With baners busked bownn” (1591-3). The army gathers with their banners raised high, prepared to go to battle for Milan as they stand right under the walls. This wounded bishop, who at the beginning of the poem was forced to raise his own clerical army, now finds the army of Christendom convening to fight, not only for Milan, and not only for God, but also for him. Now, gathered under the banner of Christianity, and not under any particular king or ruler, the united front will take on the Saracens who have fled behind the walls of the city. We are told that the supplies the army from Briton brought have sufficed to bolster the troops, and they are readying for battle, and then, right before what is likely the final battle, the poem breaks off. Still, the power of Bishop Turpin is clear. From a priest willing to excommunicate even King Charles himself to a heroic leader on the battle field, Turpin has been the driving force of the poem always reminding and encouraging the audience, both internal and external to the poem, to be Christian warriors. The passion he expresses, from hysterical ranting against Charles to his own verbalized connections to the wounded Christ, mark him as representative of the power of emotions in the poem.

204 For a discussion of the connection between piety and chivalry in the London Thornton Manuscript, see Chapter Four on Duke Roland and Sir Otuel of Spain.
Finally, in Bishop Turpin is the representation of sanctioned madness, one of the ultimate displays of religious devotion. Turpin was able to challenge the king and rage with a religious anger, both at his king and at Mary, and remain unchastized at the beginning of his war with the Saracens. Towards the end, he displays what Mills calls a “Quixotic” behavior when he mistakes the Britons coming to help for an advancing Saracen army:

Than Turpyn gan to Charls say,
‘I see a felle hoste, bi my faye,
That sone will nege us nere.

Yone are the Sarasenes mekill of mayne,
The full powere owt of Spayne,
That sone sall full ill spede.

For, by him that swelt on tree,
This day no Sarasene sall I see
Sall gerre me torne my stede.‘

And in his hande he caughte a launce—

205 Like the possibility of reading the Sultan Arabas as a reference to Wycliffite supporters at the time the poem was written, there is a potential connection between Turpin and historical events. Though much more successful, Turpin resembles in passion the vibrant Bishop Despenser of Norwich, who led a crusade against the Clementists in 1383. Though ultimately a complete failure that resulted in Despenser’s impeachment, the crusade began with much enthusiasm, as May McKisack notes: “[The Norwich crusade] was launched amid scenes of extraordinary enthusiasm, themselves significant of the prevailing mood of national hysteria” (431). Though it occurred likely at least a decade or more before the writing of the poem, the image of a valiant bishop able to lead his entire country, not just a parish or church, to religious and martial victory, may have been very compelling to the poet. Though unlikely to have been a direct reference to the failed priest-warrior Despenser, the success of Turpin certainly suggests a desire from the poet to see such valiance in his clergy.
'Have gud day, Charls, and grete wele Fraunce!'—

And agayne that hoste he yede. (1447-58)

Even with many broad banners on the coming Britons (1440) the Bishop still believes these men are enemies. Thankfully, they are able to identify him and not attack and then identify themselves to him before anything tragic happens. Upon the realization that the coming army is on his side, Turpin blesses and welcomes them. Missing from the text is any accusation that Turpin is either crazy or out of line from the author. Instead, they prepare for the coming battles. As Shepherd notes, there is never any penalty for the madness expressed by Turpin. Indeed, like all other outbursts from the Bishop, he is condoned through the silence of the author.

Conclusion

The Siege of Milan is a poem about piety and the expressions of that piety. It rigorously endorses orthodoxy, persistently punishing those who refuse to acknowledge either the Christian God or the proper displays of piety. The poem also flirts with anti-Lollard sentiments. When the Sultan Arabas is punished with death and burning for his refusal to acknowledge Christian icons, when Charlemagne is called a “heretic” for his refusal do as God has commanded and when the Bishop Turpin becomes a warrior, the poem takes on and revels in heretical issues, peppered with very real references to Lollard ideology and language. The piety of Roland and the other knights is manifested in their absolutely orthodox rendering of Christian tenets and then rewarded with miracles. Bishop Turpin’s behaviors include Mary adoration and heroic killings of Saracens in battle, both of which stand against very clear Wycliffite ideas about Marian

Shepherd 127.
icons and non-violence. The poem repeats the message that true Christians fight the enemies of the Church with passion, even more than skill, and are then rewarded with success. In the end, the violent displays of Turpin are valorized and vindicated in the (probable) success of the siege of Milan. If Christian virtue is measured by a willingness to participate in battle, as is often the case in Charlemagne romances, then the heroic violence sanctioned in this poem is the ultimate expression of that Christian virtue. The Siege of Milan is a poem that openly endorses violence against the Saracen enemies of Church abroad, while its subtext endorses violence against potential Lollard heretics at home.
The performance of piety is at the center of *Duke Roland and Sir Otuel of Spain*, a late fourteenth century romance that focuses primarily on the character of Sir Otuel, a Saracen warrior and messenger sent by the Sultan Garcy to Charlemagne’s court to insist upon the surrender of the French. Otuel’s conversion to Christianity is the product of a miracle and the majority of the poem is spent post-conversion, with Otuel striving to perform his Christianity. As a model for this performance, Otuel chooses Roland. In this way, despite the fact that Roland is significantly present in only the first third of the poem, his presence in the manuscript title is much deserved, as the poem itself is about Otuel’s transformation from a Saracen warrior to a French knight through his imitation of Roland. Structurally, the poem is remarkably repetitive: after his conversion, Otuel steps into the role of Roland, and faced with a Saracen enemy, performs acts of heroic Christian violence to demonstrate his new found piety. In order to fully become a Christian knight, Otuel must retrace and reiterate Roland’s actions, repeating, with some differences, the pattern of events he experienced with Roland, but now occupying Roland’s role. In other words, to become a Christian knight, Sir Otuel must (re)perform the Christian knightly behavior enacted by Roland in the first third of the poem, no matter
how much prowess he displayed when before his conversion. All of the characteristics or events that Otuel must perform to become a Christian knight not only fit in with the ideas of knighthood, but also reflect ideas of medieval masculinity. In this chapter I will argue that the repetitive structure of the poem is central to its meaning: Otuel must reperform Roland’s piety and masculinity in order to be a successful Christian knight.

*Duke Roland and Sir Otuel of Spain* is a poem written at a time when actual participations in the crusades and such displays of knightly prowess in battlefield combat were nearly impossible. Still, the poem is powerful in the representation of masculinity that it offers its audience by reenacting the same story twice. In the first story, the audience is shown what an already perfect knight can do. In the second, through Otuel’s establishment of himself as a man, the audience is shown what it takes for a worthy knight to establish his masculinity.

Also significant to the repetition and replacement of Roland by Otuel is the fate of Roland: betrayed by Ganelon, Roland will be killed by Saracens. The narrative of conversion is haunted by the story of the *Song of Roland*. In a moment when real-life crusade heroism is waning, and in a genre where the ultimate crusade hero will die, the image of a potential replacement is a powerful one. Christine Chism notes the power of Alexander, a character with similarities to Otuel, in the *Wars of Alexander* to a fourteenth century audience:

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207 Johan Huizinga famously notes that “in the fourteenth or fifteenth century [chivalry] was nothing more than a rather artificial revival of things long dead, a sort of deliberate and insincere renascence of ideas drained of any real value.” “The Political and Military Significance of Chivalric Ideas in the Late Middle Ages,” *Essays by James Huizinga*, trans. James S. Holmes and Hans van Marle (New York: Harper and Rowe Publishers, 1959) 197. The significance of this “revival” is much debated, and I see it here as a means of presenting the values of chivalry to a late medieval audience.
[Alexander] becomes a hybrid of eastern and western cultures who empowers himself as he attempts to obliterate his connections to his oriental origins, […]. He represents western chivalry’s admiration for and aversion to an oriental world it can never convert or conquer and from whose learning, science, and history Europeans had drawn a great part of their own.²⁰⁸

Though, unlike Alexander, Otuel can be converted, Chism’s point works for Otuel as well. Facing the literary Roland’s death and the politics of failing crusades, the Otuel romance makes victory possible. Though Roland will die, the patterns established by this text suggest the possibility of a solution: after all, if a Saracen can become a great Christian knight, certainly an Englishman could. The poem allows its audience, through alienation turned to identification, to accompany Otuel on his path to knighthood.

**Manuscript Context and Critical History**

Likely translated from an Anglo-Norman original, there are three medieval English versions of the poem. The oldest of these is *Otuel a Knight*, found in the Auchinleck MS and so dated before 1330-40. The second is *Otuel and Roland*, found in the Fillingham MS, dated to 1475-1500. The last manuscript version we have is *Duke*

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Roland and Sir Otuel of Spain found in the London Thornton manuscript, and though the manuscript dates to the mid fifteenth century, H.M. Smyser indicates that the version was probably composed around 1400.\textsuperscript{209}

While all three of these versions recounted the same basic plot, they vary in rhyme scheme. For the purpose of this chapter and my dissertation, it is not my intention to analyze in detail the ways in which these texts vary, but rather to examine the one version of the poem that appears in the London Thornton MS.\textsuperscript{210}

Otuel follows The Siege of Milan, with a Latin prayer and hymn between the two. Sidney J. Herrtage, editor of the poem, follows M. Gaston Paris in suggesting:

... [Milan] forms a kind of introduction to Otuel, in the same way as the Destruction of Rome is introductory to Fierabras. [...] This view, that the Sege of Melayne was intended to form an introduction to Otuel, is supported by the facts that the scene of action of each poem is laid in Italy, and that in each the same name, Garsie, is given to the Soudan. The connection would, very probably, have been shown much more clearly had the end of the poem not been unluckily lost.\textsuperscript{211}

Commenting on this suggestion, Smyser says that he has “some misgivings” about the classification of Milan as an introduction to Otuel because “[t]he Sege never names Otuel


\textsuperscript{210} For a discussion of how the texts vary, see Smyser or Janet M. Cowen “The English Charlemagne Romances,” Roland and Charlemagne in Europe: Essays on the Reception and Transformation of a Legend, ed. Karen Pratt (King’s College London: Center for Late Antique & Medieval Studies, 1996) 149-68. See especially 154-6 for a discussion of the “Otuel” group.

\textsuperscript{211} S.J. Herrtage ed., The English Charlemagne Romance, Part II: “The Sege off Melayne” and “The Romance of Duke Rowlande and Sir Otuell of Spayne.” Early English Text Society Extra Ser. 35 (London: N. Trubner & Co., 1880) x. All citations are from this text.
and we do not know how its story ended. No version of Otuel has been adapted to accommodate it to the Sege as a prologue.” However, he goes on to note that, the fact remains that the villain of the Sege is Garcy and the scene is Lombardy; [...] Furthermore it may not be insignificant that the tail-rime Sege precedes the tail-rime Duke Roland and Sir Otuel of Spain in MS Additional 31042. As an independent, “detached” romance, the Sege would have ended with either the death or baptism of Garcy. On the whole it seems less likely that it ended with any such flat contradiction of a poem well known to the author and many of his contemporaries than that it ended with the escape of Garcy from Milan to Attaly, from which capital he sends his challenge to Charlemagne at the opening of Otuel.212

Finally, some small evidence from the manuscript itself lends support to the theory that Milan and Otuel are to be read in sequence. Herrtage believes that The Siege of Jerusalem, the romance that precedes Milan in the manuscript, is in a different hand than Milan and Otuel, which are in the same hand.213 Though being in the same hand does not prove that the scribe intended the two to be linked, it does make the option more likely. Critical response linking the two poems has been very limited. In one discussion, A.M. Trounce notes briefly that “[Otuell’s] battles are feebler [...] but in place of the heroic note it has really effective humor in the picture of the volcanic Otuell [...]”

212 Smyser 93-4.
213 Herrtage x. There is some conflict over the presence of multiple hands in the manuscript. I follow Janet Cowen, who, in the article cited above, argues that there is only one hand (157, n.28).
contrast[ed to] Rowlande’s courtesy.” Such contrast, humorous or not, is at the center of the text because it is only Otuel’s adoption of all of Roland’s attributes that he becomes a Christian knight.

**The Saracen in Medieval Romance**

The figure of the Saracen is a staple of late medieval English romance, especially the *chanson de geste* of France. By the time *Otuel* was written, the Saracen was a figure specifically from the East and very often shown worshipping Mohammed (as Otuel does). This was hardly universal, especially in the earlier English romances, where Saracens could be enemies from the north as in *Blaunchardyn and Eglantine*, or Scandinavians as in others. *King Horn*, a romance at the beginning of the Middle English romance tradition, exists in multiple versions, and, in one of the earlier versions, the invaders, not called “Saracens,” are mostly from Denmark; but, in the Anglo-Norman version, “the invaders are called Saracens and they come explicitly from Islamic regions.” Though the description and origin of the Saracen varies early on, the popularity of Saracens is clear. Dorothee Metlitzki notes the frequent adaptation of Saracens from the French Charlemagne romances: “The surviving Charlemagne romances in English—ten metrical romances and three prose romances printed by Caxton—reflect a specific popular interest in the Saracens.” By the time *Otuel* was

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written in the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century, Saracens from the Middle East were not only stock characters and familiar to audiences, but were popular as well.\textsuperscript{218}

While the figure itself was popular, the vision of a chivalrous Saracen might have seemed an anomaly in the late twelfth and early thirteenth century.\textsuperscript{219} In several renderings, Saracens were made to be as unsympathetic as possible to the audience of the texts, either through their behavior, or through depersonalization:

... if an audience is able to identify with an enemy, even one individual, then it might also come to sympathize with it which, in times of war, is counter-productive. In the case of this text corpus [Middle English literature] only Saracen knights who later convert to Christianity are treated with greater tolerance because they are seen to become members of the audience themselves.\textsuperscript{220}

The Saracen convert, then, unlike the savage, idol-breaking, standard Saracens of so many other romances, is allowed both sympathy and a heroic role. However, in the creation of this heroic role, the Saracen is never entirely unlike the Christian heroes he battles and whom he eventually joins: “The primary feature which distinguishes Christians from Saracens is their adherence to their respective faiths.”\textsuperscript{221} The Saracen

\textsuperscript{218} Of the surviving ten, \textit{Fierabras/Ferumbras} and \textit{Otinel/Otuel} were the most popular with four and three versions respectively. (Metlitzki 120.) Diane Speed notes that almost all of the English Charlemagne romances are related: “Apart from three of the very late texts, all the extant English Charlemagne romances are related to three of the chansons: \textit{The Song of Roland} is based on a version of \textit{Roland}; \textit{The Sowdone of Babylone, Sir Ferumbras, Firumbras}, and, later, Caxton’s \textit{Charles the Grete} are based on the Fierbras story; and \textit{Otuel and Roland, Otuel}, and \textit{Duke Rowland and Sir Otuell of Spayne} are based on the Otinel story, with \textit{Roland and Vernagu} and \textit{The Sege off Melayne} thought to be related to it.” 572.

\textsuperscript{219} Marianne Ailes, “Chivalry and Conversion: The Chivalrous Saracen in the Old French Epics \textit{Fierabras} and \textit{Otinel},” \textit{Al-Masāq} 9 (1996-1997): 1. Ailes is the first critic to have discussed in detail the structural repetition occurring in the French text.

\textsuperscript{220} Cordery 92.

\textsuperscript{221} Metlitzki 186.
who will convert and the Christian whom he fights are, in fact, more alike than unlike, especially when it comes to their virtues, and this is particularly true in the case of Roland and Otuel. 222 If, as it often appears with Saracen characters who are worthy of conversion, they appear to only be misguided in the object(s) of their faith, not in their skills, and since conversion brings little if any change in physical appearance, how does an audience have proof of the reality of the conversion? The answer, for the author of Otuel, is in the repetition of knightly tasks of prowess, chivalry and piety by the newly Christian hero. In order to prove himself as a knight, Otuel must redefine and reaffirm one of the primary elements of medieval knighthood: chivalric masculinity.

Finally, the Saracens in medieval romance were figures upon which fears could be placed and through which various moral and religious attitudes could be expressed. Primarily, Saracens participated in excesses that were, morally speaking, unavailable to Christians. Jeffrey Cohen notes, through his use of Zizek, the position of pleasure in a culture’s relationship to the “other:”

Ethnic and racial violence, Zizek argues, is an attempt to snatch or destroy (“strike a blow against”) what might be called “unbearable surplus-enjoyment” of the other. Powerful fantasies structure the relationship between subjects and their own “lost” enjoyment which (against all evidence to the contrary) they see as being possessed by this other. 223

222 Other prominent “worthy” Saracens include Sir Palomedies from the Arthur cycle, and Sir Ferumbras from the Fierbras cycle. There is also a Saracen convert in the later romance The Taill of Rauf Coilżear.
This excess of pleasure, Cohen argues, is present in *The Sultan of Babylon* in the form of vast feasts with unusual foods, the huge sexual appetite and prowess of the Sultan Laban and the violence that the Saracens use. A similar kind of excess is hinted at in *Otuel*, though sexual prowess is left entirely undiscussed and the primary ways in which excess is represented is through his propensity for violence and his excessive bragging. While Cohen and Zizek read the “surplus-pleasure” of the other in general, and in many medieval romances, the Saracen in particular, as a root of racial violence, I think it is also applicable to the *Otuel* romance and its conversion. One of the reasons why Otuel must repeat the masculine feats so clearly performed by Roland is because Otuel must be inscribed into the Christian set of values. He must lose the excess pleasure. In this sense, the elements of chivalric restraint become crucial. Otuel’s shift to Christian values and to the chivalric culture delineated in romance goes beyond his pledging faith to a new Christian God, and beyond his proving that he is still just as good with a sword. The multiple reperformances of the chivalric values throughout the poem, particularly restraint that is lacking when he arrives at court, are a way of containing and/or eliminating the excesses he had as a Saracen.

**Chivalry and Masculinity**

As Maurice Keen noted in his study of chivalry: “[...] chivalry may be described as an ethos in which martial, aristocratic and Christian elements were fused together. Chivalry [...] is a way of life in which we can discern these three essential facets, the military, the noble, and the religious.” For a knight, or a would-be knight, in medieval

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224 Cohen 213-18.
England, these three things also coincided with what it meant to be a man. Ruth Mazzo Karras, in her work on formations of medieval masculinity, discusses the ideals of knighthood and how the three parts of medieval masculinity, violence, piety and chivalric behavior (or “noble” as Keen calls it) are linked. The first element of masculinity is violence:

Physical prowess and military success were always an important part of what medieval people admired in their leaders, and it was in feats of arms that young boys received their first knightly training. [...] Violence was the fundamental measure of a man because it was a way of exerting dominance over men of one’s own social stratum as well as over women and other social inferiors.226

The idea that violence is central to a knight’s success is made obvious in just about any romance in Middle English. The fight between knights, either in tournament or battle, is almost always a staple scene in the genre. However, when the heroic knight is a new Christian convert, the violence must be more specifically directed. Presumably, as is the case with Otuel, the formerly heathen knight has already demonstrated a great deal of success at battle, and so must redirect the violence. Christine Chism, in her study of The Siege of Jerusalem, discusses the display of violence as a support of faith and a display of piety:

The poem [The Siege of Jerusalem] begins by redefining Christianity, appropriating it for imperial chivalry and wedding it to war. In that

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process, Christianity literally changes hands, from the disparate, sorrowing, devoted hands of its private practitioners [...] to the restless, resistless, relentless hands of the provincial Roman military leaders Titus and Vespasian. 227 Though specific to *The Siege of Jerusalem*, with its rapid shift from Titus and Vespasian’s worship of Christ to violence in the name of Christ against the Jews, the idea of devotion through violence is applicable to *Otuel*. Like the Roman converts, Otuel must demonstrate his new devotion to God, and, like them, he does so through violence.

The second element that Otuel must demonstrate is piety. He must take on the Christian faith and demonstrate his devotion to that faith. Geoffroi de Charny connects piety to prowess as well:

> You should, therefore, always and in all circumstances be determined to do your best, and above all have the true and certain hope that comes from God that He will help you, not relying just on your strength nor your intelligence nor your power but on God alone, [...]. You can see clearly and understand that you on your own can achieve nothing except what God grants you. 228

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The notion of “God alone” becomes particularly important to this romance because Roland is unable to convert Otuel solely by the strength of his arms. The Holy Spirit must intervene.

Finally, Otuel must demonstrate a sense of the chivalric code. Karras notes that violence is not the only important element of knightly masculinity: “The successful man in the chivalric world was one who not only could fight but also knew how to behave appropriately at court, and this included behavior toward women.” Behavior at court is stressed in this romance when Otuel is forced to defend himself from bodily harm by a over zealous Christian knight at court. These three elements, violence, piety and courtesy are all important to the medieval knight.

In Otuel, the poet uses the main character to create an example of a knight achieving each of these and becoming a great French knight. By patterning Otuel’s behavior on Roland’s and having Otuel reiterate the previous behavior of Roland the poet sets up an exemplum for his audience: Otuel’s journey demonstrates how a non-Christian could become a Christian knight and in doing so instructs the audience on the crucial elements of knighthood. Not only is Roland an example of the best of Christian knights, but Otuel also becomes an example of how to achieve similar greatness. That a

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229 Karras 25.
230 Glenn Wright analyzes the ways in which Rauf Coilʒear in The Taill of Rauf Coilʒear, after a confrontation with Roland, reenacts that confrontation with a Saracen. For Wright the repetition is not about the conversion of a Saracen into a Christian culture, but about the “conversion” of a commoner to a nobleman and represents anxieties of social class: “Essentially, Rauf functions in the earlier episode as a surrogate Saracen, with Roland the defender, in this instance, not of religious orthodoxy but of aristocratic primacy.” “Convention and Conversion: the Saracen Ending of the Taill of Rauf Coilʒear,” Al-Masāq 14.2 (2002): 104.
text could have such didactic ambitions, or be read for such information, was hardly unusual in the later Middle Ages:

Literature provided entertainment, but it also affected the ideals, interests, mentalities, and aspirations, if not the actual behavior, of the knightly class in the late Middle Ages. It worked to reconcile several sets of competing ideals: romantic love, gentility, knightly prowess, and piety. Those who read it, and took it seriously, in the late Middle Ages internalized the aristocratic ethic, the ludic aspects and the Christian tinge as parts of the definition of the ideal man.\textsuperscript{231}

Sir Otuel does engage in all of the ideals listed above. The integration of Otuel into the fellowship of the French knights—with fellowship as the ultimate marker of his inclusion into Christian chivalric culture—includes his negotiation of romantic love (or at least marriage) with Belesant, his displays of gentility, his reaffirmation of Christian faith, and finally his violent prowess.

The performance of each of these elements would not only be crucial for a pagan becoming a Christian, but also for a Christian man seeking to be a knight. Also important to note is that these characteristics displayed through performance must be continually reinvented. That is, performing or displaying such prowess, piety, or chivalric aptitude once is not sufficient. Even more, the continual reinvention of a knight as a champion is

essential to knighthood. As Patricia DeMarco notes about Cador’s desire for battle with the Romans in the alliterative *Morte Arthure*:

> Past battles may have provided ‘lordchipez’ and ‘loos,’ but ‘dedez of armes’ have an evanescent character: their ability to instantiate repute quickly threatens to dissipate, and they must be enacted again and again. Chivalric identity requires its own continual, reiterative performance, [...] Marked by the chivalric ethos of violent self-assertion, warfare is understood and applauded here as an opportunity to display virtue and to acquire public repute.\(^{232}\)

While the need to “reiterate” performance of knightly qualities exists even for the heroic among the Christians, it is even more central for the new Christian heroes. Otuel’s past successes, which are impressive even if they are against Christians, are insufficient. In the world of Middle English romance in general, and of *Otuel* specifically, masculinity must be repeated to exist. In the remainder of this chapter I will discuss the ways in which Otuel reperforms Roland’s role in order to both prove he can be and become a Christian knight.

**Otuel at Court**

Otuel’s arrival at court—his first encounter there with the French knights—establishes his character, marking both his success and failure as a knight. This episode makes clear the behaviors and attitudes he must change later in the poem in order to become a successful Christian knight. Important to note in the first episode is that Otuel

does not enter court a completely uncivilized beast, especially in terms of proper behavior established in chivalric literature. Both Otuel and Roland demonstrate an understanding of the necessary parameters that govern violence, and this goes back to the generic convention of the convertible Saracen. Leona F. Cordery notes:

Otuel later converts to Christianity; thus, particularly in this case, it is essential to show the equality of both knights. Both [Roland and Otuel] must be seen to be worthy of being called Christian knights, i.e. to have both the chivalric prowess and the right belief. Both Christian and Saracen knights must uphold the accepted chivalric code [...].

This necessity of similarity is at the center of the structure of *Otuel*. As a knight, he must first prove himself worthy as an opponent, and thus potentially worthy as an ally, before he can become not only an ally, but also a Christian hero. Upon his arrival at court, Otuel praises his leader in terms of chivalric language and values:

> In Paynym ne es none so doghety,
> [Garcy] hathe the flour of cheuallrye
> All redy with hym broghte.
> Charlles I ne maye noghte honour the,
> For þou hase greuede Mahoun & me,
> Þat alle þis worlde hase wroghte. (100-5)

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233 Cordery 94-5.

234 There are examples of allies to the Christian cause who are not Christian, nor do they become heroic. One example includes Floripas, Ferumbras’ sister in the *Fierabras* and *Ferumbras* romances. She betrays her father and eventually converts so that she can marry the Frenchman she loves.
Otuel explains that Garcy has the three elements so important to the establishment of medieval masculinity through knighthood: chivalric courtesy, prowess, and piety, though they are seen from the point of view of a pagan (here Saracen) knight. His opening speech turning first to the chivalry of his own king suggests that he understands the rules of the French court and how important they are to his relationship to them as both messenger and warrior. First, Otuel praises his own leader, the Sultan Garcy as a “flower of chivalry,” a phrase used multiple times in various romances to describe Roland and/or Charlemagne. His use of the vocabulary demonstrates clearly that he knows, even if he does not satisfactorily perform, the conduct of the court. This politeness is also more prevalent in this text than in the French original Otinel, though both poems begin with the Saracen’s arrival to offer a challenge to Charlemagne. In the French version, he insults Charlemagne, and refuses to salute him.

Though he does refuse to do full honor to Charlemagne here, it is a refusal based on a mirror-like reversal of Christian piety, justified because he cannot give full honor to Charlemagne and his court who do not worship “Mahoun,” creator of the world. This move demonstrates his clear, but misdirected, sense of piety. The lack of Christian piety is the source of most of the social evils of Saracens: “Socially [Saracens] are the embodiment of all foul practices, simply because they lack the one thing necessary in Christian eyes for perfection—belief in Christianity.” In the case of Otuel, like all other cases, it is a matter of “if only.” If only Otuel could correctly direct his piety to

\[^{235}\text{For an interesting twist on this usage, see The Siege of Milan, in which the similar wording is applied to Bishop Turpin when he is called “the flower of the priesthood” by Charlemagne in line 1583.}\]

\[^{236}\text{Ailes 12.}\]

Christ and Christianity, oh what a knight he would be! Because this poem has multiple sources, both in French and English, and is part of the Charlemagne tradition, it is reasonable to think that the audience would be familiar with this story and familiar with the fact that Otuel does convert, but even without a knowledge of this story an audience could recognize the worthy chivalric traits in Otuel. The opening demonstrations of misplaced piety function both as both evidence of Otuel’s worthiness and as a kind of foreshadowing of his ultimate conversion. He furthers his display in his commentary to Roland:

> And, Rowlande, if euer I may the see  
> At Batayle or at any Semble,  
> Thi dedis schall dere be boghte.  
> And Rowlande, gif euer I may þe mete,  
> With my swerde I schall the hete,  
> To-hewe thi body in two;  
> And fulle the vnder my horse fete,  
> Saraʒenes myrthe with the to bete,  
> For þou hase wroghte þam woe. (106-14)

Otuel offers to demonstrate his prowess in battle, making clear that he will defeat Roland on the battlefield. First, this establishes his awareness that violence is the primary means of establishing dominance in the knightly society, and second it further highlights his understanding of courtesy because he defers the violence to the proper place (“at battle”) as opposed to openly threatening Roland or any other knights in that moment. Again,
this is different than the French original, in which Otinel wishes to see Charlemagne hanged and the twelve peers beaten to death.238 Once again, the English poem, a much later version, shows a Saracen with a clear understanding of the correct ways in which to show his own power and skill. Otuel is an enemy who looks strikingly chivalrous and European, especially since the battle he wants with Roland deploys the typical tropes of the romance genre fight:

It is useful to recall that nearly all of these fight scenes [from chivalric literature] involve a first stage of combat on horseback with lances, often with one or both men unhorsed and wounded, followed (if both survive) by lengthy combat with swords on foot, one man finally being hacked into submission [...].239

The desire of Otuel to see Roland crushed beneath the hooves of his horse, while using more explicit language, is still within the realm of chivalric battle at the time. Otuel presents himself at the court of Charlemagne behaving within the bounds of chivalric behavior, showing both the court and the reader that he has the potential to be a great knight. In short, this passage sets Otuel up as redeemable. He shows elements of knightly masculinity even as he lacks Christian piety.

In contrast, Roland responds allowing the audience both internal and external to the poem to see what Christian chivalry looks like. Roland’s response to the challenge demonstrates his own understanding of chivalry, and the problem with Otuel’s declarations:

238 Ailes 12.
And Rowlande at those wordes loughe, & said: “sir, þou arte doghety ynoghe Siche dedis to vndir-too. þou may langill & make it toughe, For here schall no man do the woghe Till aughte days ben a goo.” (115-120)

Roland does not respond with anger. As he chastises the Saracen knight for his “jangling” about the deeds he would undertake, he rebukes Otuel with a sanctimonious tone highlighting the fact that he, with his adherence to the chivalric treatment of guests, is the better man, no matter Otuel’s level of prowess. Otuel’s words are easy because they offer only idle threats; as a messenger Otuel is under the protection of Charlemagne for eight days. In other words, he can make all the threats he wants to make and, by the rules of courteous chivalry, the knights should not respond with violence. It is very likely that Otuel, with his “jangling” knows this fact, and is taunting Roland—and later others—in an attempt to prod them into unchivalrous behavior. Roland’s response indicated that he is both aware of the protected position of a messenger and not moved by Otuel’s ploy.

Reassured by Charlemagne that no harm will come to him (121-6), Otuel proceeds to continue to brag about his prowess in battle, claiming to have killed “a thosande [...] / of Cristen men mekill of myghte,/ Righte with myn awenn hande” (142-4). Again, Otuel demonstrates his understanding of chivalry by clearly understanding that a reputation is built on deeds of prowess, but he fails in courtesy through his self-praise. As Geoffroi de Charny notes in his Book of Chivalry, “Speak of the achievements
of others but not your own, and do not be envious of others.” Though at the moment he is not particularly envious, nonetheless Otuel is fond of bragging about his own strengths and achievements. The author of the poem continues to set up Otuel as Roland’s foil, and shows his behavior as troublesome rather than knightly, even as Otuel semi-successfully employs chivalric values and language. It is important to note here that Otuel’s position as an enemy is established by the god(s) that he worships and men that he kills and is separate from his ability to be courtly. That he has killed Christians does not make him less chivalric, only more of an enemy. Otuel, though not one hundred percent successful at chivalric behavior, is a worthy opponent in terms of his prowess, his (misplaced) piety and his awareness of chivalric courtesy. He stands as Roland’s enemy because he is not a Christian; he stands as Roland’s foil because he is not a true knight in the Christian sense, but will become one, in a structural / narrative sense in the poem, by becoming Roland.

After establishing the budding potential of Otuel to be a Christian, the action then takes a dangerous turn, using an explosion of violence as an opportunity for the author, through Roland, to demonstrate true chivalric behavior. Though Roland is able to exchange words with Otuel and handle his suggestions without impropriety, not all the knights have such self-control. In this way, Roland stands in contrast not only to Otuel, but also to lesser French knights who are unable to control themselves and behave

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courteously. In response to Otuel’s bragging, Sir Estut a “hardy knyghte” (151) leaps up and demands to fight Otuel right then and there, and arms himself with a staff. Roland intervenes:

Than Rowlande sayde full sobirly;

“Now gud sir Estut, let it be,

He is a Messangere:

He es Ensurede to myn Eme & mee.

For-thi, gud sir, par charyte,

Thyn hert þat þou wolde stere. (157-162)

It is worth noting that this moment starts its own stanza and is marked in the manuscript with a large capital “T,” drawing attention to the passage. Though an audience of Christians and Englishmen couldn’t help but identify with Sir Estut and feel rage at Otuel’s behavior, Roland makes it clear that Estut’s behavior is inappropriate with his mostly gentle rebuke, repeating his assertion that messengers are protected. In this way, Sir Estut becomes another kind of foil for Roland. However, unlike Otuel, Estut should behave better. He is beyond the point of redemption. That is, if he does not yet understand how he should behave and behave accordingly, then he is a failure as a knight. For the author of Otuel, chivalry not only requires the prowess to beat one’s enemies, but also the poise to know when violence is appropriate. Roland notes that for the sake of reputation (both his and Charlemagne’s) Otuel as a messenger must not be harmed. Geoffroi de Charny again expresses a similar opinion:

Thus [men of rank and prowess] are closely observed as examples of good manners and behavior, [...] and they are questioned about their situation,
way of life, and conduct. It is not, therefore, the only virtue of those who bear arms that they carry weapons and perform feats of arms; but, in addition to this, it is necessary *that in all the respects mentioned above, in no way can anything dishonorable be perceived nor said concerning them*.241

It is crucial in the worlds of both Roland and Geoffroi to be aware of one’s standing and reputation. Both Roland and Charlemagne are men of rank and prowess, and so, in both Geoffroi’s and Roland’s world, manners are as crucial to reputation as their conduct is and always will be well known and examined. Roland criticizes Estut’s manners, not his desire to avenge the fallen Christians. The protection of a messenger is the protection of the appearance of propriety. To have knights at court who will attack messengers (no matter how much they seem to deserve it) is to risk an occasion for rumors of poor conduct. By behaving dishonorably and discourteously, Estut is not just risking his own reputation, but that of the whole court.

Roland offers no concern for the physical well being of Otuel or Sir Estut. This conflict is a matter of chivalric behavior providing a structure for sanctioned violence. Otuel’s goading coupled with Sir Estut’s rising to the bait threatens the stability of order. The following events make it clear that the order Roland seeks to protect is, indeed, very fragile, and when the rules of chivalry are broken, a kind of mad violence ensues:

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241 Kaeuper and Kennedy 109. (My emphasis) “Et dont sont il regardés sur toutes bonnes manieres et contenances, [...] et demandent de leur estat mesmes et de leur vie et de leurs gouvernemens. Or n’est ce pas dont tout le bien de ceulx qui se arment que d’estre armez et de bien faire es armeures tan seulement. Mais convient aavecques ce que en tous les regars qui dessus sont nommez, que en nulle maniere l’en ne puist chose deshonneste veoir ne dire sur eulf” (108).
Bot ʒit þe knyghte ne wolde noghte spare,

Bot hent þe Saraʒene by þe hare,

& backwarde doun hym bere.

Þe Saraʒene stirte vp breme as bare,

Cursu his swerde he drewe reghte thare,

Þe knyghte hede of he schere. (163-8)

Sir Estut grabs the Saracen by his hair and drags him down. This fight is utterly outside the bounds of the chivalric fight Otuel described only moments before. It is not only inappropriate in context, but also generically. Romances do not have this kind of fight as a marker of heroic Christian knighthood or masculinity. Unlike the threats made by Otuel above, in which he claims that he will successfully defeat Roland on a battlefield, this fight more resembles a barroom brawl, or, given the hair pulling, perhaps a pair of hysterical teenage girls. The only element that allows Otuel to remain redeemable even after this display is that he is wronged party. He was attacked and had to defend himself. Though the brawl is far from exemplary, it is also not Otuel’s fault, nor did he strike the first blow.

The beheading is followed by the near disintegration of the court: “Than saide þe Baronage with hole sowun:/ ‘Lay hande on the traytoure feloun,/ He hase done

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242 For an example of a parody of chivalry, with a prolonged fight, see The History of Reynard the Fox Translated and Printed by William Caxton in 1481, ed. Donald B. Sands (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1960) 171ff. One particular example of unchivalric behavior is the moment when the fox, “gave the wolf a stroke with his tail full of piss in his eyes then Isegrim weened he should have lost his sight. And this [the fox] did often times” 172.
velanye!” (169-71). The moment of violence rapidly escalates (almost) into a lynch mob. The crowd of knights, once renowned for their chivalry, demands to “lay hands” on the “traitor felon.” There is no call for justice, nor is there any sort of awareness, it seems, of Sir Estut’s missteps. The author further highlights the impropriety of such a fight by describing Otuel throughout this brief episode in terms of animals: “Bot he rollede his eghne both vp & dowun,/ And ferde als a wilde lyoun,/ Brayde vp his browes one hye” (172-74). He leaps to his feet like a fierce bear and then behaves like a wild lion. Both add to the tone of madness and disorder in the scene. Furthermore, these descriptions mark the difference between the French and the Saracen as this kind of comparison to animals is almost always exclusive to Saracens. The rolling eyes, too, are a typical mark of the Saracen figure. In her discussion of eye rolling as a Saracen trait used in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Phillipa Hardman notes that in *Otuel* there is a similar instance, and that eye rolling and other markers of Saracen-ness stop after conversion: “Roland does nothing comparable, nor do any of the French knights, nor does Otuell himself once he is converted.” Not only will Otuel convert, but he will also drop some of the physical actions that marked him as a Saracen. Finally, the bestial nature displayed by Otuel is a mark of his excess; in this case, his inability to control his emotions. Though he professes to know and understand chivalry, his excess emotion spills out after he is forced to defend himself and contained violence rapidly shifts to uncontained savagery. Clearly, the danger of the excess is emphasized by the fact that the chaos almost spreads through the entire court, leading the other knights to demand

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243 Phillipa Hardman, “Dear Enemies: the Motif of the Converted Saracen and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*,” *Reading Medieval Studies* 25 (1999): 70. Other Saracens have rolling eyes, including Otuel in *Otuel* before he and Roland do battle and the Giant of Mautrible from *The Sultan of Babylon*. 154
immediate vengeance instead of justice. The threat created by the Saracen in this poem is not simply manifested in excessive display, but in excessive behavior with the power to spread rapidly, even through Christians.

The fate of Sir Estut in this passage implies judgment on him without the narrator ever being explicit. He is beheaded by Otuel who is defending himself. Estut never engages in a swordfight, never is able to exchange blows, never is able to demonstrate his own prowess and finally, put bluntly, Sir Estut is never able to establish himself as a real man and knight. The rage that overtakes this scene casts Estut entirely out of the boundaries of definable and acceptable courtly masculinity. Roland stands in contrast with all of the characters present, both Saracen and French, who are unable to maintain the balance between violence and courtesy. This scene contrasts the correct performance of masculinity, located in Roland, with Sir Estut’s overblown violence and establishes that knighthood is more than being able to wielding a sword.

In *Otuel*, civility is regained only through the reassertion of the promises of courtesy: Charlemagne asks Otuel to hand over his sword and deliver his message. In doing this, and in not specifically chiding Otuel for his actions, Charlemagne is tacitly accepting Otuel’s behavior and acknowledging that he is a worthy knight.244 Roland finally convinces Otuel that he will keep his sword safe, saying “And when thi Message es doun & dighte,/ I schalle delyuer the thi brande so brighte,/ Als I am trewe duspere” (190-2). Again, Roland turns to his reputation for honor to reestablish stability. It is because Roland is known for his honor according to chivalric rules that Otuel does give

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244 Glenn Wright notes the similar moment in the Auchinleck MS romance *Otuel a Knight*: “the Saracen Otuel displays the most outrageous arrogance toward his French hosts […] finding this behavior infuriating but also deeply impressive, [Charlemagne] extends Otuel every measure of courtesy […]” 104.
up the sword to him. In a moment of parallel structure, Otuel then ends his concession with another threat to kill Roland, and behead him, on the battlefield (193-8), again demonstrating his understanding of the proper place for such violence, despite the fact that he has just decapitated a knight in the court. Though he is the only one in the scene characterized as animalistic in his behavior, it is clear that Otuel was not the sole instigator of the violence. The restatement of his threat / challenge to Roland, with the repetition “at battle,” reconstructs the boundaries that had been broken in the outbreak of violence, effectively ending the episode. The author constructs Otuel so that he clearly understands notions of courtesy, but does not see that the whole basis of knighthood, though manifested in violence, is Christianity.

The appropriateness of Otuel as a Christian knight is marked, finally, in his preparation for battle. He is dressed in armor from Charlemagne by Charlemagne’s daughter Belesant and her maidens. Otuel himself asks for armor marking himself out as a person skilled in the ways of chivalry, right down to his proud steed (which of course will die in battle, as the genre requires). Charlemagne, not only provides a hauberk, shield and spear, but goes one step farther:

Þe kynge þan lokes hym be-syde
And saughe his dogheter mekill of pryde,
Belesent, brighte of blee;
Þan he comandide hir that tyde:
“Goo take hym fayre be thi syde
Wele armede þat he bee.” (391-6)
In her reading of *Otinel*, Ailes reads the arming as a sign of Otinel’s worth:

Just before the combat opens, we have the first clear indication that Otinel will be saved. Charlemagne asks his daughter, Belissant, to arm Otinel, which she does with the aid of her ladies. [...] Here, in Otinel, in the absence of any particular chivalry on the part of Otinel, it serves as a preparation for his conversion.  

While this commentary is on the French version, in the late Middle English *Otuel*, the Saracen Otuel is much more chivalrous. Charlemagne allows this Saracen to be dressed in his (Charlemagne’s) own armor by his own daughter. Such a move efficiently tells the audience both that the French court appreciates Otuel’s skill in battle (even if he does lose to Roland, as he is supposed to, it isn’t a dishonor) and his character. Armor would seem a fitting gift to a son-in-law to be.

**Demonstrating Dominance: the Conversion of Otuel**

The unification of knighthood and Christianity is established most clearly in the poem through the battle/conversion scene involving Roland and Otuel. Here, the hero and the villain come into direct martial conflict, resolved only by God and not by man. By splicing the battle scene with the continual prayers of Charlemagne, the author solidifies the connections between knighthood and Christianity. As suggested by Geoffroi de Charny earlier, ultimately the success of the Christian knight does come from God.

The battle begins with the men meeting for battle in a meadow, in full armor, with spears and on horseback. They charge each other:

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245 Ailes 14-5.
Thies kene knyghtis to-gedir gan glide,
The Medowe tremlyde on aythir syde,
In scheldes þay cowped full euen.
Theyre Ioynynge was so harde that tyde
That theyre tymbir in sondire gan ryde,
In mo þan sex or seuen. (451-6)

They both shatter the wood they use, and then go on to break their lances on each other’s armor (457-62). Roland succeeds in killing Otuel’s horse, and then Otuel returns the favor (463-480). The two then move on to fighting with swords, Otuel taunting “þis was a stythe stroke of a knyghte/ & no thynge of a childe!” (485-6). Seeing the trauma done to both warriors, and especially to Roland, Charlemagne once again begins to pray to God, Mary and Saint Michael that Roland be saved from shame (487-92). Two important points are being made here. First, Charlemagne’s invocation of Mary right before the battle directs the audience’s attention away from the prowess of the fighters and toward God. Second, Charlemagne continues to emphasize the need for reputation. It is not only for Roland’s safety that Charlemagne prays; he prays that Roland be saved from shame. Physical safety and reputation are so bound together here that there is no distinction. Though Roland is clearly in harm’s way, the prayer is for protection from shame. Presumably, the reputation of God is on the line too. If the Saracen defeats Roland, the best knight in France, then what chance has the Christian God against the Saracen one?

Immediately after the prayer, Roland is able, once again, to perform great feats of arms. He attacks Otuel once again:
Rowlande raysede vp Drondale,

Abown his hede he gane it hale

His Enemy for to dere.

He hade almoste wroghte hym bale,

A quartere of his helme a-waye gane vale,

And halfen-dele his one Ere; (493-98)

Otuel responds, and they fight so violently that their armor “lay in þe felde,/ Als floures þat strewede were” (503-4). The flowers of chivalry have shed each other’s petals. The language of beauty associated with such violence does connect the whole episode again, linguistically, with Otuel’s opening claim that Garcy is a “flower of chivalry.” This repetition of language also serves to equate both men. Both of their armors are like flowers in the fields. This visual sense of equality—that both men have lost equal amounts of armor and both are beautiful in their wounded states—once again prepares the audience for the coming conversion. These men will become equal Christian knights who are now almost indistinguishable bodies, covered in mud and blood, with their distinguishing characteristics, their variant armor, stripped and scattered around them. Such events, entertaining as they are, are not uncommon:

The staple of all combat in all chivalric literature, of course, is the encounter of two mounted knights, lances ‘straight out’ in the words of the

*Chanson de Roland*. Many thousands of these combats appear in works that were listened to or read for centuries. Audience seemingly never tired of the details: one lance pierces shield, hauberk and body; or both lances
splinter spectacularly, perhaps leaving the two knights unhorsed and temporarily dazed, soon to rise and go at each other with sharp swords.\footnote{Kaeuper, \textit{Chivalry and Violence} 174-5.}

The fight between Otuel and Roland follows this pattern almost exactly. The author spends copious amounts of time constructing (or translating) a fight like so many other fights in so many other Charlemagne romances. This use of standard fare serves to reinforce the importance of chivalric prowess.

The focus of the text, however, as with earlier interruptions of the action for commentary by Charlemagne, shifts away from prowess. As if in response to the narrator’s mention of flowers, Belesant offers a comment on the battle to her father Charlemagne: “Mi lorde, þay feghten full gentilly” (506). This reminds the audience that these are gentlemen (clearly used both as an assessment of character and a marker of class) who fight, and as such are examples. It also allows the poet to once again bring the audience back to God. Charlemagne responds by praying again to God and Mary:

\begin{quote}
Fro schame зе Rowlande Saue;

And conuerte vs зон gentill knyghte

þat es so hardy and so wighte,

For elles it were grete wathe.

He es so ferse in armes to fyghte

And a man of mekill myghte;

Full doghety are þay bathe. (510-6)
\end{quote}
Earlier in the poem, Otuel had demonstrated that, despite the breakdown of civility, he was capable of being chivalrous. Here, the audience is given confirmation by Charlemagne himself. Both he and his daughter recognize that this knight is more than just a Saracen who challenges Roland and Charlemagne’s court. He is not only strong and skilled (fierce in arms and a man of much might) but also a “gentle knight.” Again, like his daughter, Charlemagne recognizes both behavior and class in one word. Furthermore, Charlemagne calls him “doughty,” the same world used by Roland after Otuel’s first boast that he could defeat Roland in battle. The word used in a sanctimonious rebuke is repeated now, with full sincerity. Finally, evidence for Otuel’s now elevated status comes in Charlemagne’s prayer that the Saracen be converted.

Roland and Otuel are at the end of the fight in which both have been valiant, but neither has been able to gain the upper hand and, as though he heard Charlemagne’s prayer, Roland makes Otuel an offer:

Sarazene, will thou cristenyde be
& leue appon oure laye?
A noble gifte I schall gifte the,
Belesent þat es brighte of ble,
In þe worlde ne es siche a maye.
And thow and I and Olyuer,
We schall be felawes all in fere,
& travuell nyghte & daye:
we schall ryde both ferre & nere
Wyn Citees & townnes dere, 
& gode horses at assaye. (518-528)

Roland stops trying to kill the Saracen and instead tries to convert him, and the basis of this conversion is the chance to be a member of Roland’s brotherhood—and is essentially bribery. The offer is twofold. By marrying Belesant, Otuel would become an actual member of Roland and Charlemagne’s family. The marriage of Otuel to Belesant would establish him as a member of Charlemagne’s family, a move that gives Otuel not only entrance into wealth and power, but also the ability to have legitimate, powerful heirs, as Karras notes: “Control over a woman [...] became an important currency in which masculine status was measured in part because it implied control over reproductive resources. [...] Marriage was a goal because it meant continuing the patrilineal chain.”

Roland is offering not only legitimacy for Otuel, but for all of his children as well. As we will see in the last two-thirds of the text, Otuel will accept this offer, but will not marry Belesant until he has established himself as a Christian knight by the standards of courtesy, violence and piety (with the last two frequently combined, as I will discuss below) that I discussed in the introduction.

Furthermore, Roland’s promise of a position in the world of chivalry is telling: to convert is to become a member of an idyllic club in which the boys ride around the countryside and are “fellows.” For the author of Otuel, chivalry promises not only a patriarchal line, as suggested above, but also masculine friendship. Roland’s offer gives

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247 A similar act of bribery occurs in The Taill of Rauf Coiltȝear where Roland offers Magog, a messenger from Tartary there to announce a Saracen invasion, not only eternal salvation, but the hand of a duchess, along with her lands.

248 Karras 35.
the Saracen both the benefit of conversion, saving his soul, and the benefits of knighthood. That Otuel rejects it outright, mocking “thou can to ltitill of clery/ to leryn me sych a lare” (530-1), accusing Roland of understanding his religion too poorly to be convincing. This suggests that his promises of French heirs and brotherhood are not enough to bring him around. Furthermore, this follows the consistent patterns of Charlemagne romances, which indicates that battle is a necessity: “As with analogous scenes in the romances and chansons de geste, battle is a necessary prelude to conversion: the infidel must prove himself worthy of salvation.”

Though they are mid-battle, Otuel still will not convert for worldly possessions. This demonstrates, ironically, his strength of faith.

The failure of both the brotherhood and the prowess of Roland’s chivalry allows the poet to turn to God instead, once again reaffirming the role of God in the text. As the battle between the two men drags on, they are equally matched:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Þaire dynttis so thikke gan samen helde} \\
\text{Þaire harnays hewen was in ðe felde,} \\
\text{Ful ltitill was ðam leuede,} \\
\text{Þaire dynttis felle so sadde & sare,} \\
\text{Þat bothe þaire bodies wexen bare,} \\
\text{Þaire armours all to dreues. (568-73)}
\end{align*}
\]

The blows are thick, their harnesses have been long since shredded, and neither is unscathed. Both are sore and have taken and given so many blows that their armor is all but gone. There is no end in sight and victory for Roland is far from assured. Simple

\text{\textsuperscript{249} Wright 108.}
prowess is not sufficient, but through the entire battle, Charlemagne has been praying for Roland’s success and the conversion (not just the defeat) of Otuel, and his prayers are answered:

Þare-fore sir Charlles hade mekill care,
appon his knees he knelys thare,
& both his handes vp-heues,
And als þe kynge thus prayed faste,
A dofe come fro the holy gaste,
& one þe Saraʒene lightes:

And þan was he full sore agaste,
And vn-to sir Rowlande saide he in haste:
“Sesse, sir, of thi fighttes,
For I ame broghte in siche a will,
Þat I þoure lawes will fulfill,

And be-come a Cristyn knyghte.” (574-85)

As in the source material, Otuel’s conversion is not a result of prowess. Roland does not beat Otuel into physical submission so that he is forced to concede that the Christian God is stronger, as happens in several other Charlemagne romances. It is the appearance of the spirit that moves Otuel to convert. After the opening sequence of violence,

250 See Sir Ferumbras, The Sultan of Babylon and The Taill of Rauf Coilʒear for examples of late fourteenth and fifteenth century English Charlemagne romances following this form. In the first two, Charlemagne prays that Oliver will be successful in battle with Ferumbras, even though he is wounded.
followed by the very physical clash of the two great warriors, this moment throws the pious aspect of chivalry into sharp relief. Even though Charlemagne understands that it is only through the power of God that Christian knights will be successful and prays accordingly, the point is unforgettably driven home with the dove—the traditional visual representation of the holy spirit—physically touching the Saracen knight and causing his conversion. Otuel himself makes this connection, noting that he will become a Christian knight. The use of both words together suggests his awareness that they are not the same thing. One could be a knight and not be a Christian, as he was pre-conversion, or a Christian but not a knight.

**Becoming a Christian Knight: Otuel (re)Establishes Knightly Masculinity**

For Otuel there is more to being a Christian knight than simply converting thanks to a dove from the sky. Though Otuel demonstrated his abilities as a pious (if to the wrong god), courteous and powerful knight in the first third of the poem, as the last two-thirds demonstrates, he must reiterate all of those qualities now as a Christian in order to truly be the heroic Christian knight he now desires to be. All of the virtues that Otuel demonstrated in the first third of the poem served to show that he was sufficient to become a Christian knight, but they did not eliminate the need for him to reprove his worth as a Christian knight once he had converted. The remainder of the poem is his reestablishment of piety, courtesy and prowess to this end.

Interestingly, it is neither Roland nor Charlemagne who denies that Otuel is a full-fledged Christian knight, but Otuel himself. After Otuel’s christening, Charlemagne demonstrates his full faith in Otuel’s conversion through his offerings to him:
Otuel is promised all of the things that are available to one of the famous “twelve peers” of France. He is promised Lombardy, a beautiful wife, and the fellowship of the famous knights. The conversion, including Otuel’s being touched by the dove, as well as the christening, serves as proof enough for Charlemagne that Otuel is worthy. However, in terms of medieval masculinity, a dubbing ceremony, which is what the christening essentially is in this case, was not the end of becoming a knight, but the beginning:

After being knighted, a new knight had to demonstrate his prowess. [...] 

These knights performed for the sake of other men. Their battles were
with and before men. [...] The display that was such a big part of knighthood was for other men, and it was other men who ultimately evaluated the young knight and ruled him a full man.251

Otuel recognizes this, and though he thanks Charlemagne, refuses the marriage for the moment:

[…] I make a-vowe to mylde Marie,
That I hafe now chosen to my lady,
Þat es so mylde of mode,
That I schall wende to attale,
And for thi lufe do cheualrye
And distruye þe heythyn blode.
Sir kynge, I giff a-gayne to the
This mayden þat es faire & fre,
& in clethynge comly clede. (643-51)

In this moment, Otuel makes a vow to Mary, a staple move in the Church during the late fourteenth century to display orthodoxy.252 However, he also makes a move that is orthodox in terms of the romance genre. Not only is he going to do great acts of chivalry, but he will also do them for love. Ailes once again notes about Otinel: “From arrogant pagan, Otinel has become, instantly, courtly Christian knight, fighting for the love of his lady.”253 True in Otinel and true in Otuel. The knight Otuel has moved into the Christian

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251 Karras 65.
252 For a discussion of the relationship between swearing, icons and Mary worship and orthodoxy, see Chapter Three on the Siege of Milan.
253 Ailes 17.
chivalric culture not only with the object of his violence, but also with the justification for his violence. He will fight for the honor of his lady. Karras notes that the role of the woman as the inspiration to success in battle is more about the men than the women: “Although the knight performed deeds of prowess ostensibly to earn the love of a woman, the subplot was that the knight ostentatiously served a woman so as to advertise more widely his deeds of prowess.”

Though Otuel claims that it is for the “love” of his would-be bride that he spills heathen blood, he makes this claim in front of his new king, Charlemagne, and his new companions, the twelve peers and other French knights.

And lokes alle þat we redy be
In to the landes of lumbardeye
Righte als we firste redde,
For to distruye there goddes Enemy
þat hath to ʒowe ther grete envy,

With folkes on fote wele fedde.
When I hafe tane Myn Eme garcy
And the Cite of Attaly
þis Mayden schall I wedde. (652-60)

Again, just as Karras suggests, Otuel understands that he must prove his prowess once again in front of his new fellows, and he must do so by enacting violence on his former ally and uncle, Garcy. The rejection of paganism is not enough; he must defeat them in battle, publicly reinforcing not only his prowess as a knight, but also his Christian faith.

254 Karras 51.
Only then can he marry and be fully integrated into the culture. He not only joins the battle, but he himself will take the city, placing himself in the role of Roland, not merely in the role of a Christian foot soldier. He must retrace the steps taken by Roland before him to establish, now in this new realm of Christian knightly masculinity, his piety, his courtesy and his prowess.

Otuel is able to establish his piety when he confronts the Saracen Clariel. When Clariel calls out demanding the name of the warrior he faces, Otuel not only tells him who he is, but also recounts his conversion, making his Christianity public to the Saracens for the first time:

[...] I highte Otuell,

For no man will I hyde:

And fro ʒoure Mahoun ame I went,

And Cristyndome hafe I hent,

& Baptiste ame I full righte.

My lemman es both faire & gente,

Hir reghte name es Belesent,

Charlles dogheter þe brighte. (1138-46)

Important to note here is the series of equations. Not only does Otuel locate himself in Christendom, specifying his move from “Mahoun” to Christianity as well as his baptism, but he also recounts his position in French culture. He notes that his lover, or fiancée, is

\[\text{255 The exchange with Clariel in } \textit{Otuel} \text{ is very similar to the one in } \textit{Otinel}. \text{ Ailes notes of the French version: “In a later combat between Otinel and the pagan Clariel we have a re-run of the combat, this time with Otinel as the Christian knight. [...] The combat itself is related more briefly—with no lessening in Otinel’s “mautalent” nor any pointed missed opportunities for chivalry,” 17.} \]
the daughter of Charles. He specifies that not only is she pretty, but she is “gentle,” or of noble blood. Otuel has located himself both in terms of Christianity and in terms of medieval culture; Christian piety and social position are reinforced through his relationship with a woman.

Clariel responds to this announcement with sorrow, declaring “allas,/ Now is this a wikkede case,/ & ðou so noble a knyghte” (1147-9). He further counsels Otuel to recant, “I rede þat ðou conuerte the in hye,/ [...] & forsake not thy lawe” (1153, 1155). Both Otuel’s Christian faith and the Saracen King’s attempt to convert him echo the earlier interaction between Roland and Otuel, with Otuel in the Saracen’s position. Otuel brought the message to Charlemagne’s court that “þou schall vn-cristen bee/ & leue appon oure ley” (218-9) and Clariel’s earlier statement demanding that Otuel follow Muslim law is similar to Otuel’s suggestion that the French will be converted to “our [Muslim] law.” Charlemagne responds to Otuel asserting “Schall neuer Saraʒene of heythyn ley/ Welde France by nyghte ne daye;” (250-1) and a few lines later, Roland’s response of utter disgust and rage at Otuel’s threats, bribes, and ill manners is swift and definite:

“Vnconnande Saraʒene,” he sayde, “in þis place

Þi wykkednes es þare.

By hym þat dyede appon a tree,

Þou scholde haue a velany of me,

Ensurede nyfe þat I ware!

170
Bot in Batelle if euer I may þe see,
Schall neuer no kyng of Cristyante
Be encombirde with the mare." (293-300)

Roland makes clear in this passage that if Otuel had not been a messenger and thus protected, he would certainly pay for his comments. Furthermore, he accuses Otuel of being “unconnade,” literally meaning “unknowing,” but certainly here laden with the implication of uncouthness. He accuses Otuel of not living up to the standards of chivalry he believes he understands. When faced with Clariel and his assertions that he should convert, Otuel’s reaction is similar to Charlemagne’s and Roland’s:

Vn-to þe Saraʒene gon he defye:

“Þour lawes are nogthe worthe a pye,
Þat dare I Sauely saye.
And if þou wilt for Mahoun fighte,
Loo, me here a Cristyn knyghte,
With hym þat myghtes maye,
Stalworthely to stande for oure right.” (1156-60)

He rejects the worthiness of the Muslim law, just as Charlemagne did, and then declares that he is a Christian knight, and challenges Clariel to a fight. This moment does not exactly repeat the exchange between Otuel and Roland from earlier in the poem, but the structures are the same. The assertion of the power of “Mahoun” and his law is repeated,
and the rejection of that law for Christian values, followed by a willingness to defend those values with violence, is stated originally by Roland and restated by Otuel.

Before the two men fight, Otuel is able to demonstrate his courtesy. As the two prepare to fight, Clariel calls out to Charles, cursing him and then declaring that Charles is too old and wrinkled to fight (1250-7). When Charles then desires to fight him, Otuel steps in properly:

   Bot sir Otuell saide full curtasely:
   “Gude lorde, graunte this Batell to me,
   For trowthes hafe we plighte.
   He sett þe lawes of Cristyantee
   Nott at a pillynge of a tree
   ʒistereuen within the nyghte.” (1261-6)

The narrator even notes that Otuel is “courteous” in his request, telling Charles that the two men had already promised to do battle yesterday, when Clariel had originally insulted the Christian laws. This moment, though brief and subtle, indicates that Otuel has fully shifted his loyalties not only to the Christian God, but also to Charlemagne: Otuel notes the importance of his promise, but also the necessity of deferring to the king. In this case, because the promises had been made, Charles steps aside and allows Otuel to fight for him. All that is left for Otuel to demonstrate is his prowess in violence.256

256 A similar example of the trope functioning here appears in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight when Gawain steps up and takes the Green Knight’s challenge.
The author sets up Otuel to step into Roland’s role through Clariel’s boasting earlier in the poem. Clariel, as he brags to the other Saracen kings, declares that he hopes to fight and kill the great French knight Roland:

\[\text{Kynge Clariell sayde: “als mot I the, Rowlande es holden full doghety, Es none siche vndir Sone. Be Mahoun I wolde he were here me by, I scholde assaye his body My dynttis scholde he con!”} \] (793-8)

Clariel expresses his desire to face Roland, but rather than facing Roland he faces Otuel. Otuel’s desire to be a Christian knight is dependant upon him proving his prowess before the other men, and he has that opportunity. Not only can he face a Saracen king in battle, but also he faces the one who wished to fight Roland. He is stepping into Roland’s role in this moment.

The battle between Otuel and Clariel is where the structural repetition climaxes:

“The effects of the conversion of Otinel are seen most vividly through his approbation of what had been Roland’s role in the earlier combat.”\(^\text{257}\) The reinvented battle follows almost the exact same pattern as the battle between Roland and Otuel earlier in the poem, though it is much shorter, coming in at only four stanzas for a total of forty-eight lines. Both of the knights begin on horses and, with the first pass at the lances, both are unhorsed (1297-1302). Similar to the original fight, Belesant is watching and, like her father in the previous episode, cries to Mary when she sees the two men unhorsed. Both

\(^{257}\) Ailes 17.
men wound each other, with Clariel suffering more than Otuel, and ultimately Otuel drives his sword through Clariel’s heart, killing him and sending him “vn-to Mahoun” (1340). Unlike Otuel, Clariel is not worthy of being a Christian knight or is unable to be converted, and so Otuel’s victory, and his demonstration of prowess as a Christian knight in front of other knights on the battlefield, is completed with Clariel’s death.\textsuperscript{258}

**Conclusion**

Otuel’s journey to actualized masculine knighthood is completed with the capture and eventual execution of the Sultan Garcy, followed by his marriage to Belesant and his lordship over Lombardy. In his marriage and acquisition of land, Otuel becomes the ultimate knight, and perhaps more important to the audience reading the poem, the ultimate representation of an English knight. By repeating the courtesy, piety and prowess of Roland, and reiterating his already established masculinity, Otuel demonstrates the path a knight must follow. This establishment of a Christian knight, one worthy to fight in the crusades, has a twofold appeal to fourteenth century audiences: it alleviates the pain of Roland’s fictional death, and the very real Christian failure in the crusades. *Duke Roland and Sir Otuel of Spain* offers a pattern of behavior that is repeatable by audience members. The early evidence of Otuel’s promise, his understanding of chivalry, his devotion to “Mahoun” and his clear martial prowess serve as evidence of his potential to be a great Christian knight. However, after his conversion and christening he must reestablish, reiterate and reenact all of these qualities to be completely integrated into the fellowship of French knights, and hence cease to be an

\textsuperscript{258} Though Clariel is not worthy of conversion, he is a worthy opponent. The attention to the fight serves to demonstrate that, because the opponents must be worthy in order for the victories to be valid.
outsider performing knighthood. Finally, the poem, like the other two considered in this dissertation, uses violence as a marker of Christian piety, and, conversely, Christian piety as a justification for displays of violence.
CHAPTER 5

(RE)READING TEXTS AND CONTEXTS:
THE LONDON THORNTON MANUSCRIPT

In the previous three chapters I have examined each of the three romances that open the London Thornton Manuscript (British Library Additional 31042) in the cultural moment in which each was composed. In this chapter, I look at the romances together with the other opening material of the manuscript: the *Cursor Mundi*, *A Discourse between Christ and Man* (also from the *Cursor Mundi*), *The Northern Passion*, *O Florum Flos* and *Passionis Christi Cantus* (both from Lydgate). Bringing together the contents of an entire manuscript, or in my case, a coherent and unified part of a larger manuscript, has different demands and benefits from the readings found in the previous chapters. For this chapter I have an explicit and definitive audience for the manuscript: Robert Thornton, a member of the Yorkshire gentry in the second quarter of the fifteenth century and the original owner and compiler of the manuscript. Compiled and copied by a specific man in a specific moment, this manuscript can be studied as an expression of his own devotion. In my own examination of this section of the London Thornton Manuscript, I follow Andrew Taylor who, in his book *Textual Situations: Three Medieval Manuscripts and Their Readers*, outlines his task: “to suggest how […] a given collection of texts might have taken meaning in the mind of a particular reader, a real person, at a
given moment.” In the previous chapters I have discussed how each of the romances comments on its own time of composition: *The Siege of Jerusalem* uses affective piety as a conduit for violence; *The Siege of Milan* might have been read as an anti-Lollard piece; *Duke Roland and Sir Otuel of Spain* shows Christian piety as a display which must consistently be re-performed to be both real and believed. In each case, the text negotiates the relationship between devout piety and violent display.

In the second quarter of the fifteenth century these texts are brought together, and, in the company of the religious poems that surround them, are now re-read in terms of fifteenth century devotional culture. Helen Cooper has traced the way that the meaning of romances and their motifs change over time:

[...] whilst some romance motifs remain superficially the same, sometimes even down to the verbal detail, the usage and understanding of them changes over time [...]. ‘New readers make new texts’; every generation brings different cultural expectations to works of the past and so finds new meanings and new things to respond to. Even successive recopyings of a single text record a process of shifting interpretations and significances, and those shifts becomes more marked as traditional elements are re-used in new stories and new contexts.260

The romances of the opening section in the London Thornton Manuscript undergo the same kind of transformation Helen Cooper describes above. However, not only do they

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transform in meaning, participating in orthodox devotion, but their placement and inclusion with texts seemingly so steeped in the language of affective piety also serves as a powerful example of how significant meditative devotion was to this fifteenth century Yorkshire gentleman. The texts that make up the opening unit of the London Thornton manuscript form a coherent vision of medieval meditative devotion reflecting the fantasy of sanctified violence. Affective piety, primarily understood to be the meditations on the Passion of Christ and / or on the suffering of Mary in order to adopt their passivity, forms the devotional basis of this manuscript: all of the texts invoke Mary or Christ, and most do so at great length or in great detail. Affective piety takes the meditation on the Passion or on Mary and focuses it inward, eventually leading the person experiencing it upward to God and heaven. The meditative devotion inspired by the romances in the London Thornton manuscript resembles affective piety, but ultimately moves the focus outward, rather than inward, seeking action and violence rather than passivity. In the London Thornton manuscript Robert Thornton has created a vision of affective devotion, which begins with the traditional affective piety of the religious texts and then, using that as inspiration, moves away from it to the graphic violence of the romances.

In this chapter I will argue that the collection of texts in this manuscript produces a vision of religious devotion combining the traditional meditative structure of affective piety, as seen in Richard Rolle’s mysticism, Nicholas Love’s Mirrors of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ and the Meditations, with the heroic violence of the Christian knight. The result is a kind of late medieval piety that gets its cake and eats it too: the contemplative meditation spurs provocative action. Thornton develops a kind of overarching plot or narrative that governs this section of his manuscript. The pieces move from the
unattainable divinity of Christ himself to the more manageable expression of faith of real (if somewhat fictionalized) characters. This move from the religious to the secular mirrors the move from the long ago past to the more recent, with a movement to contemporary chivalric values. Though Titus and Vespasian are fifteen hundred years in the past and Charlemagne five hundred, the move from one to the other brings Thornton and his audience to his “now.” By finishing with Lydgate’s *Passionis Christi Cantus*, which retells the past event for use in the present moment, Thornton gives the reader an example of popular fifteenth century devotion, and when we finish the series of texts, we, too, end in that moment.

**Manuscript and Critical History**

Robert Thornton was a member of the minor gentry, became lord of East Newton in Yorkshire in 1418 and, as George R. Keiser notes, “was no bookish recluse […] Rather it seems that he had a fairly ordinary life as an active, though by no means leading citizen of Ryedale and the North Riding.”

A study of the manuscripts compiled by Robert Thornton, whether he was a “bookish recluse” or not, reveals a compiler who was not only capable of bringing together such manuscripts as the London Thornton and the Lincoln Cathedral, but who was also invested in the creation of a coherent and purposed manuscript.

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Both the London Thornton and the Lincoln Cathedral manuscripts have been the subject of much study, primarily for their significance in containing unique copies of several romances, including the two Charlemagne romances in this study. Sidney J. Herrtage first published his commentary on the manuscript in 1880. More recent studies include Karen Stern’s two-part comprehensive examination and list of contents of the manuscript, in which she comments on previous descriptions:

Most of the fuller descriptions of [the London Thornton Manuscript] have been made by editors of single items and, unfortunately, the information which they provide is not of a uniform kind, as not all have been equally methodical or exhaustive.

Stern’s articles give a detailed account of the organization, gatherings, bindings and content of the manuscripts, though she asserts that the rebinding of the manuscript in 1972 makes establishing the original quires impossible. In response to this, Sarah M. Horrall suggests a new partial collation based on “a careful study of catchwords and

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watermarks.” Ralph Hanna offers a few “improvements” to the collation, offering his own collation. Hanna later addresses the issue of Robert Thornton’s compilation and copying habits, concluding from watermark evidence that

[…] typically Thornton seems to have worked contemporaneously on four or five emerging fascicular manuscripts. He was remarkably flexible in his methods. None of the larger booklets was absolutely completed until Thornton arrived at the end of all his copying: each was capable of extension and of melding with other units, so long as new texts could be acquired. The only rule, not a particularly rigorous one, which Thornton seems to have followed, was that each fascicle contained works which were generically homogenous.

Hanna paints a picture of a compiler who, far from organizing works in the haphazard order in which they became available, structured his manuscripts with a sense of theme and purpose.

Potential interpretations of the choices Robert Thornton made in his compilation prove controversial. The repeated appearance of examples of Marian worship and invocation, affective piety and multiple figurations of Christ’s body suggests a persistent adherence to traditional devotion. However, John J. Thompson cautions that while the major poems in the opening of the manuscript seem to have a coherent theme and

already [suggest] a much stronger sense of thematic continuity to some scholars of the London Thornton Manuscript [...] the available evidence also shows that it is easy to overstress Thornton’s presumed interest in, and personal responsibility for, the creation of this sequence.\textsuperscript{269}

Despite his warning, the majority of critics have continued to suggest that the London Thornton Manuscript, and primarily its opening sequence of texts, deliberately follows the theme of Christian history; Karen Stern notes, “These poems, including some romances, are concerned principally with Christian history.”\textsuperscript{270}

Phillipa Hardman has discussed the thematic nature of the manuscript at length in her many studies of the London Thornton manuscript.\textsuperscript{271} Hardman has noted that the placing of the fitt divisions of \textit{The Siege of Jerusalem}, when examined in contrast to other versions of the poem by roughly contemporary compilers, “shows a far better grasp of narrative integrity than the other copies [...]” and that ultimately it shows that Thornton’s practice of fitt divisions, “is that of a pragmatic and responsive reader, interpreting the sense of the texts he is copying as he goes.”\textsuperscript{272} As a compiler Robert Thornton’s manuscripts show evidence of his concern for the way(s) in which his text would be read.

It is not only form that suggests Thornton was a thoughtful compiler; there is also much to be made of connections between the texts in the manuscript in terms of content.

\textsuperscript{269} John J. Thompson, \textit{Robert Thornton and the London Thornton Manuscript: British Library MS Additional 31042}, Manuscript Studies 2 (Wolfeboro, NH: D.S. Brewer, 1987) 48. Thompson’s book-length study of the manuscript includes a discussion of the scribe, commentary on the structure and assembly of the manuscript and potential conclusions about themes of the texts. He also includes several facsimile pages from the manuscript itself.

\textsuperscript{270} Stern, “Miscellany (II)” 212.


Often, one poem leads into another, suggesting that, not only did Thornton construct the breaks in his longer texts to be for the readers’ benefit, but also he also deliberately ordered the poems as best he could:

Thornton’s collection shows a concern to create or preserve sequences of texts arranged to form larger narrative structures, intended for continuous reading […] The lyrics in the main sequence are carefully placed to help the reader obtain maximum devotional benefit from the Passion-centered narratives[…]

The manuscript created by Thornton is clearly designed with religious devotion in mind. Phillipa Hardman concludes specifically about *The Siege of Milan*:

Thornton’s reading and contextualizing of the *Sege of Melayne* gives us near-contemporary evidence for an understanding of the poem as primarily affirmative of the reader’s Christian faith in terms of both orthodox doctrine and popular devotion.

It is not only *The Siege of Milan* in the London Thornton Manuscripts that is “affirmative” of “orthodox doctrine and popular devotion.” The opening texts of the manuscript function together to create such a vision.

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273 For a discussion of *The Siege of Milan* as a deliberate, connected preface to *Duke Roland and Sir Otuel of Spain*, see Heritage, x.


275 Hardman, “A Fifteenth Century Reading” 86.
Piety and the Gentry

Understanding Robert Thornton’s reading(s) of the texts he brought together in his manuscript requires at least a brief discussion of the relationship between the primary readers of such a manuscript—aristocracy and gentry—and its subject matter—the Church. The aristocracy and the gentry were responsible to a large degree for the protection and proliferation of the church. In the fifteenth century this fact did not change, though protection was sustained through orthodox obedience:

> [W]hatever the intensity of their religious feelings, the aristocracy did almost universally believe in the power of the church, and did what they felt was their duty to obey it and promote it. [...] Medieval aristocrats did believe that obedience to the church’s teachings and disciplines went hand in hand with acceptance of the social structure and of aristocratic authority, and assumed that one reinforced the other.\(^{276}\)

This reinforcement of church and secular authority appears repeatedly in the romances in the London Thornton manuscript. In both Jerusalem and Milan, good kings and/or rulers physically defend the Church, whether early or late, as a part of their rule. In Otuel knighthood is dependent on a repeated demonstration of faith through prowess.\(^{277}\)

One of the main manifestations of aristocratic, and indeed all devotional worship in the later Middle Ages was affective piety. The meditation on the wounded body of Christ had become a central element of devotional practice:


\(^{277}\) For a full discussion of the protection of the church and the manifestations of pious devotion, see Chapters Two, Three and Four.
The humiliated, tortured, whipped, nailed-down, pierced, dying but life-giving body of Christ, the very body literally present in the eucharist—this body became the dominant icon of the late medieval church and the devotion it cultivated and authorized.\textsuperscript{278}

The figure of Christ on the Cross was a staple not only of the visual images in the form of stained glass windows, frescoes, triptychs or other icons, but also was a prominent feature in written texts, appearing both in the texts of manuscripts and in their marginalia.\textsuperscript{279}

One central text on the Passion is the \textit{Meditations on the Life of Christ} (\textit{Meditationes Vite Christi}). Sarah Beckwith notes that “it is hard to underestimate the importance of the \textit{Meditationes}, for it was the text that literally translated the life of Christ for his followers, and itself because a work that was developed in several vernaculars.”\textsuperscript{280} This vision not only details Christ’s suffering, but also instructs the reader on how to interact with such images: “Now we must treat of the passion of our Lord Jesus. A person who wishes to glorify the passion and cross of the Lord should persevere in earnest mediation on it.”\textsuperscript{281}

Phrases reminiscent of the declaration to “meditate” appear in the London Thornton


\textsuperscript{279} For a discussion of York as a location for particularly graphic Passion descriptions, see Clifford Davidson, “Civic Concern and Iconography in the York Passion,” \textit{Annuaire Mediaevale} 15 (1974): 125-149.

\textsuperscript{280} Sarah Beckwith, \textit{Christ’s Body: Identity, Culture and Society in Late Medieval Writings} (New York: Routledge, 1993) 64.

manuscript, particularly in Lydgate’s *Passionis Christi Cantus* where the reader is instructed multiple times to “think” on the Passion (8, 16, 24, 32, 40, 48, 56, 64 and 72).²⁸²

Examples of affective piety—focused meditative contemplation and passive response to religion—surround, and on occasion invade, the active and violent romances. This contrast may suggest a conflict between the two displays of piety. Titus and Vespasian, Charlemagne, Roland and Otuel and even Bishop Turpin all exemplify characteristics of both active and contemplative lives throughout their various romances—they are examples of the mixed life, as Richard Rolle called it. Robert Thornton was familiar with Richard Rolle’s works, as some of Rolle’s texts appear in the Lincoln Cathedral manuscript. Two points in Rolle’s treatise found in the Lincoln Cathedral manuscript are relevant to my argument: first, Rolle’s notion that rich men—likely members of the gentry—should live the mixed life, and second that Jesus himself practiced the mixed life. The rich man should live the mixed life, Rolle argues, because to leave the active life entirely is a sin:

[... ] vnto these men also longith meldid life, that is both actife and contemplatif. For if þese men stondynge the charge and the bonde which thei haue takene, wille leve vtterly the besynes of the world, the which owe skilfullly to be vsed in fulfillynge of hir charge, and hooly yeve hem to contemplatif life thei doo not well for thei kepe nott the order of cheretie.²⁸³

By giving over entirely to contemplation, the member of the gentry fail in their duty to charity, not to mention potentially in their duty to family, tenants or servants they might have. Richard Rolle then continues on to point out that Christ’s own life is an example of the mixed life:

[Our Lord] yave hem ensample by his own wirkyng he thati shulde vse this medlid liffe as he did, that tyme he comyned with men and medled with men, shewynge to hem his dedis of mercy. For he taght the vn-couthe and vn-kunnynghe by his prechynge, he vesited þe seke and helid hem of hir sores, he fedde the hungry and he conforted the sory. And an othir tym he lefte þe conuersacion of alle worldely men, and continued alle night in prayers alone, as the gospelle seith.\(^\text{284}\)

The blended life, then, is one of going out into the world and dealing with people in a charitable way, and also spending time in contemplative prayer alone. It seems no surprise that Robert Thornton took this idea of a mixed life and used it to shape the contents of his London manuscript. The combination of pious romantic violence and of violence done to Christ’s body is not a contradiction, nor, I believe, are these two elements in conflict at all. Instead, Thornton’s pairings suggest an understanding of medieval devotion that rests in the mixed life. For Thornton, to dwell on Christ’s Passion or on the suffering or power of Mary and then to turn to violence was not a violation of the passive nature of affective piety, but was a logical movement from contemplative to active devotion.

\(^{284}\) Perry 25.
Not only are texts like those in the London Thornton manuscript capable of offering commentary on a reader’s devotional choices, they are also potentially capable of offering instruction that may promote and teach specific action. Andrew Taylor notes of the manuscript Harley 978:

Like other thirteenth-century manuals, [Harley 978] served as a kind of courtesy book from which its owner could acquire social graces and useful knowledge. From the fragmentary hawking manual, he would have learned the preliminary training of the bird […] From stories like Yonec in which a woman shows her gentility by taking a secret lover, he might have culled material for seduction. […] Harley is a book that shows its owner how to do things.²⁸⁵

Though certainly not a courtesy manual, BL Add. 31042 offers instruction; Thornton and any fellow readers could have been participating in affective piety and Marian devotion by reading it. The audience would have been shown the course of Mary’s life, a discourse on the Passion from Christ’s point of view and the Passion itself. Readers would have seen Titus and Vespasian, Charlemagne and Turpin, and Roland and Otuel along with countless others take up arms against Jews and Saracens, (or possibly even heretics) and defend the faith.

**Mary, Marian Miracles and Marian Devotion**

The manuscript as it comes to us today begins with a fragment of the *Cursor Mundi*, picking up in the middle of the fifth age of the world at Mary’s betrothal. Phillipa

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²⁸⁵ Taylor 133.
Hardman argues that Thornton never intended to include the entire text of the massive poem, and that the decision to use a part of it suggests his editorial capabilities and attitudes:

A complete copy of *Cursor Mundi* would have been more than twice as long as any other text which Thornton has attempted, whereas an abbreviated copy of forty folios would accord with his regular choice of ‘long’ texts of about forty to fifty folios placed at or near the beginnings and ends of the collections, with ‘short’ texts of fewer than twenty folios in between. [...] It looks as if Thornton chose to excerpt that part of *Cursor Mundi* which concerns the life of the Virgin and the earthly life of Christ in order to combine it with the *Northern Passion* to make a continuous gospel narrative [...] It was common practice for part of a long text to be extracted in this way so as to adapt it for a new context.286

While there is some controversy over this particular reading of the manuscript,287 I find Hardman’s reading compelling and so will follow her suggestion that the manuscript begins with the fifth age section of the *Cursor Mundi*.

The opening image of the manuscript is that of Mary’s holiness and purity. It is her purity that makes it possible for her to be the mother of Christ:

Hu mild, hu mek, hu chaste, hu clene,

It was wel kyd þar-bi and sene

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286 Hardman, “Reading the Spaces” 257.
287 John J. Thompson in particular challenges the notion of the manuscript starting with the fifth age: “[...] such speculation finds no obvious support from the limited physical evidence that can still be recovered from the remaining fragments of quire and leaf signatures.” *The Cursor Mundi: Poem, Texts and Contexts* (Oxford: The Society for the Study of Medieval Languages and Literature, 1998) 81.
Þat god him-self in hir wald light,
And in hir do his wonning dight.

[...] 

Vr lauerd wil him neuer bede
To saul þat solewid es wit sinn,
To mak him woning sted þar-in.

Þan most þis mai be clene and bright,
Wit-vten plaint, wit-vten plight,
O quam þe king þat al can make

Semed his manhed wel to take. (10629-32, 10636-42) 

This passage emphasizes the necessity of Mary’s purity by establishing the fact that someone tainted by sin could not be the vehicle through which Christ achieves his human form. This passage also reflects one of the most popular elements of orthodox devotion: Marian worship. Furthermore, the emphasis on the purity of Mary sets up the later texts that include Marian devotion and miracles as essential parts of the narrative.

While there are repeated invocations of, and prayers to, Mary by almost all the heroes in both Milan and Otuel, the most striking example of Marian devotion in the romances occurs in Milan, when Bishop Turpin calls to her and chastizes her for the death of some forty thousand soldiers at the hands of the Saracen enemy:

288 Richard Morris ed., Cursor Mundi (The Cursor of the World) Early English Text Society Original Ser. 59, 62 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1875-76). This edition gives the parallel texts from four manuscripts: Cotton MS Vespasian A 3; Fairfax MS 14; MS. Theol. 107; MS R. 3. 8. All textual citations come from the Cotton Vespasian. John J. Thompson notes that this manuscript is “representative of the Cursor Mundi as a whole [...] because of C’s relatively early date and relative completeness when compared to the other extant manuscripts and prologue.” “The Cursor Mundi Poem” 20.
A, Mary mylde, whare was thi myght
That thou lete thi men thus to dede be dyght
That wighte and worthy were?
Art thou noghte halden of myghtis moste,
Full conceyvede of the Holy Goste?
Me ferlys of thy fare.
Had thou noghte, Mayre, yitt bene borne,
Ne had noghte our gud men thus bene lorne—
The wyte is all in the.
Thay faughte holly in thy ryghte
That thus with dole to dede es dyghte—
A, Marie, how may this bee? (546-56)\textsuperscript{289}

Though the rebuke of Mary seems odd as a display of faith, there is no question that Turpin is a true believer in Mary’s powers.\textsuperscript{290} The argument is not a question of whether or not Mary is capable or worthy of faith and devotion, but why she chose not to intervene. As Phillipa Hardman notes, this kind of rebuke of Mary is not uncommon in the context of “Miracles of the Virgin” where Mary has power over the elements, saves her favorites from the sea or from fire and has the power to pardon sin:

This is precisely how Turpin views the Virgin in his tirade, seeing her chief characteristic as her “myght”, and appealing to her reputation for

\textsuperscript{289} Alan Lupack, ed., \textit{Three Middle English Charlemagne Romances} (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications Western Michigan University, 1990); all citations from Lupack’s edition.

\textsuperscript{290} For a discussion of various reactions to this moment, including Maldwyn Mills’ assertion that Turpin’s outburst brings him dangerously close to pagan idol smashing, see Chapter Three, 112-117.
surpassing power ("halden of myghtis moste") and her notorious favoritism towards those who honor her ("They faughte holly in thy ryghte") in his disappointed expectation of victory. Turpin’s truculent attitude to Mary resembles that shown in a range of miracle stories where a devotee of the Virgin rebukes her for failing to prevent some catastrophe, after which Mary miraculously reverses the disaster.²⁹¹

Turpin continues to call on Mary for support and to offer her thanks and praise throughout the remainder of the poem. Furthermore, the death of the soldiers over which Turpin has so much anger is the last significant loss of French life in the poem. From this point on, Turpin leads the charges against the Saracens, and victory, both individually for Turpin and overall for the French, is in the hands of the Christian heroes. Unfortunately, the concluding lines, one or more leaves of the manuscript, are missing. While we know that victory is assured, the exact mechanism is unknown, but it might very well have been a completion of the Marian focus of the poem: “the end of the romance involved a miracle of some kind in which Mary intervened in the course of events on behalf of her knights.”²⁹² No matter if there was Marian intervention, or if the defeat of the Saracens is from the martial prowess of the French knights alone, the poem and its hero, Bishop Turpin, consistently return to Mary to express their piety and devotion to Christianity. The picture of Mary in the Cursor Mundi and in Milan connect the alternate visions of

²⁹¹ Hardman, “A Fifteenth Century Reading” 81.
²⁹² Hardman, “A Fifteenth Century Reading” 82-83.
Mary in the Middle Ages: she is both pure and powerful. She not only was pure enough to bear Christ for the world, but through that act also became powerful enough to aid Christians in the world by performing her own miracles.

Thornton followed *Milan* with the Marian lyric from Lydgate *O Florum Flos* suggesting that he also recognized the Marian emphasis of the romance.\(^{293}\) The poem returns first to the beauty and purity of Mary, invoking an image of a statue and finally asking for intercession on our behalf.\(^{294}\) The poem combines multiple elements of the Marian side of affective piety, first blending the religious lyric with the love lyric by detailing Mary’s beauty in the same terms as one might a lover, and then turning from such blithe subject matter to focus on the emotional and physical manifestations of her grief at Christ’s crucifixion. The poem’s renderings of her beauty and purity are consistent across the twelve stanzas describing the various body parts including her hair, cheeks, brows, neck, breasts and “body, bake and syde” (113).\(^{295}\) The poem then takes a gruesome turn, recounting the ways in which, in a fit of grief, Mary damaged her own beautiful body:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Thyn here þou rent, thyn eghne distillede blode,} \\
\text{This mouthe to-breste with waylynge and with cry,} \\
\text{Thi breste þou bette, þe swerde of sorowe stode} \\
\text{Owte thorowe thyn hert, þi son when þou saw dy.} \\
\text{þe gloryfiede swete bewte of thi body}
\end{align*}
\]

\(^{293}\) Hardman, “A Fifteenth Century Reading” 83.
\(^{294}\) Hardman, “A Fifteenth Century Reading” 83-4.
Schortly to saye, þou sparede in none degre,
Whi suffrede þou woo vnworthily,
O Florum flos, O Flos pulcherime! (121-28)

Such violence, at least at this point in the manuscript, is commonplace. This once again returns the reader to the suffering caused by the Crucifixion. Now, not only is it Christ who suffers, but the audience is reminded of the suffering of Mary as well.

The Marian elements of the London Thornton manuscript reflect orthodox popular devotion: Mary is pure, powerful and able to act as an intercessor between the audience and Christ. She is also a figure who suffers much like Christ and, as such, offers another instance in the text upon which an audience might meditate. Milan, when read in context of its surrounding material, seems less like an attack on iconoclasts than an example of Marian power. The Cursor Mundi and O Florum Flos serve to gloss the romance so that it becomes yet another in a series of orthodox renderings of Marian power and piety. Mary moves from the mother of Christ to a mother figure and an intercessor for everyone. She is venerated for her own exemplary life, for her suffering at the Passion and finally for her ability to perform miracles for her followers, including affective military battles. To take example from the devotion in the London Thornton manuscript is to trust in Mary for her life, her post-mortem powers and her potential to effect even the daily lives of her followers.

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296 Rosemary Woolf notes that the contrast between the beauty of Mary in the preceding stanzas and the radical turn to her grief is unusual: “most of the stanzas could be a description of the beauties of a poet’s ideal mistress, with the comparisons to flowers and precious stones,” but, “the turn at the end, therefore, when the defacing of the Virgin’s beauty at the Crucifixion is described, […] come[s] both unexpectedly and inappropriately.” The English Religious Lyric in the Middle Ages (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1968) 275-6.
The Body of Christ, the Passion and Affective Piety

As much as the images of the purity and power of Mary are central to an understanding of the opening texts of the London Thornton manuscript, images of the Passion are even more pervasive, and while the manuscript opens with the life of Mary, it moves from that to multiple sustained examples of Christ’s life and Passion. The figure of the suffering Christ was immensely popular in private manuscripts:

In the recesses of the Book of Hours the aspect of Christ’s body most developed by private usages was that of the suffering Christ, the Christ of the crucifixion, of the vulnerable, bleeding flesh of the Passion. Devotions to the wounds had developed in the monastic milieu in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, but spread more widely in the later Middle Ages, especially in England. 297

Robert Thornton’s manuscript is replete with such imagery. The first example comes from the Cursor Mundi. Having omitted the section from the Cursor Mundi dealing with the passion, Thornton pauses before jumping to The Northern Passion and includes The Discourse between Christ and Man (lines 17111-17188 of the Cursor Mundi), as a short lyric. 298 The seventy-seven lines situate Christ’s Passion in terms of affective piety.

The poem opens with Christ speaking and recounting his own story, exhorting the readers: “Thinc, ai thinc, ai sinful man,/Þou thinc on iesu, Þi lemmman” (17119-20). These

298 Thompson, London Thornton 51.
lines focus the reader specifically on the contemplation at the core of affective piety. The poem continues with a litany of suffering so common to Passion narratives in the manuscript:

I stode naked als i was born
Þe wicked Iuus þaim bi-forn,
Bunden til a piler fast,
To-quils þe bandes moght last;
On mi back i bar þe rode,
Quen i vnto mi ded yode,
[…]
Bi-hald mi fote, bi-hald mi hand!
Mi bodi es wit scurges suongen,
Brest, and hand, and fot thurgh stungen.
I hing apon þis herd rode,
For þe i gafe mi hert blode;
[…]
I haf þus mani blodi wondes,
And sufferd her þis herd stondes,
And ded on þes rode tre,
Þou sinful man! for luue o þe. (17121-26, 17132-36, 17151-54)

This passage covers many of the typical elements of the Passion narratives. The first person narrative connects the events of the Passion to affective piety because, just as the speaker is the one enduring the pain, the audience should be imagining themselves in that
position. The *Meditations* contains instruction for such an effect: “Therefore because he was truly human, it was as a man that he was placed in great agony. Contemplate and watch carefully all the actions and each and every affliction of your Lord. As closely as you can, suffer together with him.”

The purpose is to suffer with Christ, not merely watch the suffering.

In this text, Jesus also reminds the audience that the immediate worldly source of his suffering is the “wicked Jews” who tortured him. This vilification of the Jews, so common in passion narratives, becomes even more important in the context of this manuscript. Not only does it function to mark a particular group as outsiders against which the Christians are defined, it also relates directly to the upcoming *Siege of Jerusalem* in which the focus is the destruction of Jerusalem and the Jews who crucified Christ. The final lines of this passage redirect the focus to remind the audience that the sacrifice was for them. The *Discourse* sets up the audience to be prepared to meditate on Christ’s wounds and remember his sacrifice not only as a general devotional principle, but also as a fact of the manuscript as the next two texts also find the Passion as their subject.

Following the *Discourse* is *The Northern Passion*, the Passion narrative substituted by Thornton for that found in the *Cursor Mundi*. Titled in the manuscript *Passio Domini nostri Ihesu Christi*, the poem draws immediate attention to the Passion, expanding in great detail on the brief narration from the *Discourse*. Echoing the previous piece, the poem includes Christ’s beating:

Thay bande hym to a pelare thare
Thay bett hym with skourges full sare
They dange hym whils þe skourges wald laste
That the blode rane of hys body full faste (1195-98) 300

As with the Discourse above, the pillar-beating sequence is recounted. This repetition serves not only to emphasize the torture to which Christ was subjected, but also to keep the same images persistently in the minds of the audience, whether reading or hearing the texts. The Northern Passion goes farther and offers more detail, including the gruesome account of Christ being stretched to fit the holes made in the cross:

Thaym [the Jews] was full lathe oþir bores to make
Twa rapis þane þay gane to take
Thay didde a rape one the ryghte hande
That the blod braste owte for strenghe strange
Ane oþir rape to þat oþir
Mercy one hym hauede they none oþir
They drewe his armes than full faste
Whiles þat those rapis myghte laste
The synowes braste all in twa
Lythe fra lythe þay did aslwaa
Thay tuke nayles talk by tale
And drewyne thorowe his handis smalle

Thay lukede to his fete bryghte
And said þay lay noghte aryghte
Thay tuke rapis þat wolde laste
And bande his fete wondir faste
Thay satt one his breste with grete scornynge
And drewe his fete ouir the borynge
His shakes brake full wa was hym by gane
Ffor Mercy one hyme ne haued þat nane (1606-30)

This passage, first, is important for the violence it adds to the narrative of the Passion. While the previous text narrated the suffering of Christ with little detail, *The Northern Passion* lingers on various instances of suffering. This serves to emphasize the sacrifice that Christ made for the audience, encouraging, once again, affective meditation and empathy. Also important to note, however, are the repeated lines reminding the audience of the merciless nature of the torturers. Twice we are told that the men nailing Christ to the cross had no mercy.\(^{301}\) This particular reminder becomes more important in light of the coming text, *The Siege of Jerusalem*. The repetition of violence on Christ’s body coupled with the reminder of the lack of Jewish mercy for Christ sets up the vengeance that is brought by Titus and Vespasian in the next poem.\(^{302}\)

As the manuscript moves from text to text, the importance of Christ’s body as both a devotional object of piety and the location of a historically significant event

\(^{301}\) It is interesting to note that *The Northern Passion* is a particularly violent Passion narrative, coming from the Yorkshire area. This is the same are that produced the York *Crucifixion* play, a particularly gruesome rendition of nailing Christ to the cross. There is more work to be done on the connections between the London Thornton Manuscript and other works produced in this area at and around this time.

\(^{302}\) For a full discussion of affective piety and its manifestations in *The Siege of Jerusalem* see Chapter Two, 21-46.
becomes clear. Like the two preceding texts, *The Siege of Jerusalem* holds as its anchor and center Christ’s suffering body. However, this text moves beyond the Passion as a historical fact and devotional location to the use of the Passion as a catalyst for history. *Jerusalem* leaves the Passion behind and moves to the poetic recounting of the historical siege of Jerusalem in 70AD, when Titus and Vespasian razed Jerusalem to avenge the death of Christ.

*Jerusalem* forefronts Christ’s body by opening with a discussion of the Passion, situating it in context of the governing bodies at the time:

In Tyberyus tyme, þe trewe emperour,
Sire Sesar hymself seysed in Rome
Whyle Pylat was prouost vndere þat prince riche
And Iewen iustice also in Iudes londe,
Herode vndere his emperie— as heritage wolde
Kyng of Galile ycalled— whan þat Crist deyed
Þey Sesar sakles were þat oft synne hatide,
Þrow Pylat pyned he was and put on þe rode.
A pyler pyʒt was doun vpon þe playn erþe
His body bonden þerto and beten with scourgis:
Whyppes of quryboyle vmbywente his white sides
Til al on rede blode ran as rayn in þe strete.
Sup stoked on a stole with styf mannnes hondis,
Byndfelled as a be and boffetis hym raʒte,
“$zif \ \theta ou \ \theta e \ \theta rothete \ \theta ef, \ \theta rophecie,” \ \theta ey \ \theta ayde,

“Whiche \ \theta erne \ \theta e\ r\ aboute \ \theta obbe \ \theta e \ \theta laste?”

A $\theta range \ \theta orn\ en \ \theta roun\ e \ \theta raste \ \theta n \ \theta e \ \theta ed,

Vmbecasten \ \theta \ \theta ry \ \theta nd \ \theta roys \ \theta lowen.$^303 \ \mbox{(1-18)}

The first important aspect of this passage to note is the inclusion of the current government at the time of Christ’s crucifixion. This poem, like the other two romances that follow it, deals with the relationship between the secular governing body (emperor, king or aristocracy/knights) and the Church.\footnote{Ralph Hanna and David Lawton eds., \textit{The Siege of Jerusalem}, Early English Text Society Original Ser. 320 (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003); all citations from this edition.} In this case, the secular and religious authorities are named as culpable in Christ’s death. For Robert Thornton in the mid-fifteenth century, the relationship between the Church and the State, particularly the state under Henry V, was a tight one:

Henry’s own piety was [desiring a more puritanical and personal commitment], and closely allied to his messianic streak; but it impelled him to a regeneration of the traditional structure rather than to the initiation of a new order. Whatever his political disagreements with Archbishop Arundel, he was at one with him in seeing the church as a pillar of the kingdom and was ready to protect its rights and liberties against anticlericals and Lollards.\footnote{G.L. Harriss, “Introduction,” \textit{Henry V: The Practice of Kingship} (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1985) 24.}
The opening lines of the poem remind the audience that a secular government had a hand in the crucifixion of Christ, and the politics of the moment remind the audience that the current government has a hand in religion. Henry V made it is his job to protect the Church from dissenters and heretics. The London Thornton manuscript, with its inclusion of *Jerusalem*, reinforces that political ideology.

The second important element to note is the repetition, yet again, of certain events that occur in all of the Passion scenes in the manuscript. Once again, the pillar sequence is recounted, along with the beatings, and with the challenge to prove himself capable of “prophecy” and the crown of thorns. All or most of these elements are mentioned in the previous two texts. Finally, the images present in this passage bring to mind the affective meditation central to the previous texts.

The incidences here of Christ’s Passion recounted in *Jerusalem* are a part of the continuing repeated narrative of Christ’s Passion and its placement in relationship to the secular texts. The previous positionings of Christ’s Passion have been in religious devotional texts, and by placing this instance here, the narrative structure of the manuscript begins its move from contemplative or strictly devotional to active. In following that pattern, the poem moves from the focus on Christ’s body as an object of veneration and wonder to the subject matter of the poem: vengeance.

For al þe harme þat he hadde    hasted he noʒt

On hem þe vyleny to venge    þat his veynys brosten,

Bot ay taried on þe tyme    ʒif þey tourne wolde;
While it is clear that Christ had mercy and waited a full forty years to see if the Jews would repent, what is also clear is that Titus and Vespasian have no such mercy. Instead, the apparent grace that is shown by Christ is entirely ignored in favor of the extreme violence of the siege, and Christ’s body, once again, motivates that violence. The similarity between this scene and *The Northern Passion* is a crucial element in the manuscript’s overarching narrative of meditative piety. All four accounts of the Passion in the manuscript include the torture of Christ by blindfolding him and demanding he show his gift of prophecy by saying who hit him. Conflating all four instances as exemplifying the *same kind* of affective devotion, with equal and equally appropriate responses becomes not only possible, but also likely. For Robert Thornton, all of the texts participate and encourage equal kinds of Passion centered devotion. The difference between *The Discourse* and *The Northern Passion* and *Jerusalem* is, of course, the result of “thinking” on the Passion.

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306 The violence of the narrative is “extreme” because it goes above and beyond the traditional or typical violence for such narratives. For example, Caiaphas is hanged, then put in a sack with a cat, dog and monkey to be torn apart. In the siege scene, a pregnant woman is hit with a rock from a catapult, and her unborn child is shot over a wall. These examples, two among many, led Ralph Hanna to dub the piece the “chocolate covered tarantula of the alliterative movement.” “Contextualizing *The Siege of Jerusalem,*” *The Yearbook of Langland Studies* 6 (1992): 109.
Vespasian motivates his troops the same way the *Meditations*’ author motivates and moves his audiences: by commanding them to place themselves mentally at the Passion. However, Vespasian begins his inspirational speech by directing his troops attention to their end purpose, and then moves to the Passion narrative to drive that purpose, recalling the same suffering that opens the poem:

[...] lordlynges, a londe, lestneyþ my speche.

Here nys kyng noþer knyʒt comen to þis place,

Baroun ne bachelere ne burne þat ne folweþ,

Þat þe cause of his come nys Crist forto venge

Vpon þe faiþles folke þat him fayntly slowen.

Byholdeþ þe heþyng and þe harde woundes,

Þe byndyng and þe betyng þat he on body hadde:

Let neuer þis lawles ledis lauʒ at his harmys

Þat bouʒt vs fram bale with blod of his herte (492-500).

Within the text, this recollection of Christ’s suffering serves to refocus the troops to their true purpose: for Vespasian this is first and foremost a religious battle. Furthermore, the vengeance is historically literal. These are the same Jews that were alive and present (some of them, anyway) at the actual crucifixion. The manuscript moves from Christ’s story and his experience beyond what any human could endure to the (re)actions of real people. Titus, Vespasian and their soldiers existed and did, in fact, participate in the siege of Jerusalem.
An example in contrast serves to highlight the narrative move made in Vespasian’s speech. Nicholas Love’s *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Christ* explores the same kinds of Passion moments found in *Jerusalem*. However, Love offers an alternate response to the one given by Vespasian:

Wherefore hauyng [Christ’s suffering] in mynde, first to stiryng of þe more compassion. […] For þe grete misteries & alle þe processe þerof, if þei were inwardly consideret with alle þe inwarde mynde & beholdyng of mannus soule. As I fully trowe, þei sholde bringe þat beholdere in to a newe state of grace. For to hym þat wolde serche þe passion of our lorde with alle his herte & alle his inwarde affeccione þere shuld come many douout felynges & stirynges þat he neuer supposede before. Of þe whech he shuld fele a newe compassion & a newe loue, & haue newe gostly confortes, þorh þe whech he shold perceyue him self turnede as it were in to a newe astate of soule, in þe whech astate þoo for seide gostly felynges, shold seme to him as a nerneste & a partie of þe blisse & ioy to come.²⁰⁷

This is not Vespasian’s kind of piety. Far from finding compassion and a new sense of love and comfort from the recounting of the Passion, Vespasian sees it as both justification and inspiration for the upcoming carnage. Furthermore, Vespasian’s response gives us insight into Robert Thornton’s potential reading. Far from the contemplative life afforded men like Love and Rolle, Vespasian’s response offers a potential direction of the emotion inspired by the Passion in the active life. The Christian

militaristic response here shown by Vespasian as evidence of his and his soldiers new
found faith may be the exact kind of response Thornton desired. Forget the compassion
and love, just pass the sword. *Jerusalem* begins with imagery associated traditionally
with affective piety typically found in works like Love’s *Mirror*, but it rapidly moves to
an outward, communal expression of violence antithetical to the “bliss and joy” of Love’s
devotions. However, given the patterning of the manuscript, it is doubtful that Thornton
saw Vespasian’s response as a complete departure from religious devotion. Instead, the
praise Vespasian garners in the poem—including his eventually being made emperor of
Rome—serves as a justification for his actions, both within the lines of the poem and in
the larger narrative of the manuscript.

The manuscript then moves to another view of Christ’s body, but this time in the
form of *imitatio Christi*. In *The Siege of Milan*, the heroic Bishop Turpin leads the
charge of Charlemagne’s French soldiers in a battle against the Saracens for Milan. In
his attacks he suffers a wound resembling that of Christ:

> Bot, als the cronakill yitt will telle,
> There come a Sarasene fers and felle
> And to the Bischoppe glade,
> And stroke hym righte thorowe the thee
> And agayne to the hethen oste gane flee;
> And Turpyn after hym rade. (1102-7)

This spear through the thigh in battle echoes Christ’s wound in his side. Later in the
poem, Turpin announces that Christ suffered far worse wounds and received no
treatment, so he will take no treatment, food or comfort until the battle against the
Saracens is won (1342-53). While this is far less emphatic than the previous examples of Christ’s wounds, nonetheless the invocation first of a wound similar to Christ’s, then of Christ’s suffering explicitly serves to at least thematically echo the previous texts. Once again, the overarching narrative of the Passion, in any number of forms, is invoked, giving a sense of unity to the manuscript. By moving from Titus and Vespasian to Roland, Charlemagne and Turpin, the manuscript moves forward in time to events that, though they are centuries in the past, represent chivalric values still very much a part of fifteenth century English thought. The Christian chivalric heroism here feeds the fantasy of the mixed life narrative: there are ways to be both violently heroic and imitate Christ’s Passion.

Finally, Thornton closes this section of the manuscript with Lydgate’s fifteen-stanza passion Lyric, *Passionis Christi Cantus*. This brings the manuscript back again to the explicit Passion of Christ. Like the *Discourse*, this poem is spoken by Christ in the first person. Also like the *Discourse*, the poem recounts the passion and encourages meditation, though its encouragement is much more explicit. The first four stanzas are traditional in their affective piety. Each stanza encourages the reader to think on some element of the passion: “crowned with thorne, woundid with a launce”; “bloody face,/ the reed, the sponge,”; “the veyl that went assonder”; “Bounde to a peleer...” (4, 9-10, 17 and 29). These are a few of the examples in the first thirty-two lines of moments that repeat the same content with similar phrasing as the Passion instances in the earlier texts of the manuscript. This poem, however, is even more consciously and deliberately meditative. Each of the first nine stanzas ends with exhortation for the reader to “thynke” or “remember … my passioun” (8, 16, 24, 32, 40, 48, 56, 64 and 72). Stanzas 10 and 11
explain how the Passion served to create the foundations of Christianity: the sacraments and the Church itself. Twelve recounts the harrowing of hell and the restoration of Adam, while thirteen talks about evidence of Christ’s divinity expressed in the gospels. Stanza fourteen urges the audience to once again “thynk on my passioun” when death comes. Finally, the last stanza returns to meditation on the Passion of Christ, and specifically on the poem:

Go, lytel bylle, with al humylyte
Hang affore Iesu, that list for man to bleede,
To-fore his cros pray folk that shal the see,
Onys aday this compleynte ffor to reede;
No losse of tyme, thou shalt þe better speede
Redyest weye to ther saluacyon,
No bettir socour, nor support in your neede,
Than offte thynkyng on Crystys passioun. (113-120)

In the spirit of Chaucer’s “little book,” Lydgate urges his poem to go and help people spend their time in contemplation of Christ’s Passion as a way to salvation. The poem does not simply suggest meditation on the Passion as a reasonable pious gesture—an option in a sea of options for worship—but as the ultimate form of piety: it brings salvation and there is no better support in a time of need. By closing this section of the manuscript with this text, Thornton highlights the perpetual position of affective piety throughout the texts. There is no image so pervasive in the manuscript, nor one so perpetually thrust into the spotlight than the body of Christ in the midst of the Passion. The repeated emphasis also serves to downplay what can be viewed as the less orthodox.
elements of the romances—violence in *Jerusalem* and heresy in *Milan*—in favor of the orthodox devotion to Christ’s Passion.

**A Union of Images: Mary the Jew in *The Siege of Jerusalem***

The figures of Mary and Christ, manifestations of their power and their suffering, and the heroic responses of Christian knights to those images form the components of the overarching narrative of this section of the London Thornton Manuscript. As the texts move from critical moments in Christian history to contemporary devotional poetry, the audience, too, is moved both emotionally and intellectually to a vision of devotion that embraces both the meditative and the violent as manifestations of faith. However, the London Thornton manuscript does more than just offer examples of faith. There is one moment in the middle of the manuscript section, in the last third of *The Siege of Jerusalem* that brings together the various components into one powerful example of the devastating difference between the Christian and non-Christian. The example of Mary the Jew unites the figures of the grieving Mary and the suffering Christ by serving as a counter example. By eating her own child, the Jewess Mary invokes one of the most important images of late medieval religion: the Eucharist. The Eucharist is the physical reality of the miracle of the Passion: “The suffering of the human Christ was the image most amenable to personal identification, one of the most interesting was through its association with the eucharist.”308 Andrew Taylor gives a summary of the relationship between the Eucharist and medieval religion:

> The Eucharist, a symbol of the social body of believers, celebrated the miracle by which the host became the body of Christ. In the late Middle

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308 Ruben 302.
Ages this body was increasingly represented as the bleeding flesh of the Passion, which became the focus of intense emotional concentration. Devout lay people dwelt on the details of the Passion in systematic meditation, imagining themselves as participants in the final scenes. The organic body of the faithful was, therefore, not just an intellectual theory for the canonists, but, through the symbol of Christ’s body in the Eucharist, an emotionally charged and widespread vision of communal identity. […] The commitment to a unified social body, the obsession with the purity of the Virgin’s body, the emotional concentration on Christ’s suffering body and the depiction of Jews as bodily defilers, torturers, and murderers whose own bodies must in turn be subjected to corresponding violence are all part of one psychological nexus. The intensity of late medieval affective piety is psychologically connected to the Eucharist rituals of social union and to the violent attacks, both textual and physical, directed against outsiders.  

For Taylor, this relationship between the wounded body of Christ, the Eucharist, and those figures who torture him is manifested in the dialogue created between the text of the Decretals in BL MS Royal 10.E.4 and the marginalia surrounding it. In the London Thornton manuscript, the cannibalized child of the Jewess Mary becomes a vivid image of could-have-been Eucharistic consumption: without Christ, the sacrifice of a child is not a miracle of redemption, but a grotesque tragedy.

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309 Taylor 182.
The plight of Mary the Jew, who is forced to cook and eat her own child as she starves in the besieged Jerusalem, brings together the ideas of Mary, Christ’s body, the Eucharist and the outsider/torturer/Jew as a nexus of English piety in the later Middle Ages. The cannibalism passage in *Jerusalem* is one of the most gruesome and sympathetic moments in the violent poem:

On Marie, a myld wyf, for meschef of foode,
Hire owen barn þat ʒo bare brad on þe gledis
Rostyþ rigge and rib with rewful wordes,
Sayþ “sone, vpon eche side our sorrow is alofte:
Batail aboute þe borwe our bodies to quelle;
Withyn hunger so hote þat neʒ our herte brestyþ
Þerfor ʒeld þat I þe ʒaf and aʒen tourne,
Entre þer þou out cam”, and etyþ a schouldere.
Þe rich roos of þe rost riʒt into þe strete
Þat fele fastyng folke felden þe sauere.
Doun þei daschen þe dore, dey scholde þe berde
Þat mete yn þis meschef hadde from men layned.
Þan saiþ þat worþi wif in a wode hunger,
“Myn owen barn haue I brad and þe bones gnawen,
ʒit haue I saued ʒou som”, and a side feccheþ
Of þe barn þat ʒo bare, and alle hir blode chaungeþ.

Forþ þey went for wo wepande sore (1081-97)

Clearly this moment is meant to invoke both Mary as the mother of Christ and the ultimate figuration of the Eucharist as the eating of Christ’s body. The unsatisfying and pitiable consumption of real flesh by the Jews, as opposed to the bread-made-flesh of the Eucharist, is a poignant reminder of the salvation of Christianity. This moment reminds audiences of the power of Christ’s body by contrasting it with a person who reaps no benefit from that sacrifice.

This moment is made more powerful by the sympathetic portrayal of Mary, who is called a “mild wife” and who is, it seems, worthy of our pity. This is different from the source material, as Elisa Narin Van Court argues:

But the Siege poet renders the [cannibalism] as a result of desperation, reworking his sources to produce a sympathetic account that invites not disgust, but sorrow from the reader. In the sources, the scene is prefaced by a pointed rendition of “you are what you eat” calculated to degrade and dehumanize the Jews. […] Clearly the local effect of this episode is radically different from that of its sources: there the act of cannibalism heightens the hatred and disgust directed at the Jews; here, disgust is transformed into sorrow and pity.310

The question then becomes why the author chose to make her an object of pity.
Furthermore, why, after multiple texts condemning the Jews, would Thornton choose to include a poem with such sympathies? The poem shows no pity for the Jews in general, making clear in the opening that they had forty years to repent and have not done so. The point of this pity generated by the text is to create a kind of empathy not unlike that achieved through traditional meditation on the body of Christ. A figure that the audience can feel pity for is one that the audience can identify with, and by asking us to identify with her, the poet then highlights the importance of the Eucharist to Christians. Roger Nicholson suggests that the pity an audience feels should be only temporary:

> Within the frame of the [cannibalism] episode there seems to be real sympathy, but to stay with that would be to miss the point—that the Jew is confined to the carnal and therefore trapped within the pattern of abhorrence that the poem traces. The point is not that physical suffering here compels pity or compassion, but that this suffering is nothing more than itself, unlike that of the Virgin Mary and her Son, which, through the elevation of suffering to sacrifice, provides a symbolic anchor for an entire religious and social system.\(^{311}\)

While I agree that by naming the cannibal mother Mary, the author invokes the Virgin Mary and that this scene is designed to invoke the Eucharist and Christ’s sacrifice through contrast, it is not, I think, designed to eliminate pity. Yes, the sacrifice of Christ is made utterly clear by the ineffective consumption of Mary’s cannibalized son, but it is through pity—even if that pity is coupled with abhorrence—that the audience reaches

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that conclusion. While the example is clearly meant to contrast the literal mindedness of the Jews with the spiritual benefits of the Christians, if the audience in this moment renders Jews utterly unworthy of pity, entirely outside, then the impact of the moment is diminished. The audience must be able to see Mary in his moment as the answer to the “what if” question: What if I was not a Christian? What if I was forced to make literal what I know to be spiritual? The horror of this cannibal moment is bound up with the possibility of salvation and the ramifications of the denial of that salvation.

Placing this moment in the context of the rest of the manuscript, with its emphasis on both Marian and Passion imagery, it becomes all the more powerful. The repeated distance the other texts create by utterly vilifying the Jews is contrasted here with the pity we feel for the mother. Also, in terms of the repeated demands to dwell on the sacrifice of Christ, this passage becomes more powerful. The mother here kills and tears apart her son to devour him, thematically echoing the multiple abuses of Christ’s body recounted in other poems in the manuscript. The mother here gains no satisfaction, yet the audience, after reading and experiencing poem after poem about Christ’s sacrifice, is reminded of their own fortunate salvation. This moment moves the audience from the images of Mary and Christ’s physical body to the Eucharist. The audience jumps from meditative contemplation of the past to the immediacy of the Eucharist as their experience of Christ in the present. The image of tragic characters without the comfort of Christ’s sacrifice manifested in the Eucharist reminds the audience of the redemption and salvation all Christians share.
Conclusion

The opening texts of Robert Thornton’s London manuscript lead the reader and/or audience through repeated images of Mary and Christ, with particular focus on Christ’s Passion. These images serve to reinforce the main elements of orthodoxy in English piety in the later Middle Ages: Mary, the Eucharist and the Passion of Christ. Surrounded by the *Cursor Mundi, A Discourse Between God and Man, The Northern Passion*, and the lyrics *O Florum Flos* and *Passionis Christi Cantus*, the romances of the London Thornton manuscript become reiterations of pious action. These texts, and the overarching narrative they create, are ultimately reflective of a desire to participate in the larger culture of devotion. Through the meditation on the Passion, Robert Thornton could access Christ, and then, through the display of Christian prowess in the romances, could fantasize about how to respond to that access. For Robert Thornton, affective piety and the meditation on Christ’s body is both a private and public act, as Sarah Beckwith argues in her discussion of affective piety after Arundel’s 1407 Lambeth Constitutions:

> Late medieval crucifixion piety is a curiously literal embodiment of a drama of exclusion and participation in [the body of Christ]. For affective piety is obsessed with belonging, with the fantasy of fusion and the bitter reality of separation and so with the entrances to Christ’s body.  

Robert Thornton’s manuscript reflects this fantasy of belonging. The religious texts bring the audience—and most certainly Thornton himself—through typical meditative moments of affective devotion, while the romances bring the audience to secular heroics in the name of Christianity. By collecting texts that repeat the same moments of the

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312 Beckwith 42.
Passion, and then vary the response and context, Thornton’s manuscript serves to elide the differences between those responses and contexts. The “thinking” inspired by *The Discourse* or Lydgate’s *Christ’s Passion* is the same “thinking” the Roman soldiers do before their siege in *Jerusalem* and Bishop Turpin experiences as he is wounded in the thigh in battle with the Saracens in *Milan*.

The romances that are the subject of this dissertation change and shift in meaning as they are read and reread through the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. *The Siege of Jerusalem* uses Christ’s body as a catalyst for extreme violence as a display of piety, and through this raises questions about the late medieval views of the Passion. *The Siege of Milan*, in its fourteenth century context, potentially reads as an attack on the Lollard heresy, rejecting iconoclasm, encouraging the government’s active protection of the church, and encouraging church sanctioned violence. Finally, *Duke Roland and Sir Otuel of Spain* offers a pattern for the behavior of a Christian knight through the heroic pagan convert to Christianity Otuel, whose primary display of faith is through killing Saracens. However, when read in the context of the manuscript in which these are all found, they become parts of a whole narrative on devotion. Robert Thornton left us not only with the single extant copies of many Middle English romances, but with a clear suggestion of how he thought they ought to be read.
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