ROMANCING THE OTHER:
NON-CHRISTIAN AND INTERFAITH MARRIAGE
IN LATE MIDDLE ENGLISH LITERATURE, 1300-1450

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By

Jennifer Mary Gianfalla, M.A.

*****

The Ohio State University
2009

Dissertation Committee:

Professor Lisa J. Kiser, Advisor
Professor Richard Firth Green
Professor Karen A. Winstead

Approved by

Advisor
English Graduate Program
ABSTRACT

This dissertation makes a significant contribution to postcolonial medieval studies by examining how fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Middle English authors use representations of non-Christian and interfaith marriages to enter a wider Christian European discourse centered around the threat of the religious Other. Because such marriages are not well documented historically in medieval England, my dissertation argues that their portrayal is not a reflection of actual practice, but rather a fantasy that allows these authors to engage actively in maintaining and defending the dominance of Christianity and the Catholic Church. As my readings show, these texts serve to bolster the Church’s campaign against non-Christians by moving this campaign to marriage’s domestic sphere. Marriage is thus not only politically important, as it enables alliances to be forged among kingdoms and nations; it is now also religiously important, as it becomes a means for the culture to fantasize about the extent to which Christianity can dominate.

The texts I examine cover an extensive period of the later Middle Ages, ranging from 1300 to 1450; the period of one hundred fifty years indicates that authors maintained an interest in conversion as a consequence of marriage and suggests that this motif was pervasive. The romances I examine include both canonical and non-canonical texts, many of which are anonymous. In chapter one, John Metham’s 1449 text *Amoryus*...
and Cleopes permits me to discuss how aristocratic marriage is imagined (and expected) to have consequences on the populace of the spouses’ kingdom(s)—most importantly, the consequence of conversion. Metham’s text thus paves the way for my subsequent studies of interfaith marriage in the rest of the romances. Chapter two investigates how authors apply similar attitudes toward interfaith marriage to both Christian and Saracen figures. Though it seems at first that these authors attempt to show that Saracens share the same ideas and fears as Christians, their texts ultimately undermine any portrayal of a real Saracen figure because the Saracen figures’ actions are always responses to the threat of Christianity. Finally, by looking at the Constance legends and popular romances featuring Saracen princesses, chapters three and four analyze the varying role of women in the evangelization process through their participation in interfaith marriages and argue for a reassessment of gender roles and a rereading of the Constance figure.
Dedicated to my parents and grandparents,

Joseph and Catherine Gianfalla and William and Dolores Gannon
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My work on this project has been aided by the generous contributions of many individuals. First, I must thank my advisor, Lisa J. Kiser, for the many roles she has taken on throughout this project, including mentor and intellectual guide. I appreciate her enthusiasm for my project and her belief that it will make a significant contribution to the field. Her advice has inspired me, and my work has benefited in important ways through her influence. I especially appreciate her willingness to discuss so many aspects of medieval marriage and its literary portrayals with me over the last several years, as many of the ideas set forth in this dissertation arose from our discussions.

I must also thank Karen Winstead and Richard Firth Green, my dissertation committee members, for their careful reading of my work and thoughtful comments. Their guidance on many of the legal and literary aspects of medieval marriage has been extremely helpful throughout my work on this project.

My interest in medieval marriage was first piqued in Alastair Minnis’ 2004 course on medieval marriage at The Ohio State University, so I thank him for introducing me to the subject of non-Christian and interfaith marriage and encouraging my work on it.

Finally, last but never least, I must thank my family, including my parents, Joseph and Catherine Gianfalla, my sister Michelle, my grandmother, Dee Gannon, and my fiancé, James Macpherson, for their relentless support and encouragement.
VITA

March 28, 1981………………………….Born – New Haven, Connecticut

2005……………………………………..M.A. – English, The Ohio State University

2003……………………………………..B.A. – English, summa cum laude,

The Pennsylvania State University

2004-Present……………………………Graduate Teaching Associate, English, The Ohio

State University

2007-2008………………………………Distinguished University Fellowship, The Ohio

State University

2003-2004………………………………Distinguished University Fellowship, The Ohio

State University

FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: English
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedication</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vita</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapters:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Consent and the Making of Aristocratic Marriage (and its Consequences) in John Metham’s <em>Amoryus and Cleopes</em></td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. “She wile, for me sake, / Cristendome at thee take”: Interfaith Marriage and Erotic Conversion in <em>Bevis of Hampton</em> and the <em>King of Tars</em></td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Their Fathers’ Daughters: Erotic Conversion and the Troubling Behavior of Saracen Princesses in Three Middle English Saracen Romances</td>
<td>219</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Conclusion</td>
<td>266</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>277</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

Discussions of marriage in Middle English romance often focus on the central role that marriage plays in the creation of the hero’s legacy. His marriage frequently permits him to either establish or, in some cases, regain a kingdom, in which he will leave behind heirs who will rule for him after his death. Marriages therefore frequently take place near the end of the romance narrative, as they serve as a fitting conclusion to the hero’s tale. Thus, as we see in a text like *King Horn*, the hero is rewarded with marriage upon the successful achievement of his knightly goals:

Horn com to Suddenne
Among al his kenne;
Rymenhild he makede his quene;
So hit mighte wel beon. (1531-4)

Horn’s marriage to Rymenhild at the end of the text is the logical conclusion to his development as a hero; we know early on in the text of his desire to wed Rymenhild, and the plot follows his progression as a suitable knight-warrior who ultimately is able to defeat his nemesis and marry into a kingdom, thereby reclaiming in a sense the patrimony he lost at the beginning of the text. *King Horn’s* position as the oldest Middle English romance and its author’s adoption of the marriage-at-the-end motif suggests an early interest in the idea of marriage (and through marriage, access to a kingdom) as a just

---

reward for the romance hero. Subsequent Middle English romances adopted the very same motif, and as a result, marriage as a logical conclusion to the hero’s exploits became an expectation of the reader of romance, as Helen Cooper has claimed:

Usually, the very familiarity of romance conventions ensures that the reader has a fair idea of what is to happen, even if the author does not outline the plot in advance, and even if the hero has different ideas. The reader will always know more than the protagonists (that they will survive their adventures, marry their beloved, win back their kingdom), but that knowledge is a shared assumption between author and audience that bypasses the characters themselves.²

Cooper acknowledges that marriage is not only an obvious characteristic of romance, but also an integral component in the romance’s conclusion of “happily ever after.” Indeed, Cooper claims that “Almost all romances are narratives either of courtship leading to marriage, or of the trials that part a loving married couple.”³ Overwhelmingly, then, marriage serves as a formulaic conclusion to the hero’s development and a reward for his prowess.

But marriages are not always merely a logical conclusion to the hero’s tale; sometimes they are integral to the hero’s exploits and therefore take a central role in the texts even well before the narratives’ conclusions. Such is the case with the romances I will consider in this dissertation. Why does marriage play such a central role throughout each of these narratives, and how does its purpose differ from marriages which serve only as logical conclusions to a hero’s adventure? The answer, I will suggest, is in the religious dimensions present in the unions described in them, namely the religious

difference of the potential spouses and the possibilities Christian heroes (and, in some cases, heroines) see in interfaith marriages.

Although there is no interfaith marriage in *King Horn*, it shares many of the romance motifs associated with marriage, religion, and conversion that I will uncover throughout this dissertation. The texts I have selected for this study have been chosen because of their explicit focus on certain principles—most significantly, interfaith marriage. Each of the texts I will examine portrays marriage as having a central role in the plot, and each also portrays conversion as a consequence of marriage. The marital relationships I will analyze most closely are at first interfaith, meaning they are proposed between a Christian and non-Christian. The portrayal of these interfaith marriages, I suggest, permits these authors to enter a wider Christian European discourse centered around the threat of the religious Other. Because such marriages are not well documented historically in medieval England, my dissertation argues that their portrayal may not be a reflection of actual practice, but rather a fantasy that allows these authors to engage actively in maintaining and defending the dominance of Christianity and the Catholic Church.

Because these authors choose to participate in a Western European discourse centered on religious dominance through their portrayals of interfaith marriages, they must imagine such marriages as having significant consequences for both spouses and, more widely, for their kingdoms. Significantly, the characters of these texts are aristocratic individuals, a fact which indicates that much is at stake in their marriages generally, but since they participate in interfaith marriages, even more is at stake, specifically for the non-Christian culture. We are conditioned to expect that the marriages
of high-ranking aristocrats will affect the populace to some extent—indeed, historical fact supports this view, evidenced by rulers’ fixation on producing male heirs to maintain stability in a kingdom (Henry VIII is a perfect example of a ruler obsessed with this duty). Historians of medieval marriage have also discussed at great length how and why parents and friends frequently became involved in making aristocratic marriages—because too much was at stake in these marriages, including property, family relations, and, most importantly for this study, sometimes political—and therefore religious—alliance.

My interest in conversion as a consequence of marriage arose from my observation that while marriage is a vital component of the romance narrative, it is frequently written off by critics for that reason: it is expected, and serves as a reward for the hero and/or heroine, so critics generally accept its position and role within the romance as necessary or standard rather than purposeful. Part of my goal is to provide a much-needed link between historical studies on medieval marriage and literary criticism on the significance of the representation of marriage in Middle English texts. Historians have dominated the field of medieval marriage studies, and sometimes attempt to engage in literary criticism while also dealing with specific court cases and historical data on marriage in the Middle Ages. Such studies have tended to focus on how portrayals of marriage in medieval literature are similar to and different from the actual practice of marriage, and literary critics interested in the role of marriage seem to have taken their cues from this type of study. Literary critics have largely focused their attention on the disparity between practice and portrayal; the work of both Neil Cartlidge and Conor McCarthy falls within this category. Both Cartlidge’s and McCarthy’s books argue that
portrayals of marriage in literature can reveal what medieval authors knew and understood about the actual practice of marriage, and their work thus straddles the fields of literary and historical criticism.\(^4\) Historians like Shannon McSheffrey, however, have focused on what court cases can reveal to us about how marriage was practiced and understood in medieval England. Her work focuses specifically on London, and reveals that the practice of marriage was complicated at any social level and often involved the input and consent of others.\(^5\) More recently, literary critics have begun to consider again the important cultural role that marriage plays in medieval literature, and as a result, we have lately seen a burgeoning interest in how marriage is used to achieve certain ends by medieval authors.\(^6\) Emma Lipton’s recent book suggests that in literature, marriage is an institution that allows authors to engage in a discourse surrounding social relationships, even relationships beyond those of husband and wife.\(^7\) My work builds in some ways on Lipton’s interest in the connection between literary portrayals of marriage and medieval culture, but my interest in the cultural value of marriage extends beyond the kinds of personal social relationships with which Lipton is interested. Instead, my work suggests that marriage—specifically interfaith marriage—is imagined as a possible means of affecting an entire kingdom’s religious culture. My interest in marriage thus focuses on its importance as a social institution that has important cultural consequences for large


\(^6\) I say “again” because marriage was certainly of interest to Chaucer critics in the early twentieth century, especially in terms of dealing with the “Marriage Group” of the *Canterbury Tales* which George Kittredge first discussed. See “Chaucer’s Discussion of Marriage,” *Modern Philology* 9.4 (1912): 435-67.

populations, and therefore makes a new and important contribution to the field of medieval marriage studies.

While this dissertation contributes to the field of literary marriage studies, it will also make an important contribution to the field of postcolonial medieval studies. Medieval scholars have recently begun to use the ideas associated with postcolonial studies proper (meaning studies of literature from postcolonial nations of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries) as a way of understanding the military campaigns of the Crusades. Such scholars argue that ideas surrounding issues such as race and slavery were present in the Middle Ages, and that by studying these issues, medievalists will be better able to relate to critics of other literary periods. This argument is the one David Wallace’s recent book attempts to prove. By analyzing premodern geographical locations and considering the texts which hail from these locations, Wallace attempts to provide a link between postcolonialism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and postcolonialism in the Middle Ages. Wallace argues that the premodern locations he considers have much in common with postcolonial nations, in that they experienced the same issues in terms of race, slavery, technology, etcetera.

Geographical boundaries have been argued to play a role in how various peoples are described in medieval romance in terms of race and physical appearance. Equally interesting, however, is how religious boundaries are linked to these descriptions. Recently, critics have begun to consider what the description of difference, or “otherness,” in medieval romance reveals to us about medieval culture (including medieval religious culture). In her landmark postcolonial study of romance, Geraldine

---

Heng is interested in how boundaries are created and negotiated, specifically in terms of empire. Heng argues that the attempt by Europe to engage in a military conquest through the Crusades devolves into a cultural conquest we are able to witness in literature. She is interested in how romance becomes a genre authors use to recover potentially disturbing historical events and which allows them to develop ideas and views on issues like race and ethnicity. Heng’s postcolonialism thus focuses on how the idea of empire can arise from military and cultural conquest alike, and she seems most interested in geographical rather than religious boundaries, evidenced by her interest in nation-building.

While encounters with specific nations and geographical locations have both been widely covered in medieval postcolonial studies, equally important is the idea of cultural encounter. Medieval postcolonial scholars have discussed cultural encounter in terms of race, ethnicity, and religious difference, and my work in this dissertation builds on the important position of cultural encounter by connecting it with the representation of interfaith marriage. This study will benefit the field of postcolonial medieval studies because it covers an extremely important yet understudied phenomenon: how can an individual have a significant and lasting effect on his or her culture? The answer, my readings show, is by using his or her ability to participate in the social institution of marriage to create a link with an individual of another culture.

One of the major shortcomings of many medieval postcolonial studies is the lack of emphasis on the texts themselves. Medievalists who use postcolonial studies frequently seem to overlook the importance of literary analysis of these medieval texts in favor of broader claims that identify how medieval texts deal with the same issues as later

---

truly postcolonial texts. I do not aim in this dissertation to make an argument that postcolonialism occurs in the Middle Ages in the same way that it does in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. I find that postcolonial theory is useful to my work not because of its interest in and emphasis on the imperial aims of great nations, which proceed to conquer other nations in attempts to become global forces of domination, but rather because some of the terminology and ideas we can take from postcolonial theory are useful in discussing specific motifs and their portrayal in medieval literature. I do not believe that the Crusades of the Middle Ages should be likened to the kinds of colonial pursuits undertaken by England in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as the purpose of the pursuits differs fundamentally. In the Middle Ages, the Crusades were not strictly meant to create one overpowering empire, but rather to impose the Christian religion and culture on those who did not embrace it—individuals who just happened to reside in other nations. What postcolonial theory does for scholars of the Middle Ages, and more specifically for me in this project, is provide terminology and concepts to use when we witness Christian culture confronting the culture of the Other in literature. As my readings show, many medieval texts serve to bolster the Church’s campaign against non-Christians by moving this campaign to marriage’s domestic sphere. Marriage is thus not only politically important, as it enables alliances to be forged among kingdoms and nations; it is now also religiously important, as it becomes a means for the culture to fantasize about the extent to which Christianity can dominate.

The phenomenon of the representation of interfaith marriages in Middle English literature is somewhat puzzling because during the later Middle Ages, England was a largely homogeneous country with no immediate threats of an internal Other. In
examining this widespread yet understudied motif, my dissertation seeks to do three things: first, uncover this motif and explore how it is played out in both canonical and non-canonical texts of the later Middle English period; second, explain the effects of this motif not in terms of England’s national ambitions, but rather in terms of wider Catholic European attempts to control both the non-Christians perceived as threatening and the Catholics who might encounter these non-Christians; and finally, discuss how the issue of religious conversion through marriage contributes to a reassessment of medieval gender roles.

Conversion is the most important analytical category to this study, for in all of the texts I will examine conversion is shown as a condition for or consequence of marriage. In all but one of these texts, I suggest that the authors use interfaith marriages to allow people to fantasize about the possibility of “erotic conversion”—conversion that takes place on a personal level due to the influence of the Christian spouse.\textsuperscript{10} This personal conversion, because it occurs between aristocratic members of the ruling classes, results in the large-scale evangelization and conversion of the non-Christian spouse’s kingdom to Christianity. The portrayals of these unusual and puzzling marriages thus reassert the dominance of the Catholic Church.

My analysis also engages gender studies to some extent. In two of the chapters, I examine the role of women in the conversion process. In my discussion of Christian women’s involvement in interfaith marriage and conversion, I make use of material from conduct literature, which I suggest has a strong influence on the portrayal of these women’s involvement in the conversion process. As I discuss Saracen women’s

\textsuperscript{10} The sole exception is John Metham’s \textit{Amoryus and Cleopes}, as we will see. Metham’s characters are both non-Christians and therefore do not participate in an interfaith marriage.
involvement in interfaith marriage and conversion, I suggest that authors employ specifically masculine traits in their descriptions of these women to highlight the lack of Saracen equivalents to Christian “female culture” and how this lack must be addressed during the conversion process.

One postcolonial study very useful to my work in analyzing non-Christian figures and their involvement in conversion is Sylvia Tomasch’s discussion of the literary “virtual Jew.”11 As I mentioned above, during the late Middle Ages England was a primarily homogeneous country, and so authors’ portrayals of Jewish figures were necessarily imaginative constructions that bore no real resemblance to the true Jews, who had been expelled from England in the thirteenth century. Although I do not examine any Jewish figures here, what Tomasch claims of portrayals of Jews in medieval literature is also true of portrayals of pagan and Saracen figures in that literature, as they were similarly not present in medieval England. Tomasch’s postcolonial work provides an important framework for the discussion and analysis of non-Christian figures that is vital to my work. Writers, I shall suggest, constructed their own versions of these figures in order to achieve certain ends, and in the texts I shall examine, conversion is always the desired result.

I do not mean to be overly general or reductive in my discussion of the characters and their interfaith marriages; there are exceptions to every category or rule, as my conclusion will show. Instead, I aim to uncover through the specific characters and interfaith marriages I discuss a pattern of portrayal that points to a widespread interest on the part of Middle English authors in how marriage is imagined as a possible means of

accomplishing religious goals. What is important about my observations is that they reveal an ongoing interest over an extended period of the late Middle Ages in the possibility of marriage as a means of conversion and in the possible roles available to women as evangelists (which are based on their ability to become wives).

The texts I examine cover an extensive period of the later Middle Ages, ranging from 1300 to 1450; the period of one hundred fifty years proves that authors maintained an interest in conversion as a consequence of marriage and suggests that this motif was pervasive. The romances I examine include both canonical and non-canonical texts, many of which are anonymous. I have chosen these texts because they best exemplify the patterns and issues that I engage in this dissertation. John Metham’s 1449 text *Amoryus and Cleopes*, for example, permits me to discuss how aristocratic marriage is imagined (and expected) to have consequences on the populace of the spouses’ kingdom(s)—most importantly, the consequence of conversion. Metham’s text thus paves the way for my subsequent studies of interfaith marriage in the rest of the romances. I also analyze two anonymous romances from the Auchinleck manuscript, *Bevis of Hampton* and the *King of Tars*, as examples of how authors imagine both Christians and non-Christians reacting to the possibility of interfaith marriage and fearing its consequences; these romances are in my view the best examples of authors attributing analytical views of both the importance and consequences of marriage to non-Christian characters. Further, my study examines two types of romance heroines: the Christian and Saracen women who engage in interfaith marriage to achieve differing ends. For the Christian woman, the desired and expected outcome is the conversion of her non-Christian spouse and his kingdom, but for the Saracen woman, while conversion of both her and her kingdom occurs, the original
desire was actually the marriage alone—the conversion was only undertaken because it was necessary to achieve her goal. The canonical texts examined as examples of the Christian woman include Geoffrey Chaucer’s *Man of Law’s Tale* and John Gower’s “Tale of Constance” from the *Confessio Amantis*. These well-known (and well-studied) romances work to create an idealized Christian woman who can be used to achieve religious ends through her marriage(s). The texts examined as representative of the Saracen woman include the widely popular but understudied romances *Octavian* and the *Sultan of Babylon*, as well as *Bevis of Hampton*, all of which feature women with behaviors that seem masculinized.

The chapters are linked through their shared interests in marriage and conversion. Chapter one uses John Metham’s *Amoryus and Cleopes* to explore the validity of non-Christian marriages. This chapter also introduces marriage as a means of conversion on both personal and public scales, a theme which is covered more explicitly in the subsequent chapters. The remaining chapters focus on interfaith marriage between Christians and non-Christians. Chapter two investigates how authors apply similar attitudes toward interfaith marriage to both Christian and Saracen figures. Though it seems at first that these authors attempt to show that Saracens share the same ideas and fears as Christians, their texts ultimately undermine any portrayal of a real Saracen figure because the Saracen figures’ actions are always responses to the threat of Christianity. Finally, by looking at the Constance legends and popular romances featuring Saracen princesses, chapters three and four analyze the varying role of women in the evangelization process through their participation in interfaith marriages and argue for a reassessment of gender roles and a rereading of the Constance figure.
Chapter one outlines the importance of marriage among aristocratic figures, and is the first inquiry into the idea of marriage as a means of or stimulant for conversion. This chapter therefore sets up the main themes with which the subsequent three chapters will be dealing, including parental control over marriage and the important role marriage is imagined to play in the conversion of kingdoms to Christianity. Here, I examine how John Metham’s *Amoryus and Cleopes* responds to a number of issues surrounding the theory and practice of medieval marriage. Though Metham very clearly seems to depict two valid marriages (one pagan, one Christian) taking place between the title characters, in the end he undermines the validity of the pagan marriage by preventing the characters from consummating their relationship until they have been converted to Christianity. Metham relies on Christian principles of marriage to present the pagan marriage as valid. Thus the pagan marriage, although valid according to the Church’s rules, is represented as an imperfect imitation of the later Christian marriage. Furthermore, the Christian marriage serves as a catalyst for the conversion of the entire kingdom. This reading thus enables the discussions of both erotic conversion on a personal scale via marriage and large-scale enforced conversion in the following chapters.

In chapter two, which explores the interfaith marital agreements undertaken by Christian and Saracen figures, I argue that the authors of the Auchinleck *Bevis of Hampton* and the *King of Tars* expressly employ the fears of the Church regarding interfaith personal relationships in their portrayals of both Christian and Saracen figures. Though the Saracens are decidedly Other, these Christian authors imagine their fears to be quite comparable to Christian fears: not only do the Saracens fear the possibility of individual conversion as an effect of interfaith marriage, but their actions also manifest
fears about possible war and enforced conversion of entire nations. Furthermore, there is an emphasis on the impressionability of individuals—the main reason the Church chose to forbid interfaith marriage. Thus, although the Saracens are Other and are represented as such repeatedly throughout the texts, the Christian authors construct the Saracens in their own image—at least with respect to their beliefs and feelings about marriage and their religion. While such constructions emphasize the humanity of Saracens by portraying their fears and desires as similar to those of Christians, any true understanding of medieval Islamic cultural practices is lost: Saracen social institutions are merely considered imperfect imitations of Christian ones, as evidenced by the treatment of marriage. The authors make no attempts to understand how Saracens actually practice marriage; instead, they portray Saracen marriage in these texts solely as an attempt to prevent the introduction and spread of Christianity into Saracen kingdoms. Thus, Saracen marriage is not truly Saracen; rather, it is tainted by the Christian authors who conceive of it as a Saracen response to the Christian colonial desire for the evangelization and conversion of Islamic lands.

Chapters three and four provide the most comprehensive study of gender roles within these portrayals of interfaith marriage. Here, I provide an alternative reading of the well-documented differences in representations of Christian and Saracen heroines in Middle English romance. While postcolonial and feminist critics have noted the overtly masculine portrayal of Saracen heroines who marry Christians in these texts, they have not explicitly considered how the roles these women take on as active evangelists are similar to the roles of Christian princesses in the Constance legends. These chapters examine how both the converted Saracen and Christian Constance figures engage in
evangelism. I argue that figures such as Chaucer’s Custance of the *Man of Law’s Tale* and Gower’s Constance of the *Confessio Amantis*, unwilling participants in interfaith marriages, engage in the conversion process by following the rules of Christian conduct for women. It is through their example of ideal conduct that they are able to influence non-Christian men and women to convert to Christianity. Saracen princesses, on the other hand, such as Floripas in the *Sultan of Babylon*, Josiane in *Bevis of Hampton*, and Marsabelle in *Octavian*, actively seek out Christian husbands. Through their promises to convert for marriage, these women engage in evangelism in the same way as the Saracen men who marry the Constance figures—by enabling the Christians to forcibly convert their Saracen people. Although the methods by which the Constance figures and the Saracen princesses convert others differ markedly, they have in common both their reliance on marriage to enable their participation in the conversion process and their active roles as agents by which conversion can occur. While the Constance figure has been routinely read as an inactive, passive conduit for conversion, my reading suggests that her role is decidedly active and on a par with that of the Saracen princess; the Constance figure simply performs her role through adherence to her Christian education. In the conclusion, however, I examine the problematical image of the Princess of Tars in the *King of Tars*. This Christian princess feigns conversion to Islam, which allows her to convert her husband, but later prompts her husband and her father to forcibly convert the Saracens of Damascus. It is in this portrait, I suggest, that the active roles of the Christian and Saracen princesses are combined into a female champion of Christianity.

My work here differs from previous work in these fields not only because it is specifically focused on how marriage and conversion are imagined to create a cultural
and religious fantasy for Christian authors and their audience, but also because it takes into consideration how gender is imagined as affecting the fulfillment of that colonial religious fantasy. This dissertation will make a vital contribution to the field of medieval postcolonial studies because it engages a topic that critics of other literary periods (sometimes with interests in postcolonialism) have been studying: how intercultural marriage affects individuals and society more generally. Although nineteenth- and twentieth-century scholarship on American literature is rife with discussions of interracial marriage and miscegenation laws and covers interracial sexuality through its discussions of such cultural phenomena as quadroon balls, for the most part medieval scholarship has taken for granted the important role of interfaith marriage (and marriage more generally) in Middle English romance. The arguments I make throughout this dissertation will not only make an important contribution to both the fields of medieval marriage studies and medieval postcolonial studies, but will also provide a significant link between medieval literature and the literature of later literary periods. The romances I examine here have much in common with later texts also interested in intercultural marriage, such as Jean Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea*. There, we see the Creole spouse—the “Other”—dominated by her white English husband and ultimately displaced by Jane Eyre, the new, white, English wife. The issues that this dissertation raises about marriage and how the dominant religious culture uses interfaith marriage to assimilate the Other can be translated to later postcolonial texts, where we can consider how marriage works to assimilate the Other into the dominant culture or, alternatively, as we see in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, to silence and ostracize the Other.
CHAPTER 1: 
CONSENT AND THE MAKING OF ARISTOCRATIC MARRIAGE (AND ITS CONSEQUENCES) IN JOHN METHAM’S AMORYUS AND CLEOPES

In 1215 at the Fourth Lateran Council, the Catholic Church for the first time codified the seven sacraments and set forth some guidelines for the institution of marriage, which it included among the sacraments. Not only were clandestine marriages to be condemned, but other guiding principles, such as the importance of marital banns and freedom from impediment, were implemented. Perhaps the most important policy on marriage to come out of the Fourth Lateran Council, however, was the decision that marriage began at the moment of consent. Although the Church therefore began to recognize the consent of the individuals and strongly favor the role of love within marriage, Church theory did not always reflect marital practice—a fact which many historians have emphasized in their discussions of medieval marriage. My goal in this chapter is to analyze how the theory and practice of marriage intersect in a fifteenth-century adaptation of Ovid’s “Pyramus and Thisbe,” John Metham’s Amoryus and Cleopes. My reason for choosing Metham’s text is that through his representation of two marriages in which the main characters participate, he works to resolve the disparity between the Church’s marriage theory of individual consent and the aristocracy’s and gentry’s marriage practice, which often did not rely on individual consent and instead
required the consent of family and friends to the match. In order to better understand Metham’s attempt to create a marriage which would reconcile the discrepancy between medieval marriage theory and practice, it is first necessary to introduce the differences scholars have recognized between marriage theory and marriage practice in late medieval England, specifically focusing on the issue of individual consent among the aristocracy and gentry. Discussion of these issues, and a treatment of conversion themes in Metham’s narrative, will prepare us well for the representations of marriage in texts treated later in my dissertation.

Even before marriage was officially made a sacrament at the Fourth Lateran Council under Pope Innocent III, during the twelfth century Pope Alexander III had created his own “consent theory of marriage,” evidenced most clearly through his undated *Veniens ad nos* to Bishop John of Norwich, and by which he hoped to “use canon law to influence the course of social development.” Despite Alexander’s familiarity with Gratian’s *Decretum*—he wrote a commentary, the *Summa magistri Rolandi*, on it—and Gratian’s argument that marriage did not occur until the moment of consummation, Alexander supported the idea that marriage began at the moment of present consent, presumably because this “consent theory” was descended from Roman law. However, Roman law’s version of a “consent theory” was quite different from what

---

3 Also important to Alexander’s decision to accept consent over consummation as the moment at which marriage occurs is the marriage of Mary and Joseph. Because their marriage remained unconsummated, theologians and canonists were concerned with ensuring that the canon law on marriage did not neglect to take into consideration this most important marriage in Christian history. The interpretation of Roman marital law that Alexander and other supporters of the “consent theory” of marriage advocated provided them with a way to portray the marriage of Mary and Joseph as fully legitimate.
would become Alexander’s policy, as consent for Romans meant that both the individuals and their families/guardians had to consent. Alexander’s new policy unconventionally negated the need for anyone beyond the two spouses to consent to their marriage, and it has been argued that English spouses in particular took advantage of this ruling in order to escape the pressures and involvement of their families, guardians, and employers by contracting clandestine marriages: “We do know that at least in England [the Alexandrine rules] seem to have had the effect of loosening the grip of families and lords on marriage choices and that at least in part persons entered into the very clandestine marriages of which Alexander disapproved but which he did not hold invalid, in order to escape from that grip.”

Although Charles Donahue Jr. here credits Alexander III’s policy with the introduction of the practice of freedom in marriage choice to England, he is perhaps too optimistic in suggesting that the Alexandrine rules significantly affected the social practice of marriage, specifically among the aristocracy and gentry. As important as the doctrine of free individual consent may seem to the history of medieval Christian marriage, the doctrine was not always practiced, as we shall see.

---

5 Donahue, “The Policy of Alexander III’s Consent Theory of Marriage,” 274-5. Here and in another of Donahue’s articles, “The Canon Law on the Formation of Marriage and Social Practice in the Later Middle Ages,” Journal of Family History 8 (Summer, 1983): 144-58, he suggests that in court evidence from England and France we see many more cases involving *verba de presenti* in England, which indicates that perhaps French parents had greater control over their children’s marriages than English parents. Andrew J. Finch later took issue with Donahue’s analysis of clandestine marriages as useful in allowing lovers to marry without the interference of guardians, arguing that this was too simple an explanation for the phenomenon of clandestine marriage. Instead, Finch argues that clandestine marriages—or even simply claiming to have married clandestinely—afforded many benefits beyond simply escaping the desires of one’s parents. In France, for example, women who had engaged in sexual relations with a man who later argued against their marriage could receive monetary compensation for their seduction and subsequent “defloration.” See Andrew J. Finch, “Parental Authority and the Problem of Clandestine Marriage in the Later Middle Ages,” Law and History Review (1990): 189-204.
6 While I mention both aristocratic and gentry marriages here, it is quite likely that even members of the gentry had more choice in marriage partners than did members of the aristocracy. What is true of the aristocracy is generally true of the gentry, but gentry parents may have had a little less control over their daughters than aristocratic parents, which is evidenced by the example of Margery Paston and Richard Calle discussed later in this chapter.
A more comprehensive overview of the changes that marriage went through during the twelfth century, and just prior to the Fourth Lateran Council, is provided by Michael M. Sheehan, who, like Donahue, believes in the importance of the introduction of the “consent theory.” Sheehan summarizes the significant changes to the canon law of marriage thus:

1) The matrimonial bond was created by consent; neither consummation nor formality of any kind was required for validity. 2) It was the consent of the couple that created the marriage bond. Whatever the role of the family or the lord may have been, it was secondary and dispensable. 3) It was preferred that the marriage bond be created in a public setting but, inasmuch as external formalities were developed and imposed, they were located within neither familial nor seigniorial structures, but in the local community considered in its religious or parochial capacity. 4) There was a desire to internalize the marriage relationship. Theologians emphasized the bond of charity between the spouses and the possibility of its growth as a reason for their choice of each other. 5) Throughout the discussion by both canonists and theologians the point of view was one that focused on the couple: by and large, lordship was ignored; the wider family circle and even the children born to the couple received little attention.7

What is important to glean from this overview of marriage as theorized in the twelfth century is the interest in the intimacy of the sacrament of marriage. With no requirement for familial permission or public witnesses—although both may be considered desirable—the sacrament took on a greater sense of intimacy, at least in theory. It is of course important to remember that this summary is theory, and does not necessarily reflect practice. In fact, R. H. Helmholz indicates that quite often parents or other guardians became involved in secular marriage contracts, primarily concerned with property; on the other hand, they became involved in what he designates “spiritual

contracts” (ecclesiastical contracts) only as “objectors to a union.”

“Objecting to a union” could mean a variety of things, but the most common assumption would be that some sort of impediment to the marriage existed. One interesting case of objection to a union that Shannon McSheffrey cites occurred during the calling of banns: a young woman’s father objected to the union, stating that banns should not be called until the potential spouses were “better agreed.” Though the case does not specify what was meant by “better agreed” (melius concordati), it seems likely that the father’s objection was made due to the fact that an adequate agreement over property had not yet been reached between the families.

The interest of aristocratic parents and guardians in their children’s marriages is a well-accepted fact of medieval history that likely interfered with the newly adopted “consent theory” of marriage. Early in the Middle Ages, marriages arranged between spouses within the same aristocratic family were quite common, so at the Fourth Lateran Council the Church also set forth guidelines on consanguinity to prevent marriages between relatives too closely related. The rules on spiritual affinity were also created to prevent marriages solely based on family connections. Georges Duby famously argued that twelfth-century France witnessed two competing models of marriage, the

---


9 See Shannon McSheffrey, Marriage, Sex, and Civic Culture in Late Medieval London (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2006): 37. McSheffrey does not speculate on the cause of the reclamation, but does suggest that it was for a non-canonical reason.

10 The new guidelines stated that spouses could not be related within four degrees; in other words, they could not share a great-great-grandparent. Prior to the Fourth Lateran Council, the impediment of consanguinity at some times extended to the seventh degree. The ruling of the Fourth Lateran Council that relaxed the prohibition of marriage from seven to four degrees primarily occurred because it could be very difficult to judge and restrict relations beyond the fourth degree.

11 The guidelines on spiritual affinity were that marriages could not occur between a child and any member of his/her godparents’ families or his/her in-laws.
ecclesiastical and the aristocratic.\textsuperscript{12} His thesis suggested that the medieval Church began its attempt to regulate marriage and enforce rules about consanguinity for its own gain; in other words, by forcing aristocrats to engage in exogamy, the Church would also break up some of the greatest family-held lands—which remained within the same family through intrafamilial marriage, or endogamy—and perhaps guarantee itself some share of these lands through wills. This argument, while intriguing, is of course not unproblematic. Duby sees these two models of marriage as cut-and-dried binaries; his analysis is based on either/or categories: secular aristocratic marriage allows divorce, while ecclesiastical marriage does not; love is prized in ecclesiastical marriage but not in secular aristocratic marriage, etcetera. Duby’s argument that the Church desired to control marriage because it was such an important social institution which regulated aristocratic wealth fails to consider other important aspects of marriage, such as its inclusion among the sacraments. Though unofficial until 1215, the idea that marriage should be considered a sacrament was prevalent, and while Duby does discuss marriage’s sacramental nature, he does not consider that the Church’s decision to draft ecclesiastical rules concerning marriage may have much more to do with marriage’s sacramental nature, which would soon become official, than with its desire to regulate sexuality and its greed for the wealth of aristocratic families.

However, the Church’s attempts to prevent marriage between (or within) aristocratic families purely for the transfer of land and property were not completely successful. In her book on marital practice in fifteenth-century London, Shannon

McSheffrey claims that parental involvement was common in all classes of society, but especially among the aristocracy and gentry: “There was probably a correlation between the amount of property that changed hands on the occasion of a marriage and the level of control or influence exerted by third parties in the making of a marital bond.”¹³ Thus, while marriage theoretically was supposed to be based on mutual love and the desire of both individuals to proceed to marriage, among the aristocracy and gentry the potential for wealth and family connections mattered at least as much, if not more so.

Part of the Church’s attempt to curb the number of aristocratic marriages occurring for familial gain in favor of marriage based on its own theory of free choice can be related to its efforts to promote the concept of maritalis affectio, or marital affection as descended from Roman marriage law, which suggested that the Church valued the idea of love and choice of marriage partner above all else, but most specifically, above marriage for monetary or property gain.¹⁴ The interest in marital affection was also tied to the sacramental nature of marriage, which was now clearly representative of the bond between Christ and his Church. David D’Avray’s work on “marriage symbolism” credits this comparison with establishing the importance of monogamy and indissolubility in marital relationships. Though D’Avray traces the concept of marriage symbolism through many different religions, he claims that this symbolic view of marriage took hold in

¹³ Shannon McSheffrey, *Marriage, Sex, and Civic Culture in Late Medieval London*, 78.
Christianity during the thirteenth century primarily due to the proliferation of preaching among friars and the advocacy of celibacy among the religious.\(^\text{15}\) Because marriage was now symbolic of the union of Christ and his Church, which was clearly based on love, and because it was now indissoluble, canon lawyers and theologians began to argue that marriage should be based on *maritalis affectio* and, thus, individual, free consent, as it was this that actually made a marriage.\(^\text{16}\)

The “consent theory” or model of marriage that became the basis for the major changes in marriage in the Middle Ages arose out of a twelfth-century debate among canonists and theologians, and is perhaps most commonly represented as a debate between the followers of Gratian and the followers of Peter Lombard. While Gratian advocated the idea that a marriage was not fulfilled until the moment of consummation, Peter Lombard (among others) disagreed, claiming that marriage was fulfilled at the moment of present consent—through *verba de presenti*—by the spouses.\(^\text{17}\) Part of the reasoning for such a distinction was due to the “problematic” marriage of Mary and Joseph: since their marriage was unconsummated, the moment of the sacramental bond could not possibly have been the moment of consummation.


\(^{16}\) Neil Cartlidge has argued that this recognition of the emotional value of marriage was also reflected in religious literature of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in which marriage played a thematic role. See *Medieval Marriage: Literary Approaches 1100-1300* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1997).

\(^{17}\) *Verba de presenti* work in direct contrast to *verba de futuro* in making a medieval marriage. *Verba de presenti*, or “words of present consent” immediately make a legally binding marriage. *Verba de futuro*, or words of future consent, however, indicate only that the potential spouses are promising to marry at some point in the future. Thus, the marriage is not an immediately legally binding contract. If, however, *verba de futuro* are exchanged between two potential spouses and intercourse follows, the marriage is made legally binding because the carnal union is considered indicative of present consent. One of the major problems posed by these two different marriage formulas in England was the English language, which had no obvious future tense. Thus, sometimes people who meant to exchange only *verba de futuro* actually exchanged *verba de presenti*, with the effect that the marriage became binding and could be argued as such before the court.
By following the policy set forth by Alexander III and supported by Peter Lombard and making the moment of consent the moment at which the sacramental bond was made and the marriage was completed, the Church perhaps created even more problems than it solved. Not only could marriages continue to take place outside of the Church in clandestine conditions (even though such marriages had been condemned in 1215, and were sometimes punished\(^{18}\)), but spouses could also marry without witnesses or the knowledge or interference of anyone else. Marriage and family historians have argued that choice of marriage partner caused the early idea of the extended family to develop into the Western concept of the nuclear family with which we are so familiar today, but such a view drastically overlooks the divergence between theory and practice that scholars and historians of medieval marriage have recently documented.\(^{19}\) The movement from the extended family to the nuclear family cannot simply be attributed to the “consent theory” of marriage in which one can choose one’s marriage partner because of the extent to which other parties beyond the potential spouses played roles in the marriage process.

While scholars such as Donahue have argued that clandestine marriage and present consent offered spouses freedom of choice and freedom from parental or guardian involvement in their marriages, McSheffrey argues that conditional consent—in which one potential spouse consents to marriage on the condition that her (as conditional consent was usually exercised by women) parents or other interested parties consent to

---


\(^{19}\) I am thinking here specifically of the work of Shannon McSheffrey, Conor McCarthy, and R.H. Helmholz, who all write about the differences between theory and practice and note the common inclusion of friends and family members in the marriage-making process, who could ultimately influence the spouse to marry an appropriately chosen partner rather than allow her to choose her own partner freely.
the match as well—afforded freedom, or at the very least, flexibility, in marriage choice.
Citing some court cases involving conditional consent during the fifteenth century in
England, McSheffrey suggests that a woman using conditional consent experienced
greater freedom or flexibility because she was not only able to prolong making a final
decision by claiming she must ask her family and/or friends, but she could also continue
negotiations with multiple suitors and possibly benefit both financially and emotionally,
from the extra time.\(^{20}\) R. H. Helmholz’s research indicates that the most common
conditions surrounding issues of consent were those involving the acquiescence of
parents.\(^{21}\) Thus, despite the promotion of this “theological right to freedom of choice,”\(^{22}\)
families and even employers continued to become involved in prospective marriages.
McSheffrey argues that individual, private consent was not so clearly practiced and
advocated, but rather that “bonds of marriage and sex were simultaneously intimate,
deeply personal ties and matters of public concern, subject to intervention by everyone
from a woman’s or man’s family, friends, and employers to the mayor of London
himself.”\(^{23}\) Nowhere, perhaps, do we see more confirmation of others’ involvement than
in the documented evidence of court cases and remaining first-hand accounts of letter
writers.

While historians have compiled much information about marital practices among
all social classes in late medieval England from both ecclesiastical and secular court

\(^{20}\) Shannon McSheffrey, *Marriage, Sex, and Civic Culture in Late Medieval London*, 88-91. The financial
and emotional benefits could occur in a variety of ways after the conditional consent; McSheffrey suggests
that financial benefits could occur if several suitors were pursuing the same woman, who was then able to
take some extra time to try to arrange the best financial match, while a conditional statement could prevent
the feelings of a suitor the woman did not desire from being hurt by a blatant rejection.
\(^{21}\) See R. H. Helmholz, “Marriage Contracts in Medieval England,” 266.
\(^{22}\) This phrase is McSheffrey’s; see *Marriage, Sex, and Civic Culture in Late Medieval London*, 76.
\(^{23}\) McSheffrey, *Marriage, Sex, and Civic Culture in Late Medieval London*, 4.
records, we also have first-hand literary evidence from those actually involved in making marriages. Collections of family letters among gentry and aristocratic families can provide us with important information about the actual practice of marriage in medieval England. Marriages are discussed in many of the fifteenth-century Paston, Stonor, and Plumpton family letters, and here we can see the issues of property, familial and individual consent, and arranged and clandestine marriage played out. The effect of these marital issues on the family surrounding the potential spouses is evident in the letters, which suggests that marriage was much more public and less individualistic than Church doctrine states it should be.

The Plumpton letter and paper collection originating from Yorkshire, and the family biography generally, contain fascinating details about the contracting of marriages between gentry families. In this collection, we find that family involvement was considered integral in marriages. Not only did the potential spouses need approval by family members, but the spouses’ potential income was commonly at issue as well. For example, in several letters exchanged between cousins Edward and Robert Plumpton, we see Edward trying to convince Robert of Edward’s choice of a widow, Agnes, as his marriage partner. Not only does he seek Robert’s approval of Agnes, but he also requests that Robert grant him money so that he can complete the match, as Agnes’ friends desire that she receive more money than he has. We also discover that Robert was involved in Edward’s first marriage, as Edward reminds Robert that he had given him money to make a match with his first wife.  

24 Though Edward reveals in this letter that he and Agnes “are

agreed in onn mynd & all one,” the outcome of their marriage depends entirely upon the exchange of money and property and the approval of both Agnes’ friends and Robert Plumpton. The subsequent letter in the collection, which followed only eight days after the first, is also from Edward to Robert, in which Edward again goes over the details of what he needs to make the match, though this time he specifies that the money he requires is for a yearly annuity for Agnes during her lifetime. It becomes clear that this support is a matter of urgency to Edward, who writes Robert again only nine days later, reiterating the same points made in the first two letters and requesting that Robert reply with haste. What is interesting about this third letter is Edward’s discussion of Agnes’ friends who have set the price for the match: Edward claims that her friends who are involved in the match will not be so involved in their married life, and that any promises Robert makes now to help Edward attain this match Edward can later “relesse & vnbind.” What we are to gather from this series of letters is the belief that individual, free consent is not acceptable in contracting a marriage in the gentry class; instead, marriage is viewed not just as an exchange of consent between the prospective husband and wife, but as a negotiation that requires the assent of their friends and relatives as well.

The genealogical details of the Plumpton family can also relate important information about the difference between theory and practice in real-life marriages of the fifteenth century. The marital maneuvers of the first patriarch of the family, William Plumpton, are rather intriguing, as he was betrothed to Elizabeth Stapleton at twelve years old by his parents, and upon Elizabeth’s death he lived with a woman, Joan

Wintringham, to whom he later claimed he had been married clandestinely for years.\textsuperscript{27} Despite the fact that William acted independently by marrying Joan clandestinely, he proceeded to match his own ten children—three sons and seven daughters—with spouses based on what would best benefit the Plumpton family. Joan Kirby attributes this goal of marrying his children well to the political climate of fifteenth-century Yorkshire: “with predators always on the lookout for chinks in the security of titles, and the hazards of a political crisis…that aggravated the discords and uncertainties of a society based on land Sir William forged defensive alliances with important local families through the marriages of his three sons and seven daughters.”\textsuperscript{28} Keith Dockray even claims that William Plumpton’s marital negotiations were made with a “malign hand.”\textsuperscript{29} Not only did William Plumpton negotiate the betrothal of his young son Robert to Elizabeth Clifford (then six years old), he also added a clause to the negotiations so that if Robert died leaving Elizabeth a widow, his younger son William would be forced to marry Elizabeth. Upon his son William’s death, the elder William Plumpton even went so far as to contract a marriage for his as-yet-underage granddaughters with very financially eligible heirs, with the promise that all of his estate would be left to them—a promise which would leave the son by his clandestine marriage with nothing but an annuity. Upon rethinking his decision, which required that any son he had would become a ward of one of the families to whom he had betrothed his granddaughters, he proceeded to prove

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{27} In the appendix of her edition of the Plumpton letters, Joan Kirby cites evidence given before the York civil court by Robert Littester, who claimed that William Plumpton had told him of his true marriage to Joan and asked Robert to attest to its validity should he die in battle. See Joan Kirby, ed., \textit{The Plumpton Letters and Papers}, 261.
\item \textsuperscript{28} Kirby, \textit{The Plumpton Letters and Papers}, 4.
\end{itemize}
through testimony of a witness that he had indeed married Joan and that his son was legitimate. 30 According to Kirby, in the process of validating his marriage and legitimating his son so that he would have an inheritance, William “subjected his second wife to years of humiliation…and defrauded his granddaughters.” 31 Thus, even in studying a single male’s marital maneuvers, both for himself and his children and grandchildren, we can see that there was a constant tension between marriage theory and marriage practice, but it becomes apparent that social practice and customs which involved parents and negotiations of finances and property generally won out over the Church’s theory that marriage should be based on love and free choice when marriages were actually made.

While the Plumpton letters and papers reveal much about the extent to which family and friends were involved in the marriage making process, the Stonor family letters additionally reveal much about the importance of property and position in gentry marriages. The letters which discuss marriage in the Stonor papers are clearly most concerned with the transfer of property and position, which were incredibly important to the family as Christine Carpenter notes: “All three of William Stonor’s marriages had been made for money or position…Matches were arranged on a commercial footing.” 32 Although scholars have noted that there is more concern for, or at least acknowledgement of, feelings of love and affection in the letters between William and his wives, we

---

31 Kirby, The Plumpton Letters and Papers, 7-9. Dockray’s feelings on the subject are somewhat stronger; he claims “Sir William Plumpyon’s callous disregard for the feelings of his children, his overriding greed, and his downright dishonesty when dealing with the Rocliffes and Suthills were, in fact, ultimately to prove the family’s undoing (as the letters make only too abundantly clear).” See “Why Did Fifteenth-Century English Gentry Marry?: The Pastons, Plumptons and Stonors Reconsidered,” 67.
continue to see the involvement of parents and friends in assenting to and creating marriages for would-be spouses and even children.\textsuperscript{33}

As we saw in Edward Plumpton’s letters to Robert Plumpton, in the Stonor collection we find potential marriages discussed in terms of what friends will think of the match. In Thomas Mull’s letter to William Stonor, for example, Thomas discusses what his potential bride’s friends expect her to receive for a marriage. Because she can receive a certain amount from another suitor, she tells Thomas that she must not receive less than that from him because her friends would think her unwise.\textsuperscript{34} Despite the fact that the bride may prefer Thomas to this other suitor, she cannot, or at least will not, marry him without the approval of her friends. Yet again, the focus is on the approval of friends of the match—an approval that seems unable to be achieved without a significant promise of money for the potential bride.

While we are able to see the importance of the involvement of friends who look after the financial well-being of the bride through both the Plumpton and Stonor letters, we are also able to see the first-hand involvement of mothers and fathers in arranging marriages for their children. The Stonor letters present marriage matches as “dinner conversation” among the parents of quite young children, as evidenced by Elizabeth Stonor’s letter to her husband. Here, we see Elizabeth report to her husband a proposal from a young boy’s parents for her underage daughter that took place during a dinner party. Elizabeth reveals that she would not agree to the match without first discussing it

\textsuperscript{33} Both Christine Carpenter in her introduction to the edition of the letters and Keith Dockray note that there is some expression of feeling exchanged in some of the Stonor letters. Though Carpenter claims it is only visible in William’s exchanges with his second wife Agnes, Dockray suggests that affection is expressed in letters between William and all three of his wives. See Carpenter, “Introduction,” v. I, 19; and Dockray, “Why Did Fifteenth-Century English Gentry Marry?: The Pastons, Plumptons and Stonors Revisited,” 69-70.

with her husband, even though the daughter is from her previous marriage. The words she uses in the letter indicate that the young girl has no say, and that it is up to the parents to come to an arrangement:

And þer was at dyner with hym þe frendys of ȝe childe which was movid for oone of my doþers at your last beyng heere. And so at after dyner þey hadde þere comunycation for þe said mateer, wherby I understode þer disposiuctions how þat þey were disposid in the said mateer. And truly hit was nothyng as hit was spokyn of at þe begynnyng: wherefore I answeryd and said in þis wyse: that þoo she were my childe, as she is, I coulde not answere that mateer without yow nor noght wolde doo. How be hit, I answeryd in your byhalf: that I wyster ryght well þat ȝe wolde be ryght kind and lovyng ffadir, yif God ffortunyd that ye and they shulde dele.35

Elizabeth divulges two things here: first, that the marriage between her daughter and this other “childe” had been discussed before, but that the latest negotiations were possibly less satisfactory; and second, that even a stepfather could have more influence in choosing a potential spouse than the girl herself.

Through the Plumpton and Stonor letter collections, then, we are able to gauge the relative importance of theory versus practice in marriage-making. As the letters show, among gentry families the social practice of marriage, which involved the approval of family members and friends, and advancement through titles, positions, and property, prevailed over the Church’s theory that marriage should be based on love rather than potential gain. My intent is not to generalize that love and arranged marriage are completely incompatible, however, for some of the letters from the Paston family—the letters to which we shall now turn to analyze further the importance of the consent of

others in the making of marriage—do in fact prove that love can occur within arranged marriage.\textsuperscript{36}

Analyzing the marital content of the most well-known letter collection of fifteenth-century England, the Paston letters, H.S. Bennett takes this view a step further, characterizing the representation of fifteenth-century gentry marriages in the letter collection as monetary transactions often undertaken for the good of the parents rather than the good of their children.\textsuperscript{37} While Bennett may be overstating the parents’ reasons for becoming involved in their children’s marriages, his claim that families were more often than not involved in choosing their children’s spouses attests to the importance of consent beyond that of the individual spouses among upper-class families.

Bennett discusses the Paston family’s forays into marriage negotiations as monetary or material transactions. He presents Agnes Paston as a woman most concerned with furthering her family’s holdings, and argues that the marriage of Margaret Mauteby and John Paston was a specific goal of Agnes and her husband: “The Pastons, like very many others, were intent on increasing their lands and possessions, and a marriage such as this was all part of the plan by which the family hoped to take a prominent place among the Norfolk gentry.”\textsuperscript{38} Because both the spouse and his/her family benefited from a particularly attractive match, families which hoped to secure a position of prominence were undoubtedly more interested in their children’s potential to secure good spouses, and thus \textit{maritalis affectio} may not have been considered as important as dower or family

\textsuperscript{36} I am thinking here specifically of the Valentine letters between Margery Brews and John Paston III, which prove that love is possible even in arranged marriage and suggest that the parents’ and friends’ arrangement of a marriage is not always incompatible with the desires of the potential spouses.
\textsuperscript{38} Bennett, \textit{The Pastons and Their England}, 27.
name. While the Pastons’ stake in the marriage of Margaret and John was clear—this marriage would help the Pastons to rise among the gentry families in their area—in later marriages we see discussed in the text, particularly in the case of Margery Paston and Richard Calle, there seems to be a balance of concern for the good of the family and for the good of the child/spouse.

The marriage of Margery Paston and Richard Calle is perhaps the most well-known discussion of marriage in a letter collection. Here, we see the problems that aristocratic and gentry families had with individual consent and clandestine marriage. In this case, Margery Paston and Richard Calle, a servant of the Paston family, have contracted a clandestine marriage which infuriates the Pastons, who have better expectations for their daughter and sister. Indeed, John Paston, Margery’s eldest brother, angrily wrote upon hearing the news of Margery’s clandestine marriage, “and my fadyr, whom God asoyle, wer alyve and had consentyd [to the marriage], and my modyr and ye [his younger brother John] bothe, he shold never have my good wyll for to make my sustyr to selle kandyll and mustard in Framly[n]gham.”

Margery’s mother’s anger causes her to refuse to receive Margery into the Paston household. Clearly there were prohibitions against secret, non-family-approved marriages, at least within the Paston family.

Not only do we uncover much about the family’s involvement—or at least the family’s desire to be involved—in the making of a marriage through the situation of Margery and Richard, but we also learn about the involvement of Church officials when a marriage was challenged. What is particularly intriguing about this case is the

40 The Paston Letters, 75-6.
involvement of Bishop Walter Lyhert in questioning Margery—presumably at her mother’s request—and her defiant responses to his questions:

And the bysschop seyd to here ryth pleynly, and put here in rememberawns how sche was born, wat kyn and frenddys that sche had, and xuld have mo yf sche were rulyd and gydyd aftyre them; and yf sche ded not, wat rebuke and schame and los yt xuld be to here yf sche were not gydyd by them, and cause of foresaky[n]g of here fore any good ore helpe ore kownikfort that sche xuld have of hem; and seyd that he had hard sey that sche loved sche on that here frend were not plesyd wyth that sche xuld have, and therefore he bad here be ryth weel avysyd how sche ded, and seyd that he wouold wndyrstond the worddys that sche had seyd to hym, wheythere yt mad matramony ore not. And sche rehersyd wat sche had seyd, and seyd yf thoo worddys mad yt not suhere, sche seyd boldly that sche wold make yt suerhere ore than sche went thens; fore sche sayd sche thowthe in here conschens sche was bownd, watsoevere the worddys wern.

Despite Margery’s mother Margaret’s protestation, the Bishop calls Margery and Richard each before him to hear the exact words they exchanged so he can determine whether a clandestine marriage was contracted. While the Bishop’s decision is not revealed in this letter—indeed, Margery’s own words may prevent his decision from mattering, for she claims that she will speak whatever words necessary to make the marriage right then and there—what is revealed is his remarkable preference for the involvement of Margery’s family and friends in making her marriage. Because the Church, according to its doctrine on marriage, advocated the concept of *maritalis affectio* and ultimately individual consent, it is striking that the Bishop of Norwich here reprimands Margery for choosing her mate based on love rather than her family and friends’ advice. The Bishop’s position as a member of the clergy and his preference for the involvement of Margery’s friends

---

41 The involvement of a Bishop in a marital case was exclusive to the aristocracy and gentry; generally, disputes among the lower classes were taken to the ecclesiastical court. Lyhert was Bishop of Norwich from 1446-72.

42 *Paston Letters*, 75.
and family suggests that the clergy sometimes aligned itself with the desires of the aristocracy. His preference for a combination of canon law—acknowledging that *verba de presenti* ultimately make a marriage between two consenting individuals—and social practice—advocating the involvement of Margery Paston’s family and friends—in making a marriage brings us to the main point of this chapter, analyzing the intersection of canon law on marriage and social marital practice in a fifteenth-century English text in which aristocratic marriage plays a pivotal role.

The issues surrounding the practice of marriage made their way into many medieval texts; one need only think of the Wife of Bath’s assertion that she had five husbands “at church door.” George Kittredge and Henry Ansgar Kelly have written at length about the prevalence of marriage issues in Chaucer’s canon, while M. Teresa Tavormina has written about marriage as an overarching theme in *Piers Plowman.* Literary scholars have pointed out the deliberate references to actual marriage practices in these texts, while history scholars have discussed the differences between marital theory—created by canonists and theologians, who most often did not marry—and marital practice among all societal classes. What I plan to show here is how a mid-fifteenth-century English writer familiar with and writing for the aristocracy and gentry maneuvers between marital theory and practice. In his attempt to balance the importance of theory and practice in making marriages, we find that the marital theory of the

---

canonists and theologians is questioned and largely rejected in favor of common social practice, and that this is done for the benefit of the aristocracy—the patrons and readers of this text. More importantly, this chapter will demonstrate the significant role aristocratic marriage plays in medieval romance and will argue that its importance is determined because the consequences of such marriages affect the kingdom at large—not just the individual spouses and their immediate families.

The text I intend to look at here as representative of this questioning of the practicalities of marital theory is John Metham’s 1449 text *Amoryus and Cleopes*. Metham’s text is useful for this study of the intersection of theory and practice because we see Metham trying ultimately to balance the involvement of theory and practice in his representation of aristocratic marriage. While he permits a clandestine marriage based on love to occur between his hero and heroine, which allows them freedom of choice and therefore follows marital theory as set forth by the Church, he restricts their ability to act freely as spouses because of their aristocratic responsibilities. It is not until their marriage is publicly legitimated by the involvement of the kingdom’s citizens—and the use of Christian marriage law—that Amoryus and Cleopes are able to act as spouses. Thus, what we see occurring in Metham’s text is his attempt to resolve the disparity between the Church’s concept of love within marriage, and therefore choice of partner, and the social aristocratic practice of marriage, which favored collaboration and involvement of friends and family. Because Amoryus and Cleopes are the children of the rulers of the kingdom, their marriage, more than the aristocratic marriages of others, must also benefit the citizens of the kingdom. For this reason, Metham rejects the significance of the clandestine marriage they contract individually and without regard for the input of others
(or, perhaps, which they contract despite their concern that others will not approve). So, although Metham appreciates the Church’s view that marriage should be based on love, he supports the social aristocratic customs and practices which dictate that marriage should be undertaken for the benefit of those around them—here, particularly the citizens of the kingdom—and thus does not allow the full recognition of their marriage until the marriage benefits not just them. However, Metham proves wrong those scholars who have claimed that love could not be imagined within marriage or that marriage for love did not exist during the Middle Ages, for he finds a way to balance love and responsibility in the marriage of his hero and heroine. The most important aspect of the aristocratic marriage that occurs in his text, however, is the conversion of both spouses and the influence their conversion and marriage has on their kingdom: every single citizen is converted to Christianity through the example and marriage of Amoryus and Cleopes.

There has not been much scholarly attention focused on Amoryus and Cleopes; in fact, besides the two editions of the text (Stephen F. Page’s 1999 edition and Hardin Craig’s 1916 edition), there are only two articles entirely devoted to the study of the text, one of which is authored by Page. The focus of both articles is comparing Metham’s style and content with that of Geoffrey Chaucer, particularly his Troilus and Criseyde. While this comparison is indeed important and useful—in fact, Page insists that

Metham’s text is integral to understanding the fifteenth-century reception of Chaucer\textsuperscript{45}—such comparative or intertextual scholarship does not take into account Metham’s innovation in making the Pyramus-and-Thisbe tale relevant to his fifteenth-century audience beyond reading it as a response to Chaucer. Roger Dalrymple, for example, suggests that Metham ties up Chaucer’s loose ends in \textit{Troilus} by providing a story that is quite concerned with harmony, and that his “instinct to harmonise Chaucer”\textsuperscript{46} squares with the common fifteenth-century reception of Chaucer. If we look beyond how Metham draws from and responds to Chaucer (and Lydgate), however, we are able to see that he is both commenting on a very important institution of social life—marriage—and responding to the various ecclesiastical and social theories and practices surrounding that institution of which his aristocratic patrons and readers would have been well aware.

In \textit{Amoryus and Cleopes}, Metham particularly betrays his concerns about the practice of individual consent in making a marriage. As a member of the extended Stapleton family of East Anglia, and possibly its secretary,\textsuperscript{47} Metham must have been fully attuned to the importance aristocrats placed on marriage. His own relationship with the Stapleton family was likely entirely dependent on the intermarriage of the Metham and Stapleton families, as Page claims in his introduction to the text.\textsuperscript{48} Thus, Metham would have been completely familiar with—and may have even endorsed—the aristocratic notion that marriage should be based on position, influence, and wealth rather than simply love between the potential spouses.

\textsuperscript{45} Page, “Introduction,” \textit{Amoryus and Cleopes}, 1.
\textsuperscript{46} Roger Dalrymple, “\textit{Amoryus and Cleopes}: John Metham’s Metamorphosis of Ovid and Chaucer,” 158.
Through the secret relationship of Amoryus and Cleopes, Metham explores the role of individual consent in the making of marriage. Though the Church has by this point in time established quite clearly that it advocates the role of love in marriage—the idea of *maritalis affectio*—Metham is nonetheless writing for a noblewoman for whom the arrangement of marriage may very well have been based on family connections rather than marital affection. Lady Katherine de la Pole Stapleton is revealed in the text as Metham’s patron for this work. Katherine was married to Sir Miles Stapleton after the death of his first wife, and by 1449 the couple had two daughters. Like the Plumptons, Stonors, and Pastons, the Stapletons must have had an interest in the marriages of their daughters, Elizabeth and Joan. Despite the fact that the Stapleton daughters must have been quite young at the time Metham wrote *Amoryus and Cleopes*—Katherine de la Pole had married Miles Stapleton only a decade or so earlier—their youth would not have prevented their aristocratic parents from beginning to think about their marriages, as evidence from the letters of the gentry families suggests. Marriage was commonly discussed and thought about well before children were of marriageable age. Thus, the issue of marriage would likely have been of interest to the Stapleton family, and perhaps particularly the issue of individual versus familial consent.

---

49 Also of note is Katherine de la Pole Stapleton’s later marriage to Richard Harcourt, who both wrote and received letters from the Stonor family.

50 See, for example, the example in the Stonor letters, when Elizabeth Stonor writes to her husband William about a proposal for their daughter’s marriage. Editor Christine Carpenter states that the daughter in question must have been a “mere chil[d].” See The Stonor Letters and Papers, v. II, 18-19. The case of William Plumpton’s first marriage, which was arranged when his fiancée was only six, and William’s arrangement for both his young sons and his granddaughters also attest to the frequency that marriages were thought about and discussed well before children were legally of marriageable age.

51 We do have some information about Elizabeth and Joan’s subsequent marriages. Joan married Christopher Harcourt, the son of her future stepfather Richard, prior to 1474, and bore three sons. See Arthur Collins, The peerage of England; containing a genealogical and historical account of all the peers of that Kingdom, Also their paternal coats of arms, 5th ed., vol. 5 (London: 1779): 268. Elizabeth, meanwhile, was married to John Fortescue. See Collins, The peerage of England, vol. 7, 394.
Through his depiction of Amoryus’ and Cleopes’ relationship, Metham tries to weigh the importance of both *maritalis affectio* and the common aristocratic concerns about marriage, such as whether it will benefit the family and here, more significantly, whether it will benefit the kingdom. Throughout the text, Metham suggests that aristocratic responsibility takes precedence over love, which leads him to downplay the role of individual consent in the making of marriage.

Quite early in the text, we are introduced to the notion that with nobility comes responsibility and part of that responsibility, Metham suggests, is to marry well. No doubt responsibility was also important to his aristocratic patrons, as Metham betrays his obsession—and maybe that of his patrons—with aristocratic lineage especially in his conclusion to the text, where he praises his patron, Lady Katherine de la Pole Stapleton, and her husband, Sir Miles Stapleton. In this conclusion, he alludes to the fact that since an effect of marriage is to produce offspring, the better lineage one has, the better his/her descendents will turn out:

But trwth yt ys that a gret rootyd tre
Durabyl frute beryth; of this knyght, I mene, nobyl of lynnage,
The qwyche decendyth of a gretyd aunsetré
Of nobyl werrourrys that successively, be veray maryage,
The to and fyfty knyght ys computate to hys age,
Home God hath induyd wyth alle maner of sufycyauns
So dyscrete therwyth that abyl he ys an hole reme to have in governauns.⁵²

Here, Metham praises the “veray maryage” that has brought forth the noble line of Stapletons. It is not entirely clear what Metham means by the word “veray”; Page at least daughters did well in marrying, and it is not unlikely that Miles and Katherine were interested in their potential mates quite early.

glosses it as meaning “true.” But in the context, there are other possible definitions that could also work. I would like to propose another possibility here. The *Middle English Dictionary* claims that “veray” can mean “lawful, valid” and “legitimate.”

This definition seems like it would fit well here since Metham spends much of the text exploring canonically valid versus publicly legal and legitimate marriage. Perhaps then it is Metham’s goal to distinguish the marriages of the Stapleton line as having gone through both the important social and ecclesiastical conditions of marriage.

Not only do we find that the Stapleton lineage is worthy of noble marriage, but we also find that Katherine de la Pole comes from noble stock herself. Metham seems especially impressed with Katherine’s lineage, as she is closely descended from William, Duke of Suffolk:

> But this knyght despousyd had a lady,  
> Havyng decens by ryght lynage  
> Of that wurthy and excellent stok lineally  
> That Poolys men clepe, to duke Wylyam as by cosynnage  
> Ryght nece; that of Suffolk first successyvely  
> Was bothe fyrst markeys and duke; and be this remembrauns  
> Ye may noght fayl qwat kyng had than Englond in governauns. (2150-6)

The way that Miles’ choice of Katherine as a marriage partner is represented here suggests that it was based entirely on Katherine’s bloodline. Because she was closely related to William, Duke of Suffolk, a marriage to her and heirs produced by her would create important aristocratic and political connections for the Stapletons. What is jarring about these descriptions of the Stapleton marriages is that they are completely focused on the lineage created by the unions; Metham says nothing about love. Though he praises Miles and Katherine individually—Miles for his great qualities as a warrior,

---

53 See *MED*, s.v. “veray,” 2b and 2c.  
54 It should be noted that although Metham calls her William’s “nece,” she was actually his first cousin.
and Katherine for her great qualities as a woman and advocate for the poor—he never
mentions their love for each other or the greatness of their union beyond its obvious
ability to produce great heirs. This in turn suggests that Metham views their marriage as
great because it combines the noble lineage of each; since Miles had no children with his
first wife, his heirs would come from this union of two lines which combined martial and
political prowess and power. Love perhaps seems less important in this context.

Metham’s obsession with lineage and descent becomes most clear, however,
when he discusses his own ancestry. In the last lines of the manuscript, which are
partially obscured due to erasure, Metham claims that his father was “be ryght
consangwynyté, / Decendyd fro the fyrst Alyscounder Metham, the knight” (2218-19).
By revealing his own noble ties, an effect of which may be to gain some sort of authority
for himself as a writer, he indicates that socially one’s genealogy is of the utmost
importance—a theme which he continually references throughout the text. While
Metham waits until the end of the text to praise the lineage of his patrons and even
himself, from the beginning of the text he alludes to the importance he places on lineage
and aristocratic connections.

A good way to begin the discussion of Amoryus’ and Cleopes’ relationship, then,
is to look at their individual, though very similar, genealogies, which Metham introduces
within the first fifty lines of the text. As he introduces Dydas and Palamedon, the dual
rulers of Albynest hand-picked by Nero and the fathers of Cleopes and Amoryus
respectively, it becomes immediately clear to the reader that for Metham, lineage is
particularly important in the marriages of rulers. Though Nero first chooses Dydas and
Palamedon to act as lords over the city of Albynest in Persia, they are later promoted to
become kings of the city because of their “prudent port and governauns” (36). Metham immediately indicates that part of their “prudent” governance is to marry well:

Thyse princys dwelling in pes and rest
In the chef cyté of Persys, namyd Albynest,
Qwere thei despousyd wyvys of the lynage
Of Daryus, sumtyme emperour of that cuntré,
Multyplying the world, as seyth myn autour Fyrage,
Qwere he tellyth the ryalté of ther maryage,
Remembrynge the love and eke the adversyté
Of Amoryus and Cleopes, that were the chyldyr dere
Of thise lordys, how thei lovdyd and dyid in fere. (41-9)

Because Dydas and Palamedon are both displaced Romans who take on the governance of Albynest, Persia after Nero has conquered the region, and are therefore supplanting the rightful, yet defeated, ruler, it is significant—and prudent—that they marry into the line of the legitimate ruler of Persia. While such marriages will combine the lineages of the rulers from both Rome and Persia, they may also serve to give authority and legitimacy to the Romans who have supplanted the Persian emperor. Thus, these marriages seem focused on lineage and succession rather than love.

Although lineage is revealed to be an important component of a ruler’s marriage, so too is the acceptability of the marriage to the citizens. Since Amoryus’ and Cleopes’ fathers married prudently, and for political and aristocratic reasons rather than love, it is evident that Metham’s aristocratic concerns are foregrounded in his discussion of marriage throughout the text. These concerns extend into the discussion of the imminent marriage of the next important ruler, Amoryus. Upon introducing us to Amoryus, Metham proceeds to tell us that the citizens of the kingdom, who knew Amoryus’ prowess and fame well, were concerned with his marriage:
Although Amoryus has been fostered in Nero’s household and thus has not spent much of his life among the citizens in Albynest, it is apparent that they are proud to have such a noble prince. Their discussions about Amoryus center on his role as both a representative of their kingdom and their future ruler. Thus, according to Metham, they are rightfully interested in his marriage because it will affect them as well. Since Amoryus was born well and has “nobyl lynage,” they accordingly pray to Venus that he will have a “lygkly marylge.” The use of “lygkly” to describe the sort of marriage they expect Amoryus to undertake is important here, because it suggests that Amoryus’ marriage should be based on qualities other than love, which brings us back to the issue of individual consent versus responsibility to one’s family and friends (and here, one’s citizens). The definition from the MED most likely to fit Metham’s purpose in using this word is “appropriate, suitable.” As in Metham’s discussion of Sir Miles and Lady Katherine’s real-life marriage, here too love plays no role. The citizens are more concerned that the lineage of Amoryus’ spouse is appropriately analogous to his. Though they pray to Venus, the patron of their temple and the goddess of passionate love—and often illicit love—it is clear that their main desire is that Amoryus’ match be suitable for their prince and great warrior, and that love is secondary if it even factors in at all.

That the beliefs of the citizens matter in Amoryus’ marriage makes sense in the context of the story. The significance of the citizens in aristocratic decision-making is favored throughout the text, and the responsibility of the rulers to their citizens is

56 See MED, s.v. “likli,” 2d.
repeatedly stressed. Such responsibility is evidenced by several climactic events in the text, especially the destruction and rebuilding of the temple of Venus, Amoryus’ battle with the dragon, and finally, Amoryus’ and Cleopes’ public marriage before all the citizens of Albynest. Through each of these events, the relationship between Amoryus and Cleopes is simultaneously and paradoxically developed and impeded due to Amoryus’ social and political responsibility to the citizens.

Amoryus and Cleopes first meet—significantly—in the temple of Venus, the goddess of love (but importantly, as we will discuss below, not marriage). Their meeting occurs because an earthquake had destroyed the temple of Venus. As a result, Dydas, Cleopes’ father and the only ruler present in Albynest, must undertake the rebuilding of the temple. In this situation, aristocratic responsibility drives the actions of Dydas and his co-ruler Palademon, who returns from Nero with Amoryus for the rededication of the temple. Within the temple, in a scene drawn very much from Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde* and Lydgate’s *Troy Book*, Amoryus and Cleopes first see each other and reveal their mutual interest. This revelation, however, must be done as discreetly as possible, for each fears the gossip of the citizens present. It seems likely that Amoryus’ and Cleopes’ fear of gossip can be related to their responsibility to the citizens: unless (or until) their match is acceptable to those around them, it is in their best interest to remain secretive, and their individual actions portray this cognizance.

In order to prevent those present from realizing that he is watching Cleopes, Amoryus masks his intentions under the guise of prayer. He claims that he is behind in

---

57 For specific details about the similarities between the scene in Metham’s text and those of Chaucer and Lydgate’s texts, see Page, “John Metham’s *Amoryus and Cleopes*: Intertextuality and Innovation in a Chaucerian Poem,” 203-5.
his devotions, and proceeds to kneel and pray (which Page rightfully suggests is Metham’s attempt at comedy, as the “gret devocion” he utters is merely two lines\(^{58}\)). Following his prayer, he walks about the temple, closing in on Cleopes but never getting too close for, as Metham reveals, “ever fere of tungys hym let” (764). As Cleopes realizes that his sighing and circling intimates his romantic interest in her, she figures out a way to display her mutual interest covertly: upon finding a picture of a hind and a knight, each holding a heart (and the knight holding a ring as well), she displays this picture to Amoryus, who is able to discern the meaning.\(^{59}\) Amoryus understands Cleopes’ action, and the two begin to mourn their mutual desire, which they do not wish to reveal to anyone. Though I will suggest that the secrecy of their love is a result of the social pressures surrounding the institution of marriage, other critics have attributed the secrecy to the conventions of courtly love. For example, Page discusses the relationship Metham depicts between Amoryus and Cleopes in terms much too simple. He not only claims that the secrecy of Amoryus’ and Cleopes’ love should simply be attributed to the conventions of courtly love, but he also claims that Amoryus is a pagan who has “no concept of marriage.”\(^{60}\) Page’s generalizations about Amoryus’ and Cleopes’ relationship mask what I will argue Metham is doing by presenting two characters fully aware of the significance of their committed relationship, and as I will now argue, their valid, yet pagan, clandestine marriage.

\(^{58}\) Page, “John Metham’s Amoryus and Cleopes: Intertextuality and Innovation in a Chaucerian Poem,” 204.

\(^{59}\) Roger Dalrymple interestingly suggests that this image of the hind and knight with hearts, which is then printed on a handkerchief for Amoryus’ joust, prefigures and parallels the later episode in the woods, as the lion who has eaten a hind wipes blood on Cleopes’ handkerchief. See “Amoryus and Cleopes: John Metham’s Metamorphosis of Ovid and Chaucer,” 153-4.

\(^{60}\) Page, “Introduction,” 10, 12.
As their love relationship progresses, Amoryus and Cleopes are ultimately driven to take drastic measures which are a direct result of their fear that others will gossip and disapprove of their relationship. Each laments the fact that they cannot be together in their backyards which, unbeknownst to them, are joined by a wall in which there is a cranny caused by the earthquake which destroyed the temple. Once they realize that they are able to communicate through this cranny (it is Cleopes who in fact discovers the cranny, and reveals it to Amoryus by throwing part of a broken glass bottle over the wall), their relationship develops in a very significant and serious way, for it is this evening during which, I will argue, they contract a clandestine marriage.

At this point in the text, when Cleopes and Amoryus discover their ability to communicate through the cranny, the “Pyramus-and-Thisbe” motif with which Metham is working becomes evident. What is quite interesting about Metham’s adaptation of the “Pyramus-and-Thisbe” motif is that he does not say anything about Amoryus’ and Cleopes’ fathers preventing them from interacting, as Ovid does in Book IV of the Metamorphoses. Chaucer also involves the lovers’ parents in his adaptation of the motif, the Legend of Thisbe. There, Chaucer laments that Pyramus’ and Thisbe’s fathers become too involved in their relationship:

And certeyn, as by resoun of hire age,
There myghte have ben bytwixe hem maryage,
But that here fadres nolde it nat assente;
And bothe in love ylyke sore they brente,
That non of alle hyre frenedes might it lette,
But pryvyly som tyme yit they mette
By sleyghte, and spoken som of here desyr;
As wry the glede and hotter is the fyr,
Forbede a love, and it is ten so wod. (728-36)61

Thus, Chaucer envisions the duo as participating in a strictly forbidden love, so that their later pagan suicides represent true martyrdom for it. Metham, however, refuses to make his lovers blatantly disobedient of their fathers’ wishes. While they do secretly contract what appears to be a valid pagan—though clandestine—marriage without their fathers’ consent, their purpose in contracting a clandestine marriage seems to have less to do with their fathers than with the citizens of Albynest. It is the gossip of the citizens which Amoryus fears rather than the approval of his father, though Metham does alert us to the fact that Palamedon is not a lover. Earlier, when Amoryus’ companions were singing and talking of love, Metham tells us that Palamedon rode silently with them, “thynkyng alle but vanyté and foly” (408). Because it is clear that Amoryus’ father is not a lover, we may imagine that he would perhaps be less likely to approve a relationship or marriage simply for love; as it becomes clear later when Amoryus takes on the task of fighting a dragon, Palamedon’s main concern is the responsibility of rulers to their people. So although Amoryus’ father may not approve of young love, he is not the reason that Amoryus and Cleopes keep their love secret. Their reason for secrecy again becomes clear during the meeting in which they exchange marriage vows, as we will see.

In his brief synopsis of the text, Page calls this first meeting of Amoryus and Cleopes at the cranny simply a time when they “declare their love and agree to meet again,” but such a generalization diffuses the true significance of their meeting. It is during this meeting that Amoryus and Cleopes exchange what I will argue are valid marriage vows, and which should result in a valid clandestine marriage (at least based on

---

the Christian marital principles with which Metham and his readers would have been so familiar).

There are two distinctly important components of their exchange which suggest strongly that they are fully aware of the implications of their words and actions, and that they actually intend to contract marriage: the use of marriage vows drawn from the English Sarum rite, and the exchange of golden rings to visibly indicate the meaning of these vows.

We have already reviewed the importance of *verba de presenti*, and acknowledged that it is only through the use of words of present consent that a marriage can be contracted. If *verba de futuro* are used, the only way a valid marriage can result is through the subsequent use of *verba de presenti* or consummation. In the verbal exchange Metham portrays between Amoryus and Cleopes at the wall, it becomes clear that they are contracting marriage, for their words, which so closely mimic common English marriage vows, are made in the present tense. Amoryus speaks to Cleopes first, introducing the idea of marriage:

“Myne hole hert, my lyfe, and my lady sovereyn,
To serve yow before alle odyr wythowte repentauns
Is my hole entent, and ever to do yowre hertys plesauns
Every owre, bothe day [and] nyght,
To serve yow before alle odyr, my trwth I plyght.
And ther ye say onys yea, schal I never say nay,
But ever do my bysynes qwyl my lyfe wul endure
To be yowre trwe servant; qwat schul I more say?” (1117-24)

What is significant about Amoryus’ word choice here is that he has plighted his troth, or pledged his fidelity to Cleopes forever. In the English Sarum rite of matrimony, the spouses use the specific phrase “I plight the my trouthe”: “I N. take the N. to my wedded
[wyf/housbonder], to have and to holde fro this day forwarde, for better or wors, for richere for poorer, in sykenesse and in hele, tyl dethe us departe, if holy chyrche it woll ordeyne, and therto I plight the my trouthe.\footnote{This English translation from the Sarum rite of matrimony comes from A. H. Pearson, ed. and trans., \textit{The Sarum Missal in English} (London: Church P, 1868): 552. For the Latin description of the vows, see J. Wickham Legg, ed., \textit{The Sarum Missal Edited from Three Early Manuscripts} (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1916): 413.} The vows the spouses repeat are nearly identical with the exception of the addition “to be bonere and buxum in bedde and at the borde,” which is stated only by the woman. Amoryus’ specific use of the phrase “my trwth I plight” thus seems indicative of his desire to contract a present-tense contract of marriage with Cleopes, especially when coupled with her response. In his discussion of “trothplight,” or the act of “plighting one’s troth,” Richard Firth Green indicates that the pledging of troth was not strictly reserved for marriage contracts, but that the formula most commonly used to contract marriages included a reference to trothplight, as in the Sarum missal’s marriage rite above.\footnote{See Richard Firth Green, \textit{A Crisis of Truth: Literature and Law in Ricardian England} (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1999): 331.}

Cleopes’ response is perhaps more strongly indicative of marriage, for she very clearly draws from the English Sarum rite in her vow:

\begin{quote}
“Truly,” quod Cleopes, “and I before every creature
Yeve yow holy myn hert, myne owne knyght, be ye sure.
And to love yow best only as myne owne hert dere,
Wythowte repentauns, I take yow fully for my fere.” (1125-28)
\end{quote}

Cleopes’ use of the word “fere” here is notable, as “fere” commonly means “spouse,” and even Page glosses it as “companion” \textit{and} “spouse” in his edition. The \textit{MED} lists several uses of “fere” by both Chaucer and Lydgate that mean “spouse,” and significantly, one of these uses occurs in \textit{Troilus and Criseyde}, from which Metham drew much inspiration in
By using the word “fere,” Cleopes very directly indicates that the relationship they are discussing is a marital relationship, and the vows they are taking are lifetime vows of marriage. The significance of their words becomes clearer, however, when Cleopes proceeds to further qualify her vow of fidelity:

“I sqwere to yow feythfully
That ever as trw and stedfast to yow I schal be,
As ys possyblyl, bothe in weltht and eke adversyté.” (1132-34)

Cleopes’ use of the phrase “in weltht and eke adversyté” mimics the words of the English Sarum missal, which prompts the use of antonyms in marital vows: better/worse, sickness/health, and richer/poorer, as we saw above. This direct borrowing from the most common marriage rite in England tellingly implies that what we are witnessing in the text is a private, clandestine marriage between Amoryus and Cleopes.

Furthermore, as if the specific words the lovers exchange which imply and, at least on the part of Cleopes, specifically indicate, marriage are not enough, Metham tells us that they also exchange rings before departing from the wall:

Iche to odyr put thru the crany for a remembrauns
A ryng of gold, for trw lovys everlasting contynuauns. (1161-2)

This exchange of rings as gifts between two partners who appear to have also exchanged legitimate marriage vows serves further to validate the claim that Amoryus and Cleopes do much more than “declare their love and agree to meet again”; it signifies that this scene portrays a properly contracted clandestine marriage based on individual verba de presenti. Though it may at first seem anachronistic to place such importance on the exchange of rings in a wedding ceremony, Peter Rushton’s work on the exchange of gifts

---

in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England indicates that rings were then, and even
much earlier in the Middle Ages, commonly exchanged as a sign of marriage: “When,
prior to 1753, valid marriages could be made by a couple ‘handfasting’ or contracting
themselves before witnesses, irrespective of any later church wedding, the words
exchanged and the gifts given were crucial items in the making of binding
relationships.” He goes on to claim that the gift exchanged to signify marriage need not
be a ring, but that “A gift, as a token, became the physical embodiment either of an actual
union or of a promise to marry.” It is very likely that Metham would have been familiar
with this notion of gift-giving as constituting a marriage. Although Rushton’s article is
concerned with court cases in a later period (1560-1630) simply because the records
during those years are most complete, it seems a likely probability that marriage tokens
would have been exchanged during the fifteenth century as well, for Rushton claims that
“It is clear from the surviving depositions in Durham that it was assumed that marriage
tokens would be given or exchanged,” and further, that “this was obviously an ancient
custom.” Richard Firth Green also discusses the use of tokens in sealing trothplights in
the Middle Ages, and claims that tokens served as “concrete symbols…whose handing
over registered the actual traditio visible, clothing the abstract trothplight with a thinglike
physicality.” Engagement and marriage rings are included in the category of tokens
which visibly signify the entry into a contract, even though Green notes that rings were

---

66 Peter Rushton, “The Testament of Gifts: Marriage Tokens and Disputed Contracts in North-East
69 Green, A Crisis of Truth, 50.
not the only tokens used to signify betrothal, and furthermore, that the token itself was not important so much because of what it was as what it signified: “Of course, tokens might be expensive (like a modern engagement ring), but that was not their main point: they were seen, not as objects to put in pawn or set against bail, but as symbols to be witnesses; in certain circumstances richness of material might indeed make them more memorable, but equally it might be symbolically quite inappropriate.” Thus, it is a valid conclusion that the rings, which are given “for trw lovys everlasting contynuauns,” become a strong visible and tangible sign of the marriage that Amoryus and Cleopes have contracted. In addition to the exchange of tokens which make Amoryus’ and Cleopes’ union visible and tangible, they also exchange a gesture before departing from the wall:

And than Amoryus thus sayd, “Madame for yowre sake
To this walle I do my observauns,
And of yow, my lady, my leve I take.”
And than he kyssyd the walle, seyng, “For yowre remembrauns
And very tokyn of love wythowte varyauns,
Thys insensybyl thing I kysse insted of yowr persone”;
And Cleopes dyd the same, ful sqwemfuly makyng her mone. (1163-9)

Green discusses two different kinds of truth documentation associated with the plighting of troth: oral and visual documentation versus written documentation. In the case of marriages, oral and visual documentation largely sufficed during the Middle Ages; written documents or marriage licenses were used only when permission for the marriage was required by a church authority. The use of the kiss to seal the contract of marriage, however, is common and remains today an integral part of the marriage ceremony. Green indicates that gestures were even more frequently visible signs of the entry into a binding

---

70 Green notes that in addition to rings, “homely tokens” such as knitting needles, spindles, and bobbins had been used to signify betrothal contracts in England, while in France items such as woolen belts, ribbons, flowers, fruit, and cake had been used. See *A Crisis of Truth*, 51.
trothplight than the exchange of tokens, and mentions the act of kissing between betrothed individuals as a gesture which “marked the settlement of their dowry.” It thus seems that although the kiss is not public and witnessed by anyone besides the lovers, the kisses Amoryus and Cleopes exchange (even though they must kiss the wall rather than each other in fulfilling the gesture) also indicate quite clearly that their intent has been to enter into a binding marriage contract.

Though Metham proceeds to have Amoryus and Cleopes contract a completely valid marriage at the cranny in the wall, he also insinuates that though they love each other, they make their vows for ultimately problematic reasons, a move which will allow him to present their later public Christian marriage as the more acceptable and desirable union and permit him to support the practices of the aristocracy and gentry. Directly prior to their meeting at the cranny for the first time and the exchange of their marital vows, Cleopes tries to attract Amoryus’ attention in an interesting and potentially provocative way that may illuminate the potential problems Metham sees with their clandestine, pagan union: when she hears Amoryus lamenting over his love for her, she throws a broken glass bottle over the wall:

“O Venus dere! how I am now feynt
For Cleopes sake!” The qwyche wordys causyd her to abrayd
Thorw the buschys; and to wyt be hys voys ho yt was,
Sche thrwe over the bottum of a brokyn glas.
And he therwyth astoynyd, “Ho strowyth therin thus homely?
Be Venus he ys nogh taught, qwatsumerve he be!”
And Cleopes hys voyse knw in hye,
Ansqweryd, “Mercy, dere hert, Amoryus!” quod ssche. (1090-7)

What is so remarkable about Metham’s representation of Cleopes’ response here is his specific choice of a broken bottle as the object which she tosses over the wall. In

---

literature of the Middle Ages and later, glass vessels are frequently represented as symbolic of a woman’s flesh and containing a liquid associated with female chastity.⁷³

One well-known example of a glass vessel being linked with female chastity comes from the *Ancrene Wisse*. Here, in this manual for anchoresses, the author advocates the careful bearing of these glass vessels and the guarding of the precious liquid within them:

> the bere a deore licur, a deore-wurthe wet as basme is, in a feble vetles, healewi i bruchel gles, nalde ha gan ut of thrung bute ha fol were? Habemus thesaurum istum in vasis fictilibus dicit apostolus. This bruchele vetles, thet is wummone flesch, thah no-the-leatere the basme, the healewi is meidenhad thet is th’rin—other eft[er] meith-lure, chaste cleannesse. This bruchele vetles [is] bruchel as is eani gles. For beo hit eanes tobroken, i-bet ne bith hit neaver, i-bet ne hal as hit wes ear, na mare thene gles. Ah yet hit breketh mid leasse then bruchel gles do. For gles ne tobreketh nawt but sum thing hit rine, ant hit, onont meith-lure, mei leosen his halnesse with a stinkinde wil, swa vorth hit mei gan ant leaste se longe. Ah this manere bruche mei beon i-bet eft ase hal allunge as hit wes eaver, halest thurh medicine of schrift ant bireowsunge…Nuh as ich seg, this deore-wurthe healewi i bruchel vetles is meithhad ant cleannesse in ower bruchele flesch, bruchelure then eani gles, thet yef ye weren i worldes thrung, with a lutel hurlunge ye mahten al leosen as the wrecches i the world the hurlith togederes ant breoketh hare vetles ant cleannesse schedeth. (III.511-20)⁷⁴

The author’s main concern here is the fragility of the glass because it contains such a precious liquid. Since the *Ancrene Wisse* so clearly places such a concern within a Christian context, the symbolism of the broken bottle could be useful to Metham in portraying a problem with the marriage vows which Amoryus and Cleopes are about to take. The *Ancrene Wisse* author reproves the young female readers to guard their “glass bottles,” or flesh, because once the bottles have broken and the flesh has succumbed to carnal desire, the liquid the bottles have carried, the women’s chastity, has been lost.

Cleopes, then, could be read as a young woman who is not very careful with her flesh and

---
⁷³ The idea of a bottle or “earthen vessel” as symbolic of human flesh is Biblical, and is referenced in 2 Corinthians 3:6-18. Here, Paul discusses the difference between the outer flesh of the “earthen vessel” and that which it contains, the soul.
will succumb to carnal desire. Although Amoryus suggests that Cleopes’ act of throwing
the broken bottle over the wall indicates that she has not been taught by Venus, this
moment can ironically be read as Metham indicating that Cleopes has been taught too
well by Venus. Because Venus is associated with lust and often illicit love and is the
patroness of Albynest’s temple, where Amoryus and Cleopes first fell in love, it is not
surprising that Cleopes may seem not to value her chastity as much as a Christian
maiden.

Metham may also use the broken glass bottle to suggest an important underlying
difference between pagan and Christian marriage, a distinction which becomes extremely
significant later in the text. The brokenness of the glass bottle implies that Cleopes is
acting based on lust, and insinuates that the marriage vows between the two, while valid,
may be based on something beyond love: the vows may also be undertaken for carnal
desire, which is the reason behind Amoryus’ and Cleopes’ later suicides and,
significantly, their eventual conversion to Christianity. This moment clearly indicates that
consummation is on the minds of the lovers as they participate in the troth-plighting
ceremony. By linking their clandestine marriage with a lustful desire for consummation
rather than a desire to be joined before God for the purposes of procreation and fidelity,
Metham lays the groundwork for the public Christian ceremony the lovers celebrate.

While Metham may favor the public Christian ceremony he describes near the end
of the text which Amoryus’ and Cleopes’ family, friends, and citizens authorize and
witness, he must also remain consistent with the Church’s teaching on marriage.
Therefore, while the clandestine union may be entered into partly for lust, it is important
for him to represent that the marriage is also based on true feelings of love, which will in
the end allow him to represent a marriage that will be pleasing to both the Church and these aristocratic lovers’ families and citizens. Thus, it is important that the reader recognizes the complete validity of their clandestine union.

My analysis of this exchange of vows and rings and my decision to argue for it as a valid clandestine marriage may lead some to wonder about its similarity or difference to the moment in *Troilus and Criseyde* which Henry Ansgar Kelly (among others) has argued constitutes a valid clandestine marriage.75 First I must say that I am in disagreement with Kelly in calling Troilus’ and Criseyde’s relationship a marriage. Though I will not perform a complete analysis of the scene in which Kelly and others claim Troilus and Criseyde take part in a clandestine marriage, I would like to identify the major differences between that scene and the scene in *Amoryus and Cleopes* which I have just discussed.

Kelly too relies on the words of a verbal exchange and the exchange of rings between the lovers to identify them as entering into a clandestine marriage, but this evidence is much weaker in *Troilus and Criseyde* than in *Amoryus and Cleopes*. As Rushton claims, the exchange of gifts, presumably made with the proper use of *verba de presenti*, served as a visible indication that a marriage had been entered into by the parties. In *Amoryus and Cleopes*, the combination of the lovers’ use of clear language drawn from the English Sarum missal and their serious exchange of rings suggests

strongly that their intention is to undertake a clandestine marriage.\textsuperscript{76} In *Troilus and Criseyde*, however, the words used do not so clearly point to marriage. What Kelly believes to be the strongest indication of marital intent in the exchange between Troilus and Criseyde is Troilus’ entreaty to Hymen, the god of marriage.\textsuperscript{77} Beyond this reference to Hymen, there is no clear wording that would indicate either Troilus or Criseyde is thinking of marriage. Conor McCarthy rightly questions Kelly’s calling the relationship a marriage on account of the words exchanged: “The problem with Kelly’s argument lies in the ambiguities which Chaucer seems to deliberately introduce.”\textsuperscript{78} Metham’s specific replication of words evoking authentic marital vows much more strongly indicates that the intent of Amoryus and Cleopes is, in fact, marital.

Kelly also places much emphasis on the exchange of rings between Troilus and Criseyde as part of his argument that a marriage has been made between the two, but again, Amoryus’ and Cleopes’ situation differs drastically from that of Troilus and Criseyde. While Metham deliberately states that the rings are exchanged as signs of “trw lovys everlasting contynuauns,” Chaucer emphasizes that the exchange of rings between Troilus and Criseyde takes place as they are speaking of “sondry thynges” (1366) and “pleyinge” (1368). That their discussion is of “sondry thynges,” which the *MED* indicates means “various” or “diverse” topics, is an important key to understanding the exchange because we are to understand that their discussion is not simply about love or their

\textsuperscript{76} For the full rite of matrimony in the English Sarum Missal, see Pearson, *The Sarum Missal in English*, 551-60. For the corresponding Latin, see Legg, *The Sarum Missal*, 413-18.

\textsuperscript{77} Kelly, *Love and Marriage in the Age of Chaucer*, 229.

Thus, the following exchange of their rings does not serve as a visible indication of their clandestinely, and validly, married state. Furthermore, Chaucer specifies that the exchange of rings is done so while “pleyinge.” Though the MED does not list this specific usage of “pleien” among its textual examples, all of the definitions clarify that “pleien” is associated with gaming and pretending. Not a single definition suggests that there is a serious intent associated with the use of this verb. In order for a marriage to be considered binding, intent was considered of the utmost importance—canon law specified that intent had to be shown through internal and/or external signs. Chaucer’s use of the word “pleien” here thus seems to bring about an interesting case of intentionality, as the verb seems associated primarily with things not considered serious. Thus, it is problematic that Kelly uses the exchange of rings as a strong indication of the marital intent of Troilus and Criseyde. Perhaps to strengthen the association of the exchange of rings with marriage, Kelly argues that though Chaucer emphasizes it occurs while “pleyinge,” it must be taken in context with Troilus’ naming of Hymen, the god of marriage, even though the entreaty took place over a hundred lines earlier, and before they had (presumably, as Chaucer likes to point out) consummated their relationship.

Kelly’s next argument is based on what he perceives as Chaucer’s desire to make the relationship between Troilus and Criseyde as moral as possible. Kelly suggests that Chaucer means to create a marriage between the two that is “clandestine in a double sense: it was hidden not only from the world of Troy, but also, to a certain degree, from the eyes of his own audience.” He does not, however, take into consideration Criseyde’s vehement diatribe against the bondage and lack of freedom she associates

79 See MED, s. v. “sondri,” 2a, 3a.
80 Kelly, Love and Marriage in the Age of Chaucer, 240.
with marriage, which I would argue Chaucer includes not to suggest that Criseyde is immoral, but rather to suggest that she is independent and must remain that way in order to guarantee her own safety as she is passed between Troy and Greece.\(^81\) Also telling is the fact that Troilus never publicly claims Criseyde as his wife, a move that could well have prevented her from being passed back to the Greeks and into the hands of Diomede.\(^82\) Thus, it seems to me that Chaucer rather deliberately invokes the idea of marriage only to dismiss it in this case, as C. N. L. Brooke has also suggested.\(^83\) It is thus the combination of the verbal exchange of *verba de presenti* pulled directly from the English Sarum missal and the exchange of rings for “trw lovys everlasting contynuauns” that makes the relationship between Amoryus and Cleopes the more likely candidate for a validly contracted clandestine marriage.

What both pairs of lovers do have in common, however, is their desire to keep their relationship secret because of the potential gossip that will ensue. While Troilus and Criseyde seem to have perhaps a stronger reason to keep their relationship secret—Criseyde is, after all, the daughter of the man who betrayed Troy and joined the Greeks—the gossip that they fear most is that Criseyde’s reputation will be damaged. In *Amoryus and Cleopes*, however, it seems that both the lovers fear the potential gossip about their relationship. Even though they have exchanged what appear to be *verba de presenti* and marital rings, they depart from each other before dawn so as to avoid suspicion and “evyl tungys”:

\(^81\) For this monologue, see Geoffrey Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, 2.750-6.
\(^82\) This is also an argument Derek Brewer promulgates; see Brewer’s review of Kelly’s book, *Review of English Studies* 28 (1977): 197.
“But trwth yt ys that evyl tungys be ever redy; 
And qwat men wold sey yf thei aspyid us in this owre, 
It ys uncerteyn; therfore, betyr yt ys, I knowe yt verily, 
Penauns to sofyr for a tyme than ony maner of susspycion 
Schuld ryse of owre asstray walkyng of communycacion.” (1151-5)

What is actually occurring here, however, seems to be cognizance of the fact that their marriage, though valid, will not be recognized by others and may not even be considered acceptable by others. It is significant that their fathers are not mentioned; it seems that their fears are based on their responsibility to appease the citizens of the kingdom rather than themselves and their immediate families. Though they will later marry publicly with the assent of the citizens, as we shall see, their clandestine marriage—and specifically their desire to consummate it—continues to be inhibited by their social responsibilities as the children of Albynest’s rulers.

When Amoryus returns home after his meeting with Cleopes, he overhears a report given to Palamedon that causes him to sacrifice potentially both his life and his relationship with Cleopes for the good of the citizens in a neighboring city of the kingdom. The messenger warns Palamedon that unless someone will agree to fight and slay a dragon, his citizens will leave:

    “Nowe yowre pepyl for thought and hevynes
    So dyscumfortyd be that but ye wul her nede redress,
    They wul alle flee and leve yowre cite desolate.
    Ther stavys stond evyn at the yate.” (1187-90)

The idea that his citizens may be forced to abandon their city is troubling to Palamedon, and even the messenger has clarified that it is Palamedon’s responsibility as ruler (and, presumably, as the warrior-ruler, as Dydas seems to take charge of situations that do not involve battle) to defeat this dragon and save his city and his people. Right away, he asks
Amoryus if he will accept the challenge, warning him that it is not “child’s play” and that he may die. Though it may seem insignificant that Palamedon without delay asks Amoryus to take up this task, even this small detail indicates that Palamedon endorses social responsibility over all else, even his son’s life. Amoryus’ response to Palamedon reveals that he too is invested in the importance of social responsibility and considers it his duty:

“And yf yt fortune that he sle me in owre fyght,  
The pepyl schal say that, ‘Amoryus  
Qwyt hym for owre salvacion as a manful knight  
That so manful was to fyght for us.’” (1205-8)

Amoryus’ response to his potential death is completely based on what the citizens will think of him. He is less concerned with his potential death than he is with giving the people the perception that he is willing to die on their behalf, presumably as a good ruler (or, here, future ruler) should be willing to do. When Amoryus is successful in defeating the dragon and receives the praise of all the people, Metham again reminds us that he fought the dragon not so much to gain individual praise as to fulfill his social responsibility: he had “labouryd so for her myscheve” (1538).

While Amoryus acts on behalf of his citizens and credits taking the task of fighting the dragon to his responsibility as a prince and future ruler, Cleopes, upon hearing that Amoryus will fight the dragon, acts as Amoryus’ wife should and proceeds to do everything in her power to save his life. She understands his social responsibility, and perhaps views her attempt to teach him everything he must know as having double significance: not only will she save her husband’s life, but she will simultaneously save the future ruler of Albynest. We even find that the ring she gave to Amoryus as a symbol
of their commitment has another significance as well: it will help him to fight the dragon, as she reveals:

   “And in yowr hand, halde that ylke ryng
Wyth the smaraged that I here delyveryd yow this odyr day.
Loke that the stone be toward hys eyn alwey.” (1314-16)

Metham here places a greater symbolic importance on the ring Cleopes has given Amoryus. No longer is it merely a symbol of her commitment to Amoryus; now it has become a means to save his life during his battle with the dragon. The ring thus doubly serves as an indication of their marriage and a defense for Amoryus against the dragon he must fight on behalf of the townspeople. By specifying that it is the “ylke ryng” Amoryus received during the clandestine marriage which will help him fight the dragon, Metham suggests that the ring’s usefulness as a defense against the dragon trumps its symbolic value as a sign of Amoryus’ commitment to Cleopes. This symbolism also implies that Metham may be questioning the significance of the marriage he so clearly created earlier in the text, and if so, it is because the marriage contracted was clandestine and the heirs to the kings of Albynest did not seek the approval of their future citizens.

Roger Dalrymple claims that Metham attempts to “harmonise some of the central antagonisms identifiable in Chaucer’s great Trojan narrative” and “bring[s] conflicting conceptions of love, the pagan and the Christian…into less inimical relationships”84; but more specifically, Metham is looking at and dealing with conflicting conceptions of marriage, both the ecclesiastical/Church theory, by which the clandestine marriage contracted through individual verba de presenti is valid, and the social/aristocratic model of practice, in which it is expected that such important figures would marry only with the

input of others and their social responsibility in mind. Metham, however, seems to admire the fact that Amoryus’ and Cleopes’ marriage is based on love. Of course, it helps that they are already suitable matches for each other: they are co-heirs to the kingdom, since it has dual kings, and they are both simultaneously descended from the lineage of Roman rulers and the former emperor of Persia. In order, however, to prevent himself from advocating that aristocratic children marry clandestinely, he must on the surface favor the common aristocratic practice of marriage, in which families and friends also consent to the progression of the relationship to marriage. An easy way for him to support the involvement of friends and family without breaking from the Church’s theory that the clandestine marriage he has represented is completely valid is to focus on the fact that the clandestine marriage is problematic because it is dually pagan and clandestine. The pagan nature of Amoryus’ and Cleopes’ marriage will undoubtedly make the alternative, public, Christian wedding more attractive.

Metham does not allow pagan religion to play much of a role in his characters’ relationship. Pagan religion provides nothing to the characters but the means by which they fall in love—to move forward, Metham makes it clear that they need Christian marriage. By discounting the pagan marriage he shows them take part in, and more specifically, by causing their suicides before they are able to consummate the marriage, Metham indicates that pagan marriage is inferior to Christian marriage and simultaneously advocates a public ceremony which the family and friends, and in the case of Amoryus and Cleopes, perhaps even more importantly, the citizens of Albynest, are able to authorize and witness.
Metham’s resistance to completely privileging the common aristocratic notion that marriages could be arranged without any regard for feelings of love is subdued as he writes of their plan to consummate their relationship upon Amoryus’ return from defeating the dragon. It is here that Metham begins to problematize what he originally portrayed as a valid clandestine marriage; specifically, by disclosing that it is lust rather than a desire for children which drives Amoryus and Cleopes to meet in the forest and consummate their relationship. By calling their desire “veneryan” (1549), Metham reminds us of their pagan status and that there is a better type of marriage, one that is acceptable both to the Church and to society, family, and friends. As a result, their meeting in the forest to consummate their relationship will be interrupted, and for the right reasons, Metham claims:

But truth ys sayd that God schapyth for the best.
He knwe at the begynnyng qwat the conclusion schul be. (1592-3)

As we can see, the love relationship of Amoryus and Cleopes is at once prompted by and indebted to religion. While they first see each other and reveal their mutual feelings at the dedication of Venus’ temple, this love, because it is pagan and because it mistakenly inspired a valid yet publicly unacceptable (and unacceptable to Metham’s patrons as well) marriage, must be made appropriate as well. Not only should the citizens assent to their match based on their lineage and acceptability as their future rulers, but Metham also requires that their love be constrained in an appropriate Christian relationship. Thus, their desire to consummate their relationship after their clandestine marriage but before their deaths is called “veneryan dysyre” because it is inspired by the Roman goddess of (usually illicit) love. Their later public marriage, however, is indebted to Christian
miracle, as the hermit Ore is able to resurrect them through prayer and marry them “aftyr
the lawe” (1939).

Though Metham indeed acknowledges the importance of the Church in making
marriages—he does after all require Amoryus and Cleopes to be married in a church
under Christian law—he also questions how far its authority should stretch, as he sees
marriage less as a private sacrament based on mutual love and more as a public
institution required to uphold the duties of the aristocratic estate. This anxiety in
Metham’s writing suggests that he is pulled between the tensions of writing as a Christian
scholar and writing a text for an aristocratic patron. Metham’s decision to support the
idea that Amoryus and Cleopes are not acceptably married allows him to write for his
aristocratic patrons, who more than likely would believe that they should be involved in
their children’s marriages, and that these should be undertaken with respect for the family
and its connections.

Metham’s view that marriage is part of an aristocrat’s duty becomes most evident
upon Amoryus’ and Cleopes’ return with Ore the Christian hermit to Albynest. After a
lion comes upon the area where Amoryus and Cleopes were to meet to consummate their
marriage, Cleopes, who is there alone, flees the scene dropping her handkerchief in the
process. Metham follows Ovid and Chaucer closely here, as Amoryus comes to the site
and upon finding Cleopes’ bloody handkerchief, assumes that she has been killed by the
lion; then, he blames himself for being late, and kills himself with the sword which
Metham tells us he conveniently had with him. When Cleopes returns to the site and finds

85 We are not completely sure of Metham’s educational background, though he calls himself a “scholar of
Cambridge” in the scientific treatises that accompany Amoryus and Cleopes in the Garrett MS. See Page,
“Introduction,” 3.
Amoryus dying, she dedicates her virginity to Jove and uses Amoryus’ sword to commit her own suicide. Though at this point both Ovid and Chaucer end their tales—Ovid by metamorphosing the lovers and Chaucer by praising Thisbe’s faithfulness in love—Metham continues his story, using this opportunity of “faithful pagan suicide” to transform his lovers into Christians and, importantly, their marriage into a publicly acceptable and Christian marriage. Through the introduction of the Christian hermit Ore, who happens upon the dead pagan lovers in the forest, Metham resolves two problems: first, the problem of a valid, yet clandestine and pagan, marriage Amoryus and Cleopes problematically entered into without the knowledge or consent of anyone else; and second, the pagan religion which all the people and rulers of Albynest celebrate. Metham resolves both of these issues through the public, Christian marriage of Amoryus and Cleopes, as we shall now see.

Upon finding the dead lovers, Ore is overwhelmed with sadness and prays to God to resurrect the lovers if they will be converted to Christianity. Although Ore’s reasons for praying are more directly tied to his goal of converting the populace of Albynest to Christianity—he reveals to God his belief that if Amoryus and Cleopes are restored to life “the pepyl of cyté, / Bothe men and women, lesse and more, / Schal fully be convertyd and leve in Thee” (1843-5)—the resurrection also becomes the opportunity for Amoryus and Cleopes to ask for public consent to their marriage (perhaps by calling banns) and to fulfill their aristocratic responsibility by marrying well, publicly, and with the consent of others. After they are miraculously revived and sing of the Virgin Mary, they ask Ore to baptize them and teach them the tenets of Christianity. Ore subsequently asks them whether they love each other less, more, or the same as before their conversion. When
they each answer that they have never loved the other more, Ore tells them that they will return to Albynest, where he will both use their miraculous resurrection to convert the people and perform a Christian marriage ceremony for the lovers.

Although Ore never specifically mentions that Amoryus and Cleopes should seek the consent of their fathers and the kingdom’s citizens before he performs their marriage (perhaps because he is abiding by the Church’s theory that consent beyond the two individuals is unnecessary), by returning to Albynest and performing the ceremony there publicly, the couple must seek the involvement and consent of their fathers and citizens. Interestingly, it is not familial consent alone which Metham requires for the two to be married under the Christian law, but rather the consent of Albynest’s citizens. It is not until they agree to the match—upon being asked to attend it—that the marriage proceeds and is celebrated. Fortunately for the lovers, both Palamedon and the citizens believe that the marriage should take place:

Most conveyent thei thowt that Cleopes—
Aftyr ther consyderauns—was bothe of beuté, byrth, and lynage
To be Amoryus fere; for bothe thei were of one age. (2054-6)

By claiming that the citizens must take a moment to “consider” whether Cleopes is the proper match for Amoryus, Metham supports the notion that the marriage should be undertaken only with the assent of their people, and proves that the concerns of the people are very closely aligned with those of the real-life aristocracy for whom he is writing. By having the people agree to the public Christian marriage of Amoryus and Cleopes, and by first revealing that the two love each other even more than they did when they contracted their clandestine marriage, Metham is able to find a balance between the Church’s theory of marriage (that it should be based on love) and the aristocracy and
gentry’s practice of marriage (that it should benefit one’s friends and family, and here, one’s citizens).

The new public and Christian marriage of Amoryus and Cleopes fulfills their social responsibility of producing heirs and successive rulers as well:

\[
\text{And many beuteus chyldyr thei had that rychely} \\
\text{Were beset, havyng lordechyp of the region successively. (2085-6)}
\]

Because Metham was writing just prior to the Wars of the Roses and only half a century after Henry IV had deposed Richard II, legitimate succession was quite likely a major concern of the English people. Thus, because this was a contemporary concern for Metham, he includes as part of the social responsibility of Amoryus and Cleopes the production of legitimate future rulers. By producing a long line of clear succession, Amoryus and Cleopes have fulfilled the greatest responsibility of a king and queen, and their marriage has benefited the community which approved it.

Metham’s commitment to the aristocracy drives the issues he brings to light in this text. Not only does he question the notion that individual consent within marriage is principal, but he also uses the marriage of the kingdom’s nobility as a tool to convert an entire kingdom. The aristocracy as represented in this text has a responsibility to the people, and Metham carries this idea through to the end, including not only the importance of a public marriage for its nobility, but also the conversion of the entire populace to Christianity, the issue with which the rest of this dissertation is explicitly concerned.

Metham’s interest in the disparity between marital practice and canon law with respect to the aristocracy seems connected to a belief that an aristocratic marriage such as
this one can have major consequences for a kingdom. He imagines that these consequences extend into religion in particular, and proceeds to end his romance—which originally seems to be a private romance story of two individuals—with a conversion narrative that allows him to fantasize about the power of faith and the possibility of converting non-Christian kingdoms through such power.

Ore explicitly links the marriage of Amoryus and Cleopes with his goal of converting the people of Albynest to Christianity: he desires to parade the duo around town telling others about their miraculous revival so “‘That the pepyl of the cyté for this myrakyl crystyd schal be, / Qwere ye aftyr the lawe despousyd schal be’” (1938-9).

While it is clear that Amoryus’ and Cleopes’ desire to marry led to their tragic deaths and resurrections, and therefore paved the way for the conversion of Albynest that Ore wishes to occur, Metham continues to link marriage to conversion in the narrative. The connection of baptism and marriage that Ore makes in these lines alludes to an interest in how the sacraments are connected. Through Ore, Metham suggests that baptism and marriage share a common goal of rebirth and unity, and that these goals should be shared with the greater community.

Amoryus’ and Cleopes’ actual rebirths through their resurrections after their suicides do not erase the visible scars on their bodies from their suicides that prove they were dead. Ore uses these physical signs as proof of God’s power to convince the people of Albynest to convert to Christianity: after Ore “schewyd the tokynnys of ther woundys, / The pepyllys chere gan change” (1970-1) to the extent that “The hertys of alle the pepyl gan enclyne, both more and les” (1974). The sole reason that Ore is able to present Amoryus’ and Cleopes’ wounds to the people in order to convince them to convert,
however, is rooted in the people’s interest in their disappearance and the gossip that arises from it; upon finding the people within the city gossipping about the disappearance of Amoryus and Cleopes, Palamedon orders them all into the temple of Venus, where they await a revelation from the goddess of love about the fate of the two. The gathering of the people in the temple for a revelation from Venus about the disappearance suggests that the people and the lovers’ fathers may believe that the disappearance is rooted in love (which indeed it is). What is most important about this gathering, however, is that when Amoryus, Cleopes, and Ore arrive at the temple and the people are able to see the marks from their suicides, they are convinced to turn away from Venus. Like Amoryus and Cleopes, whose new desire to marry under the Christian law replaces Venus with Christ in their lives, this replacement of the pagan goddess of love with the one true Christian God, who is love, extends to the people of the city:

the pepy l gan schoute and wyth one voyse say,  
‘Performe thi wordys, and anone we alle  
Converyd to thi lord schal be and krystynnyd this day.’ (1982-4)

The replacement of Venus with Christ indicates an interest in the kind of love expected from marital relationships. Because Venus is so frequently associated with sexual or lustful love, she must be eliminated from the narrative because Amoryus and Cleopes plan to marry under the Christian law, which idealizes a stronger and more important kind of love.

Although the conversion of the populace is not enforced by Amoryus, Cleopes, or Ore, what is important about this moment is that the conversion takes place only under the influence of Amoryus’ and Cleopes’ love for each other and desire to marry. Metham does not document what Ore tells the people about Amoryus’ and Cleopes’ deaths, just
that he “reportyd how that thei were dede” (1968). While Metham does not actually reveal whether Ore tells the people that Amoryus and Cleopes died on account of their love for each other and desire to be together, his use of the word “reportyd” suggests that Ore reveals the entire story to the people, who would then become aware of Amoryus’ and Cleopes’ love. While Ore uses Amoryus’ and Cleopes’ love to influence all of Albynest (as well as the lovers themselves) to convert to Christianity, he remains completely aware of the important role the lovers’ desire to marry plays in his conversion scheme. Without the original pagan marriage and the desire to consummate that marriage, Amoryus and Cleopes would not have met Ore, who seizes their obvious desire for marriage as an opportunity to do much more than simply marry the lovers under his law. In Metham’s text, marriage truly becomes a means of conversion on both an individual and public scale.

While Ore is a Christian hermit whose involvement in the conversion narrative is necessary, as it is he who prays for the resurrection of Amoryus and Cleopes and enables the marriage that results in the widespread conversion of Albynest, the rest of the romances we will examine in this dissertation feature the primary involvement of one or both spouses in prompting and, in some cases, enforcing conversion. Thus, while Metham’s text does in a sense participate in a colonial religious fantasy of sorts, he relies solely on the role of an authoritative figure from the Church to stimulate the conversion and marriage of the lovers and the conversion of their kingdom. In contrast, the texts which feature interfaith marriage rely on the role of a potential Christian spouse to inspire and effect conversion—an individual who is not sanctioned by the Church, but is rather a
member of the aristocracy, and therefore, someone whose decisions have a very strong influence on the people of a kingdom.

Charles Donahue Jr. has interestingly posited that the Church’s decision to prioritize love between marriage partners and the consent of the woman may have been tied to the emergence of courtly love ideals in the poetry of the French troubadours during Alexander III’s lifetime because, after all, “Canon law did not operate in a vacuum.”

If indeed literature could have affected the theory behind marriage, it is also likely that it could affect the actual practice of marriage. Thus, by representing a pair of lovers for whom responsibility to others is paramount, and who marry publicly with the consent of those to whom they owe that responsibility, Metham can please his patrons and support their practice of relying on the consent of others, specifically friends and family, so that they fulfill their responsibility to their family. At the same time, however, by representing Amoryus and Cleopes as true lovers and portraying them participating in a clandestine marriage—something that doubtless could have been a real concern for many aristocratic parents (as it so clearly was for Margaret Paston)—Metham may suggest that responsibility and love can go hand-in-hand. Though he clearly advocates the involvement of others, and thus presents only the second public marriage as a truly acceptable marriage, by introducing a valid clandestine (yet pagan) marriage based on love alone he indicates that there should be an attempt on the part of both the parents and the children to balance these two integral components of a fifteenth-century aristocratic marriage.

---

Extremely important to this study, however, Metham’s text works to identify why aristocratic marriage was such a significant consideration. By supporting the Christian marriage of Amoryus and Cleopes, which is undertaken with the consent of the kingdom’s people and with the presence of many witnesses, Metham indicates that aristocratic marriage is important because the populace of the kingdom also has much at stake in a marriage like that of Amoryus and Cleopes (the children of their rulers). Both spouses convert to Christianity before they marry, and the marriage will (and does) produce heirs who will undoubtedly guide the kingdom under Christian rule. Thus, the conversion of the populace is a significant consequence of Amoryus’ and Cleopes’ desire and decision to marry. The subsequent chapters of this dissertation will focus on the issues of aristocratic marriage and its influence on conversion, and will build upon the issues raised in Metham’s text through their discussion of a more specific form of aristocratic marriage that affects kingdoms through enforcing conversion: interfaith marriage.
The medieval Church’s fear of the potential influences of other religions on Christians is widely documented in canon law and was specifically addressed in the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215. In the canons prescribed by the fathers of the Council, the possibility of Christians accidentally engaging in intimate relations with Jews and Muslims was addressed by stipulating that Jews and Muslims would henceforth be required to wear distinguishing badges or clothing. The engagement of Christians in intimate relations with non-Christians was of particular concern to the Church because it feared that the Christian could be convinced to turn away from his/her religion and adopt instead a non-Christian religion. The actual definition of “intimate relations” was extensive and included bathing and even eating with Jews and Muslims. The impressionability of individuals, then, was the Church’s true fear—for this reason, eating with those of other religions was disallowed, presumably because “there is greater familiarity in eating food than in talking together: one is more easily deceived between
courses.” If the propensity for impressionability among Christians was considered great when eating and drinking with those of non-Christian religions, certainly it was exponentially greater for those Christians involved in sexual and/or marital relationships with non-Christians. Thus, the council prohibited interfaith marriage.

The fear that Christians could be seduced into other religions through intimate relationships with non-Christians that was manifested through medieval canon law is also reflected in many Middle English romances. Critics have commented on the prevalence of interfaith marriages between Christians and “Saracens” in medieval romances, but have not yet fully explored the significance of these marriages. Generally, these relationships result in the erotic conversion of the non-Christian spouse to Christianity—such is the case in the Man of Law’s Tale, Bevis of Hampton, and the King of Tars, among many other romances. What is striking about the romances’ representations of interfaith marriage is that in many cases the fear that such marriages will result in conversion seems to weigh at least as heavily on the minds of non-Christian rulers. Thus, in the Man of Law’s Tale, we see the sultan’s mother taking drastic measures, including murdering her own son and his retainers in order to prevent the sultan’s marriage to Constance from resulting in the full conversion of their Saracen kingdom to Christianity.

---

1 James A. Brundage uses this quote by Johannes Teutonicus to explain the medieval reasoning that Christians could talk to Jews but could not eat with them. Apparently the intimacy of sharing a meal and the propensity for deception (perhaps due to gluttony or drunkenness) was too great for the Church to allow. See James A. Brundage, “Interruption Between Christians and Jews in Medieval Canon Law,” Sex, Law and Marriage in the Middle Ages (Aldershot, Hampshire: Variorum, 1993): 27.

Although these romances revolve around individuals, their authors are ultimately more concerned with how erotic conversion affects the community as a whole. In this chapter, I will examine how interfaith marriages are represented as affecting not only the individual spouses (one of whom is Christian, the other Saracen), but also the spouses’ kingdoms and their societies’ religious convictions.

Although canon lawyers were evidently concerned about the possibility of Christians engaging in interfaith marriages and Christian writers frequently imagined their characters participating in such unions, canon law scholars have observed that during the Middle Ages interfaith marriage between Christians and Muslims was actually uncommon—as one scholar points out, “The very spirit…that prompted the Crusades against the Mohammedans precluded the possibility of frequent marriages with them.”

While the general absence of Muslims in medieval English society certainly must have played a role in the lack of interfaith marriages between Christians and Muslims, harsh secular and canon laws forbidding such relationships also likely contributed to Christians’ avoidance of these unions. The Christian spouse could be punished under canon law by excommunication, while he or she could be condemned to death under secular law.

Since historical records from medieval England indicate that these marriages were very rare, if they even occurred at all, the preoccupation with them in Middle English romance does not reflect actual practice, but rather points to a colonial

---

desire held by the medieval Church and Christians generally and suggests that medieval
English authors shared this colonial mentality.

The pressure on the Church to engage in colonial practices (in other words, to
spread the Christian religion and attempt to reclaim the Holy Land) was widely exposed
through a genre of treatises focused on the effort to recover the Holy Land in the early
fourteenth century. These texts circulated widely and suggested methods through which
the Church could recover the Holy Land. In at least one of these treatises, Pierre Dubois’
1305-7 *De recuperatione Terre Sancte*, or *The Recovery of the Holy Land*, marriage is
recommended as a means of converting individuals to Christianity.5 Dubois suggests that
Christian girls “may be given as wives to the Saracen chiefs” so that “By their efforts,
with the help of God and the preaching disciples so they may have assistance of
Catholics—for they cannot rely on Saracens—their husbands might be persuaded and led
to the Catholic faith.”6 Dubois’ advocacy of erotic conversion is ultimately a fantasy of
peaceful conversion through seduction, but while his text circulated widely, his ideas to
promote peaceful conversion through interfaith marriage were never put into practice.7

---

7 The fourteenth century witnessed a newfound interest in non-violent methods to prompt the conversion of
Muslims to Christianity on both the continent and in England. On the continent, for example, one of
Dubois’ contemporaries, Raymond Llull, “advocated conversion of Muslims through reason, and even
devised a plan whereby he intended to go to Muslim countries and challenge Islamic scholars to debates,
promising to convert to Islam if he felt their arguments had defeated his own.” See Michael R. Evans,
“Marriage as a Means of Conversion in Pierre Dubois’s *De recuperatione Terre Sancte*,” *Christianizing
Peoples and Converting Individuals*, ed. Guyda Armstrong and Ian N. Wood (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols,
2000): 199. In England, non-Christians were offered pensions as a reward for their conversion to
Christianity, in hopes that other non-Christians would be persuaded to convert upon learning of the
that these methods of conversion were significantly non-violent, the wide circulation of such ideas for new
conversion techniques indicates a burgeoning interest in how to accomplish evangelization without the
typical use of violence.
The historical evidence that erotic conversion was not seriously considered an effective and practical means of converting non-Christians thus begs the question why it was so often used as a conversion motif in medieval romance. Part of the reason erotic conversion may have been appealing as a textual motif was its potential to stimulate conversion peacefully. Even as romances indulge in this fantasy of peaceful conversion, however, they also show that erotic conversion alone is not sufficient to effect conversion throughout Saracen communities; ultimately, violence is required to accomplish the conversion of Saracen communities in romances, as we shall see. Since violence was the method resorted to in the Middle Ages, these romances that portray peaceful erotic conversions may also partially serve as an apology for the historically violent methods of conversion used by Christians desiring to colonize Islamic lands. For authors who wish to imagine peaceful evangelization of the Saracens, interfaith marriage becomes a particularly useful means of negotiating issues of conversion.

In this chapter, I will argue that authors use interfaith marriages to express at once colonial fears and desires. Instead of portraying the fear about the possibility of interfaith marriage to seduce spouses into conversion as exclusively Christian, these authors turn the tables and imagine that Saracens have the same fears and concerns about erotic conversion. Although their assignment of similar concerns about erotic conversion to Saracen figures might suggest an attempt to understand the “Other” by endowing them with the same fears as Christians, ultimately the authors imagine that the Saracens’ actions and social institutions, including marriage, are ineffective attempts to prevent the imminent introduction and spread of Christianity to Saracen kingdoms. Thus, because only the Saracens’ fears are warranted in the end, the authors’ portrayals of these unions
are the means by which their colonial desires can be fulfilled, and the result is a widespread fantasy among medieval English writers and readers about the extent to which Christianity can dominate.

My analysis will cover both Christian and non-Christian desires and fears as portrayed in *Bevis of Hampton* and the *King of Tars*. I have chosen these texts because each very clearly presents the issue of interfaith marriage as it affects both Christians and Saracens. Furthermore, while these texts express similar interests in and concerns about interfaith marriage and sexual relations, they are also found in the same manuscript, the Auchinleck Manuscript, which may suggest a timely interest in both how Saracens are imagined by Western Christians and how interfaith marriage is imagined as an opportunity for conversion. Finally, I will deal with the Auchinleck versions because they are generally considered the best Middle English versions among critics.⁸

While the prohibitions against interfaith marriage and the common beliefs held by Christians and Saracens about interfaith marriage have been touched on by scholars in the case of the *King of Tars*, no critic has yet discussed these themes at length in *Bevis of Hampton*, nor has anyone discussed in detail the significance of interfaith marriage in

---

⁸ Though the *King of Tars* also appears in the Vernon (Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Eng. poet.a.1) and Simeon (London, British Library, Additional 22283) manuscripts, and *Bevis of Hampton* appears in five additional manuscripts (Cambridge, University Library Ff. 2.38; Cambridge, Gonville and Caius College, 175; London, British Library, Egerton 2862; Manchester, Chetham Library, 8009; and Naples, National Library, XII.B.29), those versions found in the Auchinleck (Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, Advocates 19.2.1) are considered the best and most complete versions.
expressing Saracens’ concerns about Christian evangelization and conversion. The possibility for interfaith marriage to serve as a means of locating colonial desires has been covered before, though not sufficiently. My goal in this chapter is to discuss both how colonial desires are represented through interfaith marriage and how colonial fears are expressed through the possibility of such relationships. My analysis will cover both Christian and non-Christian desires and fears as portrayed in *Bevis of Hampton* and the *King of Tars*. Before I delve into textual analysis, however, it will be useful to cover three things: first, the work of postcolonial medieval scholars that will help to situate my own contribution to the discussion of colonial desire found in these texts; second, the work that has addressed the issue of what I have termed “erotic conversion” and how it plays into colonial issues; and third, the medieval Christian attitude towards interfaith marriage generally.

Most useful to my own study of the colonial desire found in *Bevis of Hampton* and the *King of Tars* is the postcolonial work of Susan Schibanoff and Sylvia Tomasch, whose interests in colonial desire center primarily on its appearance in imaginative productions and reveal how the authors’ Christian beliefs are affected and, in some cases, even further developed, by the representations of non-Christian figures.

Sylvia Tomasch has argued that the literary “virtual Jew” was one way that medieval writers sought to distance the English people and their Christianity from the

---

9 Most critical pieces on the *King of Tars* discuss the significance of the interfaith marriage in bringing about a lifeless, deformed child and thus, discuss the prohibitions against interfaith marriage. The sultan’s own distaste for marrying a Christian woman has also been mentioned, but has not, in my view, been sufficiently analyzed. The interfaith marriage between Bevis and Josiane in *Bevis of Hampton* has been mostly overlooked and attributed to the trope of the Saracen princess who desires a Western, Christian knight. While the text may exhibit this motif, which Calkin describes as mainly visible in *chansons de geste*, it seems to me that there is something very interesting and specific occurring surrounding the issues of interfaith marriage and sex which makes this text a particularly useful and important case study.
Jewish people and Judaism: to successfully define themselves, the English people had to replace the “real” Jews (whom they had expelled from England in 1290) with an image of the “virtual Jew” so as to have a point of comparison.\(^\text{10}\) Thus, the methodology used was that of the *via negativa*—the defining of what someone (or something) is by instead describing what s/he (or it) is not. Through the creation and dissemination of the “virtual Jew,” English Christian writers were better able to construct an English identity that focused on its ties to Christianity. Tomasch’s analysis centers entirely on the “virtual Jew” and mentions other non-Christians only in reference to their representations as allies of Jews in Middle English texts. She does not discuss the concept of another type of non-Christian who is also not present in late medieval England but is equally textually important in defining an English identity: the Saracen. Tomasch’s description of how the “virtual Jew” is constructed in literature is particularly useful to this study in that it provides a framework to aid in situating the Middle English Saracen, who is also “virtual.” Building from Homi Bhaba’s work on “colonial truth production,” Tomasch argues that

\[
\text{The virtual Jew is not a source of emanations of the actual in itself but a “re-source,” a reflection constructed by means of such processes as “reversal, enlargement, editing,” and so on. “The Jew” reflects not any actual Jews but the “capacity, strategy, agency” of the observer…the virtual Jew is an invented “reality” that does not depend on actual medieval Jews for its connotations, let alone its denotation.}\(^\text{11}\)
\]

Tomasch here suggests that the “virtual Jew” is inherently different from the “true” or “actual Jew” as it is the construction of a Christian author who has the ability to adapt

---

\(^{10}\) Sylvia Tomasch, “Postcolonial Chaucer and the Virtual Jew,” *The Postcolonial Middle Ages*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (NY: Palgrave, 2001): 243-60. Tomasch argues that the “English shift from colonialism to postcolonialism is thus marked both by the expulsion of the actual and by the persistence of the virtual” (245).

\(^{11}\) Tomasch, “Postcolonial Chaucer and the Virtual Jew,” 254.
and edit the representation of the Jew in the text to serve his/her purposes in that representation. Thus, the Jewish characters we read about in Middle English texts are tainted by the Christian author’s hand: we cannot expect to know or learn anything true about the virtual Jew, as the Jew’s characteristics have been assigned by a writer completely unfamiliar with the “true Jew” who was no longer present in medieval England. In the same way, we cannot expect to learn anything about “true” Saracen characteristics or institutions from a Middle English text, as Saracens were likewise absent from medieval England. Thus, Tomasch’s work on the “virtual Jew” is important because what she claims of “virtual Jews” holds true for the “virtual Saracens” we will see in Bevis of Hampton and the King of Tars: we cannot discuss the representations of the Saracen rituals and institutions in the texts as truly those of the “Other,” the Saracen; instead, we must remember that they are representations—the portrayals of rituals and institutions have been written by a Christian author who is likely wholly unfamiliar with

---

12 Sheila Delany’s postcolonial work on the Prioress’ Tale seems directly opposed in many ways to Tomasch’s. Delany has suggested that while some English writers may not have come into contact with “real” Jews, Chaucer certainly must have through his political career. She goes on to suggest that in the Prioress’ Tale, Chaucer portrays “real” Jews, an argument that seems to overlook the significant fact that while one may encounter a Jew or Muslim, that cannot be equated with “knowing” or understanding their cultural practices and beliefs. See “Chaucer’s Prioress, the Jews, and the Muslims,” Medieval Encounters 5.2 (1999): 210.
“true” Saracen culture and religion, and thus, any representations of Saracen culture and religion must be thought to have an ulterior—and Christian—motive.13

Susan Schibanoff pushes on this notion that representations of the “Other” are not accurate portrayals of the “true,” but rather creations that Christian authors based on their own culture and institutions. In her analysis of Geoffrey Chaucer’s *Man of Law’s Tale*, Schibanoff argues that in Chaucer’s representation of Islam we see a “rhetoric of proximity,” by which she means that the religion practiced by the Saracen characters is in fact a “heresy that mimics Christianity” rather than an unrecognizable “Other” religion.14 However, she also claims that the purpose of such a representation—to make aspects of the Saracens’ religion recognizable to Christians—is to recreate the Saracens as Others and reinforce the dominance of Christianity: “Ironically, the most effective way to maintain this system of polar opposition, which always favors the dominant party, is to figure its collapse—in particular, to depict the Other as potentially similar, the outlaw-in-law.”15 Schibanoff’s conclusion that Chaucer portrays the Other religion as a less-than-perfect imitation, or even heresy, of Christianity can also be applied to the representation of Saracen institutions in Middle English romance. The Saracen marriages portrayed in

13 Sheila Delany has argued that by the mid-fourteenth century Islamic society was actually much closer to England than critics generally consider. Delany’s article is problematic in that she does not consider the misrepresentations of Islamic society sufficiently: she argues that Jews and Muslims became “lumped together” as common enemies for Christian writers, and suggests that in the *Prioress’s Tale* Chaucer is equally concerned with Muslims as he is with Jews despite the fact that he never once mentions a Muslim in the text (210). Furthermore, although the Islamic world may have been as close as Spain and Eastern Europe, medieval writers still did not portray Islamic cultural practices accurately, as other postcolonial scholars have shown. Thus, Delany’s suggestion that mistakes in the representation of medieval Jewish and Islamic cultural practices are actually a purposeful means of creating a “linkage” between the Jews and Muslims as common enemies is problematic at best. See “Chaucer’s Prioress, the Jews, and the Muslims,” 198-213.
Bevis of Hampton and the King of Tars are not valid representations of true Islamic marriage as it was practiced in the Middle Ages; instead, as I shall argue, the Saracen marriages and Saracen attitudes toward interfaith marriage represented in both texts are very much affected by the Christian writers and their beliefs. Though the authors represent the Saracens as having a particular type of humanity—they are similar to Christians in that they have a system of religious belief to which they strongly adhere as well as a system of marriage with many of the same purposes as Christian marriages—ultimately the portrayals of Saracen marriages and the Saracen attitude towards interfaith marriage are reflections of the Christian authors’ own attitudes towards and beliefs about Saracen and interfaith marriage.

The possibility that interfaith marriage could act as a means of conversion was apparently a prevalent belief in the fourteenth century, particularly since the issue was addressed in a popular treatise of the time. In his 1305-7 treatise entitled De recuperatione Terre Sancte, or The Recovery of the Holy Land, Pierre Dubois specifically recommended marriage as a means of converting individuals to Christianity.16 Although Michael R. Evans has suggested that scholars have been too quick to assert that Dubois recommends interfaith marriage between Christians and Muslims when, as he believes, Dubois actually recommends interfaith marriage between Roman Catholic Christians and Eastern Christians, even Evans must admit that Dubois specifically mentions interfaith marriage between Christians and Saracens.17 Dubois suggests that Christian girls “may

---

be given as wives to the Saracen chiefs” so that “By their efforts, with the help of God and the preaching disciples so they may have assistance of Catholics—for they cannot rely on Saracens—their husbands might be persuaded and led to the Catholic faith.”¹⁸

Thus, during the time Bevis of Hampton and the King of Tars were written, there may very well have been a contemporary interest in the potential for interfaith marriage to contribute to the colonizing desires of a Christian society caught up in the evangelical military campaigns of the Crusades. The textual representation of interfaith marriage and emphasis on its possibility to contribute to the conversion process thus becomes a timely theme during the early fourteenth century.

While the literary themes of interfaith marriage and conversion-by-marriage are found in many fourteenth-century romances from both England and the continent, the treatment of these themes by scholars on both ends has been somewhat limited. In her reading of conversion-by-marriage in the Old French Floire et Blancheflor, for example, Lynn Shutters argues that the anxieties surrounding the issue of conversion are displaced through the introduction of the love story; in other words, Shutters argues that the interfaith aspect of the love relationship is secondary to the author’s interest in depicting Floire’s masculine development, which is what really matters in making him an

acceptable match for the Christian maiden Blancheflor. Shutters goes on to claim that “It is difficult even to tell whether inter-religious marriages are taboo…When the Emir of Babylon plans to marry Blancheflor, her religion is never mentioned, nor it is an obstacle to Floire, who marries Blancheflor before he converts to Christianity and whose own conversion seems almost an afterthought.” Though the beginning of Floire et Blancheflor indicates that the young boy and girl are separated precisely because there is a fear that they will engage in an interfaith relationship and, potentially, marriage, it is remarkable that when the marriage actually occurs, the interfaith aspect seems unimportant. While Shutters’ argument focuses on the Old French version of Floire et Blancheflor, her analysis holds true for the Middle English version, Floris and Blanchefleur, also contained within the Auchinleck manuscript.

The collection of Middle English romances featuring interfaith marriage and conversion-by-marriage which have received the most critical attention is the group of Constance narratives. In these texts, which include Chaucer’s Man of Law’s Tale, the King of Tars, Emaré, Le Bone Florence of Rome, and a brief exemplum in Gower’s Confessio Amantis, the Constance-figure enters into an interfaith marriage (or more than one) in an attempt to save her Christian people and to spread Christianity among either one.

---

19 Lynn Shutters, “Christian Love or Pagan Transgression? Marriage and Conversion in Floire et Blancheflor,” Discourses on Love, Marriage, and Transgression in Medieval and Early Modern Literature, ed. Albrecht Classen (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2004): 86. Although Shutters’ argument is specifically on an Old French version of the story of Floris and Blanchefleur, it is generally useful to my project because it considers the relationship between marriage and conversion expressed in a twelfth-century text. Furthermore, the Middle English version of the story, Floris and Blanchefleur, is contained in the Auchinleck MS alongside Bevis of Hampton and the King of Tars. Though I am not looking at Floris and Blanchefleur in this article, primarily because the “Other” religion is a pagan rather than Saracen religion and because critics have generally agreed that neither interfaith marriage nor conversion seems to be a particularly important theme, Shutters’ analysis would be useful in considering how the theme of conversion, which seems to run through many of the texts found in Auchinleck, is interwoven with marriage.

Saracens or pagans, or both. This narrative is only one of the two forms conversion-by-marriage narratives take in Middle English romance, as Jennifer R. Goodman has noted: the first is the Christian princess who, whether or not by force, marries a faraway non-Christian ruler whom she attempts to convert; and the second is the Christian hero who falls in love with a non-Christian princess, whom he attempts to convert and marry.\footnote{Jennifer R. Goodman, “Marriage and Conversion in Late Medieval Romance,” \textit{Varieties of Religious Conversion in the Middle Ages}, ed. James Muldoon (Gainesville, Tallahassee, and Tampa, FL: UP of Florida, 1997): 115.} The texts I will be discussing in this chapter fit into these categories quite well: the \textit{King of Tars} quite clearly fits the first category, while \textit{Bevis of Hampton} fits the second category. Goodman’s primary focus in this article is on the agency of the women in bringing about the conversions of their husbands to Christianity; thus, she compares the historical story of Clothilde, the fifth-century queen who is able to convert her husband Clovis to Christianity, to the fictional narrative of Constance, and argues that in texts like Chaucer’s, intermarriage is “how women change the course of history.”\footnote{Goodman, “Marriage and Conversion in Late Medieval Romance,” 120.} Goodman’s discussion of the conversion-by-marriage trope is useful in that it presents a historical overview of the role intermarriage played in conversion (at least according to historical chronicles); however, her analysis does not extend far beyond a comparison of these two categories of conversion-by-marriage narratives. Unfortunately, this comparison, which also includes a discussion of the differences between Saracen and Christian princesses, is far too black-and-white. Goodman places the Saracen and Christian princesses in direct opposition to one another: whereas the Christian bride is “resigned, self-effacing, and self-disciplined,” the Saracen princess is “aggressive, forward, passionate.”\footnote{Goodman, “Marriage and Conversion in Late Medieval Romance,” 124.} The figures
of Josiane the Saracen princess and the Princess of Tars are much more complicated than Goodman’s categories allow, and an analysis of how they break from this either/or categorization will help to reveal even more about the significance and effects of interfaith marriage. Another striking aspect of conversion-by-marriage narratives that is not sufficiently addressed by Goodman is that the conversion process does not end with the marriage or inside the home. Instead, we see the process of conversion taken to another level: the new or newly Christian king must now enforce conversion to Christianity on his people, as we will see in both Bevis of Hampton and the King of Tars.

Perhaps the most complete analysis of the interfaith relationships and marriages in the Constance-narratives, however, is that of Geraldine Heng. Heng’s work on this group highlights many of the reasons interfaith relationships may be particularly attractive to a Christian writer—specifically because they portray the effects of colonization through the conversion of the non-Christian partner. What Heng finds so interesting about such portrayals is that the colonization becomes a private matter: “To be sure, any conversion by a queen or princess to the religion of the conquerors attests a colonizing impetus at work in representation, but the historical epoch’s principal preoccupations write that colonization as a private love story mostly involving the important, high-level individuals who are the usual actors in elite cultural fantasy.”24 The “privatization” Heng mentions here does not last long, however: in most texts in which the conversion-by-marriage trope is at work, we find that the conversion must move beyond the domestic realm of the home and into the kingdom at large (an effect we will see in both Bevis and the King of Tars, but will examine more closely in the following chapter). For this study, what is

most useful about Heng’s analysis is her focus on the “fantasy” of colonization in texts: this focus takes into consideration the fact that authors can participate in the performance of colonization through their subject matter. Not only can this participation occur through their representations of the physical and political dominance of Christians, but also, as this chapter will suggest, through their effacement of the differences between Christians and Saracens. The Bevis- and King of Tars-authors perform an imaginative colonization by first applying the same reaction towards interfaith marriage and conversion that they, as Christians, have onto Saracen characters, and then by enforcing the marriage and conversion onto the Saracen societies anyway, making the original responses of the Saracen characters immaterial. In other words, Christianity must conquer, and if it is to conquer through the interfaith marriage of the Christian hero and the formerly-Saracen-but-now-converted princess in Bevis of Hampton or the Christian heroine and the as-yet-unconverted Saracen sultan in the King of Tars, the significance of Saracen marriage is twisted: it becomes a desperate means for the Saracen rulers to try to control in the first instance the wayward, impressionable princess and in the second the dangerous, Christian princess. In both instances, Saracen marriage is portrayed as a desperate attempt to prevent the intrusion of a new hegemonic (Christian) culture. To better understand how medieval Christians viewed interfaith marriage and how the authors’ Christian beliefs are manifested in these texts, however, we must also look at the discussions surrounding the issue among canonists and theologians.

The terminology used to refer to the marriages I will be addressing is important, and should be addressed first to avoid confusion. Although some scholars have referred to the marriages of Christians to non-Christians as “mixed marriages,” this terminology is
misleading, since according to canon law, a “mixed marriage” occurs only between two baptized Christians: one Catholic, the other part of a heretical or schismatic sect. The term “interfaith marriage” is more acceptable, as this distinction takes into account the issue of *disparitas cultus*, and refers directly to the marriage between a baptized Catholic and an unbaptized person. Thus, when the canon lawyers and theologians I name are discussing *disparitas cultus*, they are referring to “interfaith” marriages rather than “mixed” marriages. The difference between “mixed” versus “interfaith” marriages in canon law is the type of impediment they pose to marriage: a mixed marriage constitutes a prohibitive impediment, whereas an interfaith marriage constitutes a diriment impediment. A diriment impediment means that the marriage is completely invalid, whereas a prohibitive impediment means that it is valid, yet its contraction is sinful. The proposed marriages in *Bevis of Hampton* and the *King of Tars* between the baptized Christian and the unbaptized Saracen would thus have a diriment impediment; because, however, Josiane converts before marrying Bevis, their marriage is indeed valid. The marriage of the Princess of Tars and Sultan of Damascus occurs before any conversion has taken place and would presumably present a diriment impediment; however, this marriage is rather complicated as it occurs under the Saracen rather than Christian law, as we shall soon see.

---

25 These definitions and the types of impediments they present are taken from the Rev. Francis J. Schenk’s dissertation on marriages dealing with mixed religion and disparity of cult. I am following the terminology Schenk uses throughout his text. See “The Matrimonial Impediments of Mixed Religion and Disparity of Cult,” 10-11. Siobhain Bly Calkin repeatedly makes the error of referring to marriage between baptized and unbaptized individuals as “mixed marriage” in *Bevis of Hampton* and the *King of Tars*. This error is found in all three of her works cited in this chapter.

26 It should be noted that the term *disparitas cultus* was not used in reference to interfaith marriage until the twelfth century and was coined by Peter Lombard. The term *mixta religio*, or “mixed marriage,” was not, however, coined until the nineteenth century and is thus an anachronistic way of discussing medieval marriages. See Schenk, “The Matrimonial Impediments of Mixed Religion and Disparity of Cult,” 12-13.
In his study of the history and development of the impediments to marriage, Francis J. Schenk indicates that while the impediments against interfaith marriage generally concerned only marriages between Christians and Jews from early Christianity through the eleventh century, during the twelfth and especially thirteenth centuries the impediment was extended to include marriage to Muslims. Schenk suggests that the reason for this new inclusion of Muslims was the contemporary danger their religion represented to the Catholic Church; thus, the Church’s policies on marriage “represented rather an intense reaction toward the dangers to the Faith than a true expression of the mind of the Church.” Whether or not danger was the impetus for new stringent rules governing marriage which completely outlawed interfaith marriage, canon lawyers and theologians of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries found it necessary to address repeatedly the invalidity of such marriages.

In his *Summa de Poenitentia et Matrimonio*, a compilation of marital rules that forms the canon law on marriage and is therefore extremely important to the medieval understanding of marriage, early thirteenth-century canon lawyer and theologian Saint Raymond of Peñafort devoted a chapter to the impediment *disparitas cultus* and revealed what kinds of interfaith marriages are allowed or prohibited. Here, Raymond clarifies that any interfaith marriages made between Christians and unbelievers—which include pagans, Jews, Muslims, and heretics—are completely invalid. He even goes so far as to

---

28 It is significant and should be noted that the text on which Chaucer drew for the *Parson’s Tale* was, according to Paul E. Beichner, a “remote ancestor” of Raymond of Peñafort’s *Summa on Marriage*. See Paul E. Beichner, “Chaucer’s Man of Law and *Disparitas Cultus,*” *Speculum* 23.1 (1948): 73, n. 10. It is thus fair to assume that Raymond’s ideas concerning marriage were in circulation during and throughout the fourteenth century in England.
Raymond further explains why interfaith marriages are not allowed, relying on Old Testament scripture from Exodus which says, “You shall not take wives for your sons from the daughters of foreigners, lest they lead them after their gods.” The fear that the Christian spouse and any children produced from such a relationship would be forced or convinced to turn away from Christianity was clearly enough reason to prohibit these marriages.

Raymond next reveals, however, that there is one instance in which a marriage between a Christian and an unbeliever may be contracted: when the goal of the marriage is conversion of the unbelieving spouse to Christianity, and the consent to marriage is conditional upon the conversion of the spouse to Christianity. The key to this one instance of an interfaith couple being permitted to marry, however, is that the conversion must take place before the actual marriage—a result of conditional consent, which means that the wording of the engagement must go something like this: “I n. will marry you/marry you provided that/if you convert to Christianity.” The premise of conditional consent is that the marriage is binding only if the condition is fulfilled; thus, if the non-Christian party chose not to convert, the engagement would be null and void.

Furthermore, because the marriage would be undertaken only under the condition that conversion occurred, the marriage obviously would not be considered interfaith, as both parties would be Christian at the time the marriage was made. This conditional engagement is most commonly how interfaith marriages were contracted, as James A. Brundage specifies: “In actual practice, marriage between a Jew and a Christian was something that occurred most frequently after the fact, that is, after the conversion of one

---

of two Jewish spouses.”31 Even earlier than Raymond, Saint Ambrose spurned the concept of interfaith marriage because he believed an interfaith couple could not participate in charity, or Christian love: in the De Abraham, he writes that there can be no unity of love where there is no unity of faith.32 While other theologians also wrote about the problems associated with interfaith marriage—namely Walter of Mortagne—Raymond’s account is the most significant in that it became the canon law on marriage.33 What we can ultimately conclude from Raymond’s work is that the medieval Church expressly forbade Christians to enter interfaith marriages. Thus, the imagined interfaith marriages so prevalent in later medieval literature seem to suggest an interest in how such relationships can affect and potentially solve political and theological conflicts.

I will now turn to Bevis of Hampton and the King of Tars to discuss how these Christian prohibitions against interfaith marriage and sexuality are expressed and how they contribute to the imaginative colonial efforts of the authors.

32 In LIX of the De Abraham, Ambrose writes, “Si hoc in aliis, quanto magis in conjugio, ubi una caro, et unus spiritus est. Quomodo autem potest congruere charitas, si discrepet fides?” Though Ambrose is specifically referring to marriages between gentiles, Jews, and heretics, his belief that a single faith must unite husband and wife in marriage is certainly a common belief by the late Middle Ages and is expressed in documents upheld by the Church. See Ambrose, De Abraham (Migne, PL 14:0450D-0451A).
33 It is important to note that Raymond’s work has not been regarded as completely his own; his text on marriage seems to compile and expound upon others’ work to form the canon law on marriage, and certainly takes into account Peter Lombard’s Sentences and Gratian’s Decretum. The views of Walter of Mortagne, which influenced Peter Lombard, on marriage are primarily found in his correspondence with Anselm. See Peter Biller, The Measure of Multitude: Population in Medieval Thought (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003): 27-8.
Because of its depiction of a very Christian knight in a very non-Christian, Saracen world, *Bevis of Hampton* has been a popular case study for medieval scholars interested in postcolonialism. Scholars interested in the text’s portrayals of a Christian knight conquering and resisting assimilation into the Saracen world to which he has been sent have suggested that the elements of romance and romantic love are secondary to the religious battle the text portrays. Siobhain Bly Calkin, for example, has argued that the text “both conveys a fear of Christian assimilation into a non-Christian world, and defines a model of heroic action to counteract such assimilation and re-establish the borders between Christianity and Saracenness. However, the text also indicates the ways in which heroic efforts to reconstruct such borders might ultimately fail.” While religion is undoubtedly a significant aspect of the text, it is fair to say that marriage, too, is an extremely important theme in *Bevis of Hampton*. The text contains representations of at least eight marriages or marriage contracts which involve not only Bevis (who has two contracts) and his wife Josiane (who herself has three contracts), but also Bevis’ son, his cousin, and his mother. That the text is so highly interested in marriage suggests that it is

---

34 As I mentioned above, I am considering only the version of *Bevis of Hampton* found within the Auchinleck Manuscript because this version is the earliest English appearance of the romance and is widely considered by critics to be the best version of the romance. One editor of the text, Eugen Kölbng, claims that the Auchinleck version differs from the original Anglo-Norman text much more than other Middle English versions; however, the scenes I will consider here do not differ drastically in different versions of the text. See *The Romance of Sir Beves of Hamtoun*, Early English Text Society (Extra Series) 46, 48, 65 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1885, 1886, 1894): xxxvii-xli. Siobhain Bly Calkin argues that the main differences evident in the Auchinleck version are associated with a sense of English nationalism, a theme that does not concern me in this chapter. See *Saracens and the Making of English Identity: The Auchinleck Manuscript* (NY and London: Routledge, 2005).

a theme that should not be overlooked, and I will argue that in fact the themes of religious
difference and marriage are inseparable in this text.

I have specified that I am looking at the Bevis of the Auchinleck manuscript,
which is important to note since there are at least six English versions of Bevis of
Hampton. As the Auchinleck manuscript’s version is generally considered the most
comprehensive and the best overall version by scholars, I will confine my analysis to the
version found in this manuscript. Finally, because Bevis of Hampton is such an episodic
text, I will begin with a summary covering the main episodes that relate to the concepts
being explored in this chapter: marriage, religion, and conversion.

The text begins with the marriage of Guy of Hampton to a much younger princess
who does not consent to the marriage. The princess bears a son, Bevis, but remains in
love with another man, the Emperor of Germany (Devon), and successfully plots Guy of
Hampton’s murder with Devon when Bevis is seven. Immediately after her husband’s
death, the princess marries Devon and orders Bevis’ teacher to kill him. Bevis is secretly
kept alive, however, and invades the castle to attack his stepfather. His mother then sells
Bevis to merchants, and Bevis joins the court of the king of Armenia, Ermin. Although
Ermin tries to persuade Bevis to convert to the Saracen religion, Bevis remains a
Christian and becomes one of the greatest trained warriors in the Armenian court.

Not long afterward, a foreign king, Brademond, requests Josiane in marriage and
threatens to go to war with Ermin if he refuses. War commences when Ermin refuses the
request, and Bevis defeats Brademond. Josiane, who has secretly fallen in love with

---

36 The Auchinleck manuscript’s shelf-mark is Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, Advocates 19.2.1. The other versions appear in the following manuscripts: Cambridge, University Library Ff. 2.38; Cambridge, Gonville and Caius College, 175; London, British Library, Egerton 2862; Manchester, Chetham Library, 8009; and Naples, National Library, XII.B.29.
Bevis, promises to convert to Christianity if Bevis will marry her. Brademond, now jealous, plots against Bevis and tells Ermin that Bevis has deflowered Josiane, a move which results in Ermin sending Bevis to be executed. Instead, Brademond imprisons Bevis for seven years. In the meantime, Ermin tells Josiane that Bevis has married an English princess, and proceeds to give her in marriage to King Yvor. Bevis is able to miraculously escape his imprisonment and defeats Brademond’s men. Bevis next defeats a giant and stops in Jerusalem, where he learns from a religious patriarch that he should marry only a virgin. This advice reminds him of his contract with Josiane, and he rides to Yvor’s kingdom where he learns that Yvor and Josiane have already been married. He disguises himself as a palmer, but Josiane recognizes him and reminds him of their engagement to marry; because she has already married Yvor and is presumably not a virgin, however, Bevis refuses. When Josiane reveals that she has not consummated her marriage with Yvor, together they escape from Yvor’s court and Josiane is christened.

Before Bevis and Josiane are able to fulfill their marriage agreement, however, Bevis must fight a dragon, and while he is away, another man, Miles, forcibly marries Josiane. Josiane, however, murders Miles before he is able to consummate their relationship. As a result, his people condemn her to death, but Bevis rescues her in time. He next returns to battle his stepfather and reclaim his patrimony, and is successful in his efforts. Josiane and Bevis are married, and Josiane bears twin sons, Miles and Guy. When Bevis and his retinue leave England for Armenia, Josiane is kidnapped and sent back to Yvor. Bevis’ former teacher is able to find Josiane, and they finally reunite with Bevis. The entire group returns to Armenia, where Bevis and his son forcibly convert the country to Christianity. More troubles with Yvor ensue, but Bevis’ sons both become
heirs—one to the Armenian throne, the other to the English throne. Bevis and Josiane rule Yvor’s kingdom after Bevis is able to defeat and kill him. When Bevis and Josiane die, Bevis’ son founds a religious order to pray for his parents’ souls.

Bevis’ movement from the Christian English and Scottish kingdoms to the Saracen parts of Europe and his continuous desire to reassert his Christianity in the face of the Saracen religion indicate that religion drives many of his actions. Not only does he defeat two Saracen kings and conquer their kingdoms, but he also repeatedly denigrates the Saracen religion and works to establish the Christian religion throughout these lands, moves which designate an interest in colonialism in the text. What I will now focus on is how the Bevis-author ties these colonial goals to the issue of marriage.

Critics have noted that Josiane’s conversion to Christianity clearly makes her more acceptable as the wife of a Christian hero, but the full consequences of her conversion and union with Bevis have not been adequately explored. Calkin, for example, focuses on the medieval notion that Muslims and Jews could never be completely (meaning “bodily”) converted, and claims that Josiane’s conversion is therefore “at best a partial effacement of [her] Saracen identity.” Though Calkin rightly claims that Josiane maintains ties with her father and her Armenian lessons in botany, the argument that Josiane’s Saracen identity cannot be fully effaced in favor of a new,

---

37 My careful choice of words in referring to the Saracens’ religion in both Bevis of Hampton and the King of Tars is due to the critical consensus that the religion we see practiced by the Saracens in medieval texts is not actually Islam; rather, it is Christian authors’ faulty representations of Islam. Such representations go so far as to actually introduce the worship of pagan gods as part of Islam and misrepresent the significance of Mohammed to Islam. For example, in Bevis we see the Saracens swear by “Tervagaunt” in addition to Mohammed, and in the King of Tars we see multiple idols in the temple. Thus, it is not appropriate to refer to the religion of the Saracens simply as “Islam.” For discussions of the fallacies medieval authors make in representing Islam in their texts, see especially Edward Said’s discussion of this issue in his seminal work Orientalism (NY: Vintage Books, 1978): 59.

Christian identity seems somehow flawed. Bevis’ and Josiane’s marriage does not serve to “re-establish the borders between Christianity and Saracenness,” but rather serves as a moment in which differences in religion seem to be reconcilable. I will suggest that part of the text’s purpose in representing so many marriages is to expound upon the consequences of marriage, the most important of which is religious conversion.

That marriage has consequences becomes clear from the beginning of the text. When the much older Guy of Hampton marries Bevis’ mother, who is in love with the Emperor of Germany, his death is sealed. After the emperor has killed Guy at Bevis’ mother’s request, the two are married. This early warning about imprudent marriage causes Ivana Djordjević to claim of the text that “From the idea that marriage is bad when it is untimely (and when it involves the wrong choice of marriage partner) we have moved to the notion that marriage is bad by definition.”

Bevis becomes incensed over this marriage and calls his mother a “whore” and tries to ambush and attack his new stepfather. As a result, Bevis’ mother decides to take drastic action and sells Bevis to some merchants—but not just any merchants:

“Wendeth,” she seide, “to the stronde:
Yif ye seth schipes of painim londe,
Selleth to hem this ilche hyne,
That ye for no gode ne fine,
Whather ye have for him mor and lesse,
Selleth him right in to hethenesse!”
Forth the knightes gonne te,
Til that hii come to the se,
Schipes hii fonde ther stonde
Of hethenesse and of fele londe;
The child hii chepeden to sale,
Marchaundes thai fonde ferli fale

Bevis’ mother’s stipulation that her son be sold into heathen lands is a direct result of her new marriage, and it puts her son in a tenuous position in which his Christianity may be compromised. Throughout the remainder of the text, Bevis constantly reasserts his Christianity, as scholars have noted, though he does not do so only to re-establish the differences between Christianity and the Saracen religion, but rather to defeat the Saracen religion and attempt to establish a Christian presence and, significantly, a Christian following in this Saracen world into which he has been introduced.

Religious difference is a great source of contention throughout the text, both through war and, perhaps more interestingly, marriage. Not only are we to imagine at first that Bevis’ mother’s actions may compromise his Christianity—a concern that evidently has some credibility, as one day in Ermin’s court Bevis does not realize that it is Christmas—but we also see the effects of encounters between people of different religions. When Bevis first arrives in Armenia and proceeds to Ermin’s court, Ermin immediately desires to assimilate him into the Saracen religion:

“And solde that child for mechel aughte
And to the Sarasins him betaughte. (495-508)\textsuperscript{40}

“Mahoun!” a seide, “thee might be proute,
And this child wolde to thee aloute;
Yif a wolde a Sarasin be,
Yit ich wolde hope, a scholde the!” (531-4)

When Bevis is unresponsive to Ermin’s aspiration to turn him into a Saracen and instead berates his mother’s wickedness in selling him into heathendom, Ermin decides to take his religious negotiations to another level, offering the as-yet untested (and as-yet unknighted) Bevis the hand of his daughter, the beautiful Saracen princess Josiane:

\textsuperscript{40} Bevis of Hampton, Four Romances of England, ed. Ronald B. Herzman, Graham Drake, and Eve Salisbury (Kalamazoo, MI: TEAMS, 1999). All quotations will be taken from this edition.
What is most significant about this offer is that Ermin clearly believes that by offering marriage to Josiane to Bevis, he will be able to convert Bevis to the Saracens’ religion. Marriage thus seems to serve a transactional purpose rather than a romantic purpose. By converting Bevis to his religion and marrying him to Josiane, Ermin will not only be able to contain a potentially dangerous situation—a renegade Christian knight within his court (which, as we later find out, is in fact how Bevis is perceived)—but he will also ensure an unopposed dynastic succession of Saracen rule. Ermin indicates here that marriage is a particularly attractive means of prompting and, most importantly, sealing religious conversion. Ermin’s desire to contain Bevis’ Christianity through conversion and marriage further suggests that conversion-by-marriage need not be imagined simply as a Christian conception; conversion-by-marriage is here imagined as an acceptable solution for any religion.

Bevis, however, does not accept Ermin’s offer and instead reasserts his Christianity, a move which we later find out endangers him among the other knights of Ermin’s court:

“For Gode!” queth Beves, “that I nolde
For al the selver ne al the golde,
That is under hevene light,
Ne for thee doughter, that is so bright.
I nolde forsake in none manere
Jesu, that bouhte me so dere.
Al mote thai be doum and deve,
That on the false godes beleve!” (561-8)
Bevis here stresses his devotion to Jesus Christ and the Christian God, even at the expense of refusing marriage to Josiane, whom we are told is nearly perfect—she has only a single flaw: “Boute of Cristene lawe she kouthe naught” (526). Bevis’ rejection of Josiane is therefore equated with his rejection of the Saracen religion: Josiane becomes desirable to him only once she promises to forsake her religion and embrace Christianity, and once she does so, Bevis immediately agrees to marry her. Bevis’ view of marriage, then, is entirely dependent on how it affects his religious standing, as we shall soon see.

Although Bevis refuses to convert to Ermin’s Saracen religion, calls all the Saracen followers of Mohammed “dumb and deaf,” and even rejects Ermin’s offer of Josiane as spouse, Ermin allows him to remain in the Armenian court, and even educates him. What is perhaps more exceptional is that the Bevis-author tells us that Ermin “him [Bevis] lovede wel the more” (569) because of his refusal to compromise his Christian standing. Despite his acceptance of Bevis into his court, however, Ermin never again offers Josiane in marriage to Bevis, which I will argue is clearly telling of his attitude towards interfaith marriage. Because Bevis is only one Christian knight among many Saracen knights in Ermin’s court, he may not necessarily seem to pose such a threat to the Saracen religion and its succession in Armenia; as we later find out, however, this belief is entirely incorrect, as Bevis not only proceeds to kill many of Ermin’s Saracen knights defending himself, but he also is able to convert Josiane and produce a Christian heir to Ermin’s throne, with whom he violently enforces conversion to Christianity on the Armenian people.
While Ermin gives up on Bevis’ complete—meaning religious—assimilation into his court, the significance of religious difference only increases in importance as a theme in the text. From the beginning of the text we are to assume that the heathen, Saracen lands are precisely where one does not want to be—presumably, this is why Bevis’ mother sells him to pagan merchants and sends him into exile in “hethenesse” (500)—and throughout the rest of the text we continually see clashes between Christians and Saracens. In Ermin’s court, while jealousy seems to play a role in some of the scuffles between Bevis and Ermin’s other knights, the author consistently reminds us that these other knights are heathens—Saracens. The battles into which Bevis enters always feature him—the Christian—against the non-Christians. Bevis’ first fight in Armenia against Ermin’s men significantly occurs on Christmas day. When one of Ermin’s Saracen knights asks Bevis what day it is and Bevis claims not to know, the Saracen is surprised by Bevis’ ignorance of that fact that it is Christmas day. He berates Bevis for his ignorance, claiming that even he, a Saracen, knows that it is Christmas. In response, Bevis takes up his sword and, although he is not yet a knight, fights and kills the Saracen and fifty more Saracen companions. Calkin has suggested that by battling the Saracen knights, Bevis is able to recover from his “shameful” ignorance and recoup his Christian identity. While it may be true that Bevis must assert that his Christianity is not endangered in this Saracen world, his reliance on violence to impress upon his foes his devotion to Christianity underscores the argument that violence is somehow always already connected to religious conversion. Furthermore, while Bevis is able to prove the superiority of Christianity, he remains unable to have any significant and lasting effect on

the Saracen world: such an effect becomes possible only through his relationship with and marriage to Josiane.

Kofi Campbell has noted that the theme of intermarriage in Saracen romances occurs often enough to make it worthy of investigation, and proposes that the intermarriage of Bevis and Josiane “will give Bevis access to the wealth and fighting men he needs to re-establish himself on his own lands” and goes on to argue that their marriage “is extremely important to this text’s nation-building fantasy. It exemplifies the text’s seeming failure to achieve a separation of cultures (which I will argue is not a failure at all, but a deliberate strategy) and its decidedly colonialist desire for the appropriation of foreign land.”42 While Bevis’ marriage to Josiane does permit him to exhibit a colonialist desire to create a Christian following in Saracen lands, Campbell is, I believe, incorrect in suggesting that the marriage does not serve to “separate” Christian and Saracen cultures. It is important to remember that while the engagement is made while the couple is interfaith, the marriage occurs only after Josiane has converted to Christianity. Furthermore, as I will prove, both Christians and Saracens as represented in the text completely disapprove of interfaith marriage, which suggests that conversion is a complete process, at least in this text (though it is much trickier in the King of Tars, as we will see), and that the representation of Bevis’ and Josiane’s marriage is in fact one aspect of the text in which we are able to see a rather distinct separation of cultures/religions.

As is common in texts in which a Saracen princess becomes the love interest of the Christian knight, Josiane is the first to traverse the religious boundaries and fall in

love. Her love for Bevis is inspired by his abilities in battle, and is proven by her intervention on his behalf. When Bevis defeats and kills fifty of Ermin’s Saracen knights, his victory seems to be taken by Ermin as an act of treason: he immediately condemns Bevis to death, without even questioning him about the incident. Only because Josiane intervenes is Bevis’ life saved. When Bevis tells Ermin about the battle, Ermin, like Josiane, judges that Bevis was merely defending himself and consequently, forgives Bevis and tells Josiane to look after him until his wounds have healed. It is interesting that Ermin permits Josiane to nurse Bevis and anoint his wounds, which presumably involves contact, as Ermin later reveals his vehement disapproval of sexual relations between Josiane and Bevis.

Bevis’ relationship with Josiane frequently betrays the issue of *disparitas cultus*, or difference of religion. Although Bevis is clearly aware of Josiane’s beauty, he refuses to convert in order to marry her, and significantly, treats Josiane with much contempt until she promises to convert to Christianity. At first, Josiane does not seem to realize the effect that their religious disparity has on Bevis’ feelings towards her; she keeps her feelings hidden and even—ironically—prays to Mohammed for advice. What is most surprising, perhaps, about Josiane’s prayer to Mohammed is that she says it after Bevis has already clarified that he has no interest—sexual or otherwise—in Josiane precisely because of her religious background. His lack of interest becomes clear when he refuses to speak with Josiane after she has intervened to her father on his behalf and has

---

43 Goodman identifies this first transgression against boundaries as the action of the Saracen princess, who is generally depicted as extremely forward and forceful. See Goodman, “Marriage and Conversion in Late Medieval Romance,” 115-6.
44 See lines 891-8: “O Mahoun,” she seide, “our drighte, / What Beves is man of meche mighte! / Al this world yif ich it hedde, / Ich him yeve me to wedde; / Boute he me love, icham ded. / Swete Mahoun, what is thee rede? / Lovelonging me hath becought, / Thar-of wot Beves right nought.”
essentially saved his life. Bevis, however, shows no gratitude and refuses to speak with a “hethene hounde”—the name which he calls her three times (689-94) and which visibly upsets the Saracen messengers who must deliver Bevis’ answer. Josiane, however, remains unfazed, and continues her efforts to win Bevis’ heart; perhaps her most significant move is her request that Ermin make Bevis a knight so he can defend her from an enforced marriage (or worse, as we find out) to the Saracen king of Damascus, Brademond, for upon Bevis’ victory over Brademond, the two enter into a marriage contract based on conditional consent.

Josiane’s suggestion to knight Bevis is a direct result of Brademond’s threat that unless Ermin will force Josiane to marry Brademond, he will

“…lay hire a night be me side,
And after I wile thee doughter yeve
To a weine-pain, that is fordrive!” (924-6)

Although Brademond is Saracen royalty and clearly an acceptable match for Josiane—in fact, even Bevis alludes to his acceptability as a mate—it is Brademond’s threat to bring war to Ermin’s kingdom (that he “thoughte winne with meistrie / Josiane” (912-3)) that causes Ermin to find him an unacceptable match for Josiane. I would suggest that Ermin’s plans for Josiane’s marriage are based on his goal of creating a peacefully united Saracen kingdom; for this reason he originally asked Bevis to convert to the Saracen religion and marry Josiane. Josiane’s marriage should be considered an important resource for Ermin; by marrying her to Bevis under Saracen law, he could, as I argued above, contain and restrain Bevis’ Christianity and Christian impulses for conversion; or

---

45 See lines 1099-1104: “‘For Gode,’ queth Beves, ‘that ich do nelle! / Her is,’ a seide, ‘min unliche, / Brademond King, that is so riche, / In al this world nis ther man, / Prinse ne king ne soudan, / That thee to wive have nolde, / And he the hadde ones beholde!’”
by marrying her to another Saracen king, he could unite his Saracen kingdom with another and produce a Saracen heir to the Armenian throne, which he earlier revealed to be part of his purpose in trying to negotiate a marriage between Josiane and Bevis. Thus, when Brademond threatens to prevent Ermin from negotiating Josiane’s marriage to whomever he wants, and when he further threatens to rape Josiane and turn her into, essentially, a prostitute, Ermin’s response, to go to war against Brademond and reject his potential as a spouse for Josiane, makes sense. Ermin’s decision to send Bevis to his death after he thinks that Bevis has deflowered Josiane similarly makes sense, since Bevis has presumably accomplished what Brademond had only threatened. When Ermin knights Bevis so he can protect Josiane and Ermin’s interests, Bevis makes a point of underscoring his religious affiliation, and suggests that he is not merely protecting Josiane and Ermin’s interests—he is also fulfilling his Christian “obligation” to engage in battle with evil Saracens. When Ermin tells Bevis to carry his standard into battle to defeat Brademond, Bevis replies that he will do so gladly—but that he will do so “be the Rod” (968). Bevis’ comment here, that he will fight under the sign of the cross, indicates that at this point, he is much more interested in fulfilling his Christian duty to fight the “other” religion than he is in protecting Josiane, in whom, because she is still a Saracen, he has no vested interest. Calkin has observed that Bevis’ decision to fight on behalf of Ermin and Josiane indicates his “bold rewriting of his familial and dynastic affiliations to this point” and that his “claims to Saracen ‘brotherhood’ are articulated forthrightly and explicitly.”46 I believe, however, that Bevis elucidates his desire to be associated with battling for the Christian God rather than his Saracen ruler and the Saracen princess he

has already rejected. Such an assertion proves that his primary interests are colonial, and his colonial interests are further proven when he does finally show interest in marrying Josiane.

As a Saracen princess, Josiane stands in stark contrast to most Christian heroines because she frequently takes action, even when she is acted upon by others. Myra Seaman’s feminist reading of Bevis differentiates Josiane from most other English romance heroines by pointing to her ability to use her learning and intelligence to act and defend herself against those acting upon her. Seaman goes so far as to call Josiane a “shadow hero” of the romance, an important distinction which I find fitting, for without Josiane and her adventures, Bevis would not necessarily succeed in evangelizing the Saracen lands to the extent he is able. One thing missing from Seaman’s analysis, however, is a full discussion of how Josiane’s Saracen identity is partially the reason for these differences.

The difference between the Saracen princess and the Christian princesses first becomes clear when Josiane reveals her feelings to Bevis and offers to become his lover, without any discussion about or promise of marriage between the two. Bevis is clearly appalled by Josiane’s offer, and immediately refuses. What is perhaps most interesting

---

47 As mentioned above in n. 41, Goodman suggests that Saracen princesses frequently have more agency than Christian princesses. Susan Crane makes a similar argument about romance heroines, suggesting that heroines’ adventures in romance are ultimately influenced and shaped by the male hero’s adventures. While Josiane’s adventures are certainly influenced and shaped by Bevis’, they also simultaneously shape and influence his adventures. See Gender and Romance in Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1994): 165-203.
49 Seaman, “Engendering Genre in Middle English Romance,” 56.
50 Seaman notes that Josiane’s learning, which in some ways enables her to act, comes from her Saracen background, but does not discuss how her Saracen identity also helps to differentiate Josiane from Christian romance heroines. See “Engendering Genre in Middle English Romance,” 58.
51 See lines 1093-1109, in which Josiane tells Bevis he can “with me do thee wille,” and repeats that exact phrase twice.
about his refusal is that he suggests alternative spouses for Josiane, including Brademond and other princes, kings, and sultans.\textsuperscript{52} By including Brademond and “sultans” among his suggestions, Bevis implies that neither he nor any other Christian man would be interested in either sexual relations with or marriage to Josiane. Josiane’s reaction to this suggestion, however, is to insult Bevis, since he should not refuse her advances if he believes kings, princes, and sultans would marry her; consequently, Bevis leaves the court. Even after Josiane sends a messenger with an apology, Bevis refuses to return to her, so Josiane decides to take the initiative and go to him. It is during this meeting that their relationship takes its most important turn in the text, for Josiane proves her devotion to Bevis by forsaking her father and, more importantly, her gods and religion. Only because she here promises to convert so that she can be with Bevis will he have anything to do with her, and this promise seals the later conversion of Armenia and the proliferation of Christianity throughout the Saracen lands which Bevis encounters.

According to Josiane, her proposal to convert to Christianity is doubly significant—her conversion will not only serve as an indication of her apology to Bevis, but also as a promise for their future marriage, which becomes clear through their conversation leading into the proposal:

“Damesele,” queth Beves thanne,
“Let me ligge and go the wei henne!
Icham weri of-foughte sore,
Ich faught for thee, I nel namore.”
“Merci,” she seide, “lemman, thin ore!”
She fel adoun and wep wel sore:
“Men seith,” she seide, “in olde riote,
That wimmannes bolt is sone schote.
Forghem me, that ichave misede,
And ich wile right now to mede

\textsuperscript{52} See n. 43 above for the lines referenced here.
Min false godes al forsake
And Cristendom for thee love take!”
“In that maner,” queth the knight,
“I graunte thee, me swete wight!”
And kiste hire at that cordement. (1185-99)

In this brief conversation, Josiane and Bevis move quickly from an argument into what I will argue is a conditional marriage contract. That their intention is marriage is clear, I think, from Bevis’ choice of the word “graunte” to respond to Josiane’s promise to convert to Christianity. The word “graunte” implies that marriage is what they are negotiating because, according to the MED, “graunte” is regularly used in the context of making promises and “granting” one’s word; the word thus suggests that a legal arrangement is being made between the two. Furthermore, Bevis again chooses the word “graunte” later in the text when he has been reunited with Josiane after her marriage to Yvor. When she wishes to marry him, he questions her virginity because she has already been married. To prove to him that she has remained a virgin, she prompts him to make a covenant with her, during which he again indicates his acceptance of the marriage arrangement by using the word “graunte,” so it seems rather clear that Bevis is entering into marital agreements—though they are conditional—in both instances. According to Church doctrine, the manner of agreement in this proposal intimates that Bevis and Josiane are entering into a marriage contract based on words of conditional consent. These kinds of contracts seem to have been employed in cases of marriage which would

53 See the MED, s.v. “Graunte,” 6a, 6b.
54 For Bevis’ second use of ”graunte” in making a marital pledge with Josiane, see lines 2207-8.
55 Most frequently potential spouses drew on words of conditional consent to suspend their decision on whether to enter fully into a marriage contract until they had first discussed the issue with their friends and families. Shannon McSheffrey has suggested that fifteenth-century London witnessed women using conditional consent much more frequently than men as it afforded them freedom in placing some responsibility for their match on their parents and friends. See Marriage, Sex, and Civic Culture in Late Medieval London (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2006): 74-109.
involve conversion, which is evident from Raymond of Peñafort’s discussion of marital cases involving *disparitas cultus* in the *Summa de Poenitentia et Matrimonio*. Here, Raymond stipulates that there is only one process by which a Christian can contract marriage with a non-Christian: “a believer can contract an *engagement* with an unbeliever *with the condition* that the unbeliever be converted to the faith” (my emphasis).\(^{56}\) It is important to note that the “cordement,” or agreement, into which Bevis and Josiane enter is a conditional agreement to marry once Josiane converts to Christianity. Under the rules associated with marriages contracted using words of conditional consent, only if the condition was fulfilled could the engagement be enforced; thus, Bevis cannot and will not marry her until much later in the text, when she has finally been baptized. Josiane’s baptism is supremely important to Bevis not only because Christians can licitly marry those of other faiths only after they have been converted to Christianity, but also because her conversion will enable him to fulfill his role as a good Christian knight. For Bevis, marrying Josiane may be a simple and potentially peaceful means of reaching some of his colonial goals: by agreeing to marry Josiane on the condition that she convert to Christianity, he further infiltrates Ermin’s Saracen court and creates a Christian ally; also, when Josiane bears Christian children, they will become the heirs to the Armenian throne, which creates the possibility of establishing a completely Christian kingdom in a historically Saracen Armenia.

Josiane’s baptism and Bevis’ goals are delayed, however, through Brademond’s jealousy and, significantly, Ermin’s fears about his daughter being sexually involved with a Christian. After Brademond’s knights discover Bevis’ and Josiane’s affection for each other,

\(^{56}\) Raymond of Peñafort, *Summa on Marriage*, 51.
other, they spread a rumor throughout the Armenian court that Bevis has made a sexual conquest of Josiane. Ermin becomes enraged at this news, and sends Bevis to his death by having him bring a message to Brademond. What is particularly interesting about this incident is that Ermin’s reaction may suggest more than just his anger at finding out that his virginal daughter has been sexually compromised; his reaction may be further suggestive of a Saracen attitude towards interfaith marriage and sexuality similar to that of Christians.

As I indicated in the introduction to this chapter, interfaith marriage was explicitly forbidden by the Catholic Church, though the conversion of the non-Christian spouse to Christianity could make such a marriage acceptable. What is equally interesting, however, is that the ban or prohibition on interfaith marriage was not an exclusively Christian phenomenon; it also extended to other religions, as James A. Brundage indicates: “Jewish law was equally intolerant of marriage to outsiders.” Thus, in their attitudes toward interfaith marriage, Christians and non-Christians could find that they held a common set of beliefs: interfaith marriage was undesirable, a conclusion that becomes apparent both in Bevis (through both Bevis’ and Ermin’s refusals to engage in and permit, respectively, an interfaith marriage between Bevis and Josiane) as well as in the King of Tars, as we shall next see. The same attitude, however, also applied to interfaith sexual relations, as indicated by the words Brademond’s knights use when they tell Ermin the rumor they have fabricated. When the knights approach Ermin with this rumor about a sexual relationship between Bevis and Josiane, what is most significant is their emphasis on the fact that Bevis is a Christian:

“No wonder, sire, thegh ye be wrothe,
No wonder, thegh ye ben agreved,
Whan Beves, scherewe misbeleved,
The daughter he hath now forlain.
Hit were gode, sire, that he wer slain!” (1206-10)

Though the presumable loss of Josiane’s virginity may be particularly upsetting to her father, the knights imply that Ermin should be even more upset because Bevis is a “scherewe misbeleved,” or a “wicked infidel,” as this phrase is glossed in the text.58

Their emphasis on Bevis’ difference in religion from them, and more importantly, from Josiane and Ermin, indicates the unacceptability of interfaith sexuality to Saracens. That Ermin becomes so upset upon hearing this news and sends Bevis to his death at the hands of the Saracen king who had desired to marry Josiane further suggests that Bevis’ religion is what is so disturbing about his sexual relationship with Josiane; Ermin would rather forcibly marry Josiane to a Saracen ruler than permit her to have a relationship with an unconverted Bevis. When Josiane learns that Bevis is gone from Armenia, that Christians and Muslims share beliefs about the unacceptability of interfaith marital and sexual relationships becomes even more evident:

“Doughter,” a seide, “a is afare
In to his londe and woneth thare,
In to is owene eritage,
And hath a wif of gret parage,
The kinges daughter of Ingelonde,
Ase men doth me to understonde.” (1437-42)

Ermin’s use of the phrase “owene eritage” implies that Bevis has returned not just to England, but more specifically, to Christian England and Christianity generally. The use

58 See line 1208 in Bevis of Hampton. The MED also indicates that compounds of “mis” + “beleve” indicate a religious difference. The use of the term in this line of Bevis is cited there. See the MED, s.v. misbileven, 2b, the past participle of which is defined as “heretical, unorthodox; religiously misguided; unbelieving, lacking in religious faith.” The phrase “shreue misbileved” is also listed here and defined as “a faithless rogue, scoundrel.”
of “eritage” is doubly significant, in that it can mean both Bevis’ patrimony and his spiritual or religious heritage. Ermin’s desire to prevent Josiane from becoming further involved in any interfaith sexual relations with Bevis may also indicate his fear that Bevis may attempt to convert not only his daughter to Christianity, but also his kingdom. Such a fear was historically manifested, as Brundage claims: “Fear of religious conversion unquestionably constituted a major reason for constructing these barriers [of interfaith sexual relations], and Jewish communities were perhaps even more apprehensive about this danger than were Christian ones.” Though Brundage is here associating this fear with Jewish communities, it seems plausible that medieval people imagined Saracen communities to have precisely the same fear. It is also worth mentioning that medieval Christian writers drew little distinction between Jews and Saracens—in this text they are certainly lumped together at times—and thus, the Christian author of Bevis may consider that most communities under a different religion would react in a similar manner toward a potential threat such as conversion to Christianity. That there was a historical fear of conversion to Christianity being associated with interfaith sexual relations and, presumably, marriage, in the Middle Ages suggests that conversion-by-example was viewed as a threat not just to the individuals engaging in the relationship and behavior, but also to the non-Christian community at large. Thus, whether interfaith sexual or

59 See the MED, s.v. “Heritage,” 1a, 1b, 2a.

60 See Brundage, “Intermarriage Between Christians and Jews in Medieval Canon Law,” 28.

61 Postcolonial scholars frequently cite the mistakes Christian writers make in describing medieval Muslims and Islam; see, for example, Edward Said, Orientalism, 71; Dorothee Metlitzki, The Matter of Araby in Medieval England, 197-210; and Calkin, “The Anxieties of Encounter and Exchange: Saracens and Christian Heroism in Sir Beves of Hamtoun,” 135-6. In Bevis, the Muslims and Jews seem to be lumped together under the category of “Saracens,” which becomes clear through lines 1804-10, where Bevis claims that the Saracens chasing him are guilty of Jesus’ murder—an offense that is generally directed at Jews, such as in the Siege of Jerusalem. However, it is clear that Bevis is particularly concerned with Islamic Saracens rather than Jewish Saracens.
marital relationships resulted in actual conversions is not the issue; rather, the possibility of such a result is the concern, which we see imagined and played out in this text.

Although the *Bevis*-author’s application of such concerns and views about interfaith sexual relations, marriage, and the possibility that they will result in conversion—all of which were concerns expressed by the Church—to Ermin could be read as the *Bevis*-author’s attempt to convey that Christians and Muslims share similar concerns with respect to their social and cultural institutions, it instead becomes a way for the author to express the superiority of Christianity: while Bevis did not falter in his decision to remain Christian and turned down the offer to convert in order to marry Josiane, the Saracen figures are represented as fearing that Saracens are susceptible to wavering in their religion, a point which is most clearly demonstrated through Ermin’s treatment of Josiane, whom he fears could convert and potentially endanger his kingdom’s Saracen religion. By staunchly positioning Bevis’ Christianity as unfaltering and portraying Josiane’s father as fearing her impressionability, the *Bevis*-author succeeds in introducing a colonial aspect to the text. He proceeds to develop this aspect by depicting Ermin’s hasty decision to lie to Josiane about Bevis’ whereabouts and negotiate a marriage for her to a Saracen king without her consent.

The repeated attempts to reassimilate Josiane into the Saracen world after she promises conversion to Christianity for Bevis mark her importance as his ally and his means to influence conversion throughout Armenia and beyond. Perhaps Ermin’s fear that Josiane, who has already become involved with the Christian Bevis, will impressionably convert and eventually impose conversion on Armenia (a fear which we later see is warranted) causes him to enforce Josiane’s marriage to Yvor, the Saracen king.
of nearby Mombraunt. This match would staunchly position Armenia as a Saracen kingdom and prevent Bevis from endangering its status as one. Though there is no clear reason given in the text why Ermin forces Josiane to marry Yvor, Debra E. Best has argued that “Later events suggest that this arranged marriage occurs in part to avoid a war with Yvor; even though Ermin is not to blame, Yvor attacks Ermin after he loses Josiane, and the alliance formed by the marriage crumbles.” While Brademond clearly threatens Ermin with war unless he is given Josiane in marriage, the author does not state in such clear terms that Yvor does the same thing, though there is the implication he will make war; that the marriage between Josiane and Yvor is the basis for a Saracen alliance, however, seems extremely likely. The hastiness with which this marriage is negotiated and the Bevis-author’s explicit observation that Josiane has not consented to the marriage indicate that the marriage is undertaken primarily as a defense against Bevis and the potential influence he and, perhaps more importantly, his Christian religion, may have on the future mother to the heirs of Armenia. Thus, the Saracen marriage into which she must enter seems to be undertaken only because of the potential for Christian influences to enter the kingdom through Josiane.

63 Ermin’s efforts to form a Saracen alliance with Yvor and Mombraunt is further evidenced, I think, by his gifting of Bevis’ greatest treasures, his horse Arondel and his sword Morgelay (both of which he had received from Ermin—Arondel directly, Morgelay indirectly), to Yvor. These gifts could be taken as a sign of an Islamic dowry, an extremely important component of Muslim marriages, but more specifically, the gifting of them indicates that Ermin is displacing Bevis, whom he seems to realize Josiane loves but who is also a Christian, for Yvor, a potentially important Saracen ally. That these gifts constitute a Saracen dowry for Josiane may also be indicated by her ability to retain control of them and regift them to Bevis, as Islamic women retained control of their dowries throughout their marriages and even in divorce and widowhood. On Islamic dowries and their significance, see Youssef Rapoport, Marriage, Money and Divorce in Medieval Islamic Society (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004): 13.
64 That Josiane does not consent to the marriage is noted in lines 1457-60.
While Josiane heeds her father’s command and is officially married to Yvor, she does not believe that Bevis has deserted her in favor of an English Christian wife; thus, she chooses not to engage completely in her marriage to Yvor but rather to wait for Bevis to return to her and complete the promise of their marriage upon her conversion. In other words, Josiane chooses not to consummate the marriage through reliance on a magical ring that will protect her virginity, which we later find is of utmost importance to Bevis, who is told to marry only a virgin. By preventing the consummation of her marriage, Josiane preserves herself for a Christian marriage to Bevis, as Best rightly claims: “Since she has already promised herself to Beves, agreeing to convert to Christianity to gain his acceptance, Josiane uses a magic ring or girdle (depending on the manuscript) to prevent the union’s consummation, thus preserving her virginity and keeping the marriage from becoming completely legal.” Though consummation was not required in a Christian marriage and only consent was necessary to make a valid Christian marriage, it is important to remember that Josiane’s marriage to Yvor is not a Christian marriage, but rather a Saracen one. Under medieval Islamic law, consummation was an extremely important aspect of marriage, particularly for the wife, for only after consummation would she acquire rights to her dowry. In his work on medieval Islamic

---

65 See lines 1444-6, where Josiane believes that some “treason” is the cause of Bevis’ desertion of her.
66 Best, “Villains and Monsters: Enacting Evil in Beves of Hamptoun,” 57. St. Raymond of Penyafort also specifies that consummation was not necessary to Christian marriage, but that marriage was “said to be completed in signification through carnal copulation.” See Summa on Marriage, 27.
67 See Yossef Rapoport, Marriage, Money and Divorce in Medieval Islamic Society (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005): 18. Although it is unlikely that the Bevis-author had a detailed knowledge of Islamic marriage laws, it is important to note that, nevertheless, he does imagine certain differences between Christian and Islamic marriages. For example, while Bevis’ Christian mother has her husband killed so that she can remarry, Josiane is able simply to desert her Islamic husband in favor of her true Christian love. According to Rapoport, divorce was considered acceptable in Islamic society, and was “pervasive in late medieval Damascus” (2), but was not considered acceptable in Christian society. Also significant is the fact that while Josiane remains a Saracen and is married to Yvor, she can desert him, but once she is a Christian, she must kill Miles to preserve her virginity, escape her marriage, and return to Bevis.
marriage, Yossef Rapoport documents at least one case in which divorce occurred because the marriage had not been consummated. It thus seems that consummation was an important component of medieval Islamic marriage, and Josiane’s desire to prevent consummation makes it possible for her to marry Bevis and pave the way for the conversion of Armenia and Mombraunt.

Bevis’ first actions upon entering Damascus, before he has even discovered that his fate is to be imprisoned for his relationship with Josiane, indicate that he is already beginning his quest to destroy Islam; at this point, he believes that he will marry a converted Josiane and thus likely believes he will not only reclaim his patrimony in England, but also will be able to establish a Christian kingdom in Armenia as the heir to Ermin’s throne. Consequently, the further into Saracen territory he moves, the more vehemently he displays his Christianity. When he arrives in Damascus, his first actions disclose his intent to destroy the Saracen religion:

Out of a mameri a sai
Sarasons come gret foisoun,
That hadde anoured here Mahoun,
Beves of is palfrey alighte
And ran to her mameri ful righte
And slough here prest, that ther was in,
And threw here godes in the fen
And lough hem alle ther to scorn. (1350-7)

By murdering the Saracen priest and desecrating the Saracen gods, Bevis reveals the true nature of his commitment to Christianity and the Bevis-author prepares us for the rest of the text. Bevis’ strong religious conviction is important here because his movements from...
this point forward must be taken in the context of his duty as a Christian knight and his
desire to overtake the Saracen religion throughout Armenia and Mombraunt. After Bevis
is imprisoned in a pit upon arriving at Brademond’s court, we are able to see his
Christianity become stronger during the seven years he spends there. Not only do we see
Bevis continually pray to God, but as a result of his piety we also see miracles occur
which allow him to escape and prompt him to find Josiane, who is key to his ability to
evangelize.

On his way to find Josiane, Bevis has an important encounter with a patriarch
who warns him to marry only a virgin—a warning which could have serious
repercussions as Josiane has already been married seven years when Bevis finally tracks
her down. When Josiane recognizes Bevis, however, she seems to disregard her marital
status under the Saracen law and immediately reminds him of their marriage contract
made seven years earlier:

“O Beves, gode lemman,
Let me with thee reke
In that maner, we han ispeke,
And thenk, thou me to wive tok,
Whan ich me false godes forsok:
Now thow hast thin hors Arondel,
Thee swerd ich thee fette schel,
And let me wende with thee sithe
Hom in to thin owene kithe!” (2182-90)

Josiane clearly believes that the first contract she and Bevis made was binding, despite
the fact that she has since been married to Yvor. There are several reasons that this
marriage could be declared invalid, but the Bevis-author does not discuss how Josiane can
desert Yvor in favor of Bevis; instead, it is taken for granted that Josiane has no real
marital ties to Yvor—her ties are to Bevis. This move further indicates the lack of respect
the Bevis-author has for Saracen social institutions: whether or not he knows divorce is legal under Islamic law, he chooses to portray the Christian conditional promise of marriage as trumping the Saracen marriage that actually occurs.

Under Christian marital law, Josiane’s decision to abide by her promise to Bevis makes sense, as the individual consent of the spouses was what mattered in the making of marriage—since Josiane did not consent, and more significantly, did not consummate the marriage, she should be able to marry Bevis, with whom she made an earlier contract. Furthermore, the marriage between Josiane and Yvor is a Saracen marriage, and the Church viewed such non-Christian marriages as dissoluble. Josiane is prepared to walk away from Yvor and re-gift Bevis with Arondel and Morgelay, a significant reallocation of her dowry. Bevis, however, is not so quick to resume the engagement with Josiane and instead questions her virginity, saying, “And thow havest seve year ben a quene, / And everi night a king be thee: / How mightow thanne maide be?” (2198-2200). Remarkably, Bevis does not question Josiane’s intent to convert: he takes for granted the fact that Josiane meant she would convert, and instead becomes hung up on the issue of her virginity. Once she convinces him that she is a virgin—a fact which is later confirmed through her encounter with lions—and he agrees to take her as his wife, they run from Mombraunt. The next important step in their relationship is Josiane’s conversion, which occurs not long after they escape Yvor’s men.

Though historically marriage and sexuality between Christians and converts to Christianity could definitely be a vexed and somewhat “charged” issue, as Calkin

---

70 See Brundage, “Intermarriage in Medieval Canon Law,” 29. St. Raymond of Peñafort also addresses this issue in the Summa on Marriage, 28. The marriages of non-believers were thought to be dissoluble because they were not ratified, meaning they were made without faith.
indicates, in *Bevis* the imagined marriage between Bevis and Josiane shows no “gray areas”: while Bevis refuses marriage to her as a Saracen, the moment she promises to convert he immediately accepts the idea of marriage to her. For Bevis, conversion is conversion; he never once questions Josiane’s Christianity or her desire to convert again. Instead, once they arrive in Cologne and encounter a bishop, Bevis immediately asks him to baptize Josiane, whom he introduces as a queen of “hethenesse,” and tells the bishop that “she wile, for me sake, / Cristendome at thee take” (2582-4). Bevis also asks for Ascopard, the Saracen giant and former servant of Yvor, to be baptized as well. The next day, Josiane’s baptism serves to dissimilate her from her Saracen background, and the *Bevis*-author ensures that the reader understands the significance of this moment by portraying Josiane’s baptism alongside Ascopard’s refusal to accept baptism. Although the bishop has already prepared an extra-large baptismal font for Ascopard, when he sees the font he proclaims that it is too small:

“Prest, wiltow me drench?  
The devel yeve thee helle pine,  
Icham to meche te be cristine!” (2594-6)

Ascopard’s rejection of baptism paves the way for his future betrayal of Bevis. Though Bevis earlier had exercised some caution in allowing Ascopard to live—he was persuaded, in fact, by Josiane’s supplication—he yielded to Josiane’s request that Ascopard become their servant despite his mistake in showing Brademond mercy. The *Bevis*-author has suggested throughout the text that showing Christian mercy to Saracen warriors is a mistake, and it indeed proves to be a mistake for Bevis, as both Brademond

---

72 Dorothee Metlitzki discusses the significance of Saracen giants in Middle English literature in some detail in her book. See *The Matter of Araby in Medieval England*, 192-7.
and Ascopard betray him. The message given by these betrayals is that even when Saracens give their word and pledge their troth, they are not to be trusted. Josiane, however, has kept her word and remained true to the conditional marriage contract which she entered into with Bevis years earlier. The parallel successful and unsuccessful baptism attempts of Josiane and Ascopard, respectively, serve to indicate that Josiane has truly severed her religious ties with the Saracen world: she has not betrayed Bevis or been untrue to the Christian marriage contract she entered, and thus her baptism both fulfills the condition necessary for their marriage and sets the stage for the enforced conversion of not only Armenia, but also Mombraunt. More importantly, Josiane’s baptism and her desertion of Yvor begin a theme throughout the remainder of the text: Christian marriage will always defeat Saracen marriage. When Josiane is eventually returned to her Saracen husband Yvor as a married Christian mother, her status as Bevis’ wife is upheld, and we again see the fear Christian marriage instills in Saracen rulers through Yvor’s actions.

The Bevis-author perhaps most clearly articulates that Josiane’s conversion is not questionable when she is kidnapped and forced into another marriage before she is able to marry Bevis. Interestingly, Miles, the earl who kidnaps her and forces her to marry him, is from Cologne, which we are told is a Christian land; this fact suggests that Miles is presumably a Christian earl. Miles’ abduction of the freshly christened Josiane alludes to her new desirability among the Christian ruling population: she is no longer a Saracen, and thus she is an acceptable object of desire among Christian earls, whereas she had been previously acceptable only to Bevis and, importantly, only under the terms of their conditional marriage contract. Because Josiane is now an acceptable match for any
Christian ruler, she must protect her virginity even more: while it was important that she
not consummate her marriage to Yvor because Bevis could only marry a virgin—a fact
which remains important here, as she and Bevis are not yet married—it is even more vital
that she not consummate a Christian marriage because a consummated Christian marriage
would be completely binding.

Although the Church clearly favored individual consent and forbade coercion by
others in making a marriage, as Saint Thomas Aquinas asserts, the Church finally could
not judge the validity of a marriage on the basis of internal consent. Thus, Aquinas writes
that consummation trumps internal consent in the end because it constitutes an external
sign that can be judged to signify consent: “it is judged in external judgment following
that which is revealed outwardly; since nothing can more expressly signify consent than
the joining of the flesh, following the judgment of the Church carnal intercourse
consequently is judged to make a union of matrimony.” 73 Because even enforced
consummation of an enforced marriage could be judged to constitute an external sign of
consent, it becomes more important than ever for Josiane to safeguard her virginity. Her
understanding of the gravity of consummation in a Christian marriage becomes clear
when she vocally objects to the marriage because it will require consummation:

“Nought, thegh I scholde lese me lif,
Boute ich were thee weddede wif;
Yif eni man me scholde wedde,
Thanne mot ich go with him to bedde.

73 The original Latin of the translation and its context follow: “Alio modo quantum ad judicium Ecclesiae:
et quia in exteriori judicio secundum ea quae foris patent, judicatur; cum nihil possit expressius significare
consensum quam carnalis copula, secundum judicium Ecclesiae carnalis copula consequens sponsalia
matrimonium facere judicatur.” See Saint Thomas Aquinas, Corpus Thomisticum, Scriptum Super
specific reference to this quotation is Super Sent., lib. IV, d. 28 q. 1 a. 2 co. All translations are my own
unless otherwise indicated.
I trow, he is nought now here,  
That schel be me weddefere!” (3163-8)

Josiane’s defense of her virginity here becomes linked with her newfound Christianity and, ultimately, Bevis’ conquest of Saracen lands, as the text implies that Bevis needs a virgin wife to accomplish his duties of Christian evangelization. Miles, however, weds Josiane against her will, and consequently, Josiane must take action to prevent the consummation of the marriage. Josiane therefore resorts to murdering Miles on their wedding night to prevent the consummation of the union. By murdering Miles, Josiane is protecting her ability to marry Bevis—she is strongly adhering to the marriage contract into which she entered, and since the condition is now fulfilled, the contract is considered binding. Josiane’s actions thus prove her transformation from Saracen to Christian has occurred, which is also evidenced, perhaps even more so, by Miles’ initial desire to marry her. Josiane’s sudden desirability to another Christian aristocrat, since before this she had been desired only by Saracen rulers, further indicates that conversion, at least in this text, is considered binding. Though after her conversion and marriage to Bevis Josiane recalls some teachings from her youth—specifically, her knowledge of minstrelsy and botany—there is no indication that these particular types of knowledge are necessarily explicitly Saracen (though “scientific” botany may have been recognizably Arabic in origin), and there is not a single indication that she has not traded her Saracen identity for a Christian identity. In fact, everything that occurs after this point suggests just the opposite: since Josiane has become a Christian, she is considered a danger to the Saracen world, which is proved by Yvor’s treatment of his former wife after she is kidnapped and brought to him, as we shall see.
The marriage Bevis and Josiane are finally able to contract is rather low-key in the text, but has extremely important consequences: it serves to seal the conversion of Armenia to Christianity, even if it is a belated effect of the marriage. Following the reclamation of his patrimony in England and the birth of twin sons whom Bevis very clearly indicates are to be baptized Christians, Bevis and Josiane must endure a seven-year separation, as she is again kidnapped, this time by Yvor’s former giant, Ascopard, who wishes to return to Yvor’s service. Yvor’s kidnapping of Josiane marks the fourth time she has been desired by someone other than Bevis, which suggests that the Bevis-author envisions Josiane as an extremely valuable commodity for both the Saracen and the Christian communities. What is important about this kidnapping episode, however, is that Josiane must defend herself against the dangerous influence of the Saracen world. Now that she is a Christian wife and mother, she views her reentry into Saracen society in terms of how she can overcome it to remain in Christian society. Because her separation from Bevis occurs in the Saracen world, her advantage is that she knows how to function in this world and how to defend herself against it; these abilities will permit her to remain in the Christian world. At this point, Josiane thinks back to her education about plants and herbs and remembers that she can rub certain herbs on her face and body to make them appear leprous; presumably this disfigurement will also make her appear undesirable to her former Saracen husband. What is so interesting is that Josiane seems to think of herself only in terms of her sexual vulnerability and desirability: she feels she must only defend herself against lasciviousness, which is clear from her choice of defense. By making herself appear ugly, Josiane proves that she has indeed undergone a
complete conversion and is committed to preserving the Christian marital vows she has finally taken.

The danger that Josiane represents as a Christian wife to Yvor’s Saracen society is reinforced by his treatment of her even when he does not recognize her. While he is disgusted by Josiane’s leprous appearance and cannot recognize her because of her use of herbs to change her visage, he may also arguably be unable to recognize her because she has changed beneath her skin as well: she has become a Christian and, as we will next see in the King of Tars, Christian baptism is considered a transformative, and sometimes transfiguring, moment. Josiane is not desirable to Yvor because of her foul appearance, but she may also be undesirable to him because she is no longer a Saracen princess. Although Yvor no longer seems to desire her as his wife, he chooses to hold her captive in the Saracen community rather than release her to the Christian community. Though solitary imprisonment is not the same as reintegration into the Saracen community, by imprisoning Josiane and making Ascopard her ward, Yvor ensures that she is not released into the Christian community to provide Bevis with the ability to enforce conversion on Ermin’s people and, potentially, Yvor’s own people. Yvor seems to believe that Josiane is too dangerous to be reintegrated into the Saracen community, and he certainly seems to consider her too great a potential commodity for the Christian community. What Yvor does here, then, is attempt to stave off the conversion to Christianity which may be inevitable because Josiane is now Bevis’ wife. Through the portrayal of Yvor’s imprisonment of Josiane, the Bevis-author is again able to dismiss the significance of Saracen social institutions. Yvor does not even try to reintegrate Josiane into his society or his bedroom; however, he is completely aware of the threat she poses to his kingdom,
which is evidenced by his declaration of war against Ermin when Josiane escapes from her imprisonment. Although he does not necessarily desire her as a wife, he desires to control her through his marital relationship with her.

When Josiane and Bevis are reunited seven years later, they return to Armenia and the fears Yvor and Ermin had about Josiane’s relationship with Bevis are confirmed as the husband and wife with their children begin the process of converting to Christianity the Saracen lands they have frequented, and not without force—an aspect of conversion-by-marriage we will examine more closely in the next chapter. The most important aspect of this return to Armenia for my purposes in this chapter, however, is their discovery that Yvor has declared war on Ermin, presumably because he has lost control of Josiane again. It thus seems that Ermin is being blamed for Josiane’s adoption of Christianity and escapes from Yvor, while in fact he seems to have married her to Yvor precisely to control her movements and religion. What we really see, then, is that a battle has broken out between two Saracen rulers because of the tenuous position in which Josiane’s interfaith engagement and Christian marriage have put these Saracen kingdoms. Significantly, while the battle occurs between Saracens over the dangers a Saracen princess presents, it ultimately becomes a battle between Christians and Saracens because of Josiane’s conversion. When Ermin bequeaths his kingdom to one of Bevis’ and Josiane’s Christian sons, the full consequences of her interfaith engagement and Christian marriage are realized, as are the fears that the male Saracens who tried to control her continually expressed. Not only will Armenia become a Christian kingdom
under Guy, but so must all of its people under threat of death. Though Yvor is ransomed after his capture, he again prompts a battle with Bevis by holding his horse Arondel captive. Since the episodes that follow this one are related to Bevis’ English identity rather than his Christian identity, the one-to-one combat between Bevis and Yvor serves as the final testament to the superiority of Christians’ religion and social institutions over Saracens’ religion and social institutions. When Bevis deals Yvor a deadly blow, he encourages Yvor to convert to Christianity and save his soul from damnation, as baptism is the only recognized means of salvation for Christians. Yvor vehemently refuses, however, claiming “‘Cristene wile ich never ben, / For min is wel the beter lawe!’” (4232-3). His subsequent decapitation at Bevis’ hands prepares the way for the genocide of his Saracen people and the introduction of Christianity to Mombraunt through Josiane, whom the author tells us is “now…ther twies quene” (4256). Thus, Yvor’s efforts to control and contain Josiane and prevent her Christian influence from reaching his kingdom and people are ineffective: not only is his marriage to her proven completely unimportant except for the fact that she holds some kind of claim to the kingdom through her former position as its queen, but she aids her Christian husband in converting the masses who will and obliterating those who will not.

The triumph of Christianity over the Saracen religion and thus, the author’s colonial process, finally comes to a head when it becomes clear that Josiane’s marriage to Bevis has sealed both her conversion to Christianity and also that of Yvor’s kingdom’s inhabitants. Upon Bevis’ and Josiane’s deaths, which occur nearly simultaneously, their

---

74 See lines 4017-20, where the violence used to convert Armenia is mentioned. Although some critics have suggested that Ermin remains a Saracen even through death, I find it noteworthy that the author explicitly states that Ermin’s soul is heaven-bound, which suggests to me that Ermin chose to convert before his death. See lines 4015-6.
son Guy forms a monastery in Mombraunt to pray for their souls. The introduction of the monastery quite clearly suggests that Mombraunt is now a Christian kingdom; whereas earlier Bevis had denigrated a Saracen temple and killed its worshippers, now a Christian church for the religious practice of the people and for the teaching and dissemination of the Christian religion rises in a formerly Saracen land. Not only has the privatized Christian marriage and interfaith engagement triumphed over all Saracen attempts to control Josiane through marriage, but the Christian religion itself has also triumphed over the general Saracen population.

Clearly, we have seen that the figure of the impressionable female Saracen princess who enters an interfaith engagement and readily converts to become a Christian wife was a serious fear for Saracen rulers because of the problems she could present to their kingdoms. By trying to control her through Saracen marriage and even imprisonment, the Saracen rulers exhibit the danger Christianity represents to them through the possibility of interfaith sexual relations and marriage. The same fears are expressed, however, through Saracen rulers’ attempts to contain and assimilate Christian princesses introduced into their Saracen kingdoms, as we will now see in the *King of Tars*.

**The Auchinleck King of Tars**

The *King of Tars* is an anonymous fourteenth-century text that has served as a subject or case study for many medieval postcolonial critics because of its close ties to the Constance-narratives and its patent concerns with representation of the “Other.” Unlike most critics, who choose to analyze the *King of Tars* based primarily on its
unambiguous interest in how racial and religious categories are tied together, however, I have chosen the *King of Tars* because it very clearly indicates Saracen concerns over a female Christian “Other,” which are expressed through its portrayal of domestic issues, particularly marriage and childbirth. As in *Bevis of Hampton*, here we see the author’s application of Christian concerns about interfaith marriage and sexual relations to Saracen figures. Before I begin my analysis, however, it would be useful to briefly summarize the text.

The *King of Tars* begins with a description of the Princess of Tars, whose fame has reached all the way to the Sultan of Damascus. The sultan wants to marry her, and sends messengers to ask the King of Tars for her hand in marriage. The Christian king immediately refuses, but asks his daughter whether she would marry a Saracen. When she says she will not forsake Jesus, the King of Tars sends word back to the sultan that he will not give his daughter in marriage to a Saracen. The sultan becomes angry and holds a parliament to determine what action he will take against Tars; they agree that war should be waged. When the Saracens begin to defeat the soldiers of Tars easily, killing tens of thousands of Christians, the princess decides to sacrifice herself to save more Christians from death and begs her father to allow her to marry the sultan. The king sends messengers to Damascus to tell the sultan that the princess will marry him. When the princess arrives in Damascus, she is clothed in Saracen garb and the sultan refuses to marry her and consummate their relationship until she is converted from Christianity to Islam. That night the princess dreams that black hounds chase her but Jesus arrives to save her from them. The next day the sultan brings her to the temple and forces her to renounce Christianity and convert to his religion by threatening her father’s life. The
princess bows down to the idols in the temple and accepts Mohammed without hesitation, and then proceeds to kiss all the idols in the temple. While she learns the Saracen law and visibly and orally performs the conversion, however, she continually thinks about Christ. After her conversion, the sultan marries her under the Saracen law. Three months later, the princess becomes pregnant and, when the child is born, it is not a child at all, but rather a horrific lifeless lump of flesh. The sultan blames the princess, claiming that the child is dead because she did not truly convert. The princess tells him that if he prays to his gods and they are able to transform and revive the child, she will truly give up Christianity in favor of his Saracen religion. When his Saracen prayers do not work, the sultan allows his wife to baptize the child and says that if Jesus successfully transforms and revives the child, he will convert to Christianity. Upon baptism, the lump of flesh is miraculously revived and becomes human in form. As a result, the sultan agrees that he will be baptized a Christian. He proceeds to baptism the next day, and his dark skin becomes gleaming white from the baptismal water. The princess rejoices at the visual sign of his belief in Christ, and she urges the sultan to contact her father so the two of them can enforce conversion upon his citizens under threat of death. The sultan and King of Tars join forces, and defeat five Saracen kings who fight against the Christians’ conversion efforts. At the end of the text, we find that the remaining Saracens are imprisoned and forced to convert to Christianity. Those who do not convert, we are told, are beheaded, and this is where the text abruptly ends.

The text raises many questions about the relationship between violence and conversion, but equally important, about the relationship between marriage and conversion. The possibility that the King of Tars is a fictionalized account of a historical
event from medieval chronicles has been addressed by several critics. Lillian Herlands Hornstein has specifically discussed the allusions to interfaith marriage and conversions of pagans and Saracens to Christianity in the chronicles, but finally suggests that the references to actual interfaith marriages and political and religious alliances offered through such relationships are most likely fabricated by chroniclers. She suggests that the fictionalized narrative, known in Middle English as the *King of Tars* but circulating throughout other areas of Europe as well, became popular in the early fourteenth century as a result of “political events in the Near East and the increasing enthusiasm for a Crusade during the first decade of the fourteenth century.” The kind of religious political strife that Hornstein suggests contributed to the text’s popularity is immediately revealed in the opening lines, where the audience is urged to “Herkneþ…Al hou a wer bigan / Bitvene a trewe Cristene king / & an heþen heye lording, / Of Dames þe soudan” (1-6). That the text begins with a reference to the “holy war” which occurs indicates the author’s primary interests are religious in his portrayal of the events—this text is indeed interested in colonial practices.

Most critics have focused their discussions about the text’s colonial practices around the themes of race and religion. Lisa Lampert, for example, argues that the

---


76 See “The Historical Background of the *King of Tars*,” 410-12.

77 Lillian Herlands Hornstein, “Trivet’s Constance and the *King of Tars*,” 356. In addition to the Middle English *King of Tars*, Latin versions of the story also circulated in French, German, and Spanish manuscripts, and the story also appeared in Italian and German chronicles. See p. 355.

78 *King of Tars*, ed. Judith Perryman (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1980). All quotations will be taken from this edition.
category of race, which is explicitly linked with religion through the text’s portrayal of Christians as “white” and Saracens as “black,” is, unlike the modern conception of race, able to be defied; in other words, the text “points to the possibility of change, although this change requires conversion and is based on a fixed belief in Christianity as the only true religion.”\textsuperscript{79} Likewise, Geraldine Heng focuses primarily on the baptismal transformation of the sultan from black to white.\textsuperscript{80} What I am most interested in, however, is how the interfaith marriage serves as the fundamental means of conversion and how its portrayal reveals the author’s colonizing impetus.

As in many romances, and specifically in the Constance-narratives, the text begins with the Sultan of Damascus’ desire to wed a beautiful Christian princess. This trope occurs regularly among these narratives, in which hagiographic elements abound. Here, instead of a virgin martyr who is able to convert the “Others” to Christianity, we find a young Christian princess who must become the wife of the non-Christian ruler in order to effect conversion. While she is commonly represented as a martyr for her Christian religion, she is less frequently imagined as a martyr for her Christian people, as she is in the \textit{King of Tars}.\textsuperscript{81} The necessity for her to act as a martyr in marriage on behalf of her people is a direct result of her father’s inability to defeat the sultan’s knights, as Jane Gilbert notes: “The greater Christian community within the text is shown ultimately to profit from her marriage just as in hagiography it does from a virgin martyr’s death or

\textsuperscript{80} See Heng, \textit{Empire of Magic}, 227-37.
\textsuperscript{81} The princess is represented as a martyr for her Christian religion in all the Constance-narratives; the focus on her ability to act as a martyr to save her Christian people is specifically noted in \textit{Le Bone Florence of Rome} in addition to the \textit{King of Tars}. 

134
from a married saint’s refusal of worldliness.”82 The military weakness which required such a drastic move to be taken may be suggestive of the contemporary military failures of the Christian crusaders, as Heng suggests: “the history of military failure has shown that cultural capture is the game in town for the fourteenth century.”83 Heng later defines “cultural capture” in more explicit terms: “When the replication of colonial dominance in territorial and military terms falters, the preferred momentum of empire becomes cultural: ideological reproduction in the form of religious conversion.”84 The princess believes (rightly, as we will find out) that her entry into a socio-cultural institution with the Saracen sultan will enable Christian dominance, and her agency and actions throughout the text indicate that everything she does is directed towards this ultimate goal of “cultural capture.”

Because the princess cannot bear to cause the deaths of so many Christian knights, she offers to sacrifice herself in marriage to the Saracen sultan despite the fact that she clearly does not desire to enter into an interfaith marriage, presumably because such a move is equated with forsaking Jesus.85 What is even more interesting, however, is that while the princess finally agrees to the interfaith marriage, the sultan is completely uninterested in such a union and, before he will consummate his relationship with her, requires that she convert to Saracen law:

\[\text{Þe soudan wild com ðerin nouȝt, Noiȝer for fo no fre[n]de For noȝing wold he neyȝe þat may}\]

---

83 Heng, Empire of Magic, 188.
84 Heng, Empire of Magic, 190.
85 See lines 52-66.
While I argued that we saw common Christian concerns about interfaith relations applied to the Saracen figures in *Bevis of Hampton*, the *King of Tars* is more clearly conscious of its applications of such concerns to Saracen figures. By portraying the sultan as refusing to come near the princess or even enter the room in which she is contained, the author suggests that the sultan fears her potential power over him due to her Christian status. What the author seems to indicate, then, is that the sultan recognizes the danger of a female to the culture of the Saracens. Whereas the impressionability of Josiane was feared by the Saracen rulers in *Bevis of Hampton*, here we also see the fear of impressionability, but it seems to be the sultan’s fear that he may be impressionable and influenced by the Christian princess (again, a fear that is later warranted). Thus, just as the Saracen rulers in *Bevis* try to control and contain Josiane throughout the text, the Saracen sultan here tries to control and contain the princess’ religious beliefs first by enforcing her conversion to his religion and then by marrying her under Saracen law.

It is important to note that when the sultan requires the princess’ conversion, he also threatens to resume the war against her father if she refuses: “bot þou wilt anon, / þi fader y schal wiþ wer slon” (475-6). Because the princess agreed to the marriage to save her Christian people, this threat renews the significance of the marriage and reminds her of her role as a martyr for her people. That she envisions herself as a martyr for her Christian people rather than for Christianity generally should be reinforced because she
behaves in a manner completely opposed to that conventionally associated with martyrdom: rather than reaffirming her commitment to Christ and Christianity, she verbally and visually rejects Christianity (though she apparently thinks about Christ as she does) in favor of the Saracen religion:

“Sir, y nil þe nouȝt greue.
Teche me now & lat me here
Hou y schal make mi preiere
When ich on hem bileue.
To Mahoun ichil me take,
& Ihesu Crist, mi Lord, forsake,
Þat made Adam & Eue.
& seþþen serue þe at wille,
Arliche & lat, loude & stille,
Amorwe & an eue.” (483-92)

Once she agrees to the conversion, verbally affirming that she will forsake Jesus and marry the sultan under his Saracen law, she proceeds to perform the conversion ritual. What is most disturbing about her “conversion,” however, is that she is able to fake it so well that we realize she later knowingly enters into an interfaith marriage:

He bad hir gon & kis swiþe
“Alle þine godes on rawe.”
Sche kist Mahoun & Apolin,
Astirot, & sir Iouin,
For drede of wordes awe.
& while sche was in þe temple [þer]
Of Teruagent & Iubiter
Sche lerd þe heþen lawe.
& þei sche al þe lawes couþe,
& seyd hem openliche wiþ her mouþe,
Ihesu forȝat sche nouȝt. (497-507)

The princess’ performance of conversion, which appears to be legitimate to the sultan and other Saracens, stands in stark contrast to the later conversion of the sultan. While we find that the princess is able to disguise the fact that she does not truly convert—we are
told that she keeps Jesus in her thoughts even after she outwardly performs the conversion to the Saracen religion—the sultan’s true conversion cannot be hidden because he undergoes an external, visual conversion as well—the changing of his skin color from black to white. What is most important is that the sultan actually believes that she has truly converted, which paves the way for the birth of the shapeless child that will prompt and seal his conversion:

Þe soudan wende niȝt & day
Þat sche hadde leued opon his lay,
Bot al he was bicouȝt.
For when sche was bi hirselu on
To Ihesu sche made hir mon,
Þat alle þis world haþ wrouȝt. (511-16)

The sultan is represented as rather impressionable here; the author’s use of the word “bicouȝt” indicates that the princess’ purpose is to deceive him in fully feigning conversion. The MED defines “bicouȝt” in two ways: it can mean “to catch or trap,” or “to deceive, delude.” I would like to suggest that in this context it is meant to have both meanings, for not only has the princess deceived and deluded the sultan in feigning very well her conversion to his Saracen religion, but she has also simultaneously trapped him into an interfaith marriage that he clearly did not want. By deceiving and trapping the sultan into an interfaith marriage which even the princess did not want at first, she is able to do two things: first, she is able to continue her belief in Jesus and the Christian religion secretly without fearing for her life, and second, she is able to become the sultan’s wife, a position which will not only afford her intimate access to the Saracen ruler, but also provide her the opportunity to urge her husband’s conversion. As Neil Cartlidge has claimed, for Christians the marital union was viewed in terms of each spouse’s ability to

86 See MED, s.v. “Bicacchen,” 1a, 1b.
influence the other: “Preachers and hagiographers emphasized the potential of marriage as a channel for the moral improvement of its partners.”

Although an interfaith marriage was strictly forbidden by the Church, in this case the possibility for the princess to bring about the sultan’s conversion and, as we will later see, the conversion of all Damascus, is portrayed as trumping the law. For the author, interfaith marriage presents the best possibility for a colonial conquest of Saracen lands.

Critics’ views over how to read the princess’ mock-conversion differ drastically. Heng argues that because the princess does not undergo a visual racial change (she does not change from “white” to “black”) after her conversion, we are able to see that she does not truly convert. Siobhain Bly Calkin, however, identifies the conversion and subsequent interfaith marriage as problematic in that they complicate the strict binary categories the text seems to set up: black/white, Saracen/Christian. Calkin’s concern is that by performing the Saracen rituals, the princess works to deconstruct the visualization of religious boundaries because she appears to be Saracen while we, the readers, know that she remains Christian. Thus, when she enters into marriage with the sultan, she knowingly enters into union “within the sinful and prohibited space of Christian-Saracen sex.” While I completely agree with Calkin’s claim that the princess is the only one who knows she and the sultan are committing sexual and marital prohibitions, I would like to suggest that the princess is not simply neglecting the illegality of the union. Instead, because her focus has continually been on her role as a martyr for her Christian

---

90 Calkin, “Marking Religion on the Body: Saracens, Categorization, and *The King of Tars*,” 229.
people and Christianity more generally, she envisions the marriage as presenting the opportunity for her to truly fulfill that role. She enters into this marriage and commits the sexual prohibition not just to fulfill her role as a martyr, though: she actually supersedes this role, as she is also able to fulfill what the Christian knights could not. By taking an active role in entering an interfaith union, illegal as it may be, the princess is not only able to save her people from further annihilation, but also to prompt the conversion of her husband the sultan and the Saracens of Damascus. The princess’ performance of mock-conversion and subsequent consummation of her interfaith marriage is thus only the beginning of her active role in the conversion narrative.

The princess’ ability to deceive and entrap the sultan is another way for the author to portray the differences between Christians and Saracens. While I suggested above that the sultan enforces the princess’ conversion because he is particularly concerned that he may be impressionable and possibly easily influenced, the author here affirms the sultan’s beliefs. He has been quite easily deceived, and he will not realize the error he has made in entering the interfaith marriage with the princess until their child is born. Thus, the author consciously engages in colonialism here by portraying the princess’ cunning Christian intellect as superior to the sultan’s Saracen, impressionable intellect.

As critics have rightly noted, the birth of the child and its horrific appearance serve as manifestations of the sexual prohibitions that have occurred because the marriage has remained interfaith.91

When þe child was ybore
Wel sori wimen were þefore,

91 Lillian Herlands Hornstein has also suggested that the child’s appearance evokes a folklore theme. The way the shapeless child is described in the text, she suggests, is based on descriptions of bear cubs in bestiaries. See “A Folklore Theme in the King of Tars,” Philological Quarterly 20.1 (1941): 82-7.
Critics are divided over the reason for the child’s formlessness and lifelessness in the text. Heng, for example, claims to be unsure as to whether it is the princess’ mock-conversion to the sultan’s religion or her interfaith sexual relations with the sultan which causes the child to appear as a “lump of flesh” at its birth. Gilbert, however, argues that the child’s appearance is a result of its fatherless state, as she believes the sultan cannot actually become the child’s father until he becomes a Christian. Thus, because the sultan consummated his relationship with the princess before he became Christian, he bears the responsibility for the child’s appearance. Though Calkin has also discussed to some extent the actual interfaith marriage that takes place here and the Church’s prohibitions against such relationships, she remains interested primarily in the issue of physical appearance and the princess’ ability to trick the sultan into consummating the marriage.

Though the princess at first tricked the sultan into engaging in an interfaith marriage with her to save her father’s Christian knights from further obliteration, she finds in the birth of the child an opportunity to engage even more actively in cultural conquest.

Jane Gilbert argues that the child’s formlessness can be associated with its father’s religion: because the sultan and his retainers are continually referred to as animals—specifically hounds—we can assume that “the monstrosity of the lump-child is directly inherited from its heathen father in a process comparable to what today would be
called genetic inheritance.”  

It seems that the princess certainly believes the child’s appearance is due to its father’s religion when she rebukes the sultan for blaming her:

"Leue sir, lat be þat þouȝt.
Þe child was ȝeten bitven ous to;
For þi bileue it farþ so
Bi him þat ous haþ wrouȝt.
Take now þis flesche, & bere it anon
Bifor þine goes euerichon,
Þat þou no lete it nouȝt.
& pray þine godes al yfere,
Astow art hem leue & dere,
To liue þat it be brouȝt.
& þif Mahoun & Iouin can
Make it fôrmed after a man
Wiþ liif & limes ariȝt,
Bi Ihesu Crist, þat þis warld wan,
Y schal leue þe better þan
Þat þai ar ful of miȝt.
& bot þai it to liue bring
Y nil leuen on hem noþing
Noiþer bi day no niȝt.” (603-21)

Though the princess’ feigned conversion is now revealed, as is the interfaith status of her marriage to the sultan, she does not seem to blame the child’s appearance on the sexual prohibitions she has committed through participating in both an interfaith marriage and sexual relationship with her Saracen husband. As Gilbert suggests, “She sees through her grief to seize the opportunity for ideological confrontation, and in her emotional muscularity she exemplifies the subordination of sentiment to doctrine which befits a Christian heroine.”  

She accomplishes this “ideological confrontation” through her suggestion that they rely on the possibility of a religious miracle in determining which faith is the better. The introduction of the miracle to the text also allows the author to portray a belief common to Christians and Saracens: both the princess and the sultan

92 Jane Gilbert, “Putting the pulp into fiction,” 105.
93 Gilbert, “Putting the pulp into fiction: the lump-child and its parents in the King of Tars,” 112-3.
believe in the potential for religious miracles. This move, however, serves to underscore the author’s belief in the superiority of Christianity and works instead as a colonizing moment: the poet represents the sultan’s prayers for a miracle resulting in the sultan’s destruction of the temple and idols. Thus, the princess has accomplished part of her cultural conquest simply by suggesting that the sultan pray for a miracle first. When the child is finally transformed through its baptism on St. John’s Day, the sultan immediately sees the power of Christianity and fulfills the final aspect of the princess’ religious conquest in her home. Furthermore, the baptism of the sultan automatically invalidates the diriment impediment to their marriage—lack of baptism was the most significant prohibition against such marriages; thus, their marriage is no longer interfaith.94

The transformation of the child also reveals some insights about the difficulties a ruler can experience by choosing to convert and adds another dimension to the princess’ cultural conquest of the sultan’s Saracen lands. Though critics seem most interested in the sultan’s own baptism because he undergoes such a drastic racial transformation, I am more interested in the consequences his conversion and transformation have on his kingdom.95 Although the sultan earlier agreed to forsake his Saracen religion and embrace Christianity if Christian baptism could transform the child, he only agrees to the conversion once the princess tells him that she and the child will have nothing to do with

---

94 See Schenk, 22. Since the sultan has been baptized, an ecclesiastical court would no longer be able to find a diriment impediment to the relationship.
95 The racial transformation of the sultan seems to be a concern equal to that of the child’s transformation in most studies of the text. Calkin, for example, argues that religious boundaries are deconstructed through the birth of the “lump-child” only to be reconstructed when the sultan’s skin color changes upon his baptism. See “Marking Religion on the Body: Saracens, Categorization, and The King of Tars,” 229-31. While both Calkin and Heng mention the consequences of the interfaith marriage, they refer only to the birth of the child.
him unless he becomes a Christian. His decision has a condition, however, which is that his conversion process must remain a secret:

“Y schal be cristned þurth Godes wille
Ar þan þe þridde day.
Loþ me were mi soule to spille;
Preye now þe prest he com ous tille
& teche me Cristen lay,
As priueliche as it may be,
Þat noman wite bot we þre,
Als forþ as þe may.
& ani it wist, heye or lowe,
Þou schalt be brent & y todrawe,
& we forsoke our fay.” (878-88)

The sultan makes clear that the reason for secrecy is to protect him and the princess from the violence and bodily harm he believes is reserved for those who forsake their religion. The manner in which he phrases the condition indicates the changeable nature of religion, and further suggests that a ruler’s conversion can be particularly worrisome. Despite the sultan’s fear surrounding his conversion, the princess suggests that conversion to Christianity be forced upon the sultan’s advisors and citizens:

“Sende now þis prest in priuete
To mi fader þe king.
& pray him, for þe loue of me,
Þat he com swiþe hider to þe
Wiþ alle þat he may bring.
& when mi fader is to þe come
Do cristen þi lond, alle & some,
Boþe eld & þing.
& he þat wil be cristned nouȝt,
Loke to þe deþ þat he be brouȝt,
Wiþouten ani duelleing.” (950-60)

It is interesting and rather significant that both the idea of enforced conversion to Christianity and the idea of violence and death as repercussions for refusal to convert are the princess’. Although the sultan early on went to war against Tars, it was not directly
for the purpose of conversion, but rather so he could marry the beautiful Christian princess. Her conversion was only an afterthought, as he had his own prohibitions against interfaith marriage and sex. The princess’ agency in inducing the conversion of the sultan’s kingdom, however, fulfills the cultural conquest she began by agreeing to and actually participating in the interfaith marriage despite the Christian prohibitions against such relationships.

By portraying the sultan’s concerns about the interfaith marriage as valid, the author at first seems to draw a connection between the sultan and Christian men, as Calkin has noted: “the poet deliberately highlights a Saracen desire for married people to share one religious belief and points out how such a desire traverses Saracen-Christian borders.”

However, as I have suggested throughout my analysis of the *King of Tars* and *Bevis of Hampton*, the authors’ purposes in highlighting these desires cannot be viewed simply as a celebration of the shared beliefs of these two distinct religious cultures. Instead, by specifically focusing these concerns and desires on Saracens in the texts, the authors participate in their own colonial project which portrays the Saracen figures’ actions solely as defenses against the dangers Christianity and attraction to Christian figures present for the Saracen world.

In conclusion, I also wish to address some gender issues encountered through my analysis of these texts. Though the objects of conversion are different in each text—in *Bevis* it is the Saracen princess Josiane who must be converted, while in the *King of Tars* it is the Saracen sultan who requires conversion—the importance of females in prompting and enforcing the conversion is equally imagined by these authors. Josiane acts as an

---

96 Calkin, “Marking Religion on the Body,” 222.
agent of evangelization not just through offering her own conversion so that she may marry the man she loves, but also because through marriage she provides Bevis with the opportunity to enforce Christian conversion *en masse* throughout not just her father’s Armenian kingdom, but also her former Saracen husband’s kingdom, Mombraunt. The Princess of Tars, on the other hand, converts only on what we are to take as an imaginary level; she feigns submission to Mohammed in order to consummate her marriage with the Sultan of Damascus. The consummation of the interfaith marriage, despite its illegality and the prohibitions against it, provides her with the opportunity to convert him through the miracle of their deformed child’s Christian baptism. Furthermore, once she attains her goal of converting her husband, it is she who suggests that he unite with her father, the Christian King of Tars, to enforce conversion to Christianity upon pain of death. Thus, for both women, interfaith marriage becomes their way to engage in the colonial projects of romance heroes.

For the authors of these romances, the female who influences and engages in the colonial project through marriage represents a peaceful means of infiltrating the society of the “Other.” The Christian fear of religious impressionability among women, which in part spurred the adoption of the canon requiring special dress for Muslims and Jews in 1215, becomes a realistic fear in these texts—but not among Christian women. The authors portray this fear as a warranted Saracen rather than Christian fear: in *Bevis*, the Saracen rulers try to control Josiane and prevent her conversion, whereas in the *King of Tars*, the sultan tries to prevent his own impressionability by controlling and enforcing the princess to convert instead. In both texts, the Saracens’ fears are realized: Josiane does in fact become Christian and converts the kingdoms of both her father and her
former Saracen husband, while the miracle of the child’s transformation prompts the sultan’s conversion and his alliance with the King of Tars to enforce conversion on all his people. While the marriages that allow Christianity to infiltrate the kingdoms of the Saracens result in the peaceful conversions of the Saracen spouse, the larger colonial project cannot be accomplished without a fair amount of violence, and perhaps more significantly, without the involvement of the Christian or Saracen wife. These texts emphasize the important role wives have in the colonial project, and it is to this theme that we will now turn.
CHAPTER 3:
MARRIAGE, CONVERSION-BY-EXAMPLE AND WOMEN’S LEARNING:
EVANGELISM AND CONDUCT EDUCATION IN
CHAUCER’S AND GOWER’S CONSTANCE NARRATIVES

The fourteenth-century romance *Otuel and Roland* features a very interesting conversion scene that presents one of the stereotypical roles available to women in conversion narratives. Here, we witness Otuel’s conversion to Christianity in exchange for marriage to Charles’ daughter, Belisent. In this romance, the marriage between Otuel and Charles’ daughter—a marriage that would presumably give Otuel an important place at Charles’ court—serves partially as the catalyst for Otuel’s conversion but, more importantly, seals his conversion through the sacrament.\(^1\) Belisent’s role in the conversion narrative is minimal; after Otuel is converted, her father informs her that she is to marry Otuel, to which she replies, “‘Syr…syker aplyȝt. / ther-of y am ful fawe’” (600-1). Belisent’s passive acceptance of the marriage clearly positions her as an

---

\(^1\) I say “partially” because the romance also features the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove that descends upon Otuel after his battle with Roland, and it is at this point that he converts; his betrothal to Belisent follows almost immediately although the marriage will occur later, since Otuel wishes to wait until the Christians are victorious before celebrating a wedding. The marriage, however, does not actually take place in the text, which is one of the reasons I am not analyzing this romance more fully. Previously, Otuel had rejected marriage to Belisent in exchange for his conversion. Because he is converted by the Holy Spirit before the marriage, the marriage would effectively seal his conversion to Christianity. For the full conversion narrative, see *Otuel and Roland*, Firumbras and Otuel and Roland, ed. Mary Isabelle O’Sullivan, Early English Text Society (o.s.) 198 (London: Humphrey Milford, Oxford UP, 1935), lines 497-625.
obedient daughter willing to abide by her father’s wishes; while the marriage seals Otuel’s conversion, Belisent plays no active role in prompting the conversion—she is simply the reward for Otuel’s conversion.

The offer of marriage in exchange for conversion is not unusual in late Middle English romance; in the last chapter, we saw Josiane’s father offer marriage to her in exchange for Bevis’ conversion to the Saracen religion. Marriage to a Christian is frequently portrayed as the reward for non-Christians willing to convert to Christianity. Such is the case with the romances we will examine in the next two chapters. What differs about the marriages in the texts we will examine, however, is that unlike the conversion narrative in Otuel and Roland, where Belisent is simply a passive figure who becomes the reward for the conversion, these romances feature women who take on particularly active roles in the conversion narratives.

The role that medieval authors imagined women could and should play in the evangelization process has been studied by scholars, and such analyses have primarily focused on evangelization and conversion in the group of Middle English texts known as the Constance sagas.² This group includes Chaucer’s Man of Law’s Tale, Gower’s “Tale of Constance” in the Confessio Amantis, Emaré, Le Bone Florence of Rome, and the King of Tars. Women play extremely important roles in the conversion narratives of these texts: the Constance figure, a Christian princess, is exiled from her homeland, usually to marry a non-Christian ruler, and the text follows the conversion of her non-Christian

² See for example Geraldine Heng’s chapter “Beauty and the East, a Modern Love Story: Women, Children, and Imagined Communities in The Man of Law’s Tale and Its Others,” in Empire of Magic: Medieval Romance and the Politics of Cultural Fantasy, 181-238; and Christine F. Cooper, “‘But algates therby was she understonde’: Translating Custance in Chaucer’s Man of Law’s Tale,” Yearbook of English Studies 36.1 (2006): 27-38, who argues that Custance becomes a symbol of apostolic Christianity. Many critics tie the Constance figure’s evangelist ability to her hagiographic rather than secular qualities.
bridegroom and her attempts to influence the conversion of other non-Christians to Christianity; the non-Christian mother-in-law, on the other hand, resorts to violence, murder, and betrayal of the Christian princess in an attempt to prevent the marriage and subsequent conversion of the kingdom. While these Constance narratives portray some roles available to both Christian and non-Christian women in conversion narratives, and thus often lead to stereotypes of both, another group of popular vernacular romances involving interfaith marriage between Christian knights and Saracen princesses displays similar concerns about the role women can play in the conversion process but has received much less, if any, attention by postcolonial critics. The next two chapters will reevaluate the roles that both the Christian Constance figure and the Saracen princess play as evangelists in non-Christian communities in some select fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Middle English romances.

The common denominator in both of these romance formulas is the important role interfaith marriage plays in prompting the women to encourage and, in some cases, enforce, conversion on the people of their non-Christian kingdoms. What is particularly interesting about the women’s roles in conversion in both of these romance types is that while the effects of the women’s involvement are the same (in both cases Christianity triumphs, largely due to the role of the princess/wife), the way in which the women participate in the conversion project differs drastically based on their religious, and perhaps more importantly, educational backgrounds.

In this chapter, I will focus on two of the Constance narratives, which feature a particular kind of conversion that I will term “conversion-by-example,” based primarily on the example set forth by the Constance figure, the Christian princess who is often sent
to marry a non-Christian ruler. “Conversion-by-example” is a term that I define to encompass many qualities: Constance is regularly represented as beautiful, courteous, particularly skilled in crafts generally associated with women and, most significantly, steadfast in her Christian faith. These characteristics seem to attract non-Christian figures, and as a result, Constance often is able to influence the conversion of both non-Christian men and women alike. Through her example, Constance is able to stimulate not only the conversion of non-Christian rulers who desire to marry her, but also the conversion of many within their kingdoms. As I will show, her example is explicitly based on her preparation for a secular life, in which she will marry and encounter other wives whom she can influence. While Constance’s effectiveness as an evangelist is dependent upon the secular aspects of her life, her secular life is completely intertwined with religion, and therefore, her steadfast faith, knowledge of her religion, and ability to convey her religion to non-Christians—things that are touched upon in secular conduct manuals—combined with her beauty and courtesy form an example of conduct so idealized that it influences conversion on a large scale, even through mere rumor of her example.

In several of the romances featuring Saracen princesses who engage in interfaith marriage, however, which I will analyze in the next chapter, we see a completely different type of conversion, which ultimately has little, if anything, to do with the Saracen princess’ character or example. This form of conversion does not frequently feature conversion-by-example, but rather enforced conversion. The Saracen princess’ role here is not to inspire others to be converted to Christianity by her own good character and example, but rather to trick her father and Saracen countrymen in order to please the
Christian knight with whom she has fallen in love. The Saracen princess usually becomes involved in the war by aiding the Christians in a plan to overcome her father; therefore, instead of keeping to “women’s work” like Constance, the Saracen princess becomes involved in those things most commonly associated with men, such as battle plans. The Saracen princess’ involvement in the Christian knights’ battle plans and her betrayal of her father is what usually leads to widespread conversion; thus, as we will see in the next chapter, she differs considerably from the Christian princess whose involvement in battle plans is usually to prevent war and prolong peace through sacrificing herself in marriage.

The primary difference between the women of these texts besides their religion, then, is the way in which they behave: while the Christian princess shows dedication to her father and religion and tries to induce conversion peacefully through both her example and her marriage, the Saracen princess uses marriage—or at least the promise of it—to betray her father and religion and thus uses treason to induce conversion and achieve her own desires (which, incidentally, coincide with those of her future husband). This difference in behavior highlights a crucial detail which I will argue helps to explain the women’s radically different behavior in the texts and which has been overlooked in critics’ analyses of these women and the stereotypes associated with them: the presence or absence of a mother or female advisor and the kind of education that usually accompanies such a figure. I will argue in this chapter and the next that the differing ways in which the Christian and Saracen princesses are regularly represented as participating in the conversion projects of these texts can be attributed largely to their educational backgrounds and, as a result, the presence or absence of a mother or female advisor who is available to provide such an example. As we will see, the presence or
absence of such a figure seems to have a significant effect on the representation of the heroines who become wives in these texts and, perhaps more interestingly, on the way in which they choose to aid the conversion projects of their fathers and/or lovers/husbands.

In this chapter, I have chosen to cover only two of the Constance narratives, Geoffrey Chaucer’s *Man of Law’s Tale* and John Gower’s “Tale of Constance” from the *Confessio Amantis*, for the other well-known Constance narratives are missing important features of the conversion narrative. *Le Bone Florence of Rome* excludes both the actual interfaith marriage (there is only the threat of an interfaith marriage) and the conversion narrative, and although *Emaré* includes marriage, the marriage is not interfaith and so there is no conversion narrative. I will complement my analysis Constance with examinations of Saracen princesses in the next chapter, and finally conclude with a consideration of the Christian princess of the *King of Tars*, often considered a Constance narrative, but with some important differences.

In the previous chapter, I concluded my analysis of interfaith marriage and conversion in two of the texts I will analyze further in the next chapter and conclusion, *Bevis of Hampton* (which features a Saracen princess), and the *King of Tars* (which features a Constance-like figure), with a consideration of the similarities and differences in the authors’ treatment of the Christian princess of Tars and the newly-Christian, formerly-Saracen Josiane in their roles as facilitators of the Christians’ conversion project. What seemed most clearly expressed through these texts was the importance of controlling women because of their potentially dangerous ability to be influenced and/or to influence others. Such influences could lead to mass conversion—which is clearly what Saracens in particular were represented as fearing, and, as we shall see in the next
two chapters, what Christians count on to enable their manifest destiny. The possibility
for women to play significant roles in the conversion process was clearly an area
explored by medieval English writers, quite possibly because of women’s potential to
encourage and influence conversion peacefully through marriage, an issue that was
clearly on the minds of many as the Crusades largely unsuccessfully waged on.

During this later period of the Middle Ages in which the Crusades were not
yielding the results Christians desired, a genre of texts advocating the recovery of the
Holy Lands rose up and became particularly popular during the early fourteenth century.  
Around 1305-7, Pierre Dubois’ treatise, *De recuperatione Terre Sancte*, began circulating
on the continent as only one of a series of treatises which took up the very same issue—
how to recover the Holy Land successfully.  
Critics have argued that Dubois’ treatise
was, in most ways, merely a replication of the ideas circulating throughout the other
treatises of this genre and was not particularly original. However, Dubois’ treatise, as we have seen, was quite original in one very interesting and important way: while the treatises of this genre discussed possible means of converting Saracens to Christianity, Dubois’ was the only one to suggest interfaith marriage as an effective means of inducing conversion among the Saracen aristocracy:

While others are pursuing a policy of inflicting injury on the Saracens, making war upon them, seizing their lands, and plundering their other property, perhaps girls trained in the proposed schools may be given as wives to the Saracen chiefs, although preserving their faith lest they participate in their husbands’ idolatry. By their efforts, with the help of God and the preaching disciples so they may have assistance from Catholics—for they cannot rely on the Saracens—their husbands might be persuaded and led to the Catholic faith. Little by little our faith might be made known among them. (124)

Not only is Dubois’ suggestion remarkable in its objective to pursue conversion in a peaceful manner through interfaith marriage, but also in its reliance on women to take active roles in the conversion process. He believed that Christian women could influence conversion peaceably through love and wifely counsel and, importantly, through their example.

The influence of women becomes even more clearly key to Dubois’ conception of religious conversion among non-Christians through his discussion of the proposed education of Christian women who would participate in these interfaith marriages. Just as he believed young boys should be educated in subjects that would later prove useful to the recovery and conversion project, so he advocated the education of young girls in both

---


the Catholic faith and technical subjects which would permit them to influence not only the Saracen husbands he proposed for them, but also the Saracen women—particularly wives—who could be persuaded to adopt Catholicism through the advice and guidance of such exemplary Christian women:

Girls should be instructed in medicine and surgery, and the subjects necessary as a preliminary to this. With such training and a knowledge of writing, these girls—namely, those of noble birth and others of exceptional skill who are attractive in face and figure—will be adopted as daughters and granddaughters by the greater princes of their own countries, of the Holy Land, and of other lands adjacent thereto. They will be so adorned at the expense of the said foundation that they will be taken for daughters of princes, and may then conveniently be married off to the greater princes, clergy, and other wealthy easterners…Wives with such education, who held the articles of faith and the sacraments according to Roman usage, would teach their children and husbands to adhere to the Roman faith and to believe and sacrifice in accordance with it. They would employ arguments and opportunities far more effective than those which by the wiles of his wives led Solomon, the wisest of men, into idolatry. Such women, through the love of their native land, would arrange to have many girls from these schools married to their sons and other leading men of the land…(118-9)

Dubois’ focus on the necessity of education to prompt conversion among the Christian women’s non-Christian husbands is remarkable. Instead of advocating the military conquest of Saracen lands and peoples, he focuses here on the role education can play in the conversion process. Although Dubois notes that these Christian women must be attractive in “face and figure,” he specifies that they must also be well-learned and instructed in many subjects so that through the example of their intellect they will be able to contribute to the conversion project. Furthermore, they must be trusted to remain steadfast in their Christian faith and, importantly, entrusted to know and understand the
tenets of the faith in order to teach them.\textsuperscript{7} Thus, for Dubois, the example of the Christian wife—through her education and intelligence and her behavior—was an integral component of both interfaith marriage and widespread conversion.

What is significant about Dubois’ discussion of how women, via marriage, could aid the conversion project is that he focuses specifically on the importance of their influence over not only their non-Christian husbands, but also (perhaps more importantly) over non-Christian women.\textsuperscript{8} Because Dubois’ notion of the role of Christian women in the conversion project was based on their usefulness as examples of good wives and intelligent, educated women, it makes sense that he imagined their biggest contribution to the conversion scheme to be influencing non-Christian women to become Christian converts:

Especially [would they influence] the women, whom they would aid through the practice of medicine and surgery, and particularly in their secret infirmities and needs. It could scarcely happen otherwise than that they, nobler and richer than other matrons and recognized everywhere as having a knowledge of medicine, surgery, and experimental science, would attract matrons in need of their counsel, who admired their skills so advantageous to them and loved them on that account: would attract them, I say, to communicate with them and be glad to unite with them in the articles of faith and the sacraments. (119-20)

\textsuperscript{7} Dubois specifies later in the text that “The girls who are destined to marry those who do not adhere to the articles of our faith, as the Roman Church holds, teaches, and observes them, ought to be instructed in the articles as held by the Roman Church so that they may carry with them all the articles briefly and plainly written in a manner they can comprehend adequately” (139). Such an emphasis on the education and understanding of the tenets of the faith and, more significantly, the passing of this teaching on to others, may seem somewhat remarkable as, during the latter part of the fourteenth century, women were expressly forbidden from participating in religious instruction. They were, however, as I will show later in the chapter, strongly encouraged and expected to be educated in their religion so that they could educate their children.

\textsuperscript{8} I stress that Dubois views the potential influence Christian women could have over non-Christian women as possibly more important than the Christian women’s influences over their own husbands because Dubois seems most interested in attracting as many converts as possible. Because he believes Saracen men to have many wives, he suggests that the Christian women’s ability to influence the Saracen men’s multiple wives to follow Christian rules on marriage would result in a great number of converts to Christianity, as not only would these Saracen wives convert, but so would their children.
The relationship between women—even women of different faiths—that Dubois imagines here is one based primarily on counsel; in other words, women by necessity seek out advice and guidance from other women and develop relationships based on this need for shared knowledge and advice. Dubois’ understanding of female relationships is that they are formed not only through the sharing of experiences, but also—significantly—through the sharing of advice, and thus, through the infiltration of well-educated Christian women into Saracen societies via their interfaith marriages, the Christian women’s counsel and learning would be disseminated through the female Saracen population and, Dubois hoped and believed, would ultimately lead to conversion. Not only would such women begin to follow the tenets of the Christian faith, but they would also rebel against the customs of their Islamic culture, Dubois argued:

Their wives would strive the more zealously for this because each of them has many wives. All the wealthy and powerful among them lead a voluptuous life to the disadvantage of their wives, anyone of whom would rather have a man to herself (nor is it to be wondered at) than that seven or more wives would share one husband. It is on that account, as I have generally heard from merchants who frequent their lands, that the women of that sect would easily be strongly influenced toward our manner of life, so that each man would have only one wife. (124)

Dubois’ inclusion of Christian women in the conversion project in order to persuade not only their non-Christian husbands and the children from their interfaith marriages to follow the Christian faith, but also the Saracen women with whom they would regularly come in contact indicates a medieval generalization that women were believed to strongly influence each other in very important ways, but perhaps most specifically in the areas of love/sex/marriage and, as here, religion. Dubois’ involvement of women in the conversion process is thus based primarily on the counsel and information that could pass
between Christian and Saracen women and influence the latter to adopt both the tenets of the Christian faith and the observations of the Christian European culture.

Because Christian women could become such useful assets to the conversion process, Dubois advocated a very particular form of education for these women, as we have seen in the above passages, where he suggested medical and scientific education for these women since it would seem “impressive” and “useful” to Saracen women. What we are able to glean from Dubois’ description of female education is that its purpose was completely based on women’s potential usefulness to the conversion process: those who were not sent to marry princes and prelates of the Saracen lands should, he suggested, become teachers for the next generation of young Christian girls. What is particularly interesting about Dubois’ conception of female education is its technical nature. Though he does not specifically discuss conduct as part of his educational scheme, conduct, or the proper behavior of the young wives participating in these interfaith marriages and undertaking this conversion project, is to be read between-the-lines. If the Christian women are to influence and persuade non-Christian men and women alike to convert to Christianity, the example they set through both their knowledge and, perhaps more importantly, their behavior and conduct as wives, is paramount. While Dubois does not specifically stress the importance of individual conduct, his focus on interaction between the Christian women and their non-Christian counterparts clearly relies upon a shared interest in proper conduct and a type of knowledge that is particularly feminine.

No evidence of the implementation of Dubois’ educational model exists. While there are no records of educational manuals for young women to be used in school in medieval England, Barbara Hanawalt has suggested that these young women still
received an education, but one that was vastly different from the kind young men received (and, presumably, the kind Dubois advocated)—one based explicitly on conduct and marriage advice, and which was taught not only by their mothers, but also their fathers, parish priests, and even nurses; essentially, anyone who had the potential to mentor a young Christian woman.\footnote{Barbara Hanawalt, \textit{The Wealth of Wives: Women, Law, and Economy in Late Medieval London} (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007): 36.} Middle English authors who portray the interfaith relationships Dubois advocated depict these women as having not the sort of education Dubois suggested, but rather the one that was, for most medieval English women, the reality—the education based primarily on conduct. Alternatively, the Saracen princesses we shall examine are frequently represented as engaged in the very sort of technical education Dubois advocates, which in many cases works to masculinize rather than feminize them, and which can, as I will suggest in the next chapter, be somewhat explained by their extensive interaction with men in their fathers’ courts and the absence of important women in their lives.

The advisory role Dubois suggests occurs between women, and the importance of one woman’s example on another woman, is, according to Nikki Stiller, indicative of the ordinary relationship between medieval women. Stiller argues that while the mother-daughter relationship was very significant to medieval women, friendships between women also resulted in the same kind of relationship common between mothers and daughters.\footnote{See Nikki Stiller, \textit{Eve’s Orphans: Mothers and Daughters in Medieval English Literature} (Westport, CT and London: Greenwood P, 1980): 93-4.} Stiller suggests that the friendships between women we witness in Middle English texts place a heightened emphasis on the distinct roles of the female friends: one
friend is generally the advisor, while the other is the advisee.\footnote{Stiller, *Eve’s Orphans: Mothers and Daughters in Medieval English Literature*, 94.} Female-female connections, she indicates, provided safety and protection and, importantly, were a place for counsel.\footnote{Stiller, *Eve’s Orphans: Mothers and Daughters in Medieval English Literature*, 118.} Friendship between women, then, Stiller argues, closely mimics the mother-daughter relationship and the friendship can, in many cases, be likened to that of a foster-mother and foster-daughter.\footnote{For a full discussion of this kind of role play between medieval women, see Stiller’s chapter, “Fostermothers: Women Mothering Women,” in *Eve’s Orphans*, 93-125.} It may thus come as no surprise that those female characters represented as embodying the ideal characteristics of both wives and mothers are represented as engaging with other women in such relationships, which are largely based on the concepts of counsel and example.

Several of Stiller’s points about the roles women took on as friends are useful to my analysis of the importance of a female advisory role in a young woman’s life. “Mothering” can be, as Stiller suggests, “the model of conduct for women.”\footnote{Stiller, *Eve’s Orphans: Mothers and Daughters in Medieval English Literature*, 117.} In Chaucer’s and Gower’s Constance narratives to which I will soon turn, mothering is indeed represented as a model of conduct for women. Not only are the mothers of Constance at least mentioned, but the mothers’ roles are particularly important to their daughters’ destinies as participants in the colonial process. At the very least, it becomes clear in these texts that the Constance figure has received the kind of conduct- and counsel-based education from either her mother or another female placed in a mother-like position that is considered prized among Christians. That medieval writers perceptibly differentiate between their representations of Christian and non-Christian princesses and largely alienate non-Christian princesses from potential female role models, such as
mothers, suggests the connection between a conduct-based education and ideal female behavior, even in terms of conversion.

It would now be useful to examine exactly the kind of education a young Christian woman could be expected to receive from her female role model and, more specifically, from a conduct manual, and which will prepare us to examine how these conduct guidelines infiltrate (or do not infiltrate) the medieval romances with which this chapter (and the next) is concerned.

Conduct manuals, some scholars have suggested, “provide the material record of everyday life as it was supposed to be lived,” and while they had been around for most of the Middle Ages—think of the thirteenth-century Ancrene Wisse which set forth strict conduct guidelines for medieval anchoresses—during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the aristocracy and bourgeoisie witnessed a “flourishing” of these manuals, which also came to be known as “courtesy literature.” Kathleen M. Ashley attributes this rapid rise in the number of manuals directed toward female behavior to two things: first, the interest of the aristocracy in maintaining its elite identity during a time when social mobility was on the rise; and second, the desire of these “upwardly mobile groups” to “define their new sense of worth and place in medieval society.” While this genre

17 Kathleen M. Ashley, “Medieval Courtesy Literature and Dramatic Mirrors of Female Conduct,” 25. Mark Addison Amos similarly argues that the popularity of courtesy texts in the fifteenth century was directly related to the new ruling urban elite: those who ran the guilds, etcetera, now desired to display conduct that was in keeping with their newfound wealth and ability to purchase aristocratic luxuries. See “For Manners Make Men”: Bourdieu, de Certeau, and the Common Appropriation of Noble Manners in
was undoubtedly a response to the social issues Ashley names, what is particularly
interesting about its rise is the reflection of the rules and guidelines of such manuals we
begin to see in the romances of Middle English authors. Reading such canonical authors
as Chaucer reinforces the influence this genre had on how characters were to be read; for
example, while Dorigen of the Franklin’s Tale struggles because of her simultaneous
desire to remain faithful to her husband Arveragus and to retain the honor of her word to
Aurelius (both desires which are based on common rules of conduct manuals) and
therefore tries to follow the counsel of conduct manuals perhaps too carefully, or at least
to an extreme, the Wife of Bath and May of the Merchant’s Tale, along with Alison of
the Miller’s Tale, are portrayed as Dorigen’s antitypes: not only do they completely
disregard the kind of conduct advocated in courtesy literature, especially in regard to
fidelity, but the Wife of Bath also presents herself as, in some ways, a teacher of the kind
of behavior denounced by courtesy literature. What we can thus gather from character
representations like those of Chaucer’s pilgrims is that the behavior advocated by conduct
manuals and courtesy literature generally was such an ingrained aspect of female life that
authors even experimented with this genre’s advice in their literary recreations of social
life.

Of course, medieval authors’ interest in courtesy literature and advice manuals
was hardly limited to female conduct manuals. In her discussion of the most significant
“languages of power” during Richard II’s rule, Lynn Staley includes a group of English

---

the Book of Courtesy,” Medieval Conduct, ed. Kathleen Ashley and Robert L. A. Clark (Minneapolis: U of

18 I would argue that Chaucer purposely takes the concept of conduct education too far in his representation
of Dorigen. Though he clearly allows her an easy way out of the covenant with Aurelius by specifying that
she was playing when she agreed to Aurelius’ demand, Dorigen remains committed to keeping both her
word and her fidelity, two things very strongly stressed in medieval female conduct manuals.
texts based on the French georgic—texts that are apparently concerned with conduct and the management of a medieval household, and therefore fall into the category of courtesy literature. Though Staley’s purpose in discussing this genre of texts differs quite substantially from mine—she is interested in the political applications of these texts and suggests that they may be classified as belonging to the “advice to princes” genre—the content and prevalence of such texts indicate a real interest in domestic conduct.

One text Staley discusses in some detail, and which she claims became widely available in Latin translation during the thirteenth century, was the pseudo-Aristotelian *Economics*.\(^1\) Not only does this text have books devoted to the management of a medieval household and its lands, but it also has a book that is explicitly focused on conduct: the second book is essentially a list of rules and advice for young medieval wives. The significance of this section of the text becomes clear through the author’s connection between virtuous wives/mothers and virtuous children: virtue begets virtue, and thus, wives who abide by their husbands’ rules of conduct will have virtuous and obedient children.\(^2\) The onus of the children’s behavior, then, is placed upon their

---

2. Book II of the pseudo-Aristotelian *Le Livre De Yconomique D’Aristote*, now attributed to Nicole Oresme, focuses explicitly on marriage in eight chapters, divided into the following areas: (1) How a wife ought to conduct herself in matters not concerning her husband; (2) how a wife ought to behave toward her husband; (3) how the husband must enforce the good behavior of his wife; (4) how the husband should behave to ensure that his wife is good; (5) what else makes a wife good; (6) confirmation of these issues by quotations of wise men; (7) how a husband and wife should become one in mind and will; and (8) how the married couple should be of one will. The section I discuss here, in which the children’s behavior is explicitly linked to that of the mother, is in chapter 3. Here, Oresme writes, “Item, car se les enfans sunt bien et a droit nourris et entroduiz...” Albert Douglas Menut translates this as, “For if the children have been properly trained and educated by the father and mother and have been treated kindly and brought up to behave piously and righteously...Then they will grow up virtuous as they rightly should. And if the parents do not obtain this result, they will be the losers.” Oresme glosses this section as meaning that the children should behave “Sainctement quant a Dieu ou vers Dieu; et justement quant as homes” (Menut’s translation: “piously with respect to God and righteously with men”). Oresme
mother: any failure of the children will presumably be seen as a failure of the mother. This attitude indicates the importance of the mother’s role in her children’s lives. If her children—especially her daughters—were to grow up as virtuous, obedient, and responsible, it was her duty to set an example for them based on her own conduct.

This view was widely recognized in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, both in England and on the continent, where the importance of the mother or female guardian in teaching her daughters/wards proper conduct and preparing them for marriage became evident through the appearance and circulation of such popular texts as Christine de Pizan’s *Le Livre du Trésor de la Cité des Dames*, Geoffroy de la Tour Landry’s *Livre du Chevalier de la Tour Landry*, and the anonymous fourteenth-century English text “How the Goode Wife Taught Hyr Doughter.” Such texts not only promoted virtue in young women who were expected to marry eventually, but also served to prepare young women for the relationship between a husband and wife as well as for such practical tasks as managing a household; as Barbara Hanawalt indicates, “Girls were groomed for marriage, whether or not they would eventually marry.” These manuals, meant for young women for whom marriage was inevitable, counseled these women on appropriate behavior for all the roles they could expect to have: as young unmarried women, they would be counseled on the importance of displaying virtue; as wives, they would be advised to be obedient to their husbands and given guidance on the running of a

---

actually goes on in one of his glosses to mention the common proverb about the relationship between the behavior of mothers and daughters: “Et l’en dit communelment: Tele est la mere, tele est la fille” (Menut’s translation: “And there is a common saying: Like mother, like daughter”). Thus, it seems that the behavior of children was in fact considered a direct reflection of the parents’ behavior, and in the case of daughters, the mother’s behavior. See *Maistre Nicole Oresme: Le Livre de Yconomique D’Aristote*, ed. and trans. Albert Douglas Menut, *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 47.5 (1957). See pages 832-3 for these quotations.

household; and sometimes these manuals even extended advice on widowhood and the proper behavior of a young widow.22

Perhaps one of the best known English mother-daughter conduct manuals is “How the Goode Wife Taught Hyr Doughter,” a text which was not necessarily written by a woman but is narrated as though a mother is giving advice to her daughter about marriage and wifehood.23 The mother begins her detailed instruction and counsel on behavior by stipulating that it is important for wives to know these things: she says, “Doughter, and thou wylle be a wyfe” (5)24, a line that indicates that her advice is based on her experience as a wife and that the knowledge she will pass on is gendered—it is feminine knowledge important for wives.

Throughout the text, the mother educates her daughter to remain steadfast in her faith, obey her husband, refrain from gossip, mind her manners at table, avoid envy, pride, and greed, and tells her how to manage a household and servants. While these conduct lessons are all common throughout courtesy literature for women, what is particularly interesting about this text is the mother’s conclusion of the lessons:

22 Christine de Pizan’s Treasure of the City of Ladies is particularly noteworthy due to its extended advice to young widows. As a young widow herself, Christine desired to pass along her own experiences and the important lessons and advice she had for other young women who might be in her position. Geoffroy Landry’s Book of the Knight of the Tower does not provide the same kind of advice Christine’s text does; instead, his focus on widowhood follows the teaching of such theologians as Jerome, who advocated chaste widowhood and advised widows against remarriage.
23 Though my focus here is on advice passed from mothers to daughters, it should be noted that men also participated in the conduct manual genre, though it seems they did so on a significantly smaller scale. For example, the companion text to “How the Goode Wife Taught Hyr Doughter” is “How the Goode Man Taught his Son.” The most well-known conduct manuals written for the education of men were, significantly, advice manuals for rulers which composed the “advice to princes” genre, and would include such texts as Hoccleve’s Regiment of Princes and Chaucer’s Tale of Melibee. For a discussion of male conduct literature, see Anna Dronzek, “Gender Roles and the Marriage Market in Fifteenth-Century England: Ideals and Practices,” Love, Marriage, and Family Ties in the Later Middle Ages, ed. Isabel Davis, Miriam Müller, and Sarah Rees Jones (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2003): 63-76.
Now I have taught thee, my dere doughter,
The same techynge I hade of my modour:
Thinke theron both nyght and dey,
Fororgette them not if that thou may,
For a chyld unborne wer better
Than be untaught, thus seys the letter. (200-5)

Here, the mother indicates that her counsel on conduct is both an obligation and a
tradition: while it is necessary for the daughter to learn the instruction now so that she can
benefit from a good marriage, she must also assimilate the information in order to pass it
on to her own daughter, as the mother indicates it is better that a child is unborn than
untaught. The education is traditional in that it was passed on to the daughter’s mother by
her grandmother. What this conduct text conveys, then, is the importance of a woman—
specifically a mother—in educating and preparing a young woman for her role as a wife.

While “How the Goode Wife Taught Hyr Doughter” is a popular English example
of a female conduct manual, French conduct manuals also circulated widely throughout
England. Sir Geoffroy Landry’s Livre du Chevalier de la Tour Landry was certainly
known in late medieval England. This fourteenth-century conduct text (also known as
the Book of the Knight of the Tower) contains Biblical, Classical, and hagiographical
exempla (with the occasional story about a good or bad noblewoman or commoner)
which a father—Sir Geoffroy Landry—compiled for the education of his three daughters
in the absence of their mother. In keeping with the general purpose of conduct manuals,
Sir Geoffroy clarifies that the purpose of his Book is to prepare his daughters for marriage

25 Two English translations of the Livre du Chevalier exist from the fifteenth century, one of which is much
earlier than the other (Caxton’s printed edition). Thomas Wright claims that “the popularity of this book
soon extended to foreign lands,” which suggests that it was known in England not long after its completion
in the late fourteenth century. See Wright, “Introduction,” The Book of the Knight of La-Tour Landry:
Compiled for the Instruction of His Daughters, Early English Text Society vol. 33 (London: K. Paul,
by teaching them virtue and goes so far, as critics have noted, to present marriage as equal to virginity in its ability to convey virtue in women. Sir Geoffroy’s desire to marry his daughters well is strongly tied to his goal of promoting virtuous behavior. In fact, Mark Addison Amos has called Sir Geoffrey’s book of instruction for his daughters “providentialist,” in that “the women in his text are rewarded or punished not only by God in the afterlife, but also in their earthly lives by divine agents with the power to dispense (or deny) success, true love, prosperity, good reputation, and most importantly, a good marriage.”

Sir Geoffroy represents his parental desire to promote virtue and prepare his daughters both to attract good husbands and become good wives as the desire of the girls’ mother, who at the point of his writing, had been dead for twenty years. He tells his daughters that the purpose of his production of a conduct manual is to provide them with the kind of education their mother would have given them had she not died when they were young. The importance of a mother in passing on conduct education to her daughters is repeatedly stressed throughout the Book, as Sir Geoffroy claims that female virtue should—and, as he reveals through his description of a pivotal debate he had with his wife toward the end of the Book—must be taught by a mother (or, presumably, a female guardian).

26 Karen A. Winstead and Lynn Staley also recognize Sir Geoffroy’s advocacy of marriage; see Winstead’s John Capgrave’s Fifteenth Century (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2007): 95, where she states that his text “leveled the sexual hierarchy”; and Staley’s Languages of Power in the Age of Richard II, 271, where she claims that “the Knight offers a view of the world in which a young woman may find in marriage the spiritual fulfillment she might have sought in a nunnery.”

While the morals of several of Sir Geoffroy’s exempla specifically place the onus of teaching conduct on the mother—such as his exemplum in which a father vehemently blames his daughter’s mother for the daughter’s gluttony (it was her job to educate the daughter on virtue, the father claims)—the significance of the mother’s role in dispensing her own female advice becomes most evident when Sir Geoffroy narrates the debate he and his wife had over whether they should encourage their daughters to have paramours.

Most critics of Sir Geoffroy’s text describe the debate Sir Geoffroy narrates as occurring between his wife and him as simply a ploy to attract his daughters’ attention to proper conduct. In other words, these critics suggest that Sir Geoffroy’s use of the persona of his wife is merely a way for him to “ventriloquote” his own beliefs. What these critics do not specifically consider is why he deliberately chooses to present his wife as a more authoritative figure than himself. Though Sir Geoffroy works throughout the text to establish his own authority in the field of female conduct instruction, he chooses to include his wife at the most important moment of the text, and furthermore, presents her advice as more useful and consequential than his own.

This “central dialogue” of the text points specifically to the importance of women in passing on female counsel and, especially, conduct education. The scene, set up very clearly as a debate, works as a series of reasons why having paramours is good and beneficial, provided by Sir Geoffroy, followed each time by his Lady’s (the girls’

---

28 In his discussion of M.Y. Offord’s reading of this scene, Mark Addison Amos claims that “Offord suggests that in the debate the Knight voices opinions that he held in his youth, while the Lady ventriloquizes his current feelings.” Amos, on the other hand, suggests that the purpose of the Lady’s persona is to provide a “pragmatic” example by which the girls will be able to “coordinate the demands of an aristocratic love code with Christian virtues.” See “The Gentrification of Eve,” 27.

29 Mark Addison Amos, for example, argues that this scene constitutes the “central dialogue” and contributes to the text’s overall interest in how aristocratic and religious interests conflict in terms of women’s sexual conduct; see also “The Gentrification of Eve,” 19-20.
mother’s) rebuttals as to why their daughters should not have paramours. Sir Geoffroy opens this section of the text by both labeling the exchange with his wife a debate and admitting that the debate caused strife between them:

My dere douhters, as for to loue peramours I shal tell yow alle the debate and stryf of me and of your moder…Wherfore take ye hede, and here ye the grete debate and stryf whiche was bytwene her and me. (171) 

The significance of this opening is that Sir Geoffroy prepares his daughters to read the debate and learn the reasoning of both of their parents on the subject of paramours. By incorporating his own incorrect (as he even seems to concede by the end of the debate) ideas and presenting them as inferior to his wife’s ideas and advice, he esteems the role of his daughters’ mother—and by association, any mother—in providing the rules of female conduct. The Lady’s first entrance into the dialogue indicates that while Sir Geoffroy wishes to provide his daughters with both sides of the debate, even he recognizes that it is their mother’s side which is more authoritative:

Thenne ansuerd to me your moder, “Syr, I merueyll me not, yf amonge yow men susteyne and holde this reason, that al women oughte to loue peramours; But sith this debate and stryf is come before our owne doughters, I wylle answere after myn aduys and Intencion, For, vnto our children we must hyde nothynge.” (172)

Sir Geoffroy could, of course, have presented the advice and counsel against accepting paramours as his own, but he chooses here to present it as his wife’s and, interestingly, to “hyde nothynge” from his daughters, including the inferiority of some of his advice. The inferiority of his advice as a father who had once been a young man becomes evident

---

when the Lady rebukes his suggestion that having a paramour has the potential to bring honor to a young woman:

> Ye say, and so done all other men, that a lady or damoysell is the better worth whan she loueth peramours…These wordes are but sport and esbatement of lorde and of felawes, in a langage moche comyn. (172)

The Lady here rebukes Sir Geoffroy for his advice primarily because it is male advice tainted by her husband’s experience as a young man. Her dismissal of his counsel because it is based on words that are “sport and esbatement of lorde and of felawes” indicates that a father’s counsel could be detrimental to his daughters because he views things only from a male perspective: because a young woman can enhance her paramour’s honor, it must logically follow that she should bring honor to herself. The girls’ mother vehemently denies such a conclusion, stating that what young women actually acquire through enhancing paramours could amount to simply gossip and bad fame: there is no promise of marriage, and so a young woman’s honor could be ruined forever by having a paramour. Because Sir Geoffroy narrates this scene and chooses to represent the Lady as (rightfully) dismissing his counsel as dangerous to their daughters’ virtue and marital prospects, he ultimately gives privilege to women’s (mother’s) counsel in the education of daughters. Sir Geoffroy’s presentation of the superiority of the Lady’s counsel makes sense, as her advice to her daughters is pragmatic: if they follow her suggestions to give their love freely only in marriage, they will be rewarded not only by God, but also—importantly—by the society in which they live. Thus, her advice is integral to their success as both wives and public figures.

Another way in which Sir Geoffroy elucidates the importance of a mother or female advisor in dispensing conduct education is by recreating the girls’ mother as an
authoritative teacher: through giving his Lady a voice in the debate, she becomes an active presence in the education of her daughters. His rhetoric represents the Lady as actively educating their daughters, despite the fact that she has been dead for so many years; at one point, he represents the Lady as saying, “as for my doughters whiche ben here present” (185), a move which serves to overcome the actual physical distance between the mother and her daughters. The Lady continually speaks directly to her daughters in the text, and even directly tells them not to listen to their father’s counsel (at least on this subject):

Therefore I charge yow, my fayre doughters, that in this mater ye byleue not your fader. But I pray yow that ye hold your self clenly and without blame, and that ye be not amerous, for many reasons whiche I shalle reherce vnto yow. (172-3)

Although Sir Geoffroy is the Lady’s mouthpiece, he constantly reasserts her authority on the subject of conduct, going so far as to represent her directing their daughters to believe and abide by her counsel rather than his. Furthermore, he establishes her authority based on the fact that she is the girls’ mother (for example, when the Lady says, “As I theyr moder charge and deffende them,” 178) and not simply because she is a woman. That it is the role of the mother or guardian to provide conduct-based education is the accepted view of the Book, and he even indicates that his Lady is specifically providing advice and instruction to her own daughters—she is not concerned with other young women’s education, as she clarifies:

For myn entencion and wyll is not to ordeyne vpon non ladyes ne damoysels, but yf hit be vpon myn owne doughters, of whome I haue the chastysement and charge (184).
The exchange between Sir Geoffroy and his wife serves, more than anything, to underscore the significance of an authoritative female—in this case, specifically a mother—in the lives of young women. The mother’s advice is, according to Sir Geoffroy, the right advice, and the Lady takes her role of guiding her daughters very seriously: he represents her as being concerned only with the behavior of her daughters, over whom she has not only authority, but also to whom she has a responsibility. Because both she and her husband advocate good marriage as the only possible course for their daughters, the Lady’s advice on marriage is particularly important, for it is she who advises against extra-marital affairs and marrying below one’s class.

Amos reads this scene as the point in the Book at which Sir Geoffroy tries to reconcile “the aristocratic love code that celebrates and codifies an erotics with the Christian code that barely provides for marriage and certainly does not view the erotic as ennobling.” While Amos’ point about Sir Geoffroy’s attempt to reconcile these two completely different, yet necessary, codes of conduct in this debate between Sir Geoffroy and his wife seems valid, what stands out in this scene is the privileged role Sir Geoffroy gives to his wife. Not only does he present her as completely disagreeing with him, but he ultimately presents her as having the right advice and counsel for their daughters. By so doing, Sir Geoffroy could arguably serve to deconstruct his own authority in the text; what I believe he is actually doing, however, is complementing his authority by providing his daughters with their mother’s advice. This move does, however, evince the idea that the girls’ mother is actually the proper source for advice on female conduct.

In the end, while Sir Geoffroy does not declare a winner of the debate, it seems clear that the Lady’s arguments hold up the best and that her advice should be followed by their daughters.32 The Lady’s “win” points to the import of a mother or mother-like figure in dispensing this kind of advice and conduct education. While men like Sir Geoffroy can provide some guidance and lead young women in conducting themselves morally for the glory of both God and themselves, even they cannot be considered perfect substitutions for the conduct education a mother can provide. That Sir Geoffroy’s text places so much importance on the role of a mother or, at least, female guardian, in educating a young woman cannot be overlooked in light of the clear absence of such figures in the lives of Saracen princesses, who are so frequently represented as lacking the characteristics of a conduct-based education, as we shall see.

Showing agreement with the important role figured for women in passing on female counsel and the education of conduct manuals is Christine de Pizan’s 1405 text Le Livre du Trésor de la Cité des Dames, or The Treasure of the City of Ladies. Also known as The Book of the Three Virtues, Christine’s Treasure falls neatly into the category of conduct manual and, as one modern editor has put it, “survival manual.”33 Written explicitly for women of different estates—Christine divides the text into a section of conduct instruction for princesses, one for ladies at court, and finally, one in which she tries to cover all the other possible women who might need advice, from merchants’ and laborers’ wives to chambermaids and even prostitutes—Christine’s text is important in any consideration of female conduct literature in that we know it is an advice manual

written by a woman for women. Christine’s advice clearly differs from that of Sir Geoffroy’s Lady in that Christine intends for her advice and instruction to be followed by an audience of women who are not her daughters.34 Also, while both Sir Geoffroy and the anonymous English author of “How the Goode Wife Taught Hyr Doughter” strongly suggest that conduct education is a family affair, passed from mother to daughter, Christine indicates that conduct education is not necessarily restricted to female family members, but can also be passed down by friends and chaperones. Significantly, Christine, like Sir Geoffroy35 and the anonymous English writer, focuses on conduct education as something that should be passed between and among women.36

As a woman writing a conduct manual, Christine frequently uses her own experiences to advise the various women her text is designed to educate. While her own experiences certainly dictate the advice she gives to young widows, she designates that all women should use their own experiences and behavior to serve as examples for younger women who require conduct education, and she specifically reminds mothers that their daughters’ education is their responsibility. Christine reminds the princess that “The wise princess watches over the upbringing and education of her daughters” and further, that “Her prudent behaviour and virtue will be an example to her daughters to

34 Because I am concerned in this chapter with the conduct education (or lack thereof) of princesses, both Christian and Saracen, I will confine my analysis of Christine’s text to her section on the education of princesses.
35 Although Sir Geoffroy presents the manual as his own compilation for his daughters, he does, as noted above, detail that he has written the text only because the girls’ mother has died and cannot give this education.
36 As Christine’s Treasure is also the sequel to the Livre de la Cité des Dames, some of it is written as an allegory, and thus, while females can and should educate each other, some principle virtues which are personified as feminine, such as Prudence and Sobriety, also participate in the educational process. However, these personifications remain Christine’s voice and are based on female experience and knowledge that Christine wishes, as an authoritative female, to pass on to other women. Thus, I will focus here on Prudence’s advice as, ultimately, Christine’s teaching.
govern themselves similarly” (43). Christine’s focus on the importance of women playing role models to their daughters and, in some cases, to young women other than their daughters, is a theme that we will see throughout the Constance legends, specifically in the conversion narrative scenes. There, the Constance figure regularly befriends other women and teaches them both skills and, most importantly, Christian faith, through her example, which results in the phenomenon mentioned above, conversion-by-example.

While Christine strongly advocates the princess’ active interest in the education of both her sons and daughters (but grants that the princess’ involvement in her daughters’ lives may be more significant, in that she can be a fitting role model for a woman living in a man’s world), she is not focused on mothers to the exclusion of other potential female role models and teachers for young princesses. Part of the reason that her focus is not intensely on mothers is that she is working from the angle that the young princess requiring her instruction has already been married and is thus separated from her parents; therefore, Christine encourages the young princess to find a wise female chaperone who will continue to assist her education in behaving properly as a wife and princess. Her encouragement toward the use of female counsel intimates that Christine knows and believes that a female example of proper conduct is necessary, as this advisor will continue to teach the princess virtue and will help the princess to cultivate and maintain both her marriage and reputation.

The main argument of this chapter—that a figure’s example, including her secular and religious conduct based largely on secular conduct manuals or courtesy literature, can influence the religious conversion of others—is a topic that is actually broached in Christine’s text. Significantly, Christine suggests that the education of proper conduct is
(presumably) a Western notion, and that other countries’ women could benefit from such a manual—especially aristocratic women at court:

Women of the court in any country would be deceiving themselves very much if they imagined that it was more appropriate for them to be frolicsome and saucy than for other women. For this reason we hope that in time to come our doctrine in this book may be carried into many kingdoms, so that it may be valuable in all places where there might be any shortcoming. (51)

Christine’s perception of her book’s value is indicative of a medieval reliance on conduct education to prepare Christian women of all classes for their lives as wives and mothers (in this quotation she is obviously talking specifically of noblewomen at court).

Furthermore, her assertion that there are “shortcomings” in the courts of other countries where the kind of education she provides through her book is not available points to a kind of imaginative colonialism: by sending her book forth into countries where this kind of female conduct education and preparation is lacking, Christine will not only pass on important information about female conduct, wifehood, and widowhood, but since her book is so concerned with proper Christian conduct, she will possibly be participating in disseminating Christian beliefs in courts where Christianity is not the accepted religion.

Thus, Christine, through sending forth a written guide both to proper female behavior and to proper religious conduct and belief, may effectively be viewed as taking on the role of the literary Constance figures herself: she is teaching and advising based both on her own experience and knowledge of proper conduct and, significantly, on her religious beliefs.

37 It seems unlikely that Christine means to include other Western countries, such as England, as countries into which she hoped the conduct manual would be carried. This conclusion seems likely in that Christine was familiar with the English court because her son had spent time there, and she was also familiar with the Italian court, and could probably presume that such an education was already underway and prized in these courts. However, I do not wish to generalize that non-Western courts would have been familiar with her text, for she may well have considered the French court superior to all other Western courts. This statement is important in that it shows Christine’s interest in educating women in other courts in terms of courtesy.
Through Christine’s representation of the significance of her text, then, we can conclude that among Christians, female conduct education was highly prized because it prepared women for their future roles.

Though the influence of the conduct manual in the representations of romance heroines like the Constance figures has not to my knowledge been discussed, some critics have covered the influence these manuals had on other literary representations. Kathleen Ashley, for example, has argued that medieval English and French drama cycles clearly exhibit the influence of medieval conduct manuals in their representations of female behavior.\(^{38}\) She claims that the portrayals of female characters in the drama cycles can be viewed as exemplary rather than didactic; in other words, their behavior as depicted onstage represents a model of behavior, based largely on conduct manuals, that female audience members could follow.\(^{39}\) While Ashley’s focus is on the representation of religious figures such as the Virgin Mary, Mary Magdalene, and Martha, which leads her to suggest that the cycle authors used these women as examples of proper conduct specifically for young middle-class women, it is fair to say that the influence of conduct manuals throughout the medieval dramatic cycles extended even to negative representations of female characters which could have a more didactic effect. The negative behavior and representation of figures such as Noah’s wife from the Towneley Cycle’s *Noah and His Sons*, who is represented as a shrew and an all-around rather unappealing character, could be used to discourage certain types of female behavior, and

---

\(^{38}\) See Kathleen M. Ashley, “Medieval Courtesy Literature and Dramatic Mirrors of Female Conduct,” 25-38.

\(^{39}\) See Ashley, “Medieval Courtesy Literature and Dramatic Mirrors of Female Conduct,” 26. Ashley uses the example of the Annunciation scene in the Towneley Cycle to prove that the representation of Mary was not simply meant to teach viewers, but rather to provide and example of ‘‘prudence’’ in the face of possible temptation.”
thus ultimately serve to promote the behavior found in female conduct manuals. Because “The medieval ideal of the lady was just as universal as the ideal of the knight,” it is fair to argue that the tenets of courtesy education transcend national borders, and as I now hope to show, the Constance narratives are particularly interested in the role courtesy education can and should play in the life of a Christian woman who participates in secular life, through marriage and childbearing.

The Constance figure has often been viewed as a stand-in for the medieval Catholic Church through her role as a drifting symbol of the Roman faith and her role has frequently been considered passive, in that she is continually set adrift and has no real control over her destiny. Instead, she is married off by her father to a Saracen sultan in an attempt to encourage the conversion of his Saracen kingdom, and later, is married to a pagan king whom she influences to convert (and who also converts his kingdom). Critics have overwhelmingly read Constance’s narrative as a metaphor for evangelization of non-Christian nations, but they have largely remained steadfast in their readings of the Constance figure as a completely passive and inactive conduit for conversion.

I will  

---

40 Noah’s wife is characterized in this text by her all-around negative behavior and shrewish attitude. Noah is represented as hesitant to tell her about the ark because he fears it will begin an argument, and her asides to the audience center on the aggravation of marriage and the married state—clearly comments which do not follow the guidance passed on to wives-to-be in conduct manuals. Her treatment of Noah also runs contrary to conduct manual advice, as she hits him and later tells him she’d rather be a widow and would gladly pay to be one.


42 For critics who view the Constance figure as an inactive symbol of the medieval Church, see V. A. Kolve, *Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative*, 297-358, who claims that Custance in her boat is a stand-in for the medieval Church; and Michael R. Paull, “The Influence of the Saint’s Legend Genre in the *Man of Law’s Tale*,” *Chaucer Review* 5.3 (1971): 179-94, who describes Custance as “just too good, too saint-like, and consequently one-dimensional character,” and finally claims that she is representative of the “ideal and suffering Christian.” Morton W. Bloomfield takes this view of Custance even further, calling Custance “no mighty hero in his agony, but rather a hapless victim of circumstance whose fate verges on the funny.” See “The *Man of Law’s Tale*: A Tragedy of Victimization and a Christian Comedy,” *PMLA* 87.3 (May 1972): 385. For critics who view the Constance figure as passive, see Laura Barefield, “Women’s Power in
argue that the Constance figure’s role is hardly that of a passive, inactive conduit for conversion and that she is not merely symbolic of the medieval Church; rather, through her marriages to the Saracen and pagan rulers of Syria and Northumberland, respectively, Constance chooses to use the Christian education she has acquired in order to participate in the conversion and evangelization process in her own way—as a Christian woman with a specifically feminine kind of power.  

While there are many narratives featuring a Constance figure—including *Emaré*, *Le Bone Florence of Rome*, *King of Tars*, *Man of Law’s Tale*, and the *Tale of Constance* from the *Confessio Amantis*—not all of these narratives are predominantly concerned with conversion and the Constance figure’s role in aiding the conversion process.  

*Emaré*, for example, is more concerned with an incest narrative and features no conversion narrative, while *Le Bone Florence of Rome* features no marriage but is

---

43 Elizabeth Robertson suggests that Chaucer imagines his Constance figure to have a certain type of feminine power, but Robertson connects this power to the idea of female apostolic Christianity rather than to the secular and religious virtues valued in courtesy literature. See “The ‘Elvyssh’ Power of Constance,” *Medieval Perspectives* 15 (2000): 27; David Raybin, “Custance and History: Woman as Outsider in Chaucer’s *Man of Law’s Tale*,” 80; and Marjorie Wood, “The Sultaness, Donegild, and Fourteenth-Century Female Merchants: Intersecting Discourses of Gender, Economy, and Orientalism in Chaucer’s *Man of Law’s Tale*,” *Comitatus* 37 (2006): 79. Wood claims that she is a “symbol of inordinate passivity” and “of woman as commodity” in the text. The closest any critics come to viewing the Constance figure as an active woman are Yvette Kisor, “Moments of Silence, Acts of Speech: Uncovering the Incest Motif in the *Man of Law’s Tale*,” *Chaucer Review* 40.2 (2005): 141-62, who suggests that Custance is at times active through her speech as she tries to conceal her history; Elizabeth Robertson, “The ‘Elvyssh’ Power of Constance: Christian Feminism in Geoffrey Chaucer’s *The Man of Law’s Tale*,” *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 23 (2001): 143-80, who argues that Chaucer uses Custance’s gender and religious activity to engage charged political issues in fourteenth-century England; and Christine F. Cooper, “‘But algates therby was she understonde’: Translating Custance in Chaucer’s *Man of Law’s Tale*,” *Yearbook of English Studies* 36.1 (2006): 27-38, who suggests that Custance is “subtly active” through her ability to preach using what Cooper argues is xenoglossia.

44 Critics have disagreed over whether Chaucer’s *Man of Law’s Tale* predates Gower’s “Tale of Constance” in the *Confessio Amantis*. Some critics point to the rime royal format of Chaucer’s *Tale* as proof that it is an early Chaucerian text and predates the *Confessio*; other critics, however, point to Chaucer’s discussion of incest in the *Introduction* to the *Tale* as proof that Gower’s tale came first. For a discussion of the early arguments surrounding the dating of these texts, see Margaret Schlauch, *Chaucer’s Constance and Accused Queens* (NY: NYU Press, 1927): 132-4.
concerned with the possibility of penance and forgiveness. What all of the Constance figures share, however, despite the differences in their narratives, is their portrayal as courteous Christian women. The conduct of these figures is always prized within their narratives, and great attention is paid to the representation of their courteous behavior and the skills they have learned as Christian woman. Frequently, attention is also called to their ability to act as teachers to those around them. What is significant about the similar concern with education among the various versions of the Constance legend is the adherence to a set of specific guidelines often associated with courtesy literature. These guidelines—laid out in the introduction to this chapter—are specifically noted within the various Constance narratives, and Chaucer and Gower in particular focus on the Constance figure’s knowledge of conduct guidelines. While the texts are filled with evidence that their authors consider the Constance figure a model of Christian conduct as portrayed in conduct manuals, there is also an emphasis on the fact that the Constance figure always has a mother or female teacher who has evidently been responsible for her daughter’s education; such a figure is significantly absent from the Saracen princess’ lives, as I will show in the next chapter.

Courtesy literature or conduct manuals, as we have seen, frequently emphasized the important role women could play in the religious instruction of their children. What they did not consider was the role that women could play as evangelists: unlike Dubois’ text, which considered the potential for educated Christian women to participate actively in the conversion process, Christian courtesy literature advised women that their example of conduct was sufficient to influence the behavior of others. Thus, it was important for a mother to conduct herself as a good wife in order to be a good example for her daughters,
and it was always important for a mother to conduct herself as a faithful Christian in order to be a role model in religion for her children, male and female alike. Though emphasis was placed on the role of a woman’s example of conduct before her immediate family in these texts, her possible influence on other non-family members, such as non-Christian women and men, was not contemplated, nor did the texts propose that women seek out situations in which they could influence others. I will argue that what we see in Chaucer’s and Gower’s versions of the Constance legend, however, is that the Constance figure does in fact actively seek situations in which she can influence other individuals, and that Chaucer and Gower specifically reference details associated with a Christian female education whenever Constance is involved in the conversion of another individual. These references suggest that both Chaucer and Gower imagine that a woman can be actively involved in evangelization and conversion and is not merely a passive conduit for conversion.

The first conversion in which Chaucer’s Custance is involved is that of her first husband, the Sultan, and his people, all of whom are Saracen.\footnote{I will refer to Chaucer’s figure as “Custance,” as she is called in the \textit{Man of Law’s Tale}, and to Gower’s figure as “Constance,” as she is called in the \textit{Confessio Amantis}. When referring to her generally without regard to a specific text, I will call her the “Constance figure.”} The merchants with whom the Man of Law begins his tale encounter not Custance, but rather “th’excellent renoun” of her throughout Rome:

\begin{quote}
And so bifel that th’excellent renoun
Of the Emperoures doghter, dame Custance,
Reported was, with every circumstance,
Unto thise Surryen marchantz in swich wyse,
Fro day to day, as I shal yow devyse.

This was the commune voys of every man:
“Oure Emperour of Rome—God hym see!—
\end{quote}
A doghter hath that, syn the world bigan,
To rekene as wel hir goodnesse as beautee,
Nas nevere swich another as is shee.
I prey to God in honour hire susteene,
And wolde she were of al Europe the queene.

In hire is heigh beautee, withoute pride,
Yowthe, withoute grenehede or folye;
To all hire werkes vertu is hir gyde;
Humblesse hath slayn in hire al tirannye.
She is mirour of alle curteisye;
Hire herte is verray chambre of hoolynesse,
Hir hand, ministre of fredam for almesse.” (150-68)46

Chaucer’s clarification that the merchants do not actually meet Custance indicates that her fame is so widespread throughout Rome that even without encountering Custance the merchants will have a clear impression of her. That her description arises from the “commune voys” further emphasizes the truth of the claim: because Custance’s virtues are agreed upon by all whom the merchants encounter, the representation set forth of her must be accurate. The Man of Law himself also attests to the truthfulness of the “commune voys” in the next line: “And al this voys was sooth, as God is trewe” (169).

The Man of Law’s use of the word “sooth” indicates that this description is indeed fact-based.47 The account of Custance that the merchants hear focuses on her many virtues, including both her appearance and her manners. Although she is beautiful, she avoids the sin of pride; while she is young, she is mature; she is humble, holy, and generous; but most importantly, she is the “mirour of alle curteisye.” Because the word curteisye is suggestive of an overall style of conduct, this phrase in particular singles out Custance’s

---


47 For a discussion of “sooth” and its use to indicate truth based on facts or evidence, see Richard Firth Green, *A Crisis of Truth: Literature and Law in Ricardian England* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1999): 28, where Green states that “Chaucer generally preserves a clear distinction between trouthe, as a subjective quality, and an objectively verifiable sothe.”
virtues as those directly related to the ideals associated with courtesy literature. Her courtesy education becomes even more significant, however, when it becomes the basis for the Sultan’s desire to marry her and, more importantly, to convert for her.

Significantly, the “commune voys” constitutes the “tidynges” and “wondres” that the merchants report to the Sultan upon their return from Rome. Chaucer describes the conversation between the Sultan and the merchants as a regular event, but their interaction this time focuses on the desirability of Custance:

He wolde, of his benigne curteisye,
Make hem good chiere, and bisily espye
Tidynges of sondry regnes, for to leere
The wondres that they myghte seen or here.

Amonges othere thynges, specially,
Thise marchantz han hym toold of dame Custance
So greet noblesse in ernest, seriosy,
That this Sowdan hath caught so greet pleasance
To han hir figure in his remembrance,
That al his lust and al his bisy cure
Was for to love hire while his lyf may dure. (179-89)

Two key words stand out in this passage, tidynges and wondres. The use of the word tidynges to describe the means by which the Sultan hears of Custance indicates that his ultimate desire for her is completely inspired by rumor of her excellence; neither he nor any one of the merchants has seen or interacted with Custance at this point. Because the Sultan relies on these tidynges when he makes the decision to convert and marry Custance, some critics have called him “naïve.”

---

48 See MED s.v. “courteisie, n.,” 1, where this use of the word is defined as “The complex of courtly ideals; chivalry, chivalrous conduct; also, contextually, one of these ideals, as courtly love, benevolence, kindness, cheerfulness.”

49 See MED s.v. “tiding(e, n.,” 2c, where it is defined as “common talk, gossip; a piece of gossip; a rumor; also, a topic of general discussion.”

50 See, for example, Robertson, “The ‘Elvyssh’ Power of Constance,” 154. Susan Schibanoff notes that this “sudden, intense passion” is an “Orientalist motif” and suggests that it may work to stereotype the Sultan.
stereotypes a male figure in the same way that many female Saracen figures are stereotyped as naïve in their desire to convert for marriage and/or love, it does not consider how important the Constance figure’s example of conduct is in persuading the Sultan to convert. As Chaucer has shown in other texts (specifically the *House of Fame*), rumor (or *tidynges*) is particularly important in establishing a woman’s reputation. In the *House of Fame*’s extended narrative of the Dido-and-Aeneas story, the kind of reputation Dido earns due to rumor or *tidynges* is negative; in the *Man of Law’s Tale*, however, Chaucer is experimenting with the possibility that good fame can also be spread, and that it can inspire strong feelings—feelings which, it should be added, result in a good outcome for Custance’s Christian countrymen and the Christian Church generally.

Similarly, the use of the word *wondres* to describe the kinds of reports the merchants give the Sultan—including their report of Custance—is indicative of a specific view of Custance inspired by the public discussion of her virtues. This use of *wondres* is defined as “an extraordinary thing,” a “marvel,” or a “prodigy,” which suggests that Custance’s overall description—primarily based on her example of conduct—is considered highly unusual by both the merchants and the Sultan. Because the merchants’ report of Custance is classified as belonging to this category of “marvels,” this passage suggests that such a virtuous woman educated fully in courteous behavior is considered highly unique by non-Christian societies like the Sultan’s and merchants’. In Roman society, however, Custance’s great virtue and excellence is courtesy is renowned and highly praised—it is not so much unusual as it is a perfect example of the behavior

---


51 See *MED*, s.v. “wondres, n.,” 1a, for this definition.
expected of Christian women. Since Chaucer indicates that a woman so well versed in
courtesy education is extremely unusual in non-Christian societies, Custance’s effect on
these societies can be much greater, and her ability to influence individual members of
these societies is, at this point in the text, revealed as a wonder in its own right. This
scene is not the most indicative of Custance’s active use of her courtesy education to
convert those around her; instead, this scene proves that Custance’s courtesy education is
both ingrained and useful: as David Raybin has claimed, “Wherever she goes, Custance
impresses others with her beauty and virtue, often to the point of converting them.”52
While rumors surrounding Custance’s example of conduct are enough to convince the
Sultan to convert on her behalf, Custance will actively make purposeful use of her
courtesy education once she arrives in Northumberland, as we shall see.

While the rumors of Custance convince the Sultan that he must possess her,
conversion to Christianity is not the first conclusion he reaches, although it is ultimately
the one he chooses. First, the Sultan gathers a group of advisors who very clearly
consider options associated with their Othered, non-Christian world before reaching the
only acceptable conclusion for Custance’s Christian society, marriage and conversion:

Diverse men diverse thynges seyden;
They argumenten, casten up and doun;
Many a subtil resoun forth they leyden;
They spoken of magyk and abusioun.
But finally, as in conclusioun,
They kan nat seen in that noon avantage,
Ne in noon oother wey, save mariage.

Thanne sawe they therinne swich difficultee
By wey of reson, for to speke al playn,
By cause that ther was swich diversitee

52 David Raybin, “Custance and History: Woman as Outsider in Chaucer’s Man of Law’s Tale,” Studies in
the Age of Chaucer 12 (1990): 71.
These advisors, though they first consider magic and deception as possible means of bringing Custance and the Sultan together, are obviously familiar with the Christian world from which Custance comes—familiar enough to realize that while marriage is the only way to bring the two together, a promise of conversion will be considered necessary for Custance’s father to ever consider marrying his daughter to a Saracen sultan. The Sultan’s response to their religious conundrum is to immediately agree to Christian conversion: he says, “Rather than I lese / Custance, I wol be cristned, doutelees” (225-6).

The purpose of the Sultan’s conversion (and the conversion of his men) is not a sudden true belief in Christ; instead, the conversion is fully the result of his attraction to Custance’s example as proclaimed through the streets of Rome and conveyed all the way to Syria by the merchants. This sudden love and radical decision to convert based entirely on rumors of her example of conduct (which has, as noted above, caused critics to call him “naïve”) presents for the Christians a tantalizing opportunity—the possibility to evangelize and convert all of Syria to Christianity. The Sultan’s conversion as a condition of marriage with Custance is of course necessary—his status as a Saracen represents the diriment impediment to the marriage, which would be considered valid by the Church only if he and Custance are both Christians.  

The Man of Law goes on to describe the pope’s involvement in the marriage arrangements, and proceeds to call the marriage “so heigh a cause” (252). It becomes clear through his use of this phrase that the purpose of

53 See also Paul E. Beichner’s article “Chaucer’s Man of Law and Disparitas Cultus,” *Speculum* 23.1 (1948): 70-5, where he claims that Chaucer chooses to break from his source, Trivet, in order to allow the Man of Law to demonstrate his knowledge of the canon law surrounding marriage.
the marriage—conversion of the Saracens of Syria—is a rallying point for the Church and Christians generally. For the Sultan, however, the purpose of the marriage is practical: it will save his life, in his own words. The person least involved in the marriage negotiations but most affected by them is Custance, whose strict adherence to and demonstration of her courtesy education is the basis for the “heigh cause” in the first place.

The first time we actually see Custance display her courtesy education is in what is possibly the most emotive passage in the text—her lamentation to her father and mother against the marriage. Although Custance enters her marriage to the Sultan of Syria knowing that its ultimate purpose is the evangelization and conversion of the Saracens to Christianity, and thus does not directly stimulate the conversion except through her active example of conduct which first attracted the Sultan to her and the idea of converting to be with her, she nevertheless accepts the interfaith marriage as her opportunity to fulfill Christ’s wishes:

```
“Fader,” she seyde, “thy wrecched child Custance,
Thy yonge doghter fostred up so softe,
And ye, my mooder, my soverayn pleasance
Over alle thyng, out-taken Crist on-lofte,
Custance youre child hire recomandeth ofte
Unto youre grace, for I shal to Surrye,
Ne shal I nevere seen yow moore with ye.

“Allas, unto the Barbre nacioun
I moste anoon, syn that it is youre wille;
But Crist, that starf for our redempcioun
So yeve me grace his heestes to fulfille!
I, wrecche womman, no fors though I spille!
```

54 See lines 204-10 and 225-31, where the Sultan claims that he will die without Custance. While his exclamations are indicative of the over-exaggeration of lovesickness associated with courtly love, the fact remains that in his mind, the conversion and subsequent marriage are practical and necessary for him to get what he wants.
Wommen are born to thraldom and penance,  
And to been under mannes governance.” (274-87)

Custance specifically mentions the “fostering” she has received at the hands of her parents as she describes herself—even she cannot distinguish herself from the courtesy education she so aptly demonstrates. While Custance’s exclamation here has been read as the only time when she voices her discontent with her position, the way in which she speaks to her parents actually confirms her ingrained courtesy education. Custance does not question her parents’ decision to send her away; instead, she accepts it and chooses to use the marriage as an opportunity to fulfill Christ’s “heestes.” As Jennifer Fellows has noted, daughters’ “cardinal virtue consisted in obedience.” She has no choice but to accept the marriage; although the medieval Church ruled that individual consent made marriage and that parents could not consent on behalf of their children, nor could they force their children into marriage, the Church’s theory of individual consent was not always practiced, especially at the aristocratic level. Shannon McSheffrey’s important work has suggested that parents and friends frequently became involved in arranging and, in some cases, enforcing, marriages for their children:

More so than among the middling sorts who brought their marriage problems to the Consistory court, in elite courtships others besides the principals participated in the process of making a marriage, identifying suitable matches, helping the principals conduct the courtship, advising the parties on the financial aspects of the marriage, and acting as intermediaries in the negotiations. Marriage making was part of an elite sociopolitical world characterized by networks of service and favor.

---

55 On this moment as Custance’s only resistance, see Yvette Kisor, “Moments of Silence, Acts of Speech,” 141.
Clearly, Custance has not been at all involved in the marital arrangements, and in this case, there is no courtship to proctor: the marriage will be immediate upon her arrival in Syria. Her father, with the support of the pope and the Church, has decided that she will be married to the Sultan explicitly for the sociopolitical benefits the Christian Church will receive from the marriage.  

Strikingly, though Custance laments the fact that she must leave her family and friends for a “Barbre nacioun,” she will not disobey her father, a standard expectation of medieval Christian women: “The stance of obedient daughter willing to be governed in all things by a wise and all-knowing father was a real expectation of female behavior.”

Chaucer’s interest in female courtesy education and household advice manuals is clear within the *Canterbury Tales* as a whole: while the *Physician’s Tale* is perhaps the tale most explicitly concerned with female courtesy education, as here we witness a daughter submit to her father’s gruesome decision to murder her for the sake of her honor, he also includes the tale of Griselda as the *Clerk’s Tale*, as well as his own *Tale of Melibee*, which is itself a household advice manual. The story of Griselda is described within the *Clerk’s Tale* as a Job-like allegory for the suffering Christian (male or female), but the story was also sometimes included within female courtesy handbooks as an

---

58 Kathryn Lynch claims that the brief mention of the treasure that will accompany Custance to Syria further indicates that the marriage’s purpose is sociopolitical: “Chaucer’s comparatively limited focus on the dowry that Custance carries with her…may underscore the fact that the exchange of this woman is a carefully arbitrated bid to purchase the religious affiliation of the Saracens.” See “Storytelling, Exchange, and Constancy: East and West in Chaucer’s *Man of Law’s Tale,*” *Chaucer Review* 33.4 (1999): 415.


exemplum of obedience. In Le Ménagier de Paris (also known as The Good Wife’s Guide), a late fourteenth-century French conduct manual framed as an educational manual for a young woman from her Parisian husband, the tale of Griselda is used not only as an example of a virtuous and obedient wife, but also, as her husband tells her, “to show that God, the Church, and reason require that they be obedient, and since their husbands will that they have so much to suffer, to avoid worse they must submit themselves in all things to the will of their husbands and endure patiently all that their husbands require.”

Custance’s last exclamation before leaving her parents, that “Wommen are born to thraldom and penance, / And to been under mannes governance,” serves as further evidence that she has both received and accepts without hesitation the view that women are subservient to men and must obey their husbands and fathers (and, apparently, their mothers) that is frequently perpetuated in conduct manuals. As we see in texts like “How the Goode Wife Taught Hyr Doughter,” women often emphasized the importance of obedience to their daughters; the Goode Wife tells her own daughter

\[
\text{What man that thee doth wedde with rynge,} \\
\text{Loke thou hym love aboven all thinge;} \\
\text{Yf that it forteyne thus with thee} \\
\text{That he be wroth, and angery be,}
\]

61 The Clerk states at the end of the tale that it “is seyd nat for that wyves sholde / Folwen Grisilde as in humylitee...But for that every wight, in his degree, / Sholde be constant in adversitee” (1142-6); he goes on to argue that “sith a womman was so pacient / Unto a mortal man, wel moore us oghte / Receyeven al in gree that God us sent” (1149-51). See The Clerk’s Tale, The Canterbury Tales, The Riverside Chaucer, ed. Larry D. Benson (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1987).
63 Yvette Kisor argues that Custance’s lament here is actually a way for her to “[register] resistance through her speech.” Kisor wishes to read Custance as “complex” and “forceful” because she speaks out against her “victimization.” I disagree with Kisor’s analysis of this moment; though I accept that Custance does lament her state, she never “resists”—not even through her speech—her fate. Instead, I strongly believe that Custance is portrayed as adhering to the conduct expected of young aristocratic women—they could not resist their parents’ arrangement of their marriages. See Yvette Kisor, “Moments of Silence, Acts of Speech: Uncovering the Incest Motif in the Man of Law’s Tale,” Chaucer Review 40.2 (2005): 141. On parental involvement, see McSheffrey’s chapter mentioned in note 12.
Loke thou mekly answere hym,
And meve hym nother lyth ne lymme;
And that schall sclake hym of hys mode
Than schall thou be hys derlynge gode.
Fayre wordes wreth do slake;
Fayre wordes wreth schall never make,
Ne fayre wordes brake never bone,
Ne never schall in no wone. (33-44)

Custance realizes that obedience is demanded of women from men at all levels, and is prepared to obey both her father and her husband-to-be, to whom, the Man of Law reminds us, she will be “bounden under subjeccioun / Of oon, she knoweth nat his condicioun” (270-1). The Man of Law even says her weeping should be expected because of the subjective position in which she has been put by the nature of her state as a daughter.\textsuperscript{64} Barbara Hanawalt has suggested that the courtesy education young women received from advice manuals “was strongly against young couples forming their own love matches,” and explicitly mentions this advice poem as evidence for her claim.\textsuperscript{65} Custance’s obedience to her father is thus indicative of her conformance to the ideals of female conduct in which she has been educated. Because Custance actively decides to become an example of strict adherence to her courtesy education, which itself first attracted the Sultan to her and caused him ultimately to agree to conversion for marriage, she can be viewed as an active evangelist in all of the conversions which take place in the text.

While Chaucer’s Custance’s reputation for virtuous and courteous conduct is enough to impress the Sultan into arranging to marry her, Gower’s Constance is even more active in using her education at this point: not only does Constance use her conduct

\textsuperscript{64} See lines 260-71, where the Man of Law describes Custance’s weeping.
\textsuperscript{65} See Barbara Hanawalt, \textit{The Wealth of Wives}, 71.
education in order to earn a reputation for excellence in her own country that will be translated to the Sultan’s country, she also uses her religious education to bring about conversion. In Gower’s first description of her, we are told that she first converts the merchants who bring tidings of her renown back to the Sultan:

And sche the God so wel apaide,  
That al the wide worldes fame  
Spak worschipe of hire goode name.  
Constance, as the cronique seith,  
Sche hihte, and was so ful of feith,  
That the greteste of Barbarie,  
Of hem whiche usen marchandie,  
Sche hath converted, as thei come  
To hire upon a time in Rome,  
To schewen such thing as thei broghte;  
Whiche worthili of hem sche boghte,  
And over that in such a wise  
Sche hath them with hire wordes wise  
Of Cristes feith so full enformed,  
That thei therto ben all conformed,  
So that baptesme thei receiven  
And all here false goddes weyven. (594-610)\(^{66}\)

What is remarkable about Gower’s Constance is her immediate combination of her conduct education and her religious education to effect the conversion of the merchants. While she is performing the duties characteristic of a well educated princess—“worthili” buying the wares brought to her by the Saracen merchants—she uses the opportunity to tell them about Christ. Gower’s emphasis on Constance’s purchase of wares further supports the argument that she uses her courtesy education in order to effect conversion. That Constance purchases the wares “worthili”—“at just value”—indicates her education on liberality and largesse.\(^{67}\) Christine de Pizan writes of the importance that princesses

\(^{67}\) See the MED, s.v. “worthili, adv.,” definition a, “at just value.”
show generosity even to foreigners in her courtesy manual, *Le Livre du Trésor de la Cité des Dames*. There, Christine claims that the purpose of such generosity to foreigners is “so that in their country they may mention her generosity to their lords.” Constance clearly has such an effect on these merchants that they do indeed speak of her to their lord—the Sultan whom she will marry. What is most significant about Constance’s fairness and generosity in purchasing wares from the merchants is that she uses her meeting with them to convert them to Christianity. Her use of persuasive rhetoric is clearly evident, for Gower claims that she uses “wordes wise” to “fully inform” the merchants about Christ. Their baptism serves to seal not only their conversions, which are directly inspired by the faith education Constance gives them, but also their first-hand opinion of Constance, which they report to the Sultan upon their return.

Constance’s example, including both her conduct and religious knowledge, has the same effect on Gower’s Sultan as on Chaucer’s:

And whan the Souldan of Constance
Upon the point that thei answere
The beauté and the grace herde,
As he which thanne was to wedde,
In alle haste his cause spedde
To sende for the mariage.
And furthermor with good corage
He seith, be so he mai hire have,
That Crist, which cam this world to save,
He woll believe… (620-9)

The most noticeable difference between Chaucer’s and Gower’s sultans is their position on marriage to Constance. For Chaucer’s sultan, marriage and conversion is the last resort, not the first choice. Gower’s sultan, however, seems already prepared to be married to someone, so the merchants’ discussion of the woman who converted them to

---

68 See Christine de Pizan, *The Treasure of the City of Ladies*, 55.
Christianity is convenient, as the woman they describe is well educated, beautiful, and graceful—everything the Sultan could want in his wife. His agreement to “believe” in Christ does, as in Chaucer’s text, result in Constance being sent to marry the Sultan for the promise of his kingdom’s conversion. Evangelization is the only purpose for the marriage; Constance’s father even sends representatives of the Church—cardinals, in fact—to ensure the Sultan’s conversion. The merchants’ conversion is also noteworthy in that it is what first stimulates the Sultan’s interest in Constance: through their confession of “to what entente / Thei have here firste feith forsake” (614-5), they are able to tell the Sultan of Constance, whose “beauté and grace” has so affected them that they have come to fully believe in Christ. Constance’s significant role in guaranteeing the conversion of a Saracen ruler is thus entirely a result of her courtesy education, which she displays in this scene as a combination of practical secular and paramount religious knowledge and skills. Gower’s Constance uses the faith-based part of her education even more than Chaucer’s Custance in her evangelist efforts, which become more pronounced in the subsequent conversions she inspires.

While both Constances’ efforts to evangelize the Saracen kingdoms of their husbands are ultimately ineffective because of the jealousy and religious convictions of their mothers-in-law, their later efforts in England are completely successful and are the product of the converted individuals’ personal experiences with Constance. Constance’s conduct, a combination of both the secular and religious virtues valued in medieval courtesy literature, serves first to influence Hermengild to convert individually, and

---

69 The mothers-in-law do represent a negative stereotype of non-Christian women, but I am specifically interested in the non-Christian women who become Christian wives and mothers in this chapter. The mothers-in-law oppose the marriages between the Constance figures and their sons on religious grounds, and, in the case of Gower’s text, the sin of envy.
subsequently results in the conversion of Hermengild’s husband as well as King Alla and his subjects. It is noteworthy that Custance’s secular virtues are somewhat lessened in her conversion tactics in Northumberland, while her religious virtues (which remain associated with courtesy education) are foregrounded.

The first individual whom Constance purposefully works to convert is Hermengild, the wife of the constable who finds her boat washed up on the shores of Northumberland. The effect that women in medieval romances have on other women has been noted by scholars, particularly by critics of the Constance narratives. Geraldine Heng, for example, sets forth this view of Constance: “Women who do not intensely hate her, and wish her far from their countries, intensely desire her, and take her into the bosom of their home and family, into their very identity, even into their bed.” In the *Man of Law’s Tale*, both Hermengild and her husband are immediately enamored with Custance’s conduct, but it is Hermengild who is first influenced to convert to Christianity:

The constable hath of hire so greet pitee,
And eek his wyf, that they wepen for routhe.
She was so diligent, withouten slouthe,
To serve and plesen everich in that place
That alle hir loven that looken in hir face.

This constable and dame Hermengild, his wyf,
Were payens, and that contree everywhere;
But Hermengild loved hire right as hir lyf,
And Custance hath so longe sojourned there,
In orisons, with many a bitter teere,
Til Jhesu hath converted thurgh his grace
Dame Hermengild, constablesse of that place. (528-39)

---

Custance is described as “diligent” and “withouten slouthe,” virtuous characteristics commonly prized in courtesy manuals because they indicate a young woman’s avoidance of deadly sin and simultaneously serve to set a good example for those around the young woman. The Man of Law describes Custance’s busy-ness as particularly pleasing to not just Hermengild, but to “everich in that place” with the effect that all love her. Geraldine Heng argues that Hermengild demonstrates a desire “to be like Constance”; this desire is manifested through the dangerous conversion Hermengild undertakes in her pagan country to be like Custance, the woman whose “orisons” and “bitter tears” urge Hermengild to follow Christ. Chaucer indicates in this passage that Hermengild’s conversion is not immediate upon meeting Custance; unlike the Sultan, who relies only on rumors of Custance’s example to agree to convert so he can possess her through marriage, Hermengild requires a bit more exposure to Custance before she chooses to convert. In fact, we are told that Custance has remained with Hermengild and her husband for “so longe” that Hermengild finally begins to be affected by Custance’s orisons and tears; as Elizabeth Robertson has claimed, “Conversion seems to be inspired

71 See, for example, Le Ménagier de Paris, where the young woman to whom the conduct manual is addressed is implored by her husband to avoid the seven deadly sins, including sloth. Her husband defines sloth as “the opposite of Diligence,” and dictates to her how to confess the sin should she fall into it: “I did not set a good example for my people, for by my improper behavior, which they of course attended since I was their overlord, I modeled for them the path of sin.” Here, the husband illustrates the important effect one woman’s example of conduct has on those around her. The Constance figure’s conduct, prized by those who surround her and based on the tenets of courtesy manuals, thus can be argued to play a significant role in influencing others to convert. See The Good Wife’s Guide, 66; 74.

72 It is interesting that the Man of Law focuses on Custance’s lack of this particular sin, as her lack of sloth implies a strong work ethic and a constant effort to remain engaged in her duties. Chaucer, however, describes the Man of Law as “busy” in the General Prologue to the Canterbury Tales, but follows with the qualification, “Nowher so bisy a man as he ther nas, / And yet he semed bisier than he was” (321-2), which perhaps implies the Man of Law’s tendency toward the sin of sloth although he ironically wishes to be viewed as active and diligent. Laurel L. Hendrix also points to Custance’s example as key to her earning the love of those around her: “Diligent in her good works and her prayers that mark her penitential life, Custance earns the love of the people.” See “Pennance Profitable’: The Currency of Custance in Chaucer’s Man of Law’s Tale,” Exemplaria 6.1 (1994): 159.

73 See Heng, Empire of Magic, 183.
by observation of an example and seems to be a matter of time and choice.”⁷⁴ Though she was immediately affected by Custance’s secular conduct—her diligent work ethic—Hermengild must hear and be taught the Christian faith before she ultimately converts. Chaucer makes it clear that it is Custance, through her example of diligence and piety, who has engaged Hermengild in the Christian faith, and it is Custance who will persuade Hermengild to act on her newfound Christianity in order to effect yet another conversion, that of the constable.

Custance’s active use of her religious education (which is part and parcel of her courtesy education) and her influence on others works to prompt another series of conversions one afternoon after Hermengild is approached by a blind man who asks her to perform a miracle:

“In name of Crist,” cride this blinde Britoun,  
“Dame Hermengild, yif me my sighte agayn!”  
This lady weex affrayed of the soun,  
Lest that hir housbonde, shortly for to sayn,  
Wolde hire for Jhesu Cristes love han slayn,  
Til Custance made hire boold, and bad hire wirche  
The wyl of Crist, as doghter of his chirche.

The constable weex abashed of that sight,  
And seyde, “What amounteth al this fare?”  
Custance answerde, “Sire, it is Cristes myght,  
That helpeth folk out of the feendes snare.”  
And so ferforth she gan oure lay declare  
That she the constable, er that it was eve  
Converteth, and on Crist made hym bileve. (561-74)

Although Hermengild has fully converted to Christianity, she fears displaying her religious convictions outwardly because her husband is still a pagan. Only with

⁷⁴ See Robertson, “The ‘Elvyssh’ Power of Constance,” 168. Although Robertson admits that Custance is able to convert others through her example, she does not define “example” as indicative of the courtesy education used to prepare a young woman for marriage.
Custance’s urging is Hermengild willing to display her devotion to Christ. In other words, Custance is integral to Hermengild’s full adoption of Christianity. When Hermengild agrees to perform “the will of Christ,” her husband’s incredulity provides Custance with yet another opportunity to convert another by example. She immediately begins to “oure lay declare,” a phrase that suggests Custance’s complete, rote knowledge of the Church catechism. Critics frequently engage two issues in the conversion scenes that take place in Northumberland: first, Custance’s ability to be understood by the Britons despite the language barrier; and second, whether Custance’s religious knowledge and preaching suggest that she is heretical.

Christine F. Cooper is one of the few critics who argue that Custance can be read as an active evangelist; she claims that Chaucer’s Custance should be viewed as active because of her ability to transcend language barriers in order to prompt conversion. Although Cooper admits that Custance’s “prayers and pious example create new converts to Christianity,” she remains completely focused on Custance’s use of language to convert others: “De-emphasizing the miraculous scenes calls attention to Custance’s persuasive verbal activities.”75 Cooper does not discuss how Custance uses her example to convert others, but her point about Custance’s “persuasive verbal activities” emphasizes the significant role Custance takes on at this point in the text: that of catechism teacher.76

While critics have referred to the work Custance does as “teaching” and in his version of the Constance narrative, Nicholas Trivet described Constance’s actions as

75 Christine F. Cooper, “‘But algates therby was she understonde’: Translating Custance in Chaucer’s Man of Law’s Tale,” 32; 34.
76 Robertson also refers to Custance as a “teacher”; see “The ‘Elvyssh’ Power of Constance,” 168.
“preaching,” critics have overwhelmingly agreed that neither Chaucer nor the Man of Law intends Custance to be read as a heretical figure displaying Lollard tendencies.\(^7^7\) Instead, they have argued, her evangelist activities are meant to position her staunchly in the past, when evangelism in any form would be considered acceptable. Cooper, for example, claims that “Chaucer imagines Custance’s language as existing at a time before clerics were relied upon as the authoritative translators and glossers of Latin Scripture in England. Therefore, by imagining Custance as taking part in the early Christianization of England, Chaucer can imagine a Latin-speaking woman who is able to preach and teach in Latin without appearing in any way heretical.”\(^7^8\) Similarly, Elizabeth Robertson claims that “Chaucer skirts the question of Constance’s explicitly priestly actions, but nonetheless her effectiveness as a disseminator of the gospel and as an agent of conversion is clear. By placing Constance firmly in the past, Chaucer avoids directly affirming a woman’s ability to preach, while at the same time he is able to allude to a controversial issue of his day.”\(^7^9\) Since it is a logical conclusion that Chaucer does not mean for Custance to be read as heretical, it is significant that he presents her as completely knowledgeable about her Christian religion. Her ability to declare the “lay,” or doctrine, of Christianity to the constable with the ultimate effect that he is converted can and should be read as an active adherence to her courtesy education as well as a purposeful use of her chance arrival in Northumberland. As an aristocratic woman

\(^7^7\) On Custance as a teacher, see, for example, Cooper, “‘But algates therby was she understonde’,” 32-3; and Robertson, “The ‘Elvyssh’ Power of Constance,” 168. Trivet uses the verb *precher* when he describes how Constance and Hermengild inform Elda of the Christian faith: “Puis Hermigild e Constaunce ne cesserent [de precher] a Elda e a tote sa menee la fei Iesu Crist.” See Trivet’s text as quoted in *Sources and Analogues of Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales*, ed. W. F. Bryan and Germaine Dempster (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1941): 170.

\(^7^8\) Christine F. Cooper, “‘But algates therby was she understonde’,” 32.

educated for marriage, Custance should be prepared to educate her children in the tenets of religion, a position we previously saw advocated by Christine de Pizan in her courtesy manual. The expectation for women to be familiar with and prepared to educate their children in the Christian faith is incessantly pressed in courtesy manuals. In *Le Ménagier de Paris*, for example, the husband-narrator devotes an entire section of the text to educating his wife in the mass and confession. Although her husband claims that he educates her on religion for the salvation of her own soul, he reminds her throughout the text that his instruction is meant for her to use for her own improvement and also so that she may educate her “daughters, friends, or others, if you wish and if they need it.”

While Custance’s example of pious and courteous behavior was enough to prompt Hermengild’s conversion, to convert the constable she relies more explicitly on her knowledge of her faith and her ability to express it, making this conversion an active effort on Custance’s part.

What is particularly important about this moment of conversion is the back story we receive from the Man of Law, who tells us about the history of Christianity in this area:

```
In al that lond no Cristen dorste route;
Alle Cristen folk been fled fro that contree
Thurgh payens, that conquereden al aboute
The plages of the north, by land and see.
To Walys fledde the Cristyanytee
Of olde Britons dwellynge in this ile;
Ther was hir refut for the meene while. (540-6)
```
While other Christians hide in fear and make no attempts to demonstrate their faith, Custance is willing to pray and cry in front of these pagans, actions demonstrative of a strong Christian and indicative of an evangelist. What is remarkable is that while these Christians seem to fear violence from the pagans and therefore flee and/or hide their Christianity from the pagans, Custance outwardly practices her religion and affirms through her example Christianity’s expectations, all of which are viewed favorably by the pagans of Northumberland. Custance’s acceptance by the community and the peaceful way that she is able to convert both Hermengild and the constable are indicative of two things: first, her effectiveness as a singular figure of evangelization and the promising position women could be imagined to play in the evangelization process; and second, an alternative means of evangelizing non-Christians in which violence is unnecessary. 

Robertson suggests that Custance’s role in the conversion of Hermengild and the constable is a way for Chaucer to convey a “utopian vision of women as spiritually and politically effective,” while David Raybin claims that Chaucer attempts to show the influence a woman can have in a “less-than-holy, male-dominated world,” though he continues to suggest that her role is passive rather than active. 

Chaucer’s portrayal of Custance as an active evangelist engaging in practices concomitant with her Christian courtesy education and effectively using her education—both secular and religious—to

---

83 Elizabeth Robertson has commented on Custance’s ability to convert without force, suggesting that her ability to convert others non-violently serves to portray her as Othered, in a sense—as “elvish.” See “The ‘Elvyssh’ Power of Constance,” 178.

84 See Robertson, “The ‘Elvyssh’ Power of Constance,” 149; and Raybin, “Custance and History: Woman as Outsider in Chaucer’s Man of Law’s Tale,” 80. Raybin also suggests here that Chaucer’s Custance is not an active evangelist: “Wandering among the waves, Custance is exiled from human contact, from worldly time, from the flow of history. When she rests, she reintegrates herself into the historical frame, often playing an important, if generally passive, role in the directing of human event.” Robertson focuses her interest in this scene on the similarity between Custance’s individualized conversion efforts and the early practice of apostolic Christianity within the Church. See 169-70.
enable the conversion of others very clearly presents her as an active rather than passive figure.

In Gower’s version of the narrative, Constance immediately uses her chance arrival in a pagan land to right its inhabitants’ religious beliefs. Gower describes her as distraught over the religious tendencies of the Britons: “Bot sche no maner joie made, / Bot sorweth sore of that sche fond / No Cristendom in thilke lond” (744-6). While Chaucer’s Custance impresses those around her through her actions, including prayer, to the effect that Hermengild converts to Christianity, Gower’s Constance channels her sorrow in finding no Christianity in Northumberland into teaching Hermengild and creating Christian converts:

Dame Hermengild, which was the wif
Of Elda, lich her oghne lif
Constance loveth; and fell so,
Spekende alday between hem two,
Thurgh grace of Goddes pourveance
This maiden tawhte the creance
Unto this wif so parfitly,
Upon a dai that faste by
In presence of hire housebonde,
Wher thei go walkende on the stronde,
A blind man, which cam there lad,
Unto this wif criende he bad,
With bothe hise hondes up and preide
To hire, and in this wise he seide:
“O Hermyngead, which Cristes feith,
Enformed as Constance seith,
Received hast, gif me my sihte.” (749-65)

Gower draws attention to the fact that Constance teaches Hermengild the “creance” and does so “parfitly.” Both of these words indicate Constance’s explicit knowledge of her faith as well as her exceptional ability as a teacher. Gower’s Constance does not rely so much on her actions or behavior towards others as does Chaucer’s Custance in this
instance; instead, she focuses all of her evangelist energy on teaching the tenets of her Christian faith so that she will no longer be alone as a Christian in Northumberland. Even the blind man who asks Hermengild for a miracle perceives Constance’s teaching ability, as he claims that Constance “enformed” Hermengild in Christ’s faith. While Chaucer’s Custance uses the example of her combined courteous behavior and prayers to bring about Hermengild’s conversion, Gower’s Constance seems to rely entirely on her religious example and Hermengild’s love for her in order to convert the pagan woman.

Although Gower’s example of Constance’s conversion of Hermengild seems to rely completely on her ability to teach the Christian faith rather than a combination of her secular and religious example, this Constance is also abiding by the mandates of education set forth in courtesy manuals meant to prepare a young woman for the secular (married) life. As suggested above, neither Chaucer nor Gower seems to be depicting the issue of Lollardy or heresy in his portrait of Constance. Instead, they portray a woman doing the work of the Church in a distinctly historic setting: pre-Christian Britain. While the setting certainly seems to indicate that these women are not performing heretical duties by educating others in their religion, the expectation that women be knowledgeable about their religion was common in courtesy manuals and other forms of literature to which young women were exposed, such as narratives about virgin martyrs.

Katherine J. Lewis has argued that the virgin martyrs of hagiographical texts were considered behavioral examples for young Christian women and that the legends of these women were often read as conduct literature, in that “their lives were useful tools in the
training of young women.” The Constance narrative is frequently discussed as having much in common with the legends of virgin martyrs, and has been labeled a “hagiographical” or “homiletic” romance because of both the miracles in the narrative (such as the episode we have just seen in which the blind man’s sight is restored) and Constance’s saint-like attributes; particular attention is often drawn, for example, to Chaucer’s description of the consummation of Custance’s and Alla’s wedding night, as on this occasion Custance must “leye a lite hoolynesse aside” (713) and behave as a wife. Critics also point to Constance’s characteristics as having much in common with saints (specifically virgin martyrs); of Chaucer’s Custance, Laura Barefield argues that she is portrayed as purposely passive because of the focus on her saintliness rather than her earthly familial roles, while David Raybin draws attention to the “quasi-prophetic influence” she achieves on those around her. The saintly characteristics Constance possesses can certainly be traced to hagiographical origins, but more importantly, her religious knowledge and ability to convey that knowledge were ideals found within hagiography that were frequently translated as useful and important tools for young women preparing for a secular life.

The importance of an education in and understanding of Christianity and (to some extent) the ability to dispense that knowledge where and when necessary was covered in conduct manuals, primarily through references to and explanations of the examples of

---

86 On the Man of Law’s Tale as a hagiographic or homiletic romance, see Helen Cooney, “Wonder and Immanent Justice in the Man of Law’s Tale,” Chaucer Review 33 (1999): 264-87; and Geraldine Heng, Empire of Magic, 181-238; on the tale as an experiment with various genres, see Cooper, “Translating Custance in Chaucer’s Man of Law’s Tale,” 35.
virgin martyrs. Saint Katherine of Alexandria was a particularly significant model of female learning commonly used in courtesy manuals as an argument for women’s education in religion. Lewis claims that Katherine’s appeal as a model of education is also widely documented through the inclusion of her *vita* in manuscripts also containing conduct texts for children, and that her prevalent appearance as an example attests to the desirability of characteristics associated with her, but especially her intelligence. This view is clarified by Sir Geoffroy in the *Livre du Chevalier de la Tour Landry*, where he writes in praise of Saint Katherine of Alexandria’s education and of her ability to use it to achieve religious ends, fittingly in a chapter entitled “How children ought to be sent to school”:

> And in the same wise seint Katerine, that, by her witte and clery, with the grace of the holy gost, she surmounted and overcome the grettest philosophers in Grece, and by her clergie and stedfast faithe she wanne the victory of martirdom. (117)

Sir Geoffroy’s praise of Katherine’s education is based on her ability to use that education to “overcome”—meaning convert—non-Christian, male philosophers. Katherine’s remarkable ability to use her religious education actively to achieve a victory for Christianity is something Sir Geoffroy clearly values, and as a result, he finds it important that his daughters achieve a similar religious education and insists that young women should be educated in their faith:

> How be it there be suche men that haue opynion that thei wolde not þat her wyues nor her doughtres shulde knowe no thinge of the scripture: as touchinge vnto the holy scripture, it is no force though women medill not nor knowe but litell therof but forto read; eueri woman it is the beter that

---

88 I italicize the word *necessary* in this sentence because while women were not permitted to preach or teach publicly, there seems to have been some allowance when non-Christians comprised the audience, as I will show in a moment.

canne rede and haue knowinge of the lawe of God, and forto haue be
lerned to haue vertu and science to withstonde the perilles of the sowle,
and forto use and excerse the werkys of thaire sauement, for that is thinge
aproued and necessarie to all women. (118-19)

While Sir Geoffroy’s focus here is how the young woman will be able to save her soul
through religious education, by holding up as a model Saint Katherine, who used her
religious knowledge to convert pagans to Christianity, he implies an acceptance of not
just the religious education of women, but also a woman’s ability to use her knowledge to
teach and inform non-Christians in the Christian faith. Lewis actually claims that Sir
Geoffroy is not interested in any education that is “divorced from its religious and moral
uses.”90

Alcuin Blamires has argued that the use of teaching and/or preaching by women in such an instance—when the conversion of non-Christians is at issue—seems to have been acceptable to medieval theologians, who often conclude that these women can preach “wherever the faith was endangered” because they were “sent by’ the Holy
Spirit.”91 When Constance uses her religious education to influence the conversion of
Hermengild and her husband, then, she continues to follow the basic tenets of conduct
manuals, as she teaches and preaches only privately, to non-Christians, and within the
domestic sphere she has entered in Northumberland. Although, as critics have noted,
Constance’s evangelist actions are specifically historical and are not meant to seem
heretical, what I hope to have shown here is that conduct manuals did seem to advocate a

young woman’s religious education so that she could educate her children and, perhaps,
convert a non-Christian if she found herself in that position.\(^2\)

While the religious education evidenced by Constance in both Chaucer’s and
Gower’s texts has caused the narratives to be termed “hagiographic romances,” they have
also been called “domestic romances,” a term which I believe better encompasses both
the religious and secular aspects of Constance’s conversion efforts, which, as I suggest
here, are indicative of a conduct education. While Constance is engaged in performing
and assisting miracles to effect conversion, she also uses her worldly teachings as a
Christian woman who has been prepared for marriage to engage in and successfully
prompt the conversion of non-Christians. Gower’s Constance’s ability to actively teach
her faith to Hermengild is certainly part of the example she uses to convert others;
however, it is the combination of her skill as a religious teacher with the rest of her
idealized conduct that makes her an effective agent of conversion.

Critics have suggested that conversion occurs in these narratives “through what
others observe in [Constance],” but they tend to overlook the possibility that her
courteous behavior and religious expertise permit her to engage in active evangelism.\(^3\)
The conversions of Hermengild and her husband prove that Constance is not merely a
passive figure, for she clearly uses her example to actively become a Christian evangelist.
Significantly, it is through Hermengild’s death that Constance will be most effective as

\(^2\) Alcuin Blamires argues that particular sociopolitical considerations seemed to alternatively (and
contradictorily) allow and disallow a public preaching role for women, and that heterodox groups took
advantage of these alternating views. See “Women and Preaching in Medieval Orthodoxy, Heresy, and
Saints’ Lives,” 136-52. Blamires also points to Thomas Aquinas’ seeming acceptance of women using their
“gift” of preaching, but only privately: if they have the “‘gift of speech,’” “it must be theirs to exercise only
in the private domestic realm” (145). The distinction Aquinas makes between teaching and preaching
privately versus publicly was of major concern, and the result of it can be found within conduct manuals,
where women are often expected to engage in the religious instruction of their children.

\(^3\) See, for example, Robertson, “The ‘Elvyssh’ Power of Constance,” 179.
an evangelist, for Hermengild’s death presents the opportunity for her to use her example both to convert and marry Alla, the king of the Saxons, and to effect the conversion of the Saxons on a large scale.

The final conversion in the Constance narrative is that of Constance’s British husband, known as Alla in both Chaucer’s and Gower’s texts. In some ways, Alla mirrors the Sultan at the beginning of the text, as he falls for Constance and desires to marry her almost instantaneously. The most important difference between Alla and the Sultan, however, is that Alla has access to Constance and is able to experience her example of conduct and religion firsthand, which then urges him to convert to Christianity and marry her. As I will suggest, the interaction that is able to occur between Alla and Constance results in the most effective and, significantly, peaceful, conversion of the narrative.

In Gower’s text, Hermengild’s husband is very impressed with Constance’s conversion of his wife and the miracle he witnessed as a result—the blind man regaining his sight. Although Gower indicates that Hermengild is responsible for the miracle, her husband Elda clearly believes that the miracle is only possible because of Constance. This view is confirmed when Elda decides that he should introduce Constance to his king, Alla:

Elda, which thoghte his king to plese,  
As he that thanne unwedded was,  
Of Constance al the pleine cas  
Als goodliche as he cowthe tolde. (784-7)

The purpose of Elda’s introduction, while tied to Constance’s conversion of Elda and his wife and the subsequent miracle experienced by the blind man, is clearly tied to Elda’s

---

94 See lines 763-74, where the blind man asks Hermengild to perform a miracle, to which she responds, “In trust of Cristes lawe, / Which don was on the crois and slawe, / Thou bysne man, behold and se.”
desire that Constance become a viable spouse for Alla. Elda seems to believe that because Alla is unwedded, he is in need of a spouse, and Elda views Constance as a particularly good candidate for the position. Because he decides to inform Alla of Constance after he witnesses the miracle and has himself converted to Christianity, part of Elda’s reason for introducing Constance as a good potential queen must be linked to her religious background—as we find out, upon witnessing the miracle of the blind man’s sight being restored, Elda concludes that “he the feith mot nede obeie” (778). Alla’s response to Elda’s suggestion is positive—he wishes to “avise” (glossed as “scrutinize”) Constance as a possible spouse, and so Elda sends a messenger ahead to ask Hermengild to prepare for Alla’s arrival. This unfortunate decision results in Hermengild’s death, as the messenger’s lust for Constance turns to envy of her honor and he decides to murder Hermengild so that Constance will be blamed for the crime. The murder takes place as Hermengild and Constance lay in bed together, so when Elda arrives home he finds Constance in bed with his murdered wife. Interestingly, this moment—when Hermengild invites Constance into her bed—may indicate Constance’s influence on Hermengild, as some conduct manuals actually recommended that wives bring women into their beds while their husbands are away so as not to be accused of impropriety.95 In any case, Constance awakens to Elda’s cries, and her first meeting with Alla is not an opportunity for him to inspect her as a potential wife (though he does, in the end), but rather an

95 See Diane Bornstein, The Lady in the Tower: Medieval Courtesy Literature for Women (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1983): 53, where she cites the author of the Castigos y dotrinas que un sabio dava a sus hijas as including in his discussion of chastity the recommendation that “in the absence of her husband, she should have a maid sleep in her room.” Geraldine Heng suggests that Hermengild’s murder “neatly closes off any suggestion of an unlawful circuit of desire between the two women,” but I think this moment is meant to highlight not the closure of some improper female relationship, but rather a normal relationship between women who are expected to protect and educate each other. Of course, what is ironic is that while Constance may protect Hermengild from accusations against her chastity by sleeping in the same bed, she is unable to protect her from murder. See Heng, Empire of Magic, 391 n.49.
occasion on which he hears about the latest miracle—the death of Hermengild’s murderer upon swearing falsely against Constance.\textsuperscript{96} When he hears about this latest miracle, Alla “thoghte more than he seide” (895), which seems to indicate the thoughtfulness with which he approaches the decision of taking a wife, and, as we discover, the decision to convert:

\begin{verbatim}
For al his hole herte he leide
Upon Constance, and seide he scholde
For love of hire, if that sche wolde,
Baptesme take and Cristes feith
Believe, and over that he seith
He wol hire wedde, and upon this
Asseured ech til other is.
    And for to make schorte tales,
Ther cam a Bisschop out of Wales
Fro Bangor, and Lucie he hihte,
Which thurgh the grace of God almihte
The king with many another mo
Hath cristned, and betwen hem tuo
He hath fulfild the mariage. (896-909)
\end{verbatim}

In this instance of conversion, Constance is fully responsible for Alla’s decision to convert. Significantly, while he does hear of her qualities from a third party (Elda), he desires to “avise” her as a possible spouse before committing to the marriage, which we do not see with the Sultan. While the merchants’ direct knowledge of Constance’s example results in the Sultan’s decision to convert in order to marry her (the conversion based on his desire for her), in this instance (as well as in Chaucer’s text) the conversion is foregrounded. What is most significant about this moment is the unambiguous fact that Constance chooses to marry Alla: Gower writes “Asseured ech til other is.” The focus on Constance’s choice to enter this marriage indicates her desire for Alla’s conversion, and

\textsuperscript{96} It is worth noting that Elda never suspects Constance of the deed; it seems their new religious bond is strong enough to withstand such an accusation. See line 867.
the likely result that his kingdom will also be converted—a result that Gower assures us actually takes place.

For Chaucer, Custance’s marriage to Alla also follows Hermengild’s murder and the subsequent miracle that proves Custance’s innocence. Here, however, we are alerted to the astonishment of Alla’s people when Custance is accused of Hermengild’s murder because they are accustomed to Custance’s virtue: “they han seyn hire evere so vertuous” (624) and are willing to “baar witnesse” (626) for her before Alla. While Gower’s Alla does not arrive until after Hermengild’s actual murderer has been miraculously proven guilty, Chaucer’s Alla administers the trial, and therefore witnesses the miracle firsthand—a miracle that takes place only because Alla suggests that the murderer swear his innocence on a British holy book.97 When the murderer is struck down by God, Custance is immediately referred to as the “doghter of hooly chirche” (675), and what follows is the thoughtful decision of many present to convert:

Greet was the drede and eek the repentance
Of hem that hadden wrong suspicioun
Upon this selly innocent, Custance;
And for this miracle, in conclusioun,
And by Custances mediacioun,
The kyng—and many another in that place—
Converted was, thanked be Cristes grace! (680-6)

Although these individuals are witnesses of the miracle, Chaucer clarifies that it is a combination of witnessing the miracle and Custance’s “mediacioun” that convinces Alla and many of his retainers to convert to Christianity. As in Gower’s text, Alla does not convert simply to marry Custance; as Yvette Kisor notes, “He converts not in order to marry her, but because he has seen the hand of God smite her accuser and heard the voice

97 On the mystery of what this “Britoun book written with Evaungiles” is, see Cooper, “‘But algates therby was she understonde’,” 28; and Hendrix, “‘Pennance Profytable,’” 161.
of God proclaim her innocence.”98 Kisor, however, does not consider Custance’s “mediacioun” in causing Alla’s conversion, a word that clearly indicates her active role in prompting his conversion and the conversion of many others. Yet again, as we saw when Custance enabled Elda’s conversion, we see her use the miracle as support for her own evangelist abilities; she does not rely solely on the miracle to encourage conversion. Finally, after the conversion of Alla and his kingdom, we are told that Alla and Custance are married: “And after this Jhesus, of his mercy, / Made Alla wedden ful solempnely / This hooly mayden, that is so bright and sheene” (690-2).

Gail Ashton rightly points out that the marriage between Constance and Alla is an agreement between the spouses, rather than between her father and would-be spouse (as we saw at the beginning of the text with the Sultan): “this marriage, unlike her first, required no mediation between men, no exchange of object-gift.”99 In both Chaucer’s and Gower’s texts, Constance’s marriage to Alla occurs only with her by her terms and with her permission, which gives her agency not only in choosing her spouse, but also in choosing to engage in evangelist activities on her own: although her father and the Church authorities desired her to become a catalyst for conversion in sending her to Saracen Damascus, in the conversion that takes place in Britain, Custance is no longer the catalyst, but rather the reagent in the process.

In both texts, it seems that the marriage between Alla and Constance serves to seal the conversion of the Britons to Christianity, which is finally proven by the end of

the text when we discover that both Alla and Britain remain Christian despite
Constance’s enforced exile. When Alla is finally reunited with his wife, it is in Rome, where he has come on a pilgrimage of penance for the loss of his wife; and importantly, Alla’s son with Constance becomes the emperor of Rome, a role explicitly linked to strong Christianity.

My focus throughout this chapter on what I believe are obvious references to Constance’s courtesy education that make her an active evangelist are finally proven by Gower, who actually mentions courtesy education in his narrative. When Constance arrives in Italy after being exiled from England, she enters the house of her cousin, whom Gower indicates is overjoyed with her new female companion:

   And sche, which cowthe of courtesie
   Al that a good wif scholde konne,
   Was inly glad that sche hath wonne
   The felaschip of so good on. (1214-7)

Although Chaucer provides details about Custance’s excellence through references that specifically call to mind aspects of courtesy education, it is finally Gower who actually names the kind of education Constance has: one based on the knowledge of “courtesie.” Although Gower here refers to Constance’s cousin as having a courtesy-based education rather than Constance herself, it is clear that Constance must have the same courtesy education, if not a better education in it, as her cousin is glad to have befriended “so good on,” a phrase that intimates (in my view) Constance’s superiority in excellence. Gower’s clarification that the education comprises “all that a good wife should know” points to the necessity of both religious and secular values for a good wife. While Constance’s cousin may be a very good wife, it is Constance who actually uses her education to achieve
extraordinary ends—the lasting conversion of an entire country to Christianity, and she does so, remarkably, without any violence.

In closing, I would like to discuss two important aspects of the Constance narratives that have a bearing on the next chapter, in which we will examine how Saracen princesses engage in Christian evangelism: first, the presence of Constance’s mother in the text; and second, the peaceful widespread conversion we witness in the Constance narratives. It is noteworthy that Constance’s mother is always at least obliquely present in the text; this is true for Chaucer’s and Gower’s versions of the Constance narrative as well as Emaré and Le Bone Florence of Rome. Although the authors do not focus much of their attention on discussing the mother-daughter relationship in the texts, it is clear that the influence of the mother as a figure in the life of her daughter is considered important. In Emaré, for example, the death of Emaré’s mother subjects Emaré to her father’s sexual desire. Similarly, in Le Bone Florence of Rome, Florence’s significant influence in Rome is foreshadowed by the death of her mother when she is born, at which point it rains blood for three days and animals and birds go wild; the narrator claims that these environmental changes foreshadow great tribulations for Rome—ones that only Florence will be able to end.  

Although Gower’s Constance’s mother is mentioned only once in the text, she is actually named—Ytalie, a name that significantly coincides with

---

100 See Le Bone Florence of Rome, ed. Carol Falvo Hefferman (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1976), lines 34-57:

For þre dayes hyt reyned blode,
And bestys faghf as þey were wode,
Bothe wyld and tame wyth myght;
Fowlys in the firmament
Eyther odur in sondur rente,
And felle dedd to þe grownde,
Hyt sygnyfyed þat aftur come,
Grete trybulacyons vnto Rome,
Schulde many a man confownde… (43-51)
Constance’s Christian home.\textsuperscript{101} This significant name doubling of mother and home indicates the relationship they share: both play important roles in Constance’s personal history, and just as she will take the religion from her country of origin, so will she also take the conduct she has learned from her mother. Gower also suggests that Alla’s people view Constance as they would their mother, a reference that suggests the passage of knowledge—even religious knowledge—by a woman to others is suggestive of the relationship between mother and child.\textsuperscript{102} Chaucer’s Custance actually speaks to both her mother and father in the passage before she leaves Rome for Syria, and in this passage she calls her mother her “soverayn pleasance,” an epithet that intimates the mother’s position as educator and nurturer. This epithet also reveals the excellence that Custance recognizes and admires in her mother; although they must both abide by Custance’s father’s decision, they are at least both excellent in their examples and knowledge of courteous conduct.

Although the mothers of Chaucer’s Custance and Gower’s Constance play very minimal roles in the texts, I would like to suggest that their presence nevertheless confirms the fact that the princesses have had role models in marriage and is indicative of the courtesy education that Constance has received. Because we know that both Custance and Constance have mothers, we can infer that these young wives-to-be have received the kind of education passed down from mother to daughter. We certainly know that both Custance and Constance are educated in their faith, and we also know that they have been raised as effective daughters and wives through their obedience to both their fathers and

\textsuperscript{101} See line 591.
\textsuperscript{102} See line 1046-8, where Constance’s exile is described in these terms: “So gret a sorwe thei beginne, / As thei here oghne moder sihen / Brent in a fyr before here yhen.”
husbands. In many narratives about good wives, such as the Clerk’s Tale, the mother is completely absent; as Jennifer Fellows notes, “romances have very little to say about mother-daughter relations…in general the mothers of romance heroines are conspicuous by their absence.” The presence of both Constances’ mothers should thus tell us something about the narrative and the daughter, and I believe the presence of their mothers is a direct reflection of Constance’s background, including her educational upbringing.

While some may argue that Constance’s reliance on her courtesy education is not sufficient to consider her an active evangelist, it is important to note that Constance is the only one successful in converting others to Christianity. The role imagined for women through the Constance narratives is in direct opposition to the role imagined for their fathers: while Constance relies upon example and, in some cases, reason, to effect conversion and evangelize non-Christians, the father resorts to violence and, frequently, is represented as “exterminating” or obliterating members of the offending religion, a move which certainly will not result in evangelization and conversion. Thus, through their portrayals of a well-educated Christian woman marrying a non-Christian whom she successfully converts (along with many of his citizens), Chaucer and Gower imagine the possibility that conversion can occur peacefully, and that peaceful conversion may be the only binding form of conversion. The peaceful conversion undertaken by the Christian

104 See lines 953-66 in Chaucer’s Man of Law’s Tale, where we are told that Custance’s father violently obliterates the Sultan’s mother and her Saracen retainers; and 1179-89 in Gower’s “Tale of Constance,” where he narrates the same violent events.
105 Elizabeth Robertson also discusses the distinct difference between Custance’s conversion tactics and those of her father and Christianity at large: “Having suppressed her class origins, Constance converts
women here, however, is in stark contrast to the very violent tactics advocated by some of the Saracen princesses who engage in interfaith marriage and participate in enforcing conversion. Even though both types of women engage actively in conversion tactics—on both personal and large scales—their tactics differ radically because while the Christian princess Constance engages only peacefully in erotic conversion and conversion-by-example, the Saracen princesses we shall now examine convert peacefully via erotic conversion but engage in and advocate the violent conversion of others.

others without the violence associated with imperialist, hegemonic Christianity.” See “The ‘Elvyssh’ Power of Constance,” 160.
A very early indication of the interest in women’s positions in conversion narratives is found in *La Chanson de Roland*, which was likely circulating in the twelfth century in the same version we have today. Although women play hardly any part at all in the text—only two women are mentioned, Roland’s intended Aude and the Sultan’s wife Bramimonde, and both of them are mainly represented as acted upon rather than active—here we can perhaps begin to see how authors imagined the roles of non-Christian women in conversion narratives. Conversion plays an important role in the resolution of the war between Charles’ Christian knights and the Saracens whom they have been fighting, as it serves both to seal Charles’ victory and further develop his “manifest destiny” in Europe, but perhaps more importantly, it provides him the opportunity to evangelize both the Sultan’s wife and his retainers:

Now if there is anyone who opposes Charles,  
He orders him to be taken prisoner, burned, or put to death.  
Well over a hundred thousand are baptized  
True Christians, with the sole exception of the Queen.
She will be led captive to fair France:
The King wishes her to become a convert out of devotion. (3669-74)¹

While Charles is prepared to kill anyone unwilling to convert to Christianity, what is most interesting about this passage is that he hopes not to have to force Bramimonde to undertake baptism—he hopes that she will embrace the Christian faith through love and learning and that no force will be necessary. The portrayal of Charles’ wishes for Bramimonde’s conversion sets forth an intriguing portrait of the Saracen queen/princess that has been perpetuated throughout several Middle English romances featuring interfaith marriage: that of the potentially impressionable and willing Christian convert. Earlier in the text, we find the author constructing her as a potentially excellent candidate for conversion; in her only speech in the text, she says:

“What rubbish I hear!
Those gods of ours have given up the fight.
At Roncevaux they did us a colossal bad turn,
They allowed our knights to get killed.
They failed my lord in battle,
He lost his right hand, he no longer has it,
Mighty Count Roland severed it from him.
Charles will have all Spain in his power.
What will become of wretched, miserable me?
What a pity there is no one here to kill me!” (2714-23)²


>S’or i ad cel qui Carle cuntredie,
Il le fait prendre o ardeir ou ocire.
Baptizet sunt asez plus de .C. milie
Veir chrestïen, ne mais sul la reïne:
En France dulce iert menee caitive,
Ço voelt li reis par amur cunvertisset.

² The original French reads:

>Or oi mult grant folie!
Cist nostre deu sunt en recreantise.
En Rencesval malvaises vertuz firent,
Noz chevalers i unt lesset ocire.
Cest mien seignur en bataille faillirent,
Le destre poign ad perдут, n’en ad mie,
Bramimonde’s vocal condemnation of her Saracen gods and their ineffectiveness may be read as her predisposition to accept the Christian faith. In this passage, she is coming to terms with her fate as well as the fate of her religion. As we saw in chapter two’s discussion of the King of Tars, the moment at which a Saracen figure berates his or her gods is the moment at which he or she seems willing to consider the supremacy of another religion, specifically Christianity. Thus, it is not surprising when, near the end of the text, we witness Bramimonde’s baptism:

“There is a noble prisoner in my house.  
She has heard so many sermons and exempla  
That she wishes to believe in God, she asked to become a convert to Christianity.  
Baptize her so that God may have her soul.”  
They reply: “Now let her be baptized and have godmothers,  
Suitably noble and high-born ladies.”  
At the baths at Aix, the…are very large,  
There they baptize the Queen of Spain,  
They found for her the name of Juliana:  
She is a Christian out of sheer conviction. (3978-87)

Si li trenchat li quens Rollant, li riches.  
Trestute Espaigne avrat Carles en baillie.  
Que devendrai, duluruse, caitive?  
E! lasse, que n’en ai un hume ki m’ociet!”

3 The moment to which I refer here is when, upon the birth of the lifeless “lump of flesh” to the Sultan and his Christian wife, the Sultan enters his temple to pray to his gods to revive his son. When he experiences no response from the gods and his child is not revived, the Sultan smashes the idols and, in the end, is converted and baptized a Christian.

4 The original French reads:
“En ma maisun ad une caitive franche.  
Tant ad oït e sermuns e essamples,  
Creire voelt Deu, chrestïentet demandet.  
Baptizez la, par quei Deus en ait l’anme.”  
Cil li respondent: “Or seït faïte par marrenes,  
Asez cruz e linees dames.”  
As bainz ad Ais mult sunt granz les c…  
La baptizent la reïne d’Espaigne,  
Truvee li unt le num de Juliana.  
Chrestïene est par veire conoiscance.
The portrayal of Bramimonde and her conversion serves to establish some particular characteristics frequently shared by certain Saracen princesses or queens within Middle English romance. Like Bramimonde, these women are often portrayed as potentially predisposed to convert; as we saw in chapter two, Christian authors portrayed Saracen fathers as fearing that their daughters were impressionable and vulnerable to the influence of Christianity. These impressionable Saracen women are depicted as potentially good wives for heroic Christian knights in that they are beautiful and willing not only to convert to Christianity, but also to assist their Christian lovers in conquering and, in some cases, evangelizing, the Saracen kingdoms from which they hail.

Saracen women like Bramimonde have, however, been contrasted with another group of Saracen female figures by scholars, resulting in a strict dichotomy that has been perpetuated: the Saracen female is either predisposed to embrace Christianity and therefore beautiful, or she is vehemently opposed to conversion and monstrous in both appearance and character. In her book on these two versions of the Saracen heroine in the French chansons de geste, Jacqueline de Weever focuses her analysis on this strict dichotomy, arguing that “in these two portraits lie the coherence of appearance and behavior.” De Weever’s is the only monograph to explore the implications of this dichotomy, but she works throughout to substantiate its verity. While her argument about the link between appearance and behavior is compelling, her suggestion that “The
portraits of Saracen women who marry Frankish princes in the *chansons de geste* vividly exemplify the aesthetics and the power of artifice at work in poetry, especially the ability to erase alterity, all that makes for Otherness” seems problematic because it implies that there are no significant differences inherent in the portraits of any Saracen or Christian princesses.⁷ As I will show in this chapter, while some Middle English texts dealing with cultural issues similar to those found in *chansons de geste* indeed portray a Saracen princess who is converted and baptized as “white” and European in appearance, she is often simultaneously imagined as fundamentally different from an ideal European Christian princess, whom I identified in the last chapter as Constance.

Many critics of these texts agree with de Weever’s assertion that the beautiful Saracen, a willing convert, is essentially identical to the Christian princess; as de Weever suggests, “The representation of the Saracen woman in the conventional portrait of the French heroine becomes the eraser, rubbing out difference.”⁸ However, de Weever and critics in agreement with her tend to rationalize the essential—and important—differences between Saracen and Christian princesses, suggesting that the beautiful (“white”) Saracen princess engages in treason and murder only because she is intent upon becoming the good Christian princess and has no alternative, while the unattractive (“black”) Saracen princess engages in similar behaviors because she is bad.⁹ Siobhain Bly Calkin describes the stereotype of the good Saracen princess as the “Christian’s ideal

---

⁷ See de Weever, *Sheba’s Daughters*, 3.
⁹ See also Anna Czarnowus, “Oriental Despotism in The Sowdone of Babylone,” *The Propur Langage of Englische Men*, ed. Marcin Krygier and Liliana Sikorska (Frankfurt am Main and NY: Peter Lang, 2008): 133-47. Czarnowus claims that “the authoritarian ways of a converted Muslim princess are praised since they are meant to help the Westerners in their conquest of the East” (134).
of female Saracen behavior.”10 In this chapter, I will use three Middle English texts featuring interfaith marriage between a Christian knight and a Saracen princess to challenge the view that the “good” Saracen princess engages in troubling behavior only because the author imagines her as contributing to the colonial project of the Christians. While her behavior certainly positively affects the colonial project, I would like to suggest another underlying reason for her treacherous behavior, including the way in which she engages in evangelism: she is her father’s daughter alone. Unlike Constance, who is imagined as having both a mother and father, the Saracen princess in these texts does not have a mother and therefore, as I will show, does not have a female model of conduct. Thus, she behaves like a Saracen man (particularly like the Saracen sultan we see in the Constance narratives): oversexed, desirous of marriage, and willing to engage in treason, murder and enforced conversion.

As we saw in the final passage relating to Bramimonde in La Chanson de Roland, specific emphasis is placed on the necessity for Bramimonde, who will become Juliana, to have godmothers, or women willing to assist her through the transition of becoming Christian. In the last chapter, I argued that an ideal Christian princess (in the form of Constance) is imagined as learned in courtesy education, a form of knowledge frequently associated with mothers or female role models. The Chanson author’s clear recommendation that Bramimonde receive instruction and support from Christian godmothers suggests the important role women play in shaping the behaviors of other women in Christian society. The lack of mothers and female advisors in the portraits of Saracen princesses thus seems to indicate what Christians believe to be lacking from

Saracen society at large: a set of behavioral standards for women that will mold them as ideal wives and, eventually, mothers. Ironically, this lack serves to assist the Christian colonial project, since, as the Saracen princesses betray their fathers, religion, and kingdoms, they pave the way for the Christian knight to conquer the heathen kingdom.

The success of the Christian colonial project depends, as we saw in the last chapter, on the possibility of intermarriage between Christians and Saracens. The Constance narratives feature the “bad” Saracen woman in the form of Constance’s mother-in-law, who tries to prevent the introduction of Christianity into her son’s kingdom through the mass murder of her son and his retainers, all of whom have been convinced to convert to Christianity. The Saracen mother-in-law is condemned by the author; Chaucer calls her “Virago,” explicitly associating her behavior with male characteristics. As critics have noted, the Constance narrative serves to construct a binary between Christianity and Saraceness:

The contrast between Custance, who is the paragon of female virtue—passive, static, and servile—and the Sultaness, who is the ultimate evil—‘Virago,’ usurper of male power, and cause of damnation—not only defines ‘woman’ in the tale, but, in the sense that women serve as ‘symbolic bearers of the collectivity’s identity,’ it defines their cultures as well.\(^\text{11}\)

Since the Saracen mother-in-law is meant to stand in for her Saracen culture, we begin to see the problem associated with Saracen women in medieval romance. While they are useful in terms of the colonial project, their behavior is questionable, leading to a tension within the texts when the Saracen princess first desires the Christian knight, who is simultaneously drawn to her and circumspect about desiring her. While Constance has no

say in her marriage to the Saracen Sultan and must marry him, whether or not she is hesitant to marry him, the Christian knights in the romances I will cover become attracted to the Saracen princesses because they promise to convert and therefore become the means by which the knights can effect conversion to Christianity. What is most important about the Saracen princesses is that they are integral to the colonial process and therefore can be read as actively engaging in Christian evangelism alongside their Christian lovers. Significantly, the Saracen princesses’ involvement in the evangelist movement, as we shall see, mimics the involvement of the Saracen sultans in the Constance narratives, and the Saracen princesses’ plans to help their Christian lovers carry out the conversion process are based on male pursuits: not only do they sometimes assist their Christian lovers in pursuing battle with their Saracen fathers and kingdoms, but they also offer themselves in marriage, thereby providing the Christian knight with the opportunity to stimulate conversion. In these romances, then, the Saracen princess has much more in common with both the Saracen and Christian men in the romances in which she appears than she does with Christian women. As I will show, the male influence with which she has been surrounded is the reason for her active and unladylike (at least according to the standards of Christians) role in the romance conversion narrative.

I have chosen to cover Saracen princesses in three Middle English romances, Marsabelle from *Octavian*, Josiane from *Bevis of Hampton*, and Floripas from the *Sultan of Babylon*, because all of these women engage in interfaith marriage and proceed to

---

12 Jacqueline de Weever suggests that the betrayal of the Saracen princess became a popular theme in medieval romance in order to compensate for the story of Alice of Antioch, a Christian woman who betrays her Christian father and kingdom for the Saracens, found within medieval chronicles: “The poem turns the chronicle upside down—making cultural order out of the chaos of reality…Alice’s failed attempt to make her father a victim is replayed as the Saracen princess’s successful action in making her father a victim.” *See Sheba’s Daughters*, 133-4.
advocate and participate in the defeat of their fathers’ Saracen kingdoms and, as a result, the enforced conversion of their fathers’ citizens. I have chosen these three romances because they seem to be the most explicit in showing how Saracen princesses engage in interfaith marriage and subvert their fathers. These three romances are also among the most popular circulated throughout late medieval England, and we may thus consider the portraits of the women to be widespread examples of how audiences expected a Saracen princess engaging in an interfaith marriage to behave. My intent is not to overgeneralize about all Saracen women as represented in medieval (or even Middle English) romance, but rather to identify a pattern of representation in texts where Saracen women participate in interfaith marriages. I do not aim to construct a strict dichotomy between Christian and Saracen women portrayed in romance generally, but rather to indicate that these romances establish patterns of portrayal that link the Christian woman’s evangelism to peaceful education and her conduct and the Saracen woman’s to the advocacy of (and sometimes participation in) violence.

In her study of the English versions of the Octavian romance, Nola Jean Bamberry claims that “Women are increasingly displaced as protagonists and presented simply as enablers of patriarchal succession.” Though she is primarily focused on the Christian hero Florent’s mother rather than the Saracen princess Marsabelle, her comment again defines the Saracen princess’ behavior only in terms of how it is useful to

---

13 The fifteenth-century romance The Sultan of Babylon has been called the “most popular ‘Saracen’ romance in medieval England” by Dorothee Metlitzki, but postcolonial critics have largely failed to cover its representation of Saracen figures and issues. See Metlitzki, The Matter of Araby in Medieval England (New Haven: Yale UP, 1977): 169. Even Geraldine Heng’s landmark postcolonial study of romance, Empire of Magic, fails to mention the Sultan of Babylon, which is surprising considering not only its apparent popularity, but also its wealth of Saracen figures and postcolonial issues, such as conversion. 14 See Nola Jean Bamberry, “Evolution of the Popular Hero in the English Octavian Romances,” Modern Language Quarterly 51.3 (1990): 368.
the Christian colonial project. However, Marsabelle and Saracen princesses like her are important because they are objects of desire to both Christians and Saracens: because they are continually portrayed as the loveliest maidens in both heathendom and Christendom, the mutual desire heroes from each religious background experience for them uniquely positions these women. While the Christian Constance princesses are valued only because of their ability to link Christian and non-Christian kingdoms by adhering to Christian conduct rules, the Saracen princesses we shall now examine behave in explicitly Saracen—and thus, masculine—ways, and are able to have in some cases an even stronger effect than the Christian princesses.

As we saw in the last chapter, Constance engages in evangelism through the practice of conversion-by-example, which means that she uses her example of conduct to influence the conversion of non-Christians. Her method of conversion is largely successful, as she provides an example of the ideal Christian woman for non-Christian societies. In these texts, the Saracen princess who engages in interfaith marriage differs greatly from Constance in that her example of conduct is largely considered negative: first, she defies both her religion and her father by offering to convert in exchange for a promise of marriage; second, she proceeds to advocate violence against both her father and his kingdom (her countrymen), which results in the downfall of her father and victory for her husband (or husband-to-be). What is perhaps most interesting about the Saracen princess’ active involvement in the Christian conversion process is that her method of conversion as equally successful as—and in some cases, more successful than—Constance’s methods. However, the Saracen princess’ conversion method relies entirely on her behaving like a man rather than a woman.
We are first introduced to the masculinity of these Saracen princesses when we hear of their desire for the Christian knights who (usually) threaten their fathers’ Saracen kingdoms. In the portraits of Josiane and Floripas, their desire for the Christian knight-hero becomes immediately apparent and mimics the swift desire experienced by the Sultan in the Constance narratives. In both cases, the women fall in love with the Christian knights even before they have much contact with them, and even after the men have made clear their lack of desire for these Saracen women. What is perhaps most interesting about the portrayal of these women is that while they are beautiful and do conform to Christian ideals of beauty—embodifying the description of the “white” Saracen de Weever discusses—their beauty is overwhelmed by the negative aspects of their example of conduct, which serves to repulse the Christian knights rather than attract them (the opposite effect of Constance’s example of conduct).

The descriptions we hear of each of the three Saracen princesses do in fact conform to the standards de Weever sets forth in her study. All three heroines are imagined as “European” in their looks: they are bright of hue, fair, and Josiane even has red cheeks. All of the women are imagined as the most beautiful women in both Christianity and “heathenness,” which allows them to have an incredible effect on both

---

15 I say “usually” because Bevis is an exception to this rule, at least at first. He is taken in by Josiane’s father, but he does become a threat to the sultan’s kingdom when he proceeds to battle and murder fifty Saracen knights, and he remains a threat when he is falsely accused of engaging in sexual relations with Josiane.

16 Marsabelle is described as “bothe feyre and fre; / The feyrest thynge alyve that was / In crystendome or hethynnes, / And semelyest of syght” (784-9). See Octavian, Four Middle English Romances, ed. Harriet Hudson (Kalamazoo, MI: TEAMS, 1996). All quotations will be taken from this edition. Josiane is described as “So faire she was and bright of mod, / Ase snow upon the rede blod— / Wharto scholde that may discrive? / Men wiste no fairer thing alive” (518-24). See Bevis of Hampton, Four Romances of England, ed. Ronald B. Herzman, Graham Drake, and Eve Salisbury (Kalamazoo, MI: TEAMS, 1999). All quotations will be taken from this edition. Though we do not get an explicit portrait of Floripas, we are led to believe that she too resembles European ideals of beauty, as she is referred to as “fair” a number of times.
cultures. Siobhain Bly Calkin, following de Weever, claims that “A Saracen who looks like a western European and eventually converts is, essentially, a Christian European.”

Calkin’s statement seems problematic in that she overlooks the behaviors that explicitly differentiate Saracen princesses from Christian ones. Though the Saracen princesses are largely responsible for the success of the conversion project, they are not “essentially Christian Europeans”: they must earn this title in a way not required of the Constance figures. While the Constance figures are born into roles that require their assistance in the conversion project, the Saracen princesses choose to involve themselves in the project. Thus, while I believe that the Saracen princess’ marriages to Christian knights and their involvement in the mass conversions of non-Christian kingdoms ultimately help to efface their Saracen identities, the princesses are unable to change their educational backgrounds. They must use their Saracen backgrounds to involve themselves with Christians, and then learn how to become a Christian princess, if such a thing is possible.

In *Bevis of Hampton*, Josiane is described as highly desirable in terms of appearance, but her behavior leaves much to be desired for the Christian hero, Bevis. Upon arriving in the Armenian court of King Ermin after being exiled from his home in England, Bevis impresses the Saracen king so much that Ermin offers Bevis the opportunity to wed his daughter, Josiane, in exchange for his conversion to the Saracen religion. A good Christian knight, Bevis is unwilling to sacrifice his religion in order to become heir to a Saracen throne. As we shall see, Josiane remains entirely unattractive, and even repulsive, to Bevis until she offers to convert to Christianity, marry him, and thus provide him the opportunity to transform the Saracen kingdom they will inherit into

---

a Christian one. What becomes evident through our introduction to Ermin and Josiane is that Ermin views Josiane as a commodity: her marriage is clearly of importance to him, as he considers it an opportunity for him to gain an heir and to stabilize and perpetuate the Saracen kingdom which he rules. Thus, when Josiane later uses marriage to obtain her own goals, she not only betrays her father, but also mimics his behavior in imagining the important role her marriage can and will play for both her own kingdom and Bevis’.

Josiane’s first interaction with Bevis results in her swift desire for him. After Bevis is wounded battling and killing fifty of her father’s Saracen knights, Josiane’s father, Ermin, wishes to sentence Bevis without even hearing his explanation of the events. Josiane, however, intervenes on Bevis’ behalf, an action that could potentially be read as characteristic of a Christian—not Saracen—queen.¹⁸ Not only does Josiane save Bevis’ life by giving him an opportunity to defend his actions to her father, but she also negotiates an opportunity to become close to Bevis by nursing him through his recovery.¹⁹ Despite the fact that Bevis calls Josiane a “hethene hounde” three times, her desire is not at all abated.²⁰ Upon seeing Bevis leave the castle grounds to hunt the dangerous boar,

Josian, that maide, him beheld,
Al hire love to him she feld;
To hire self she seide, ther she stod:

¹⁸ Siobhan Bly Calkin has likened Josiane to the concept of the foreign queen consort, and the behaviors Josiane exhibits here do in fact reflect the actions expected of the queen, who is often represented as intervening on behalf of individuals before her husband to allow him to show mercy without appearing weak. On the role of the queen as intercessor, see especially David Wallace’s discussion of Anne of Bohemia in “‘If That Thou Live’: Legends and Lives of Good Women,” Chaucerian Polity: Absolutist Lineages and Associational Forms in England and Italy (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1997): 337-78.
¹⁹ Dorothee Metlitzki claims that King Ermin displays “carelessness about his daughter” when he encourages her to heal Bevis’ wounds, presumably because it provides her the opportunity to become enamored with Bevis. See The Matter of Araby in Medieval England (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1977): 168.
²⁰ See lines 689-94 for these references.
“Ne kepte I never more gode
Ne namore of al this worldes blisse,
Thanne Beves with love o time te kisse;
In gode time were boren,
That Beves hadde to lemman koren!” (764-71)

Josiane’s immediate desire to kiss Bevis and willingness to give up all of her worldly belongings for that single kiss is highly reminiscent of the Sultan’s desire for Constance.

But while the Sultan calls his councilors to debate how best to achieve a relationship with Constance and they determine the answer to be marriage, Josiane takes matters entirely into her own hands. She determines that marriage is the best opportunity for her to attain what she so desires, as she clarifies in her lament to her Saracen prophet:

“O Mahoun,” she seide, “oure drighte,
What Beves is man of meche mighte!
Al this world yif ich it hedde,
Ich him yeve me to wedde;
Boute he me love, icham ded.
Swete Mahoun, what is thee red?” (892-7)

Josiane’s prayers to Mohammed are ironic here, as she tells him that she would give Bevis everything possible if he would agree to marry her, and in the end it is her willingness to change her religious identity that persuades Bevis to marry her. Like the Sultan of the Constance narrative, Josiane’s swift love results in her belief that she will die without Bevis’ love, and as a result, she makes a promise to Bevis that has significant consequences for both her and the Saracen kingdom in which she has been raised.

While Josiane’s desire to marry Bevis will become enough to evince her promise of conversion in exchange for marriage, Bevis wants nothing to do with Josiane until she has actually made the promise. When Josiane first reveals her feelings to Bevis, she
comes across as forceful, behaving quite unlike the ideal Christian princess, and Bevis immediately rebuffs her advances, as we find through their dialogue:

[She] seide: “Beves, lemmann, thin ore!
Ichave loved thee ful yore,
Sikerli can I no rede,
Boute thow me love, icham dede,
And boute thow with me do thee wille.”
“For Gode,” queth Beves, “that ich do nelle!
Her is,” a seide, “min unliche,
Brademond King, that is so riche,
In al this world nis ther man,
Prinse ne king ne soudan,
That thee to wive have nolde,
And he the hadde ones beholde!”
“Merci,” she seide, “yet with than
Ichavede thee lever to me lemmann,
Thee bodi in thee scherte naked,
Than al the gold, that Crist hath maked,
And thow wost with me do thee wille!”
“For Gode,” queth Beves, “that I do nelle!” (1095-1112)

What is interesting about this passage is that while we know Josiane wishes to marry Bevis and is willing to give up so much in order to become his wife, she makes no mention of marriage here. Instead, she offers herself for him to “do his will.” Bevis is clearly hesitant about such a union, immediately invoking his Christian God, which may well indicate that the problem is in fact Josiane’s Saracenness. As a courteous Christian knight, he tries to soften the blow of his repulsion by telling Josiane that there is no man, king, prince, or sultan, who would not marry Josiane should he see her. That is, except Bevis! Josiane’s response—that she would rather be his lover than any other man’s wife—is clearly an unanticipated response for a Christian knight unfamiliar with Saracen princesses. Again, Bevis rebuffs her advances; this time, he actually flees
Ermin’s court. Yet again, Josiane advances on Bevis, following him from the court and cornering him with both her apology and her offer:

“Merci,” she seide, “lemman, thin ore!”
She fel adoun and wep wel sore:
“Men seith,” she seide, “in olde riote,
That wimmannes bolt is sone schote.
Forghem me, that ichave misede,
And ich wile right now to mede
Min false godes al forsake
And Cristendom for thee love take!”
“In that maner,” queth the knight,
“I graunte thee, me swete wight!”
And kiste hire at that cordement. (1189-99)

Because we are aware of the significance a marriage contract with Josiane represents to her father, Ermin—as we see in the text, Bevis fights the Saracen king Brademond at Ermin’s request to prevent him from forcibly marrying Josiane—the fact that Josiane offers herself in marriage to Bevis uniquely provides her the opportunity to become stronger and more important than even her father. By going behind her father’s back, Josiane takes control of the future of her father’s kingdom. Just as her father views her and her marriage as useful commodities, so too Josiane views herself as a useful commodity. By imagining her marriage as useful to Bevis and his desire to spread the Christian faith, Josiane perpetuates a view of her position based exclusively on masculine ideals. She is not at all concerned with how women or wives should behave; instead, she is concerned only with achieving her desire—Bevis—and allowing him to achieve his desire. Thus, her engagement in colonial activity significantly begins by her assimilation of a masculine way of thinking when it comes to marriage.

Like Josiane, Floripas in the Sultan of Babylon finds herself in a potentially powerful position that she is able to use to her advantage to achieve her own desires.
When her father captures Charles’ Christian knights Roland and Oliver, Floripas persuades him to keep them safe in order to arrange a trade for her brother, whom Charles has captured (more of this later). When Floripas realizes that Roland and Oliver have been imprisoned with no food or water, she does everything in her power to become their keeper, including murdering two individuals, as we shall see. Once Floripas is able to relocate the prisoners to her tower, where she keeps them safe and free from hunger, she continues to work against her father’s wishes by “imprisoning” the ten new Christian knights whom her father wishes to murder. This move is Floripas’ most important, as she is able to use her position as the warden of the twelve Christian knights to achieve her desire, which is to marry the Christian knight Guy. We find that when she reveals her love for Guy, she too has much in common with the Saracen sultan from the Constance narrative, as neither he nor she has actually met the object of their desire. Floripas even mistakes another knight for Guy; speaking to Duke Neymes, she says:

“Sir gentil knight,” tho saide she,
“Telle me, what is your name.”
“Whi axe ye, my lady dere,
My name here to knowe alle?”
“For he spake with so bolde chere
To my fadir yestirdaye in his halle.
Be not ye the Duke of Burgoyne, Sir Gy,
Nevewe unto the Kinge, Charles so fre?”
“Noe, certes, lady, it is not I;
It is yondir knight, that ye may see.”
“A, him have I loved many a day
And yet knowe I him noght
For his love I do alle that I maye
To chere you with dede and thought.
For his love wille I cristenede be
And lefe Mahoundes laye.
Spekith to him nowe for me,
As I you truste maye.
And but he wole graunte me his love,
We find here that Floripas’ love for Guy is completely inspired by what she has heard of him rather than by what she has seen of him—just as we saw with Constance and the Sultan. But, while the Sultan’s love for Constance put him in a weakened position, forcing both him and his kingdom to convert to Christianity, here we are to read Floripas—who similarly offers to convert—as being in the more powerful position. She goes so far as to threaten the lives of Guy and the rest of the Christian knights unless Guy promises to marry her, in exchange for her conversion. Floripas’ forwardness is even more startling than Josiane’s, and Neymes takes her threat much more seriously than Guy, who, like Bevis, is at first unwilling to even consider marrying a Saracen princess:

Tho wente Duke Neymes to Sir Gye
And saide, “This ladye loveth the;
For thy love she maketh us alle merye
And baptizede wolde she be.
Ye shalle hir take to your wedded wife,
For alle us she may save.”
“By God,” quod Gye, “that gafe me life,
Her wolde I never have;
Wyle I never take hire ner no woman
But Charles the Kinge hir me gife.
I hight him, as I was trewe man,
To holden it while I lyve.”
Tho spake Roulande and Olyvere,
Certifyinge him of here myschefe,
Tellinge him of the parelles that thay in were,
For to take this lady to his wedded wife.
“But thou helpe in this nede,
We be here in grete doute.
Almyghty God shalle quyte thy mede;
Elles come we nevere hennys oute.”

---

21 See The Sultan of Babylon, Three Middle English Charlemagne Romances, ed. Alan Lupack (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1990). All quotations will be taken from this edition.
Thus thay treted him to and fro;
At the laste he sayde he wolde. (1913-34)

While Neymes immediately points out to Guy that Floripas has promised to be baptized Christian in exchange for the promise of marriage, Guy claims first that he will never take her as his wife, then follows by saying he will take no wife whom Charles has not approved. As a good retainer, Guy wants first to please his king, but as Neymes, Roland, and Oliver point out, the best way that Guy can please Charles is by marrying Floripas, as she will save the twelve Christian knights’ lives. Already, Floripas’ betrayal of her father’s wishes is being embraced by the Christian knights. Even more importantly, however, Guy’s marriage to Floripas will allow Charles to conquer the Saracen kingdom and continue the manifest destiny desired by the Church and its royal supporters. While Guy does finally accede to marry Floripas, it is only because of the combination of her promises both to convert to Christianity and save the lives of the twelve peers. Like the male heroes and villains of romance, Floripas uses deliberately political threats and promises to achieve her desire.

Jennifer Goodman has described this first transgression against religious boundaries, always the action of the Saracen princess, as depicting her as extremely forward and forceful.\(^\text{22}\) The reactions of the Christian knights to the forwardness of Josiane and Floripas certainly support this reading, as both men are initially circumspect about the woman’s offer of love and marriage. The fact that both women realize the political value of their positions as potential wives suggests that the authors imagine these Saracen princesses as savvy; because they are constantly—and significantly—surrounded only by men at court who create and perpetrate battle plans, the Saracen princesses have a

\(^{22}\) See Jennifer Goodman, “Marriage and Conversion in Late Medieval Romance,” 115-6.
much better understanding of the unique position they occupy than does Constance, who abides by the rules of conduct which define her position.

What is particularly interesting about Octavian is that we have the stories of two women whose roles significantly represent the differences between the Christian and Saracen princesses, Octavian’s Christian wife and their son Florent’s Saracen-turned-Christian-convert wife, Marsabelle. Octavian’s wife endures a fate in many ways similar to that of Constance. Like Constance, she is exiled from her husband’s home with her children and must patiently endure suffering until she is reunited with him at the end of the tale. Also like Constance, Octavian’s wife’s behavior seems drawn directly from conduct manuals, but unlike Constance, she plays no direct role in the conversion part of the narrative. Instead, that role falls to Marsabelle who, like Josiane and Floripas, commandeers her own fate in terms of marriage.

While Josiane’s and Floripas’ love is inspired by a single Christian knight (whether or not they have actually met him), Marsabelle seems predisposed to fall in love with any Christian knight. When the King of France invites her to Montmartre, she is overjoyed because she has the opportunity to watch the Christian knights:

To the kynge of Fraunce the maydyn sende
To lye at Mountmertrous there nerehonde,
From Parys mylys thre.
At Mountmertrous beside Borogh Larayn,
That stondyth over the banke of Sayne,
For aventours wolde sche see.

The kyng of Fraunce the maydyn hyght,
As he was trewe kyng and knyght,
And swere hur by hys fay
That she must savely come therto;
Ther schulde no man hur mysdo
Neythur be nyght ne day.
The mayde therof was full blithe;
To the castell sche went swythe
And seven nyghtes there sche lay.
For sche thoght joye and pryde
To see the Crystyn knyghtes ryde,
On fylde them for to play. (790-807)

It is ironic that her father sends Marsabelle into Christian territory to watch the
“aventours” of the knights, as the ability to do so paves the way for her betrayal of both
him and his kingdom and her ultimate conversion to Christianity. Upon arriving in
Montmartre, Marsabelle is pleased to find that she can watch the Christian knights from
her chamber, and she even feels “joye and pryde” as she watches them. The inclusion of
the word “pride” suggests that Marsabelle identifies more with the Christians than with
her Saracen background; as we shall see, she too realizes the important role her marriage
can play for either her father’s Saracen kingdom or Christianity at large.

Unfortunately, there is a gap in the manuscript after this expression of
Marsabelle’s joy in watching the Christian knights. The next lines we have introduce
the giant, Arageous, who wishes to wed Marsabelle. Her father agrees that if Arageous is
able to win Paris, he will permit him to wed Marsabelle. This moment again shows the
important role Saracen sultans imagine the marriage of their daughters to play, and serves
to make Marsabelle’s own promise to marry Florent that much more obviously a betrayal.

23 The editor of the text, Harriet Hudson, does not attempt to fill in the lines from another manuscript, but
notes in a footnote what another editor had added to fill the gap:
“The gyauntys name was Aragonour;
He lovyd that maydyn par amour,
That was so feyre and free;
And sche had levyr drawyn bene
Than yn hur chaumber hym to sene:
So fowle a wyght was he!”
I do not believe that this passage sufficiently fills the gap; these same ideas are found in lines not long after
the gap, and they do not provide an adequate conclusion to the scene, as the giant has yet to be introduced,
so I do not agree with Hudson’s assessment of this passage as a “transition” for what is missing.
Bamberry calls the giant a “parodic courtly lover,” in that he wishes to gain Marsabelle in marriage through the accomplishment of a particularly dangerous feat. While Marsabelle’s father agrees to allow Arageous to marry her if he wins Paris, Marsabelle herself adds to Arageous’ mission, giving him a seemingly impossible task if he wishes to marry her: he must present to her the head of the King of France. Because we know Christians must triumph, we know that ultimately Arageous will fail in this task. What does surprise us, however, is that the Christian knight Florent hears of Marsabelle’s edict to Arageous and chooses to present Arageous’ head to her in place of the king’s. At this point we see Marsabelle’s swift passion for Florent. Unlike the other Christian knights, however, Florent is not initially circumspect about Marsabelle because of her religion; instead, it is because of her request to the giant, as he reveals upon bringing Arageous’ head to her:

“Damesele,” said Florent, “faire and free,  
Wele now gretis thi leman the  
Of that he the byhete.  
Lo, here an hevede I hafe the broghte—  
The kynges of Fraunce ne es it noghte,  
For it were full evyle to gete.” (1058-63)

It is at first unclear to Florent whether Marsabelle truly desired the head of the King of France. As we know, she set about giving Arageous a task she found impossible, for “hir hade lever dede to hafe bene / Than hym in hir chambr to hafe sene, / So fulle he was of syghte” (818-20). As soon as Marsabelle sees that Florent has Arageous’ head, she is immediately smitten with Florent and allows him to take her away on his horse. When they are unable to escape, Florent leaves Marsabelle and we find that she is already trying to find a way for them to be together: “Swylke lufe wexe bytwix tham two, / That lady

---

grett, so was hir wo, / That he ne wyn hir myghte” (1085-7). Marsabelle, however, quickly channels her woe into action. Not only will she arrange a way to be close to her father and explain her actions, but she will also fuel the war between her father and the King of France, making it explicitly about religion, and ultimately enable Florent to overcome her father so that they can be together. At their next meeting, Marsabelle reveals her willingness to convert like Josiane and Floripas:

“Lady,” he sayde, “full wele es mee,
A worde that I may speke with the,
So bryghte ert thou of hewe.
In alle this werlde es non so free
Forwhi that thow wolde cristenede be
And sythen of herte be trewe.”
“Sir, if that thou myghte me wyn,
I wolde forsake all my kyn,
Als I them never knewe.
Sythen thou wolde wedde me to wyfe,
I wolde lyve in Cristen lyfe;
My joye solde ever be newe.” (1508-19)

Again, Marsabelle’s conversion hinges on the promise of marriage, which, as we have seen, her father considers a great commodity. By manipulating her father’s ability to use her marriage as a reward for his retainers who work against Christianity, Marsabelle powerfully positions herself to have a major effect on both the Saracen and Christian kingdoms. Josiane, Floripas, and Marsabelle all recognize the important role marriage plays in Saracen and Christian societies alike, and actively use this recognition to their advantage. Their understanding of and involvement in the political and religious issues of their fathers’ kingdoms have prepared them to achieve their own desires, unlike the ideal Christian princess in the form of Constance, who acts only to please her father and her husband because she has been taught to do so. While the Saracen princesses also please
their future husbands by promising conversion in exchange for marriage, the gratification is mutual: they do not please their husbands because they have been taught to; instead, they please their husbands because they achieve their own desire simultaneously, which clearly sets them apart from the Christian princess and likens them more closely to both the Saracen and Christian males who surround them. Although conversion is always the stimulant for interfaith marriage for a Christian, for the Saracen it is the marriage that becomes the stimulant for conversion.

Now that the Saracen princesses have retained promises of marriage in exchange for their conversion to Christianity, they must find a way to enable the marriages to occur. In all three cases, the women further betray their fathers by assisting their husbands-to-be, conspiring against their fathers and the Saracen kingdom and religion in which they have been raised. Saracen princesses’ advocacy of violence again points to masculinized behavior: while their fathers are willing to reward Saracen retainers for battle victories by marriage to their daughters, the daughters actually engage in planning, assisting, and, in the case of Floripas, undertaking battles in order to achieve the marriage they desire. As we will now see, these women are portrayed as useful propaganda—they have been trained by and surrounded with Saracen men, so they are able to anticipate how best to overcome them. While Constance earns or wins allies with her special knowledge, example of conduct, and skills, the Saracen princess becomes like the men she must overcome in order to be accepted by both Christian and Saracen men.

Floripas is generally read as performing the most masculinized actions of all the Saracen princesses. Dorothee Metlitzki has gone so far as to claim that the reader must in fact hate Floripas because of her actions: “As the character is revealed in the romance
there is not one redeeming feature in Floripas. She commits perfidy and murder, is a
Goneril to her father, and the reader is entirely on the side of the sultan when he curses
her and calles her ‘hore serpentyne.’” The suggestion that we are meant to empathize
with the sultan is remarkable, as throughout the text we see Floripas’ father sanction
some terrible things, including the murder of ten thousand maidens. Instead, as I shall
suggest, Floripas’ father reacts towards his daughter in this way because she has learned
too much, too well from him: she is not only able to betray him while residing in the
same palace, but she is also able to determine how the Christian knights she protects can
defeat him.

What is ironic about Floripas’ father, Laban, in the Sultan of Babylon is that he
views women as having potentially dangerous effects on his own Saracen retainers. We
hear that when a Saracen king brings the Sultan ten thousand women “fair of face” (226),
he commands that all of the women be slain, with the result that the women all become
martyrs. The implication here is that the women the Sultan has murdered are Christian
women, which becomes clear with the Sultan’s reaction after the women are martyred:

He said, “My peple nowe ne shalle
With hem noughte defouled be,
But I wole distroie over all
The sede over alle Cristianité.” (232-5)

Though Laban realizes that Christian women may have an adverse effect on his Saracen
retainers, he ironically does not expect that his own daughter will have that effect on him.
Floripas, however, is easily able to betray her father as soon as she realizes that he has
two of the Christian twelve peers as prisoners. Laban has already lost his son (who will

later convert to Christianity) as prisoner to the Christians; now he will lose his daughter as well.

Like Josiane, who is able to convince her father to hear Bevis out before condemning him in the deaths of Ermin’s Saracen knights, Floripas acts as an advisor to her father. Upon realizing that her father wishes to murder the Christian knights Roland and Oliver, whom he has as prisoners, Floripas objects and instead suggests that he merely imprison them so that he will be able to exchange them for her brother:

“My fader so dereworth and dere,
Ye shulle be avysed of this cas,
How and in what manere
My brothir, that is to prison take,
May be delyvered by hem nowe,
Bycause of these two knightes sake,
That bene in warde here with you.
Wherefore I counsaile you, my fader dere,
To have mynde of Sir Ferumbras.
Pute hem in youre prison here
Tille ye have better space,
So that ye have my brother agayn
For hem that ye have here;
And certeyn elles wole he be slayn
That is to you so lefe and dere.”
“A, Floripp, i-blessed thou bee,
Thy counsaile is goode at nede…” (1519-35)

Laban’s immediate acquiescence to Floripas’ counsel and his evident respect for her suggestion imply that she is a respected member of his court whose advice is valued despite the fact that she is a woman. Laban’s statement “thy counsaile is goode at nede” also suggests that he has found Floripas’ advice beneficial in the past. His response to her counsel ultimately alerts us to the kind of training and experience Floripas has had: unlike Constance, who is merely a subject to her father and does only what she is told (a clear reflection of her courtesy education), Floripas has been treated as a trusted advisor and
has extensive knowledge about how her father manages his kingdom’s affairs, educational pursuits that clearly identify a dramatically different, and masculine, kind of learning. But while this moment reveals certain aspects of Floripas’ education, it also serves to set the stage for Floripas’ treason since, as Metlitzki claims, her “bloodiness is matched by a ruthless capacity for deceit.”

Thus, Floripas’ counsel to her father here and later, when she advises him to give the rest of the twelve peers into her keeping, serves to make her subsequent betrayal of her father even more painful for him, as we know he considers her a useful advisor. Simultaneously, however, it helps us to understand the useful role the Christian twelve peers will expect her to fulfill and establishes her position (and the position of the Saracen princess generally) as a useful method of propaganda because she has productive—if masculine—skills.

Floripas’ engagement in masculine pursuits even extends to murder. After she convinces her father to imprison rather than kill Roland and Oliver, she feels bad that they are not given any nourishment and decides to take action. Although none of the Saracen princesses has a mother in any of the texts, Floripas has a duenna—from whom she has apparently learned nothing, and to whose advice she clearly pays no heed. When Floripas informs the duenna, Maragounde, of her desire to feed and care for Roland and Oliver,

She wolde not assente to that dede
But saide, “Damesel, thou arte woode;
Thy fadir did us alle defende
Both mete and drinke and othere goode
That no man shulde hem thider sende.”
Floripe bythought hir on a gyle
And cleped Maragounde anoon right
To the wyndowe to come a while

Floripas’ counsel to her father here and later, when she advises him to give the rest of the twelve peers into her keeping, serves to make her subsequent betrayal of her father even more painful for him, as we know he considers her a useful advisor. Simultaneously, however, it helps us to understand the useful role the Christian twelve peers will expect her to fulfill and establishes her position (and the position of the Saracen princess generally) as a useful method of propaganda because she has productive—if masculine—skills.

Floripas’ engagement in masculine pursuits even extends to murder. After she convinces her father to imprison rather than kill Roland and Oliver, she feels bad that they are not given any nourishment and decides to take action. Although none of the Saracen princesses has a mother in any of the texts, Floripas has a duenna—from whom she has apparently learned nothing, and to whose advice she clearly pays no heed. When Floripas informs the duenna, Maragounde, of her desire to feed and care for Roland and Oliver,

She wolde not assente to that dede
But saide, “Damesel, thou arte woode;
Thy fadir did us alle defende
Both mete and drinke and othere goode
That no man shulde hem thider sende.”
Floripe bythought hir on a gyle
And cleped Maragounde anoon right
To the wyndowe to come a while

And se ther a wonder syght:
“Loke oue,” she saide, “and see aferre
The porpase pley as thay were wode.”
Maragouende lokede oue; Floripe come nere
And shofed hire oue into the flode.
“Go ther,” she said; “the devel the spede!
My consail shaltowe never biwry.
Whoso wole not helpe a man at nede
On evel deth mote he dye.” (1567-88)

Maragounde’s loyalty to Floripas’ father is clearly unacceptable to Floripas, who without a moment’s hesitation proceeds to entrap Maragounde and push her out the window to her death. Interestingly, Floripas repeats the adjective Maragounde had used to describe her when she describes the porpoises she calls Maragounde to view: “woode/wode.” The word is associated with madness, so Maragounde’s choice of the word in describing Floripas’ desired actions in preserving the health of the Christian knights implies two things: first, that Floripas should certainly not act against her father’s edict; and second, that doing so would have severe consequences. By repeating the word “wode” when she describes the actions of the porpoises she wishes Maragounde to view, Floripas defends the beliefs she has and the actions she will next undertake, for though her actions—like the porpoises’ play—may appear mad to some, to her (like the porpoises) the actions seem natural and necessary. The fact that Floripas uses the “madness” of the porpoises’ play to distract Maragounde so she can push her out the window seems somehow funny to the reader, despite the seriousness of murder. The author’s use of humor at such a moment seems to work to make the audience complicit in Floripas’ actions; in other words, we may find her actions somewhat acceptable because they work in favor of the Christians. Although the author may attempt to include some humor in this moment, this murder does (perhaps in a comic way) work to further reveal the tyrannical masculine
tendencies Floripas has picked up through her exposure to her father’s method of rule: while Floripas steps in to prevent her tyrannical father from murdering Roland and Oliver and her father heeds her counsel, Floripas, exhibiting clearly tyrannical behavior, actually kills Maragounde when she disagrees with her. Anna Czarnowus has described the governess’ murder as the clashing of the “wills of two tyrants,” a phrase that further emphasizes the influence Laban has on his daughter’s actions.27

Floripas must go even further to fulfill her plan to assist the Christian knights, as we see another episode shortly after the duenna’s murder where Floripas resorts to murder yet again. Here, she murders the jailer when he first denies her access to the prisoners and then afterwards threatens to inform her father of her request. Without hesitation,

She sued him as faste as she myghte go
For to gif him harde grace.
With the keye cloge that she caught,
With goode wille she maute than.
Such a stroke she hym there raught,
The brayne sterte oute of his hede than. (1608-13)

This murder is even more brutal than Maragounde’s, for here Floripas actually bashes in the jailer’s brains—a rather gruesome detail that points to her strength and brutality. Through these murders, Czarnowus argues that Floripas “display[s] the stereotypical Oriental ruthlessness in slaughtering her governess and then the warden of the Christian knights,” which suggests that Saracen men and women are grouped together in a single category of Otherness.28 Such a view, however, limits the expectations we have for a Saracen female. As some critics have suggested, Floripas, because she is “described in

the conventional portrait of the beautiful woman” and “conform[s] to the type of ‘heroine,’ [is] expected to behave and to act like the conventional heroine, since [her] beauty presupposes good character.”29 While Czarnowus’ claim limits the Saracen princess’ behavior to that expected of any Saracen, male or female, this second view attempts to define our expectations of her behavior solely in terms of external appearance. In terms of individuals’ actions, whether an individual’s nature or how she has been nurtured is more important in explaining those actions is a common topic of discussion. These views seem defined by the concept of “nature,” in that the critics imagine us to have expectations of people based solely on their nature, including their physical appearance and their race. What such views do not consider is how the concept of “nurture” can also be imagined to affect these individuals. Just because Floripas and the other Saracen princesses take actions that are considered stereotypically “Saracen” does not mean that these actions are inherent; instead, these actions seem to be developed through the Saracen princesses’ exposure to male Saracen behavior. As Constance must learn to behave like an ideal Christian princess in order to positively effect conversion through marriage, so too must the Saracen princess learn to behave in the way best suited to fulfill her goals, which, unlike Constance’s, are at odds with the goals of her father.

While Floripas will not stop at even murder to carry out her plan to aid the Christian knights, we still do not realize that her ulterior motive is her desire to marry Guy, as she does not reveal this motive until after her father has also captured the remaining twelve peers. What we do witness after these murders is Floripas’ ability to manipulate her father through counsel that she bases explicitly on his political interests.

29 de Weever, Sheba’s Daughters, 9.
(even though the counsel later turns out only to be in her political and domestic interests).

She is able to explain the murders of both individuals to her father in such a way that he becomes willing to place her in the position of “jailer” of all the Christian knights. This position provides her the ability first to contract a promise of future marriage with Guy (based on the condition that she will convert to Christianity) and to engage with the Christians in battle plans to overthrow her father.\(^{30}\) The position thus enables us to see even more clearly Floripas’ engagement in behavior usually identified as masculine, which is especially evident when she instructs the Christian knights in how to overcome her father:

Tho spake Floripas to the barons bolde  
And saide, “I have armure i-nowe;  
Therfore I tel you what I wolde  
And that ye dide for your prowé.  
Tomoroe, whan my fadir is at his soupere,  
Ye shalle come in alle attonys.  
Loke ye spare for no fere;  
Sle down and breke both bake and bones.  
Kithe you knightis of hardynesse!  
Ther is none helpe but in this wyse.  
Then moste ye shewen your prowes  
And wynne this castel in this guyse.” \(1949-59\)\(^{31}\)

Floripas’ counsel on how to surprise and defeat her father relies on explicit knowledge of how ambushes work, something a princess would hardly be expected to know. Her advice also advocates gruesome violence similar to the actions we see her take in murdering the jailer. What is remarkable is that the Christian knights immediately accept her counsel and have no problems with any of her plans, which in the end work to the

\(^{30}\) See lines 1935-46 for the promise Guy and Floripas make to wed in the future; later, the author notes the actual marriage ceremony and baptism of Floripas at lines 3210-12.

\(^{31}\) It should also be noted that Floripas proceeds to warn the Christian knights again, providing them advice about Lucafere, the Saracen who had hoped to marry her. She tells the knights to “entendith nowe al to me,” which again suggests that she is in an authoritative and important position. See lines 2030-8.
Christians’ advantage: not only has Floripas’ plan of attack enabled the Christians to defeat Laban and his Saracen retainers, but they have also gained an ally in a Saracen woman who will convert to Christianity and become the means for the Christians to possess Laban’s Saracen kingdom. Thus, while Floripas ends up in the same position as the Christian princess Constance in terms of her marriage becoming a useful tool for the Christians’ conversion project, it is her desire for the marriage and her active use of behaviors generally associated with knights and rulers to effect the marriage that differentiate her role as propaganda for the Christians from that of Constance.

The involvement of Saracen princesses in planning battles extends to the portrait of Marsabelle as well. Like Floripas, Marsabelle is able to manipulate her father through the use of rhetoric she has certainly picked up at his court and is able to advise Florent how to defeat her father’s Saracen kingdom so that he will be able to Christianize it. To explain her failed attempt to escape the Saracen kingdom with Florent to her father, Marsabelle concocts a story about the “ribald knight” who tried to kidnap her and asks her father to keep her away from Christian men. While the war has been about religion all along, Marsabelle further incites the religious aspect of the war, for now her father claims he will “bryne alle Cristyanté” (1129). By speaking out against the Christian knights (whom we know she has admired from afar and up close), Marsabelle positions herself close enough to her father that she will be able to effectively plan his ruin.

When she is finally reunited with Florent, Marsabelle provides him with specific details and suggestions about how to defeat her father, but what is most significant about this moment is that Florent first solicits Marsabelle’s advice:
“Lady,” he seyde, “withowtten fayle,
Howe were than thi beste consaile,
That I the wynn myghte?”
“Sertes, ye me never wyn ne maye
Bot if it were that ilke daye
That ye hafe tane to fyghte,
That ye wolde send up by the flode
Men that bene styffe and gude,
And a schippe that wele were dyghte,
And ywhills the folke were at thaire dede,
That thay me myghte awaye lede
Into youre ceté full ryghte.

“My fadir has a nobille stede,
In the werlde es none so gude at nede
In tornament no in fyghte.
In his hevede he hase an horne,
Es schapen als an unycorne
That selcoute es of syghte.
Sir, if you myghte that stede now wyn,
There were no man in heythen kynn
Agayne the that stande myghte.” (1520-43)

Because we know already that Florent is willing to “win” and marry Marsabelle only if she is willing to convert to Christianity, his conquest of her father is related not only to his desire to possess her, but also to possess her father’s kingdom for the Christians. Marsabelle reveals that she is fully informed in the plans for the battle between her father and the Christians already in place and tells Florent that he may only defeat her father if he acts on that day and does exactly as she says. She tells him to send a ship into “youre ceté,” which signifies that her advice will certainly lead to victory. He must also, however, steal her father’s “unicorn” if he is to guarantee the victory, as “no man in heythen kynn” could possibly defeat him if he possesses the animal. This advice is indeed a betrayal of Marsabelle’s position. By having Florent specifically solicit and then heed Marsabelle’s advice, the author imagines her as occupying a very useful role in the
conversion process, and the Saracen princess thus becomes potentially important propaganda for the Christians. Because she has been raised in the court of the enemy and is imagined to exhibit masculinized behaviors, her potential role as an informant who can help plan effective battles for the Christians is highlighted by the author.

The Saracen princess doesn’t claim the Christian knight as a husband because she is beautiful or the example of an ideal woman, as Constance does; instead, she claims him for a husband once she has promised to aid his quest by becoming Christian and, presumably, assisting in the colonization of Saracen kingdoms. Thus, she is much more similar to the Saracen sultan who desires Constance upon hearing of her and promises to convert in order to marry her. Nola Jean Bamberry suggests that “Florent’s ultimate encounter with the other, falling in love with Marsabele, is transformed into a simple moral tale of converting a heathen to Christianity”; however, Marsabelle’s deep involvement in the overall scheme to defeat her father certainly complicates such a reading.³²

While their Christian husbands-to-be require specific advice from Floripas and Marsabelle in order to defeat both the women’s ruling fathers and the Saracen religion at large, Bevis and Josiane are rather equal partners in the quest to Christianize (and therefore colonize) Armenia and its surrounding Saracen territories. Though Bevis is clearly the hero, and much attention is focused on his exploits, Josiane has some extremely important moments of agency that are entirely hers and contribute significantly to Bevis’ quest. What is unique about Josiane is that while she never becomes involved in providing counsel on how to defeat the Saracens, she becomes involved in an actual

battle of Bevis’, and works throughout the text to save herself because she realizes the important role marriage to her can and will play for Bevis. Josiane’s actions are therefore somewhat different from the other Saracen princesses’, in that she must actively defend herself rather than aid in attacks against her father and his kingdom in order to assist Bevis’ Christian conversion project.

Myra Seaman’s analysis of Josiane in *Bevis of Hampton* suggests that what is so interesting and intriguing about Josiane’s representation is her performance of gender. Seaman is particularly interested in the roles of women in romance and how Josiane works against the role of the stereotyped, passive female heroine. As I noted in chapter two, what is noticeably absent from Seaman’s analysis of Josiane’s identity is a discussion of how her religious background affects her characterization; in other words, Josiane is active precisely because she cannot be the stereotyped, passive female heroine: she is the Saracen heroine, stereotyped not as passive, but rather as too aggressive. Seaman suggests that her roles are more closely aligned with the expectations of a hero, but again, she does not truly consider the religious implications and stereotypes associated with this role. At the end of her analysis, she quickly suggests that perhaps her religious background plays a role, but only so that she does not seem dangerous to the Christian audience, which has its own ideas of ideal feminine behavior. This conclusion does draw attention to the fact that Saracen princesses behave differently than Christian princesses, but again the reason for these differences is subordinated to their effect—since the Saracen princesses’ behavior ultimately enables the Christians to conquer a

---


34 Seaman, “Engendering Genre in Middle English Literature,” 56.

35 Seaman, “Engendering Genre in Middle English Literature,” 72-3.
Saracen kingdom, there is no need to explore why it is aligned more closely with the Christian hero’s than a Christian woman’s. As I will now show, Josiane’s male-centered Saracen background and the absence of women in her life affects how we are to read her and reveals, like the portraits of Marsabelle and Floripas, why Christian authors imagine these princesses to behave more like men than women.

When the author first describes Josiane, he begins by acknowledging that she is her father’s daughter, for “His wif was ded, that highte Morage” (517). While neither the author of the *Sultan of Babylon* nor the author of *Octavian* mentions that the Saracen princess ever even had a mother, here Josiane is directly linked to her father because of the loss of her mother: according to the author, “A daughter a hadde” (518, my emphasis). The author’s dismissal of Morage as Josiane’s parent suggests that the loss of the mother/female model results in the exclusive link of father and daughter. By referring to Josiane as only her father’s daughter, the author sets the stage for Josiane’s betrayal of her father and implies that, having been raised by a man, Josiane may behave more like a man than woman, which is proven throughout the text.

There are two main incidents in *Bevis of Hampton* that associate Josiane’s actions with those of men: first, Bevis’ fight with some lions, which has been studied by other critics; and second, Josiane’s murder of Miles, the man who forcibly marries her. In the first episode, we see Josiane attempt to aid Bevis in his battle with the lions by offering to engage in the battle—and actually doing so. As critics have pointed out, this episode truly highlights the differences between how Josiane behaves and how Bevis expects her to
behave. The second episode, in which she murders the man who has forced her into marriage, in some ways likens Josiane to Floripas, who murders twice in order to achieve her desires, but more specifically works to differentiate Josiane and the concept of the Saracen princess from the ideal Christian princess. As we will see, Josiane defends herself rather than accepting her fate, which is what Constance continually does throughout her narratives. Both episodes thus emphasize the masculine aspects of Josiane’s behavior and, as I will suggest, indicate the important role her lack of female companionship plays in her portrait.

While I pointed out at the beginning of the chapter that the Roland author is concerned with ensuring that Bramimonde (now Juliana) will be given godmothers from whom she can learn, we find these women lacking both before and after the conversion of the Saracen princesses. In other words, while the Saracen princesses have no mothers or female role models before they convert to Christianity, they remain without models of female conduct even after their conversions. In Josiane’s case, however, we find that she has someone willing to teach her how Christian princesses are expected to behave in the form of her husband-to-be, Bevis. While the author emphasizes the fact that the lions cannot harm Josiane because she is a virgin, thereby also emphasizing her femininity, he portrays Josiane as extremely desirous of entering the fight. When Bevis returns and finds Josiane with the lions who have killed her protector, she asks him to help her avenge the protector’s death:

“Sir, thyng help, me to awreke
Of these two liouns, that thy chamberleyn,
Ryght now han him slayn!”

36 Calkin especially discusses this episode as indicative of the different expectations of female behavior in Saracen and Christian terms; see Saracens and the Making of English Identity, 76-8.
She seide, she wolde that oon hoolde,
While that he that other quelde.
Aboute the nekke she hent that oon,
And Beves bade let him goon,
And seide: “Dame, forsoth, ywys,
I myght yelp of lytel prys,
There I had a lyon quelde,
The while a woman another helde!
Thow shalt never umbraide me,
When thou comest hoom to my contré:
But thou let hem goo both twoo,
Have good day, fro thee I goo!”
She let hem skip up and doun,
And Beves assailed the lyoun. (2417-33)

What is first interesting about this passage is that Josiane claims she will avenge the protector’s death and urges Bevis to help her. While she does not wish to actually kill either of the lions, she offers to restrain one while he kills the other. Her desire to be involved in the battle is evident when she actually grabs one of the lions so that Bevis can kill the other one; this move also indicates that she expects Bevis to listen to her and abide by her suggestion. Her actions clearly align her behavior more closely with that of a hero than a heroine; Bevis is certainly cognizant of this fact, as he proceeds to tell her to step down so he can show himself to be the true hero. By asking Josiane to step back and allow him to fight the lions, Bevis acknowledges the very masculine aspects of her behavior and indicates that she should behave in a more feminine manner—after all, he is the hero. Josiane’s actions certainly portray some humor, as she offers to hold down the lions while Bevis attacks them, but this humorous episode also encodes important social information about how the author imagines her. By including the phrase “Thow shalt never umbraide me, / When thou comest hoom to my contré,” Bevis very directly indicates that her actions are in conflict with the expectations of women in his culture, as
Calkin suggests: “In this episode she learns, with difficulty, how to comport her body into a culturally-specific and approved mode of feminine behavior.”

Josiane is not so easily taught, however. As soon as things begin to go badly in Bevis’ fight with the lions, she again steps in, attempting to engage in the battle against Bevis’ wishes:

Tho Josian gan understonde,  
That hire lord scholde ben slawe;  
Helpe him she wolde fawe.  
Anon she hente that lioun:  
Beves bad hire go sitte adoun,  
And swor be God in Trinité,  
Boute she lete that lioun be,  
A wolde hire sle in that destresse  
Asse fain ase the lioueness.  
Tho she ne moste him nought helpe fighte,  
His scheld she broughte him anon righte  
And yede hire sitte adoun, saun faile,  
And let him worthe in that bataile. (2481-93)

Again, Bevis is maddened by Josiane’s desire to participate in the battle rather than watch it. By swearing to “God in Trinité” as he tells her to let go of the lion, Bevis again points out the differences in his expectations of her behavior, which seem to be based on the concept of the ideal Christian princess who is essentially passive when it comes to battles. The masculine behavior Josiane exhibits here is in line with the stereotype Dorothee Metlitzki identifies: “The appeal of this type is instructive, not only as the popular image of a ‘good’ Muslim princess but also in conjunction with the theory that the aggressive and masterful nature of such heroines was foreign to the feminine nature

---

38 I am referring here to the battle between the Sultaness and her son and his retainers who have converted to Christianity. While the Sultaness is embroiled in the battle, which results in the murder of her own son, and actively participates in harming the converted Saracens, Constance is never involved in the battle. Instead, she is the fearful onlooker who is later sent away in a rudderless boat. So, while no violent actions are taken against Constance, she does not participate in the violence, either.
of the West.”\textsuperscript{39} As a good future wife, Josiane desires to help preserve Bevis’ life, but she does so by problematically (at least according to Bevis) trying to behave like a knight rather than a maiden.\textsuperscript{40} Josiane’s political involvement in her father’s kingdom and her understanding of battles, showcased earlier in the text, are evidently aspects of her learning she finds difficult to leave.\textsuperscript{41} Ultimately, this episode suggests that as a Saracen princess, Josiane embodies masculine learning and masculine behavior and is therefore a mirror of Bevis rather than simply a companion.

The effect Josiane’s father and the other males with whom she has been surrounded have on her is again manifested through her behavior when she is kidnapped and forcibly married to Miles. Earlier in the text (and as I discussed in chapter two), Josiane’s father Ermin is very upset when Brademond tells him that Josiane is sleeping with Bevis (an accusation that turns out to be false). To prevent the sexual relationship he believes them to be having, Ermin sends Bevis to Brademond to be murdered. Following in her father’s footsteps, when Josiane herself does not like the man with whom she is supposed to sleep, she kills him—all by herself.

Although marriage was formed by consent of both the bride and groom and therefore could not be enforced upon anyone, the author does not take this aspect of

\textsuperscript{39} Metlitzki, \textit{The Matter of Araby in Medieval England}, 169.
\textsuperscript{40} Calkin also views this as Bevis’ attempt to educate Josiane, stating that “Beves links a notion of appropriate gender behavior for men and women to his native land and culture.” See Calkin, \textit{Saracens and the Making of English Identity}, 76.
\textsuperscript{41} One very good example of Josiane’s political involvement in her father’s kingdom is the advice she gives to him when he asks what his counselors advise to do about Brademond’s threat against his kingdom. Significantly, Ermin opens the floor to all of his advisors, and the only one who answers is Josiane, whose advice he heeds. Josiane suggests that he trust Bevis to defeat Brademond, so while her advice is useful in protecting her father’s kingdom from the invasion of Brademond and his Saracen forces, it ultimately helps her, as Bevis is able to prevent Brademond from forcibly marrying her.

258
canon law into consideration. Instead, Josiane is forced into the marriage despite the words of future consent she exchanged and conditional contract she made with Bevis. What bothers Josiane more than anything, however, is the realization that she will have to consummate the marriage with Miles. As Bevis revealed to Josiane much earlier in the text, he has been advised to marry only a virgin. Thus, Josiane must preserve her virginity despite this enforced marriage, and it is because of this detail that she resorts to murdering Miles. What other critics have found remarkable about Josiane’s murder of Miles is how she is able to persuade him to be alone with her. Calkin argues that she uses “proverbial gender norms” in order to defend herself in her marriage to Miles, evidenced by her request that they be left alone the night of their marriage because she is modest:

“Sire,” she seide to that erl sone,  
“Ich bidde thow graunte me a bone,  
And boute thow graunte me this one,  
I ne schel thee never bedde none.  
Ich bidde thee at the ferste frome,  
That man ne wimman her in come;  
Belok hem thar-oute for love o me,  
That no man se our privité!  
Wimmen beth schamfast in dede  
And namliche maidenes,” sche sede. (3204-13)

Calkin’s interest in this moment focuses on Josiane’s performance of femininity, as she uses what would be expected of a demure Christian woman in order to be alone with him. While she does indeed use a “proverbial gender norm” to be alone with Miles, the actions

---

42 The canon law on marriage states that marriage is made only through consent of the individual spouses, which suggested an interest in ensuring that marriage took place only between two willing individuals. This law, however, did not prevent the involvement of parents and others in arranging and making marriages, as we saw in chapters two and three. Shannon McSheffrey discusses the extent to which others became involved in making marriages between spouses and discusses the influence of parents who, in some cases, forced their children into marriage in Marriage, Sex, and Civic Culture in Late Medieval London (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2006): 74-109. This enforced marriage differs drastically, of course, because it is a desirous spouse who forces Josiane into marriage rather than her father, whom we saw force her into marriage with the Saracen king Yvor earlier in the text.

43 Calkin, Saracens and the Making of English Identity, 73.
she takes once they are alone are certainly not associated with gender norms, at least in the case of Christian women. However, Josiane’s exploitation of these female behavioral expectations serves only briefly to disguise her masculine behavior, as she proceeds to make quick work of hanging Miles in the bedroom:

Adoun a set him in that stede;
Thanne was before his bed itight,
Ase fele han of this gentil knight,
A covertine on raile tre,
For no man scholde on bed ise.
Josian bethoughte on highing,
On a towaile she made knotte riding,
Aboute his nekke she hit threw
And on the raile tre she drew;
Be the nekke she hath him up tight
And let him so ride al the night. (3225-35)

What is remarkable about this moment is how quickly Josiane is able to figure out how she can murder Miles and prevent him from taking her virginity. Her ability to create a noose and catch Miles by surprise implies that she has the sharp thinking skills of a knight who finds himself in a difficult position. The actions she takes here are reminiscent of Bevis’ escape from Brademond’s dungeon, where he is able to fool two Saracen guards into allowing him to escape. This episode thus again shows her as a mirror of Bevis’ masculinity. As Seaman notes, Josiane completely defies the expectations the audience has for the heroine in this position: “Far from being a damsel in distress, Josian takes action without hesitation to protect herself, both for her own sake as well as Beves’s.” Josiane’s adoption of murder as the only means of protecting her future marriage to Bevis indicates just how strong the influence of the knights who engage in battle and murder and who have surrounded her from birth actually is.

---

44 For Bevis’ escape from Brademond’s dungeon, see lines 1581-1641.
45 Seaman, “Engendering Genre in Middle English Literature,” 65.
Generally, when a “white” Saracen princess like Josiane or Floripas does commit murder, the victim is a Saracen who stands in her way. In this case, however, we are led to understand that the man Josiane murders is not a Saracen, but rather a Christian, as he hails from a Christian land. This fact may seem to make the murder much more problematic in that Josiane is not killing the enemy, but rather an ally. 46 Although Josiane has already converted at this point in the text, she reverts to behaviors associated with Saracen princesses in order to defend herself from rape and, more importantly, to preserve her virginity for Bevis, so that he can accomplish his colonial pursuits through marriage to her. 47 Without Josiane’s murderous actions, Bevis’ link to both Ermin’s and Yvor’s kingdom would be lost, as he would not marry her if she did not remain a virgin.

Josiane’s behavior in both of these episodes is a reflection of her upbringing, as Seaman notes:

Josian’s extreme otherness associated with her Islamic background makes her inherently unusual and thus distances her from the culture of the audience; the effect is to decrease the threat presented by her remarkable character. Her foreignness allows the writer both to suggest something quite radical and at the same time reduce any potential panic in his audience, which had the option of rationalizing her assertiveness as resulting from her inherent difference as well as her “less civilized” upbringing and surroundings. 48

While I agree with Seaman’s suggestion that Josiane’s upbringing and surroundings affect the way the audience is to read and respond to her, the suggestion that the portrayal of these issues would allow the audience to “rationalize her assertiveness” does not fully account for the author’s purpose in including these masculine behaviors. The “radical”

---
46 See lines 3130-7, where Miles is described as an earl of Cologne, the Christian land where Josiane is baptized.
47 See lines 3174-9, where Josiane objects against the marriage to Miles precisely because she would be required to become his bed companion.
48 Seaman, “Engendering Genre in Middle English Literature,” 73.
suggestion she believes the *Bevis*-author to be making through Josiane is that a heroine need not be passive, but can behave more like a hero. Although the author does portray Josiane as a mirror of the hero rather than a mere companion or a mirror of the ideal romance heroine (who is generally acted upon rather than active), what seems more important about Josiane’s actions is the extent to which they portray her as useful propaganda for the Christian conversion project.\(^49\) Calkin’s analysis of Josiane hinges on her view of the Saracen princess as embodying the position of mediator between the Christian and Saracen cultures. This view, however, obscures the fact that Josiane does nothing to strengthen the Saracen culture or any of the Saracen kingdoms in which she holds a significant role. Instead, she works against her father, her Saracen husband, and Saracen culture generally in order to provide Bevis both with heirs and an opportunity to evangelize and possess two Saracen kingdoms—a role that is clearly useful propaganda for women’s involvement in the conversion process, and leads us back to the suggestions of Pierre Dubois in *De Recuperatione Terrae Sancte* at the beginning of the last chapter.

As Dubois suggests, women can play a very important role in the process of conversion and are therefore integral to a successful conquest of the Saracen lands which Christians hope to possess. His advocacy of interfaith marriage as a means of creating a conduit for Christian conversion in a Saracen kingdom is based only on the involvement of Christian women who can convert through their examples of conduct and learning. For medieval authors, however, Saracen women can also participate in the fantasy of Christian manifest destiny, and these women may be even better prepared to take on the

\(^49\) For a discussion of the normal role of the heroine in Middle English romance, see Susan Crane, *Gender and Romance in Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1994): 165-204. Crane suggests in her fifth chapter that while heroes are exposed to feminine vulnerability through their participation in romance adventures, the adventures of heroines are subordinated to those of the heroes.
role Dubois advocates, for we find that they share some very specialized types of knowledge and learning that Christian princesses do not possess. While Constance relies only on the combination of her example and religion to aid her conversional quest, the Saracen princesses never rely on religion; instead, we find them using other skills, including their knowledge of politics, warfare, rhetoric, and even magic and herbal remedies, to aid them.\textsuperscript{50} De Weever claims that these aspects of the Saracen princess’ background create a “character…[that] consists of all that would be frowned upon in the medieval court.”\textsuperscript{51} She goes on to claim that “As sorceress, as astrologer, as skilled healer, her accomplishments mark her as outsider despite her white skin…Her actions, including her present betrayal of father and country, make acceptance problematic and mark her as an outsider.”\textsuperscript{52} Although a Christian audience may not at first wish to accept the actions of the Saracen princess, the Christian author imagines her in such a way that necessitates the collusion of the audience in her behaviors. The audience, like the author, expects to gain from the Saracen princess access to her Saracen kingdom(s) and Christian heir(s) to replace the Saracen father she has duped. The Saracen princess’ usefulness,\

\textsuperscript{50} Although I have focused only on the overtly masculine aspects of the Saracen princesses’ behavior here, the use of magic and herbal medicine appears in the \textit{Sultan of Babylon} and \textit{Bevis of Hampton}. Floripas, for example, relies upon a magic girdle to help everyone in her tower feel well fed while they are captive there. Similarly, Josiane relies on a magical ring to preserve her virginity while she is married to the Saracen king Yvor so that she will ultimately be able to marry Bevis. Josiane also uses her knowledge of botany to change her appearance when she is forcibly returned to Yvor so that he will be disgusted by her rather than attracted to her. These episodes highlight how the education of the Saracen princess is imagined as “othered,” in that the skills they acquire and use are not generally associated with acceptable forms of Christian knowledge, but rather with the long history of pagan-like knowledge possessed by figures like Medea. Cleopes, the pagan princess from John Metham’s \textit{Amoryus and Cleopes} whom we examined in chapter one, is also imagined as extremely learned in lapidaries and dragons, two subjects that are likely to be considered outside the realm of appropriate knowledge (at least by Christians). Karen A. Winstead has recognized Metham’s portrait of Cleopes as that of a “complex female character” who is “intelligent, assertive, sexual, and fully sympathetic,” without whom Amoryus would never succeed. See \textit{John Capgrave’s Fifteenth Century} (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2007): 89-90.\textsuperscript{51} de Weever, \textit{Sheba’s Daughters}, 36.\textsuperscript{52} de Weever, \textit{Sheba’s Daughters}, 141.
then, is entirely based on her ability to interact with, trick, and conceive males, both Saracen and Christian (though she will conceive only Christian males). Since both the author and the audience imagine this to be her role, it seems she would have to behave like a man in order to carry out her role.

The cultural fantasy in which both Constance and the Saracen princess are expected to engage requires the stereotypical dichotomy of the ultra-feminine, ideal Christian princess and overly sexed, aggressive, masculinized Saracen princess. Scholars overwhelmingly agree that the masculinized Saracen princess is a type acceptable to the Christian author and his audience only because her actions assist the colonial project; as Czarnowus claims of the portrait of Floripas, she “is praised for the same attitude that makes the Sultan damnable.”

This view, however, ignores how the blatant lack of meaningful female interaction also feeds into these portraits. While the Christian princess can be an effective evangelist and a good romance heroine, the Saracen princess is the hero: she works, like the male Christian knight who marries her, towards her own desire, which is paradoxically also the desire of the audience and the knight—a marital union that will lead to much more, including the possession of her father’s kingdom. To achieve her desire, she must offer something to the Christian knight, and since she has no models of guidance other than her father and his Saracen retainers and no experience beyond her involvement in a very masculinized court environment, her masculine tendencies make sense. The authors do not masculinize the Saracen princess merely to portray her as

---

53 Czarnowus, “Oriental Despotism in The Sowdone of Babylone,” 144. Jacqueline de Weever also suggests that the Saracen princess’ role works against her culture in favor of Christian culture, and that this is why she is found acceptable: “Identifying totally with the Frankish ambitions, she controls the interpretation of both cultures, one to the other, denigrating her own culture through betrayal and conversion. This is one of the tools of colonialism: to publicly cheapen the invaded culture so that its appropriation is inevitable while privately acknowledging its value.” See Sheba’s Daughters, 45.
othered; instead, she is masculinized because the skills she brings to the table, based on her experience in a predominantly male environment, are considered important and useful to the Christian colonial project. Ironically, the masculine behavior of these women, which I have argued is a reflection of their masculine environment, is similar to the role of feminine conduct embodied by Constance in that both kinds of behaviors result in the same positive effects for the patriarchal Christian community. So while the Saracen princess’ behaviors may at first seem overtly masculine, the effects of their behaviors (prompting interfaith marriage and paving the way for Christianity to spread throughout their fathers’ Saracen kingdoms) prove to be inspired by the idealized feminine role. While Christian princesses like Constance are imagined as the peaceful answer to the fantasy of religious imperialism, Saracen princesses like Floripas, Josiane, and Marsabelle offer the ability to continue and succeed in the war against the Saracens. In their portraits of Saracen princesses, these authors suggest that if Christians are to succeed in their colonial conquest of Saracen territories, they must be willing to embrace new fantasies, including the possibility of involving Saracen women.
CONCLUSION

But what of the female engaged in an interfaith marriage whose behaviors are not so easily identified as “Christian” because of their reliance on the teachings of conduct manuals or as “Saracen” because of their emphasis on primarily masculine pursuits? The Princess of Tars, first examined in chapter two, provides a fitting conclusion to this study because she cannot be easily identified as either “Christian” or “Saracen” in terms of her representation. Instead, her behaviors seem to be a combination of both kinds of behaviors I have identified in the last two chapters. What, then, are we to make of her?

The Princess of Tars may at first seem an exception to the patterns I have identified in the last two chapters of this dissertation. Although her narrative is commonly included among the Constance legends, her behavior is radically different from the behavior of the other Constance figures, specifically those of Chaucer and Gower whom I discussed in chapter three. Critics have primarily read her behavior as “disturbing” because the conversion of the Saracens to Christianity does not seem at first to be her goal; instead, she assimilates into the Saracen culture and religion of the Sultan who wishes to marry her—or at least, she feigns assimilation.¹ The Princess’ narrative differs

fundamentally from other Constance narratives because the primary purpose of her marriage to the Sultan of Damascus is not to convert him and his kingdom to Christianity, but rather to stave off the war the Sultan threatens against her father if he does not get his way. Furthermore, although her actions at first appear to have much in common with the other Constance figures—she is at first resistant to the idea of marrying a non-Christian, although she finally does so to save her father’s kingdom—her behavior also has much in common with the Saracen figures I examined in chapter four, for by the end of the text we find her participating in battle plans and advocating violence against those unwilling to convert to Christianity. I shall finally suggest here that through the Princess of Tars we witness a combination of behaviors from Christian and Saracen women in the romances we have examined—behaviors that are equally effective in stimulating conversion. Such a portrait suggests that patterns of representation are not all-encompassing in medieval romance, but it also proves that through marriage, women were imagined as being able to take on important roles that allowed them to participate in the imaginative religious fantasy with which Middle English authors were engaged.

The Princess of Tars is similar to the Chaucer’s and Gower’s Constances in that her fame is widespread because of her courteous conduct—she is not only beautiful, but also known because she is “schast & bliþe of chere” (13).² Like Chaucer’s and Gower’s heroines, the Princess’ fame reaches the Sultan of Damascus, who immediately wishes to marry her.³ However, in this narrative the Princess’ beauty and conduct are not strong

² King of Tars, ed. ed. Judith Perryman (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1980). All quotations will be taken from this edition.
³ The Sultan’s desire to marry the Princess here differs from the other Constance narratives in that he does not consider any alternatives: for him, marriage is the only possibility. The Sultan’s desire to marry the Princess differs from Chaucer’s Man of Law’s Tale and Gower’s “Tale of Constance,” where other
enough to inspire the Sultan to convert in order to marry her; he wishes to impose his religion on her, something that neither she nor her parents find acceptable. However, as the Princess witnesses Christian knights being slain to protect her from marriage to the Sultan, she decides that she must marry the Sultan regardless of his religious views, for the sake of the Christian people of her father’s kingdom. Although her mother objects against the Princess’ proposed sacrifice, what is most important about the Princess’ decision is her father’s support of this decision and the Princess’ own acceptance of her position as an aristocratic woman whose marriage to an enemy ruler could create an alliance (or at least abate a war). Both of these aspects of her decision point to the influence of her conduct education, as she is prepared to sacrifice her own desires to assist her father’s kingdom.

Where this Princess deviates from her conduct education (which, as I showed in chapter three, includes adherence to and knowledge of religion) is in her decision to knowingly participate in an interfaith marriage, which is strictly forbidden by her Christian faith. Upon arriving in Damascus, the Sultan informs her that she must become a Saracen in order to become an acceptable wife and bedmate for him. As a Christian

4 The mention of the Princess’ mother and the obvious clues to her conduct education also identify the Princess’ character as very much in line with the Constance figures of Chaucer and Gower; however, as we will soon see, the Princess does not continue to abide by such a strictly obedient and conduct-based education, as she proceeds to feign allegiance to her husband and his kingdom in order to effect something greater, which she finally attains through the birth and eventual baptism of her son.

5 Raymond of Penyafort, the twelfth-century theologian and canonist, strictly prohibits the practice of interfaith marriage unless it will result in the conversion of the non-Christian spouse to Christianity. At this point in the narrative, we have no indication that the Princess will try to convert her husband, and therefore the marriage is at first problematic because she defies canon law in going through with the marriage. See St. Raymond’s *Summa on Marriage*, trans. Pierre Payer (Toronto: PIMS, 2005): 51-3.
woman raised to be obedient to both her father and her husband, the Princess agrees to
his demands, even though she secretly maintains her loyalty to Christ:

& while sche was in þe temple [þer]
Of Teruagant & Iubiter
Sche lerd þe heþen lawe.
& þei sche al þe lawes couþe,
& seyd hem openliche wiþ hir mouþe,
Ihesu forȝat sche nouȝt…
Þe soudan wende niȝt & day
Þat sche hadde leued opon his lay,
Bot al he was bicouȝt.
For when sche was bi hirself on
To Ihesu sche made hir mon,
Þat alle þis world haþ wrouȝt. (502-7; 511-16)

The Princess of Tars seems to undermine some aspects of her conduct education here.
Although she is an obedient daughter and wishes to appear as an obedient wife, her
obedience to her husband is entirely feigned: although he requires her to undergo a
performance of conversion to his religion, we know that the Princess only pretends to
convert, thereby completely defying the expectation that she be obedient to her husband-
to-be. As I suggested in chapter two, however, the Princess feigns her conversion only in
order to actually participate in the interfaith marriage, which is integral to her
involvement in the conversion process. I will not discuss here the Princess’ decision to
follow through with the interfaith marriage, as I covered that extensively in chapter two.
Instead, I wish to pick up on the important role the Princess takes on as an evangelist.

While the Princess’ marriage is the only truly interfaith marriage in the romances
we have examined throughout this dissertation (in all of the others, the Saracen figure
converts to Christianity before the marriage is finalized) and is therefore not lawful
according to canon law, the effects of the marriage—the conversion of the Sultan and
many from his kingdom—seem to override the illegality of the union. Not long after her marriage to the Sultan, the Princess becomes pregnant and bears a child who comes into the world as a lifeless lump of flesh: “as a rond of flesche yschore / In chaumber it lay hem bifoire / Wipouten blod and bon” (580-2). The birth of such a horrific child—Jane Gilbert has called it “an outrageously sensationalist event”6—sets the scene for the mystical transformation of both the child and the Sultan through Christian baptism. But before the baptisms occur, the Princess must play the part of effective evangelist, and she does so by using skills that are associated with both the Christian and Saracen princesses we have been examining. When the Sultan blames the Princess for the child’s deformity, claiming that she has only pretended to convert and it is for that reason that they have borne a lifeless, limbless child, the Princess uses reason and, importantly, her faith in an attempt to convince her husband otherwise. She first reminds him that the child was “ȝeten bitven ous to” (604) and argues that his religion may actually be to blame rather than her own. In order to continue to perform outwardly the role of obedient wife she has been taught, however, she proceeds to reason with her husband, offering him a deal: if he prays to his gods for the transformation of the child and his prayers are answered, she will convert to his Saracen religion. This deal ultimately works to her advantage, as the Sultan’s prayers are not answered. The Princess seems to have entered into the deal knowingly, or at least expectant of such an outcome, as she proceeds to request that the Sultan offer the same deal to her:

“þe best rede þat y can,  
Bi Ihesu Crist, þat made man,

Now ichil ȝou teche.
Nou þou hast proued god þine
ȝif me leue asay mine,
Wheler is better leche.
& leue sir, prey þe þis—
Leue on hem þat stronger is,
For doute of more wreche.” (676-84)

Her original proposition to the Sultan turns out only to have been an attempt to appease him so that she will be able to convert him and his Saracen followers to Christianity, which becomes evident when she meets with the priest who is to perform the baptism of her child. As the priest laments the fact that he has been unable to perform mass for ten winters, the Princess tells him to lay aside his grief, as they have an even more important goal at hand: “‘For þurth þine help [& min], þis stounde[s], / We schul make Cristen men of houndes. / God graunt it ȝif it be his wille’” (742-4). The Princess here announces her knowing participation in an evangelical project and significantly asks a priest—an authority of the Church—to aid her, rather than the other way around.

Like the Constance of both Chaucer’s and Gower’s narratives, the Princess exhibits her belief in miracles and relies upon their influence in connection with her own ability to educate her husband (and here, also the priest’s ability to educate the Sultan) to effect his conversion. After their son is baptized by the priest on the feast day of St. John the Baptist, the child “hadde liif & lim & fas, / & crid wiþ gret deray. / & hadde hide & flesche & fel” (776-8). While the Princess’ beauty and conduct are not enough to convince the Sultan to become Christian in this text, the miraculous revival of their child through baptism is: the Sultan nearly immediately decides that he will convert to Christianity. The interfaith marriage is thus essential to his conversion, as the interfaith
sexual relations which result from the union produce the child whose baptism the Princess uses to influence the Sultan’s conversion.

While Chaucer’s and Gower’s Constances seem to effect conversion on a personal level, leaving it to the influence of those personal conversions on the public to stimulate conversion throughout a kingdom, the Princess of Tars is unwilling to end her participation in the conversion process by simply allowing the influence of her husband’s conversion to spread. Instead, she becomes, like the Saracen princesses we examined in chapter four, directly involved in planning for the conversion of her husband’s kingdom to Christianity. After her husband is baptized and miraculously transformed (changing from “black” to “white” in physical appearance), the Princess enacts a plan to force conversion on the people of Damascus:

“Sende now þis prest in priuete
To mi fader þe king.
& pray him, for þe loue of me,
Þat he com swiþe hider to þe
Wip alle þat he may bring.
& when mi fader is to þe come
Do cristen þi lond, alle & some,
Boþe eld & þing.
& he þat wil be cristned nouȝt,
Loke to þe deþ þat he be brouȝt,
Wipouten ani duelleing.” (950-60)

The Princess here prepares a plan to enforce conversion to Christianity upon her husband’s followers, a plan that relies on her familial connection to the King of Tars and his retainers. What is remarkable about the Princess’ plan is its lack of mercy, as she claims that those who refuse to convert should be killed. The plan that the Princess organizes is steeped in violence: she recommends that her father bring all the retainers he possibly can, and that he unite with her husband to baptize every non-Christian individual
they find. Even more interesting, however, is the fact that her father, her husband, and the priest all support her plan and proceed to carry it out. This passage is actually the last to feature the Princess in what remains of the text, but we find that the remaining fragment of the text devolves into a bloody battle between the Christian force of the Sultan and King of Tars and five Saracen kings who try to stave off the Christian forces and the inevitable conversion that the Saracen people will undergo. They are (in the spirit of romance) overpowered by the Christian forces, with the result that thirty thousand are captured, and any Saracen who “wald his lay forsake / Cristen m[a]n he lete him make” (1228-9) while the Saracens who refused “Into a stede þai [weren] ybrouȝt / A mile wiþouten the toun, / & Cristen men, wiþouten wene, / Striken of her heuedes al bidene…” (1232-5). The text abruptly ends at this point, but we are led to believe that the Princess’ plan has been faithfully carried out by her father and husband, who significantly take orders from her about how best to spread (and enforce) Christianity. The Princess is thus imagined as a figure who does not differ too remarkably from the Saracen princesses we saw in the last chapter. Like Josiane, Floripas, and Marsabelle, the Princess of Tars uses her position as the knowledgeable daughter of a king to plan an attack, although this attack is directed towards her husband’s citizens rather than her father and his citizens. Her advocacy of violence and participation in planning a violent religious campaign against the Saracens aligns her behaviors with those of the Saracen princesses we examined who similarly advocate (and even use) violence and use their knowledge of masculine pursuits like planning battles and campaigns to subvert their fathers’ kingdoms for their lovers. Here, however, the outcome is reversed, as the Christian Princess is able to influence the conversion of her Saracen husband to Christianity and engages him in
participating in a campaign against his own people with her father, whose Christian kingdom will benefit from a new Christian ally. While the Princess of Tars has much in common with Saracen princesses who betray their Saracen fathers in order to allow Christianity to enter into their kingdoms and flourish, however, she has as much in common with the Christian Constance figures, in that she uses her interfaith marriage as an opportunity to spread Christianity throughout a non-Christian kingdom. Also like the Constance princesses, the Princess of Tars uses her behavior to her advantage in influencing the conversion of others, as she feigns assimilation into the Saracen culture so that she is able to truly infiltrate it through sexual relations with the Sultan and the birth of their child.

Pierre Dubois’ interest in involving women in the Church’s campaign to recover the Holy Land comes full circle in this text: not only is the Princess able to prompt the conversion of her husband through participating in an actual interfaith marriage with interfaith sexual relations, but she is also able to bring her father and husband together in order to enforce the conversion of the Saracens of Damascus, truly participating in the creation of a Christian manifest destiny. The combination of characteristics some medieval authors associated with either Christian or Saracen princesses who engage in interfaith marriage found within the portrait of the Princess of Tars indicates that women who participate in interfaith marriages in Middle English romance are not simply stock romance figures, but rather complicated individuals who are able to engage fully in the conversion narrative by using the skills they are imagined to have. The Princess of Tars, through the combination of both Christian and Saracen characteristics I identified as
patterns in romances that feature interfaith marriage, seems to become the female champion of Christianity such authors were attempting to imagine.

This dissertation has attempted to further engage the connection between cultural fantasy and romance that has been posited by other scholars. Romance is frequently viewed as a genre that is particularly able to convey fantasy; thus it is a fitting genre in which authors can experiment with possibility, in terms of both religion and gender. The interfaith marriages that I have analyzed throughout these chapters work together to show Middle English authors’ interest in identifying ways to subvert non-Christian culture and religion. While their societies embraced violence in the form of the Crusades to overcome and dominate the Other, the authors of these romances (and others like them) seem through their portrayals of erotic conversion to imagine potentially peaceful means of converting the Other to Christianity. As we have seen, the erotic conversions of non-Christian spouses frequently result in the widespread conversion of the non-Christians residing in the non-Christian spouse’s kingdom. These interfaith marriages also suggest to some extent that peaceful conversion requires the involvement of Christian women. The romances covered in this dissertation champion the important role that women can play in the conversion process, whether or not they are Christian. Like the heroes of romance, heroines can have lasting effects on a civilization, even if their influence is limited to their involvement in marriage. Marriage, so frequently taken for granted as a stock component of romance, is in actuality an element of romance full of possibility and should be considered integral to our understanding of the fantasy in which romance participates.
The ideas set forth through my analysis of these romances from fourteenth- and fifteenth-century England should not be considered exclusively relevant to that era, or even exclusive to the genre of romance. Indeed, many later texts reveal interests in interfaith and intercultural marriage, and the issues and ideas I have uncovered throughout this study can be adapted to later periods of literature. In the Early Modern period, for example, both William Shakespeare and Edmund Spenser experiment with the concepts of interfaith sexual and marital relationships. Shakespeare’s interest in interfaith and intercultural marriage is evident in *The Merchant of Venice* and *Othello*, while Spenser considers the possible dangers inherent in interfaith sexual relationships through his portrayal of the liaison between Red Cross and Una in Book I of the *Faerie Queene*. As I suggested in the introduction, studies in interfaith marriage and the colonial possibilities it presents may also bring scholars of medieval literature more closely into discourse with scholars of later literatures.


Cooper, Christine F. “‘But algates therby was she understonde’: Translating Custance in Chaucer’s Man of Law’s Tale.” *Yearbook of English Studies* 36.1 (2006): 27-38


Hornstein, Lillian Herlands. “A Folklore Theme in the *King of Tars*.” *Philological Quarterly* 20 (1941): 82-7.


Hornstein, Lillian Herlands. “Trivet’s Constance and the King of Tars.” Modern Language Notes 55.5 (1940): 354-7


284


288
Shutters, Lynn. “Christian Love or Pagan Transgression? Marriage and Conversion in 
*Floire et Blancheflor,*” Discourses on Love, Marriage, and Transgression in 
*Medieval and Early Modern Literature,* ed. Albrecht Classen (Tempe, AZ: 


Staley, Lynn. *Languages of Power in the Age of Richard II.* University Park, PA: Penn 

Stiller, Nikki. *Eve’s Orphans: Mothers and Daughters in Medieval English Literature.* 

*The Sultan of Babylon. Three Middle English Charlemagne Romances.* Ed. Alan Lupack. 


Tomasch, Sylvia. “Postcolonial Chaucer and the Virtual Jew.” *The Postcolonial Middle 

Treharne, Elaine and Greg Walker. *Writing Gender and Genre in Medieval Literature: 

Wallace, David. *Chaucerian Polity: Absolutist Lineages and Associational Forms in 

Wallace, David. *Premodern Places: Calais to Surinam, Chaucer to Aphra Behn.* Malden, 

Weiss, Judith. “Ineffectual Monarchs: Portrayals of Regal and Imperial Power in 
*Ipomedon, Robert le Diable and Octavian.*” *Cultural Encounters in the Romance 
68.

Wentersdorf, Karl P. “Some Observations on the Concept of Clandestine Marriage in 