Wenshan Review of Literature and Culture · Vol 5.1 · December 2011 · 45-65.

The Cultured Barbarian: The Saracen Princess in *Bevis of Hampton*

Chen-chih Liao

ABSTRACT

The "Barbre nacioun" in *the Man of Law's Tale* is "Surrye", a nation of Muslims which stands for a pagan world. For Custance, it symbolizes savagery and uncivilization. Though reluctant, as a woman she can only surrender to her father's will and governance. In fact, the Saracenic culture was by no means barbarous in the Middle Ages. In Middle English romances, the religious antagonism between the Saracens and the Christians is one of the most prevalent themes. The paradigm proclaimed by Sir Roland in *The Song of Roland* "The pagans are wrong and the Christians are right" (1015) persists throughout medieval English literature. However, in addition to the role as religious counterpart, in English romances alternative representations of the Saracens are not rare as might be supposed. In this article, I aim to examine how the Middle English romancer represents the alien culture in *Bevis of Hampton* embodied by the Saracen princess, Josian. I will contend that the romancer shows some traces of fair appraisal of the other culture and fair representations of the Saracens.

KEY WORDS: barbarian, the Saracen, the Saracenic culture, the Medieval English romance, *Bevis of Hampton*

* Received: April 22, 2011; Accepted: December 2, 2011
Chen-chih Liao, PhD, Department of Foreign Languages and Literature, National Sun Yat-sen University, Kaohsiung, Taiwan
E-mail: duckieliao@yahoo.com.tw

有文化的野蠻人：《罕布頓的畢維斯》中的薩拉遜公主

廖貞智*

摘　要

喬塞的《律師的故事》中羅馬公主康斯坦絲屈從於父皇的意旨，下嫁敘利亞，她稱此邦為「蠻夷國度」。此稱呼隱含了歐洲中心主義與對他方的誤解。其實，中世紀時期，敘利亞擁有高度伊斯蘭文明與文化。中古文學中對於薩拉遜人的描繪多以敵對的態度，貶抑的字眼或妖魔化的形象。中古英文傳奇《罕布頓的畢維斯》中卻記錄描繪了伊斯蘭文化的進步與成就。故事中的薩拉遜公主喬思安體現了此伊斯蘭文化。薩拉遜公主喬思安是一個有品德、有文化、有行動力的傳奇女主角，有別於其他的傳奇女性角色。此浪漫作者展現了對他方的理解與對他者的公正評論。

關鍵詞：野蠻人、薩拉遜人、伊斯蘭文化、中古英文傳奇、《罕布頓的畢維斯》

* 廖貞智，國立中山大學外文研究所博士。
E-mail: duckieliao@yahoo.com.tw

The misconceptions in the views of the Saracens in Middle English romances have aroused fervent discussion for the last three decades. Four Saracen stock figures in Middle English romances classified by Dorothee Metlitzki provide a model for use in the discussion of the characterization of the Saracens.[1] The four types can be treated as an implicit response to the binary paradigm proclaimed by Sir Roland in *The Song of Roland* that "Pagans are wrong and Christians are right" (1015) and reveal a universal condition that inappeasable enmity between the two poles is prevalent in Middle English romances. This article, however, aims to discuss an exception, indicating that enmity does not dominate all the authorial intention. Admiration and fair appraisal of the Saracen princess, Josian in *Bevis of Hampton* indicates the possibility of open-mindedness and tolerance.[2]

According to Metlitzki's analysis, the popular image of the medieval Saracen comprises four stock figures: the enamored princess, the converted Saracen, the defeated emir or sultan and the archetypal Saracen giant. These figures are depicted with a derogatory tone to serve as vehicles of fanatical crusading propaganda (160-61). In her discussion of the enamored princess, Metlitzki takes Floripa in *The Sultan of Babylon* and Josian in *Bevis of Hampton* to demonstrate the type**.** I agree with Metlitzki that Floripa is the model of the enamored princess; however, I would like to argue that Josian deserves further examination. This article argues that Josian is an exceptional Saracen character, violating the typology outlined by Metlitzki and that the originality of her depiction indicates a distinctive authorial interest.

The emphasis on the eastern settings and the Saracen princess indicates the distinctive authorial interest**.** First of all, most of the story takes place in heathen lands of the East, including Armenia, and Mombraunt as well as in

[1] The term "Saracen" carries a wide range of meanings and interpretations. In the anthropological sense, it refers to peoples of a variety of ethnic origins. "They were Greeks, Persians, Indians, Copts, Nestorians, Zoroastrians, and Jews, whole populations living in a vast expanse of territories extending from the Indian Ocean to the Atlantic which the spread of Islam from the heart of the Arabian Peninsula had engulfed with lightning speed" (Metlitzki 3). In fact, after the twelfth century, Saracens simply means Muslims, as Norman Daniel points out (*Islam and the West* 53). Varied as are the ethnic groups, the common feature among them is their religion: Islam. The peoples of different ethnic origin were shaped into "a new cultural unity that expressed itself in a new *Arabian* way of life" under the influence of their Arab conquerors (Metlitzki 3). Thereafter, a generic term, "Saracen," was used to refer to a culture, a way of life, rather than to peoples by medieval westerners.

[2] The spelling of Middle English is confusing and rarely consistent. According to Herzman's edition, the title of the romance is *Bevis of Hampton*, whereas in the text the hero's name is spelled as Beves. Therefore, in this article, when I refer to the romance per se, I employ *Bevis of Hampton*; when I refer to the hero, I use Beves.

the city of Damascus where the Saracen people dwell, believing in the trinity of Mahoun, Tervagaunt and Apolin. [3] The settings of the tale indicate the romancer's concern and interest in the East. Armenia, the homeland of the Saracen princess, is a setting with historical significance in being the Christian province nearest to the Muslim frontier. Mombraunt was one of the northern Seljuk emirates. It was an important port with a flourishing trade in luxurious oriental products, such as wine and, especially, spices. In this tale, Mombraunt is depicted a brilliant and rich city. As the romancer describes, "Mombraunt is a riche cité; / In al the londe of Sarsine / Nis ther non therto iliche / Ne be fele parte so riche" (2045-48). It is situated along the most important commercial trade routes connecting Lesser Armenia and the sea (Metlitzki 132-33). Damascus in Syria had been one of the most important cities of the Islamic empire since it had been seized by the Abbasids in 750. Furthermore, the places the palmer Beves visits are in the Saracen East, which was the territory of the Crusades, dominating the scene of romantic actions. The eastern locations evince a large proportion of authorial interest.

The eastern locations indicate not only interest in a newly thriving religion, along with a flourishing culture and strong military power, but also awareness that such a crescent religion presented a challenge to the Christian world. Since the eighth century, Islamic beliefs equipped with powerful military forces had largely expanded out of the Arabian Peninsula. The immensity of the Arab Empire under the reigns of the Umayyads and the Abbasids allowed for secure travel and commercial activities "from the confines of China to the pillars of Hercules, from the banks of the Indus to the Cilician Gates, from the Oxus to the shores of the Atlantic" (Arnold 89). Even after this vast Empire broke into separate caliphates in Spain, North Africa and in the Arabian Peninsula, the journey of the Muslim traveler was still facilitated by the brotherhood of Islam (89). The degree of security attests to the power of the Empire. Through travel and frequent commercial activities, different cultures encountered each other and were exchanged. In *Bevis of Hampton*, the advanced Islamic intellectual culture is presented and embodied

[3] The forms of the spelling of the trinity are also confusing. They are spelled differently in different romances and editions. I employ the forms of spelling according to Herzman's edition. The existence of a trinity of the gods of Islam was one of the common misconceptions of the medieval people about Islamic beliefs. Norman Daniel in his *Islam and the West: The Making of an Image* and *Heroes and Saracens* offers a profound discussion on the origin of the religious misconceptions and preconceptions of Saracens. Albert Hourani's *Islam in European Thought* also provides a lucid elaboration on the general views of European thought (7-60).

by the Saracen princess, Josian. In the Middle Ages, Arabian culture was flourishing whereas European culture seemed "'infantile,' provincial, and barbaric" (Metlitzki 11). European culture was just in germ. "When the ancient world fell apart into its separate parts, Islam became the chief inheritor of the science and philosophy of Greece, while the barbarian West was left with the literature of Rome" (Southern 8). Standing on Greece, the cultural giant, Islam achieved power, wealth, and maturity almost at a stroke, which must have jolted the West with fear.

Perhaps based on the awareness of the rise of Islamic culture, the romancer of *Bevis of Hampton* desires a different Saracen character. In Middle English romances, the Islamic people mostly play counterpart roles against the Christian knights. They are idolaters in religion, perfidious and lascivious in nature, and barbarous in culture. Most of the time, the main focus of the romances is on religious conflicts between Christians and Muslims and they are settled on the battlefield where the Saracens are either converted or killed. Hostility and a sense of religious intolerance register the basic tone regarding the Saracens. Negative representations of the Saracens and their false religious beliefs are the most popular narrative elements in medieval romances, especially in those which are redacted from the French *chansons*. The romancer of *Bevis* has different ideas about the Saracens. The characterization indicates that the romancer takes care of the hero as much as the heroine with much admiration rather than condemnation. Though the eponymous title signifies that the focus of the tale should be Beves, Josian plays an equal part to Beves. The romancer deals with her feelings and her encounters from the beginning to the end. She is always present, dominating the line of narration, taking action and winning rewards. The romancer of *Bevis* presents a heroine who transcends romantic conventions in terms of her intelligent mind and agency which have been cultivated since her childhood.

The way that the romancer introduces the Saracen princess indicates a distinctive characterization. After describing her "yong age" and her beauty, the romancer particularly mentions her "bright of mod," which is not a conventional feature of a heroine. According to *Middle English Dictionary*, [4] "mod" refers to "1a. (a) mind as opposed to body; also, translating L **animus, mens**: mind as that constituent of the soul possessing the faculties of knowing,

[4] The entry of definition is taken from the electronic version of the *MED*.

understanding, etc.; **mid ~**, in the mind or heart, intellectually."Apparently, Josian is a *lerned* rather than a *lewd* Saracen.[5] Conventionally, romance heroines are portrayed in terms of their outer appearances. Exceeding beauty makes heroines most adorable and desirable; however, intellectual abilities are rarely mentioned and praised. In the case of Custance in the *Man of Law's Tale*, Custance is known for her beauty and virtue, which instantly attracts the Sultan's desire for marriage. Grisildis' beauty and her virtue of patience in the *Clerk's Tale* are most remarkable and make her a good woman. An intellectual mind does not make a heroine worthy and desirable. However, the romancer of *Bevis* rewards Josian for her bright mind.

The intellectual strength of Josian can first be seen in the episode in which she saves Beves. After Beves kills fifty Saracens at a stroke, King Ermin, Josian's father, sentences Beves to death on hearing the news. Josian expresses her understanding of Beves as a person who must have needed to defend himself from the provocations of the Saracens. Proposing her "rede" to hear Beves' side of the story, Josian also appeals to parental love: "Ich praie, sire, for love o me, / Do bring that child before thee!" (663-64). Due to reason and sentiment, the king immediately accepts her advice. The result attests to Josian's speculation and proves Beves' innocence. This episode manifests two things: Josian's wit and the legitimacy of the king's governance.

Josian not only gives "rede" in the previous case, but also in the following case of politics in which King Brademond asks for Josian's hand by threatening King Ermin. It is apparently that the king would not like his daughter to be wed to King Brademond. But if he were not to allow it, he would have to face military advances from the unwelcome suitor. This case is not only about the marriage of his daughter but also about the security of his kingdom. It turns out to be an international crisis. At the outset, King Ermin assembles his knights and desires advice. When no one is able to propose workable strategies, Josian advises: "Be Mahoun, sire! Wer Beves a knight, / A wolde defende thee wel inough" (934-35). The king heeds her. He dubs Beves a knight, giving him a shield, a sword named Morgelay, three eagles, a banner, and a horse named Arondel (970-88). First, Beves defeats King Redefoun, King Bradmond's ally, and then Bradmond himself. As Bradmond

[5] Rana Kabbani remarks on Josian's lust and her slavish devotion. At this point, Kabbani virtually overlooks the positive representation of the heroine. Josian is well-educated and her learning saves herself and the hero several times.

begs for mercy, Beves spares his life and extracts Bradmond's promise to pay homage to King Ermin (1062-76). Josian's advice achieves three goals: Beves is knighted, the unwelcome suitor is defeated and the kingdom is rid of its military threat. Both individual and public profits are obtained. Josian is not kept away from public affairs and wins rewards by her wit. "The romance," as Myra Seaman observes, "does not punish her for speaking out at a moment traditionally protected from feminine influence, but instead it praises and rewards Josian for such aggressive expression" (60). The reward indicates the admiration of the romancer for Josian's aggressive and masterful nature. The romancer's depiction of Josian's numerous encounters and adventures display an underlying approval of her unconventional character by necessarily testing her and deliberately proving her worth in various ways.

The source of agency for Josian is her education. Her nurturing empowers her to think and act independently with confidence and courage. When Josian is forced to wed King Yvor of Mombraunt, a defiant suitor, Josian ingests some herbs to make herself appear leprous so that the king desires her no more.

> While she was in Ermonie,
> Bothe fysik and sirgirie
> She hadde lerned of meisters grete
> Of Boloyne the gras and of Tulete,
> That she knew erbes mani and fale,
> To make bothe boute and bale.
> On she tok up of the grounde,
> That was an erbe of meche mounde,
> To make a man in semlaunt there,
> A foule mesel alse if a were.
> Whan she hadde ete that erbe, anon
> To the Sarasines she gan on,
> And wente hem forth withoute targing
> Toward Yvore, the riche king. (3671-3684)

When brought before King Yvor, she is "in semlaunt and in ble / A foule mesel on to se" (3688-89). The King, shocked and frightened, no longer desires her and immediately casts her into a far-away castle under the guard of her treacherous servant, Ascopard. The king's reaction is tempered with a tinge of comical horror, in which Josian, the romancer and the audience all takes part.

The episode is interesting because firstly Josian, a pagan princess, ingests some herbs to appear leprous and thus become undesirable in order to keep her fidelity to Beves. Her faithfulness denies the misconception that pagan women are adulterous and lascivious. Secondly, she saves herself with the scientific knowledge which she learned when she was in Armenia. As a female, she is not secluded from intellectual development. Thirdly, it manifests that medicine was at the core of scientific studies in Islam in the Middle Ages. During the first centuries of Islam, Muslims learned and translated scientific authorities from the Greek. By 900 the science of medicine was cultivated by Muslims throughout the Islamic Empire. Muslims added substantially to the achievement of the Greeks in the theory and art of healing disease; they founded hospitals, devised new drugs and stocked libraries with books containing detailed and accurate clinical observations. They also founded medical schools, the curricula of which included instruction in physics, chemistry and botany as well as in anatomy and pathology (Saunders 193). The first Islamic medical author was *al Rāzī*, whose greatest medical work is *al-Hāwī* (*Comprehensive Book*, in English). The book was translated into Latin in 1279. It was reprinted many times, running to five editions by 1542. The book has retained considerable influence on European medicine since then (Meyerhof 324-25). Medical accomplishments by Muslims must have been transmitted to England. Josian knows both good and bad herbs, good as medicine and bad as poison. The romancer empowers Josian with the knowledge necessary to protect herself from sexual aggression.

Fourthly, Josian is educated in physic and medicine by great teachers from "Boloyne" and "Tulete." According to Eugen Kölbing's annotation in *The Romance of Sir Beues of Hamtoun*, "Boloyne" refers to Bologna in Italy (336). In 1088, the city founded the *Studio*, which now is the oldest existing university in Europe. It was the center of intellectual learning, attracting scholars from throughout Europe. Saint Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109) and John of Salisbury (1115-80) both studied in Paris and Bologna (Swabey 18). "Tulete" refers to Toledo in Spain, which was the center of the most important Moorish culture in Europe at the time of the Umayyad dynasty. Even after its conquest by Alfonso VI in May 1085, Toledo was a center of transmission of Arabic culture (Metlitzki 10-12). The city played an important role in the study of the *Artes Arabum* (Meyerhof 346). "The schools of Toledo

attracted scholars from all parts of Europe, including England and Scotland" (Trend 28). Therefore, Josian's education in the sciences by teachers from Bologna and Toledo indicates that a brilliant education has been instilled into the pagan princess and that it empowers her to act.

The heroine is not only nurtured by a study of the sciences, but also of the arts. The art of minstrelsy she learned in Armenia saves her life and supports her in her adventures. As Josian and Saber wander in search of both Beves and Terry, Saber falls ill during their stay in Greece and Josian earns a living for them by minstrelsy:

> While Josian was in Ermonie,
> She hadde lerned of minstralcie,
> Upon a fithele for to play
> Staumpes, notes, garibles gay;
> Tho she kouthe no beter red,
> Boute in to the bourgh anon she yed
> And boughte a fithele, so saith the tale,
> For fourti panes of one menestrale;
> And alle the while that Saber lay,
> Josian everiche a day
> Yede aboute the cite withinne,
> Here sostenaunse for to winne. (3905-16)

The skills that Josian learned in Armenia indicate several things. Firstly, the court of Armenia might have provided patronage to wandering minstrels. The king might have been a patron of minstrels or one himself. In medieval history, members of royalty not only patronized minstrels but also practiced minstrelsy themselves.[6] In such environment, Josian might have become a patron and a lover of minstrelsy in her royal family and thereby acquired the art.

Secondly, minstrelsy is a sophisticated art entailing the use of multiple

[6] In 1031, the territory of Muslim Spain was divided into twenty petty kingdoms. They encouraged arts as one of the traditional manifestations of royal power. Poets thrived in the courts as well as in the towns and villages. The *taifa* kings were literate and able to participate personally in intellectual contest. Some of them were poets as Seville al-Mutamid (1068-1092) and certain others composed a history of their own fall such as Granada Abd Allah (1073-1090) (Reilly 121). It was commonplace that members of royalty were deeply involved in the art of minstrelsy.

artistic skills. One has to learn musical notes, the way to perform a musical instrument, story- telling skills, and dance in order to master minstrelsy. As the occasion and the patrons or audience demanded, the minstrel may have also included the playing of different kinds of musical instruments, magic, juggling or even acrobatics (Quinn 1). It is not an easy profession, but Josian masters the skills of minstrelsy well enough so that she is able to support Saber and herself by them. Her narrative talent and training recalls Shahrāzāh in the *Arabian Nights*. With her narrative talent, Shahrāzāh saves not only herself but also other women in the country; at the same time, she proves that women can be intelligent as well as faithful. Thirdly, financial dependence often requires that women be subjugated to the will of men. That Josian is able to sustain herself proves her economic independence, which ability once more exceeds the social expectations of women in the Middle Ages. Fourthly, the episode indicates the historical reality that a sophisticated culture flowered in the southern courts of Spain in the eleventh century and influenced the troubadour tradition (Swabey 58).[7] Finally, this episode implies the validity of one of Josian's virtues: she is willing to help people in need. She does not abandon Saber in his illness, but takes care of him for half a year.

Equipped with such training and education, Josian acts differently from other heroines in romances. She is confident, active and courageous, and always generous. All of these virtues are manifested in matters of love and marriage. Pursuing love, Josian always takes the initiative. In the Middle Ages, "being able to marry for love," as Elizabeth Archibald points out, "was no doubt an important fantasy element in a society in which so many marriages were dynastic, arranged for financial and political advantage, and in which betrothals in infancy were quite common" (163). Josian refuses to adopt the conventional trajectory of love and shows her independence of mind.

Josian maintains her autonomy in the matters of love and marriage. First, in choosing the one to love, she does not fall in love with her would-be lover at first sight like Floripas does in *The Sultan of Babylon*. Josian instead carefully observes Beves as a person and as a knight. In the aforementioned episode in which Beves kills fifty Saracens out of self-defense, Josian expresses her idea of Beves to her father: "Sire, ich wot wel in me thought, /

[7] According to John Jay Parry's analysis, the tradition of French troubadours was influenced by the culture of Muslim Spain, where many of the elements of minstrelsy could be found before they appeared among Christians (7).

That thine men ne slough he nought, / Be Mahoun ne be Tervagaunt, / Boute hit were himself defendaunt!" (657-60). Later, in the episode of the boar hunt, Josian witnesses how the envious steward ambushes Beves in order to deprive him of the honor of beheading the boar and how Beves hides the truth. Josian admires Beves' courageous and virtuous deeds and falls deeply in love with him.

Once having fallen in love, Josian shows her passion towards the beloved and makes whatever sacrifices are necessary to obtain Beves. She first confesses her love to Beves:

> "Bevis, lemman, 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." (1093-97)

When turned down with the excuse of religious difference, Josian weeps bitterly and promises to convert immediately:

> "Men saith," she seide, "in olde riote,
> That wimmannes bolt is sone schote.
> Forghem me, that ichave misede,
> And ich wile right now to mede
> And ich wile right now to mede
> Min false godes al forsake
> And Christendom for thee love take!" (1191-96)

Conversion is the ultimate strategy to obtain love. In the highly religious milieu of the Middle Ages, conversion meant change in almost everything in the whole way of life. That Josian willingly forsakes her religion for love seems to indicate that Christianity wins and the religious difference is harmoniously dealt with. However, Christianity is not mentioned from then on until Beves and his son Guy convert all of the Armenians towards the end of the romance. Christianity, in fact, plays only a small role in this romance. Conversion is simply a strategy for Josian to obtain Beves. In the following adverse situations, Josian keeps herself well and sound not by observing her new Christian beliefs as Beves prays to Christ in the dungeon and

miraculously escapes, but by use of her wiles learned in childhood.

Once her love is accepted, Josian endeavors to show fidelity to Beves. King Ermin is falsely informed that Beves has seduced her daughter. He assigns Beves a task to deliver King Brademond a letter in which King Ermin commands that Beves be dealt with. When asking of Beves' whereabouts, Josian is informed that Beves has returned to England and married the daughter of the King of England. Josian, first weeping and lamenting, quickly recognizes that "Naddestow me never forsake, / Yif sum tresoun hit nadde make" (1465-66). Josian is correct in her interpretation of the reason for Beves' absence. In fact, Beves is kept in a dungeon for seven years while at the same time Josian is forced to wed King Yvor of Mombraunt in subjection to her father's will. In the Middle Ages, marriage was often managed according to the mutual benefits of the male relatives. Josian encounters the same fate. Josian becomes the queen but she keeps her virginity by use of a magic ring for Beves. For the following seven years, she gives alms to palmers every day in order to learn about the whereabouts of Beves.

Apart from exercising her wit and ingenuity in matters of love and marriage, Josian also uses them when in distress. She does not wait for delivery by the hero but acts instantly. Once Josian and Beves are reunited, Beves returns to England to claim his heritage. In his absence, Beves assigns Ascopard the task of protecting Josian. However, the perfidious giant fails to carry out the task so that Josian is forced to wed Miles. Miles will have his wish fulfilled but Josian stops him by saying that:

> Nought, thigh 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,
> I trow, he is nought now here,
> That schel be me weddefere!" (3163-68)

Then, when they do have the espousals (3176), she successfully delays the time of consummation; meanwhile, she sends a letter to inform Beves of the situation. When Beves is unable to deliver her in time, Josian takes action on her own. At the moment of consummation, Josian asks Miles to keep everyone away from them for the sake of their privacy. She then throws a riding knot round his neck and hangs him to the rail of the bed (3220-25). She

is thus successful in preserving herself. Dieter Mehl comments on this burlesque scene and suggests that "the poet had no very subtle sense of humour" for this scene paints "an unfavourable picture of Beves's future spouse" (217). It is burlesque in that the lust-stricken bridegroom, instead of satiating his desire, is slain by his bride. However, far from being presented in an unfavorable light, Josian is shown as admirable in the way that she shows ingenuity and bravery to preserve herself sound and well.

Some comparisons between Josian and Christian female characters will shed more light on the exceptional characterization of Josian. Educated, active, resourceful and powerful Christian female characters like Josian are not unusual in romance, but they only play minor roles. According to Archibald's analysis, female characters in romance can be proximately divided into two groups: the heroines and minor female characters. The heroines in romance are beautiful, weak and passive, waiting for delivery or return of the heroes whereas minor female characters are often "powerful in some way, knowledgeable, resourceful or enterprising" (158). Minor female characters may be maids, fairies, or enchantresses**,** but never inactive heroines, only whom heroes desire to win by prowess and honor. Maureen Fries classifies female characters in the Arthurian tradition into three types: heroines, female heroes, and counter-heroes. Fries' definition of heroines is exactly the same as Archibald's. Fries' female heroes and counter-heroes are Archibald's minor female characters. Arthurian female heroes "consciously play female parts to effect transformation of their male-dominant world, but they always act only for knightly benefit," whereas counter-heroes "openly refuse to be seen in womanly supportive roles in what is essentially a male drama and attempt to change their woman-hostile world by direct and not indirect action" (Fries 72). Most of the females in romance are customized, whereas Josian is tailored.

According to convention, romance heroines are characterized by several virtues. First of all, the heroine must be the most gorgeous female of all. Beauty is the most prominent virtue of the heroine. Moreover, the heroine is expected to be passive, fragile, silent and sedentary. Those four characteristics are intertwined in the depiction of Christian woman characters. An individual female character may possess all four of them. In general, the depiction of heroines in romance manifests certain implications and values. Firstly, women are ranked under men. Secondly, women are supposed to be beautiful but at the same time are entirely inactive. They are a reward or prize for the heroes'

martial prowess. Thirdly, men admire powerful women but do not want to marry them (Archibald 156-58). In romance, powerful women play only minor roles. Josian, unconventionally, is gorgeous, active, and versatile. Most of all, she wins her happy ending: that is to live happily with her beloved hero ever after.

Conventionally, the romance heroine is not constantly present, but Josian is. "The heroine's characteristic role is," as Archibald notes, "absence: either the hero goes away from her home, and the thought of reunion with her inspires him to great deeds… or else she is abducted" (158). Sometimes, the heroine initiates the hero to go off and prove himself, but once the hero is initiated into adventures, the heroine remains in the background. "Romance, as a depiction of the warrior class's idealization of itself, actually centers upon male heroes and not female love-objects" (Fries 63). Males are the agents of the action and females are the instruments. After Rymenhild in *King Horn* inspires Horn to win his spurs, she remains passive. Horn returns in time to save her from an unwanted marriage which she is powerless to avoid. The marriage with Rymenhild is the reward for Horn's martial achievement. Felice, the daughter of the Earl of Warwick in *Stanzaic Guy of Warwick*, initiates Guy's chivalric career and their love affair. However, after their marriage, Guy is suddenly struck by remorse for his past deeds at arms and is inspired to go on a pilgrimage of atonement. Guy completely disregards Felice's protestations and leaves her behind at home. From then on, Felice is absent from the foreground. In *The Squire of Low Degree*, the princess overhears the young squire's soliloquy on his hopeless passion for her; she sends for him and initiates him to prove himself. After that, the princess becomes invisible.

Heroines are not only absent but also weak: they are never able to make decisions or take action. Emaré in the eponymous tale remains fragile when encountering the fate of exile. She is submissive to man's will. So is Constance in Chaucer's *Man of Law's Tale* in which her marriage to the Syrian Sultan is in accordance with her father's will. Belesant in *The Romance of Duke Rowland and Sir Otuell of Spayne* silently complies with her father's will to marry Otuel in reward for his conversion. The only line she addresses is "ȝee, als mot I thee!" (641) when Otuel asks her "arte, þou payed of me?" (640). Mostly, heroines are reticent when facing their humiliating fates. They have to wait in patience. Enide in Chrétien's *Erec and Enide* is an anomaly. Enide is forced to roam and commanded to say no word under any

circumstances without Erec's permission. She, however, defies the medieval expectations of a wife's submission to her husband's command and warns Erec of danger and treachery actively. Her outspokenness can be considered as "a loyal and loving *dis*obedience" (Fries 65). Though she is disobedient, her affection and good judgment are proven and Erec assures her that he knows her love is perfect. However, after the assurance, Enide is left behind and Erec continues on with his adventures alone.

Minor female characters are molded differently. Whereas heroines are sedentary, minor female characters roam freely. It is exceptional that Josian travels for so long and so far. In *Ywain and Gawain*, the heroine, Laudine is bound to patriarchal custom. She is tied to the magic fountain of her patrimony. Laudine's resourceful maid, Lunette, first talks Laudine into marrying Ywain; later when Ywain fails to keep his promise to return within one year, Lunette travels to Arthur's court to denounce Ywain for deserting his wife. At the end, Lunette aids Ywain in the reconciliation with his wife. Her wit and her physical mobility provide a stark contrast to Laudine's passivity and inactiveness.

Powerful, outspoken, and resourceful minor female characters such as Lunette are not rare as might be supposed. In the Arthurian tradition, Morgan le Fay can be seen as the most exceptional female character. She is a counter-hero, "a fluid figure, always at least double and usually multiple in her manifestations" (Fries 68). She appears to be alluring as well as revolting. She may be the beautiful healer, the beautiful witch or the ugly witch (Friedman 267). When she is beautiful, she is a healing nurse but when she perpetrates some malign schemes, she becomes progressively ugly. In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Morgan le Fay becomes an ugly hag who plots a scheme to humiliate the Arthurian court. Her ugliness can be taken as an indication of her evil nature and sinful purposes. It is striking that her entire plot is so finely designed that the Arthurian court cannot help but fall into the trap. The depiction of the plot deliberately suggests her wit and ingenuity. Comparatively speaking, Morgan's wit and ingenuity incurs condemnation whereas Josian's wins admiration and reward.

Strong-minded female characters such as Josian are not rare in romance. They know what they want and strongly persist in their efforts to achieve it. In *Sir Perceval of Galles*, the wife of Sir Perceval senior, Acheflour, is a strong mother, who raises her son alone in the forest. After Sir Perceval is slain in

combat by the Red Knight, Acheflour makes a pledge that her son must never undertake a chivalric career like his father.

> And the lady hase gyffen a gyfte,
> Holde if scho may,
> That scho schall never mare wone
> In stede, with hir yonge sone,
> Ther dedes of armes schall be done,
> By nyghte ne be daye. (163-68)

Acheflour deplores the chivalric values and deliberately forsakes all property and the splendid life of the court. Her seclusion evinces her criticism of courtly life and her independence in choosing her own life.

Her way of educating her son suggests a world of women and women's values. There is no male influence in the early life of the young Perceval. The mother deliberately secludes her son from the chivalric world. When the young son asks about the "Scottes spere," the mother replies "It es a dart doghty; / In the wodde I it fande" (203-34). The mother educates her son as a hunter rather as a knight. The young Perceval becomes expert with the dart and ignorant of chivalry and the courtly world. When he enters the "real" world, he stubbornly adheres to Acheflour's advice in all things. Perceval's foolish and awkward reactions evoke laughter instead of admiration. Acheflour is a woman of principle, decision and courage; however, her devotion is not rewarded. She is twice abandoned by her son in his pursuit of further adventures and achievements and she roams wildly in the woods obsessed with thoughts of his death. As Patricia Rose concludes, Acheflour is "the instrument of his [the young Perceval] upbringing and the cause of his naiveté" (454). Indeed, most of the romance heroines are molded to serve as instruments. Josian is also a woman of principle, decision and courage, but she is not only an instrument.

Compared to Christian female characters, Josian appears to be a beautiful heroine and at the same time possesses the characteristics of minor female characters. Knowledge is power. Josian is empowered by her education both from her family and from her training in court. In the episodes mentioned above, Josian's unusual character and her upbringing result help bring about favorable conclusions. Her pagan identity gives the romancer some freedom to create a different kind of heroine. It is not for the audience to

rationalize that her assertiveness results from "her inherent difference as well as 'less civilized' upbringing and surroundings," which Myra Seaman identifies as Josian's nature (73). Josian is not brought up in a "less civilized" culture. On the contrary, the romancer displays his interest in many aspects of the flourishing Islamic culture; he illustrates his understanding of the alien culture, its settings, customs, and intellectual learning. How Josian conforms to the concepts regarding Islamic women in reality is not the authorial intention. The romancer desires to create a different kind of heroine and rewards her by her differences. The romancer rewards his heroine with success in fulfilling her desires, in protecting herself successfully, in being reunited with her husband and sons, and in living happily ever after with her husband till the day of their death. If Beves matures only gradually through the course of various adventures, Josian with her bright mind proves her wit, her skill and her versatility in overwhelming adversity. She deserves her fame, the fulfillment of her desires and the celebration of her intellectual powers.

It would be easy to find negative examples in Middle English romances of how Christians view the Saracens as "the other." The Saracen princesses are "the other" of "the other," for they are not only inferior to Christians in religion but also subjugated to men by gender. However, in this tale, the romancer creates a favorable pagan heroine. Through his depiction of this heroine, the romancer shows his admiration and interest in foreign peoples and thereby raises himself above the contemporary hostile textual attitudes. His admiration and interest suggest the possibility of surpassing the influence of contemporary ideology, to view "the other" as what they are, and even to recognize the merits of "the other." As Albrecht Classen concludes in his discussion of the character type of the Saracen princess in medieval German literature,

> the topos of the Saracen princess was at times structured on the basis of different ideological agendas which actually turned the traditional paradigm upside down, idealizing the heathens and singing a praise of their beauty, strength, and courtly behavior. (291)

The image of Josian is created on the basis of a different ideology which exceeds contemporary attitudes towards foreigners and their culture. The existence of alternative representations of the Saracens manifests the

possibility of tolerance. As Cary Nerderman defines, "tolerance" is a mentality to protect and promote a full range of differences among individuals and groups (1). Nerderman further points out that the chronology of the development of tolerance does not date from the late seventeenth century, but much earlier, from the middle of the twelfth century. Ideas of tolerance can be found among "disparate and even directly opposed conceptual frameworks" (5). Toleration was a more widespread phenomenon than might be supposed in the Middle Ages. However, the idea of toleration is by no means perfect. The vantage point for one to claim toleration, the latent endeavor to incorporate diversity and the sentiment of condescension are implicitly linked to the idea of toleration. Though the idea of toleration is imperfect, it, at least, suggests open-mindedness and positive intentionality. This "other" image of Josian vindicates the validity of the "cultural barbarian." That is, barbarian as the other, yet not the regular type of barbarian.

Works Cited

Primary Texts:

De Troyes, Chrétien. *Arthurian Romances.* Trans. D. D. R. London: Dent, 1987. Print.

Four Romances of England: King Horn, Havelok the Dane, Bevis of Hampton, Athelson. Eds. Ronald B. Herzman, Graham Drake and Eve Salisbury. Kalamazoo, MI: Pub. for TEAMS in association with the U of Rochester by Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan U, 1999. Print.

King Horn; Floriz and Blauncheflur; The Assumption of Our Lady. Ed. George McKnight H. EETS, O. S. no. 14. London; New York: Pub. for the Early English Text Society by the Oxford UP, 1998. Print.

The Riverside Chaucer. Ed. F. N. Robinson. 3rd ed. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987. Print.

The Romance of Sir Beues of Hamtoun. Ed. from Six Manuscripts and the Old Printed Copy, with Introduction, Notes, and Glossary by Eugen Kölbing, ed. 3 vols. EETS, E.S. nos. 46, 48, and 65. London: N. Trübner & Co., 1885. Rochester: Boydell & Brewer Ltd., 2000. Print.

Sentimental and Humorous Romances: Floris and Blanceflour, Sir Degrevant, The Squire of Low Degree, The Tournament of Tottenham, and The Feast of Tottenham. Ed. Erik Kooper. Kalamazoo, MI: Pub. for TEAMS in association with the U of Rochester by Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan U, 2006. Print.

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight. Ed. J. R. R. Tolkien and E. V. Gordon. 2nd ed. Rev. ed. Norman Davis. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1967. Print.

Sir Perceval of Galles and Ywain and Gawain. Ed. Mary Flowers Braswell. Kalamazoo, MI: Pub. for TEAMS in association with the U of Rochester by Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan U, 1995. Print.

The Song of Roland: an Analytical Edition. Ed. Gerard J. Brault. 2 vols. University Park and London: The Pennsylvania State UP, 1978. Print.

Stanzaic Guy of Warwick. Ed. Alison Wiggins. Kalamazoo, MI: Pub. for TEAMS in association with the U of Rochester by Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan U, 2004. Print.

The Sege off Melayne and The Romance of Duke Rowland and Sir Otuell of Spayne. Ed. Sidney J. Herrtage. Woodbridge, Suffolk ; Rochester, N.Y. :

Distributed for the Early English Text Society by Boydell & Brewer, 2002. Print.

Secondary Texts:

Archibald, Elizabeth. "Women and Romance." *Companion to Middle English Romance.* Ed. Henk Aertsen and Alasdair A. Macdonald. Amsterdam: VU UP, 1990. 153-169. Print.

Arnold, Sir T. W. "Chapter V: Arab Travellers and Merchants, A. D. 1000-1500." *Travel and Travellers of the Middle Ages*. Ed. Arthur Percival Newton. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd., 1926. 88-103. Print.

Classen, Albrecht. "Confrontation with the Foreign World of the East: Saracen Princesses in Medieval German Narratives." *Orbis Litterarum* 53 (1998): 277-295. *HUSO.* Web. 5 Oct. 2010.

Daniel, Norman. *Heroes and Saracens.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1984. Print.

——. *Islam and the West: The Making of an Image*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1960. Print.

Friedman, Albert B. "Morgan le Fay in *Sir Gawain and The Green Knight*." *Speculum* 35.2 (1960): 260-74. *JSTOR*. Web. 1 Feb. 2011.

Fries, Maureen. "Female Heroes, Heroines, and Counter Heroes: Images of Women in Arthurian Tradition." *Arthurian Women: A Casebook.* Ed. Thelma S. Fenster. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1996. Print.

Hourani, Albert. *Islam in European Thought.* Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991. Print.

Mehl, Dieter. *The Middle English Romances of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries.* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1968. Print.

Metlitzki, Dorothee. *The Matter of Araby in Medieval England.* New Haven: Yale UP, 1977. Print.

Meyerhof, Max. "Science and Medicine." *The Legacy of Islam.* Ed. Sir Thomas Arnold and Alfred Guillaume. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1931. 311-55. Print.

"Mod." *Middle English Dictionary.* Ed. Frances McSparran, et al. 18 December 2001. U of Michigan. Web. 10 September 2010.

Nederman, Cary J. and John Christian Laursen, eds. *Difference and Dissent: Theories of Toleration in Medieval Political Thought.* Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1996. Print.

Parry, John Jay, trans. *The Art of Courtly Love.* By Andreas Capellanus. New

York: Columbia UP, 1990. Print.
Quinn, William A. and Audley S. Hall. *Jongleur.* Washington: UP of America, 1982. Print.
Reilly, Bernard F. *The Medieval Spains*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993. Print.
Rose, Patricia. "Acheflour: Wise Woman or Foolish Female?" *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 46.4 (2004): 452-72. *EBSCOhost.* Web. 24. Feb. 2011.
Saunders, J. J. *History of Medieval Islam.* London ; New York : Routledge, 1996. Print.
Seaman, Myra. "Engendering Genre in Middle English Romance: Performing the Feminine in *Sir Beves of Hamtoun*." *Studies in Philology* 98.1 (2001), 49-75. *JSTOR*. Web. 16 Aug. 2010.
Southern, R. W. *Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages***.** Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1962. Print.
Swabey, Ffiona. *Eleanor of Aquitaine, Courtly Love, and the Troubadours.* Westport: Greenwood Press, 2004. Print.
Trend, J. B. "Spain and Portugal." *The Legacy of Islam.* Ed. Sir Thomas Arnold and Alfred Guillaume. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1931. 1-39. Print.