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**Reading Women: Models of Behaviour and Womanhood
in the Auchinleck Manuscript**

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BA Hons, M.Litt.**

**Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English Language**

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Abstract

That the Auchinleck manuscript is a book that was accessed by fourteenth century female readers has been posited, but not thoroughly explored in recent scholarship. Through a significant amount of work, literary historians have established that texts written for female readers in fourteenth century England focus on the morality of women, often taking on an exemplary role designed to shape and improve female behaviour. These historians have also revealed that female readers and listeners were a significant driving force in the development of Middle English as a literary language. The result of this research has deepened our understanding of what women's books looked like, and thus can be used to establish the likelihood of a female reader for medieval manuscripts whose intended audience is uncertain. Using the codicological work of previous Auchinleck critics as a start point, this thesis affirms that the manuscript was a woman's book by demonstrating that it fits stylistic models common in late medieval English books that were written for a female reader. It will then add to this discussion by undertaking a feminist historicist reading of a select group of Auchinleck texts, revealing that the manuscript provides a variety of detailed models of female behaviour, which would both entertain and educate a hypothetical female reader or listener.

The first chapter of analysis examines texts which engage with rape and/or abduction as a major plot point. It examines the legal history of *raptus* law in order to establish the understanding of sexual assault held by the medieval audience. The chapter also provides an examination of the language of rape in non-legal sources, highlighting the difficulties of establishing what a literary rape is. Using this context, the chapter examines three texts (*The Legend of Pope Gregory*, *Sir Degaré* and *Floris and Blancheflour*) and reveals that there is a consistent lack of sympathy with the victims of rape, coupled with praise for the one woman who escapes it. Rape is used as a punishment for behaviour that deviates from the social norm. Reading these texts as a group develops a nuanced understanding of the role of female consent in protecting social norms, and this provides a model of behaviour for female readers.

'Good Wives and Dangerous Distractions', the second chapter of analysis, examines texts which offer models of wifhood within booklets one and three of the manuscript. It examines the legal nature of female consent in fourteenth century English marriage law, as well as providing a survey of the literary sources which informed opinion about wives at this particular time. Using this research as context, it examines three texts

(*The King of Tars*, *The Life of Adam and Eve* and *The Seven Sages of Rome*) to reveal three distinct models of wifely behaviour: the obedient, the disobedient, and the evil. This chapter focuses predominantly on the disobedient and/or evil wife, as there are comparatively few examples of the obedient wife as a result of the influence of literary sources which predate the manuscript. This chapter also demonstrates how, with particular reference to *The Seven Sages of Rome*, the case for reading each text in manuscript context is made through the layering of models of behaviour, which allows all three texts to create significant and complex examples of how women should behave within marriage.

The final chapter of analysis, 'Secularised Saints and Stripping Virgins', discusses the models of behaviour depicted by Saint Margaret, Saint Katherine and the Virgin Mary. It discusses four texts, the lives of both virgin saints, *The Clerk Who Would See the Virgin* and *The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin*. Beginning with a discussion of the popularity of religious and devotional literature amongst female readers and listeners in fourteenth century England, this chapter considers how the small changes in the Auchinleck redactions of both Margaret and Katherine's lives adjusts textual meaning to emphasise the required balance between the power faith grants women and the need to be subservient to patriarchal systems. It also discusses the important role of motherhood through *Seynt Mergrete* and the two Virgin Mary tales, which praise Mary for her unique status as both virgin and mother. After a final discussion on the dangers of the male gaze, expanded from that which is observed in 'Rape Instigators and Abduction Victims', the chapter concludes with a discussion of the necessity of including these religious texts in order to provide positive models of behaviour for the female reader.

In conclusion, this thesis presents two seemingly disparate Auchinleck booklets as a microcosm of the entire manuscript. It demonstrates that the separate narratives included in each booklet are intertwined, and that interpreting the meaning and purpose of each text is dependent on the models and anti-models surrounding each text. A full picture of how each text could have spoken to the female reader cannot be grasped without examining the manuscript context of each individual piece. Finally, the thesis suggests that the hypothetical reader or listener of the Auchinleck manuscript was not likely to be the merchant suggested by Ralph Hanna, but rather the daughter(s) he wished to educate.

Contents

Abstract	2
Acknowledgements	6
Chapter One – Introduction.....	7
Chapter Two – Rape Instigators and Victims of Abduction	44
Introduction.....	44
The Legend of Pope Gregory.....	66
Sir Degaré	84
Floris and Blancheflour.....	96
Conclusion	103
Chapter Three – Good Wives and Dangerous Distractions	108
Introduction.....	108
The King of Tars.....	126
The Life of Adam and Eve.....	137
The Seven Sages of Rome	146
Conclusion	163
Chapter Four – Secularised Saints and Stripping Virgins.....	165
Introduction.....	165
Seynt Mergrete.....	169
Seynt Katerine.....	182
The Clerk Who Would See the Virgin.....	190
The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin	194
Conclusion	201
Conclusion	204
Appendix One	210
Appendix Two.....	212
Appendix Three.....	213
The Legend of Pope Gregory.....	213
Appendix Four	215
<i>Sir Degaré</i>	215
Appendix Five.....	216
<i>Floris and Blancheflour</i>	216
Appendix Six.....	217

<i>The King of Tars</i>	217
Appendix Seven	218
The Life of Adam and Eve.....	218
Appendix Eight	219
The Seven Sages of Rome	219
Empress.....	219
Bancillas:.....	219
Empress.....	220
Anxulles	220
Empress.....	220
Lentyllous:	220
Empress.....	221
Malquydras	221
Empress.....	221
Catonne	222
Empress.....	222
Gessee	222
Empress.....	223
Maxious.....	223
Appendix Nine	226
Seynt Mergrete.....	226
Appendix Ten.....	228
<i>Seynt Katerine</i>	228
Appendix Eleven.....	230
<i>The Clerk Who Would See the Virgin</i>	230
Appendix Twelve	231
<i>The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin</i>	231
Bibliography.....	233
Manuscripts.....	233
Primary Sources	234
Secondary Sources	237

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For Eevee.

Chapter One – Introduction

The identity of the intended audience of the Auchinleck manuscript is an unsolved mystery that has attracted hypotheses from many critics. This thesis will discuss the likelihood that that this intended audience could have been a woman or a group of women. Numerous texts in medieval England were tailored to meet the requirements of specific female readers. I shall argue the collection of texts found in National Library of Scotland Advocates manuscript 19.2.1, commonly referred to as the Auchinleck manuscript, is, if not specifically composed and compiled for the female reader, extremely well suited as a regulatory guide for the female audience. In 1992 Felicity Riddy made a similar proposal in a conference paper when she called Auchinleck “a woman’s book”, that is a book that was intended for the female reader but not necessarily written by a woman.¹ Her suggestion was, however, never published and has not yet been taken up by critics. I will undertake a critical feminist reading of select texts from the manuscript in order to reveal a demonstrable interest in female conduct that is present across each individual text. By exploring representations of female sexuality and conduct, Auchinleck addresses the perceived needs of virgins, wives, and widows. Through research into the ways the manuscript guides the female audience, I posit that the Auchinleck manuscript was written to be a conduct book for women. By considering this research alongside current scholarship on women’s reading practices in late medieval England, this thesis will consider the possibility that National Library of Scotland Advocates Manuscript 19.2.1. was intended for a female reader or a group of female readers.²

The manuscript has generated critical acclaim for a few of its romances and for its now disproved association with Chaucer, an association that has proved difficult to dislodge.³ As the manuscript is one of the earliest extant compilations written entirely in English, it has been examined for what it reveals about the status of Middle English as literary language in England in the first half of the fourteenth century. Palaeographers have studied the manuscript and theorised about its compilation and what this may reveal about the patronage and readership of manuscripts in the late middle ages. Literary scholars have

¹ Felicity Riddy, ‘The Auchinleck Manuscript: A Woman’s Book?’, paper given at ‘Romance in Medieval England’ conference, Bristol, 1992.

² As discussed in detail below, we cannot be certain that this manuscript was read silently by an individual, read by numerous individuals, or read aloud to a group. Throughout this thesis I use the words reader, listener, hearer, and audience interchangeably in try and encompass the various ways that the narratives within the Auchinleck manuscript could have been interacted with.

³ David Burnley & Alison Wiggins, ‘The Auchinleck Manuscript’, <http://auchinleck.nls.uk> [accessed 6th December 2016].

Chapter One – Introduction

also approached Auchinleck, but they commonly remove the text they wish to study (usually a romance) from the manuscript, examining it as a single item, rather than a component of a larger object. I propose that examining the Auchinleck narratives within the context of the manuscript will reveal a thematic coherence consistent throughout the entire manuscript; one which both talks about and speaks to women.

Scholars across the medieval literary field have lately been criticising the traditional approach to medieval literature, which isolates texts and removes them from the manuscript. Murray J. Evans, in his monograph *Rereading Middle English Romance: Manuscript Layout, Decoration, and the Rhetoric of Composite Structure*, examines the relationship between the varying texts of manuscripts with a focus on their physical layout and decoration. He claims that evidence of deliberate compilation in manuscripts allows individually familiar romances to:

mutually realign and redefine themselves in their groups; they invite us to be moved, persuaded, entertained by exemplary behaviour in a rhythm and range of chivalrous, heroic and edifying contexts.⁴

This thesis will build upon Evans' work, which is primarily focused on the physical components of romances within manuscripts, applying the same principal of contextual reading to the contents of Auchinleck's literary texts. As Stephen Nichols and Siegfried Wenzel comment:

materialist philology seeks to analyse the consequences of this relationship [between manuscript and individual text] on the way these texts may be read and interpreted. More particularly, it postulates the possibility that a given manuscript, having been organized along certain principles, may well present its text(s) according to its own agenda, as worked out by the person who planned and supervised the production of the manuscript.⁵

Ralph Hanna considers this possibility particularly apt to the late Middle English miscellany; he comments that:

Miscellaneity forms a model procedure for creative work – as well as for its presentation in booklets. “The matere,” the thematic subject, governs collections to an extent many students, still bound by modern categories, have not thoroughly appreciated.

⁴ Murray J. Evans, *Rereading Middle English Romance: Manuscript Layout, Decoration and the Rhetoric of Composite Structure* (London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995), p. 114.

⁵ Stephen G. Nichols and Siegfried Wenzel, 'Introduction' in *The Whole Book: Cultural Perspectives on the Medieval Miscellany*, ed. by Stephen G. Nichols and Siegfried Wenzel (Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 1996), pp. 1-6, p.2.

Chapter One – Introduction

As will be discussed in more detail below, the Auchinleck is an example of a miscellany. Thus, by considering the audience's interaction with the manuscript as an object, this thesis will avoid overlooking additional readings that become apparent when the narrative is read in the context of the full manuscript, and it will suggest a potential agenda for the Auchinleck manuscript.

This is not an approach to medieval manuscripts that is universally embraced. Derek Pearsall, who produced the facsimile edition of the Auchinleck manuscript, strongly disagrees with seeking meaning behind the miscellany. In his essay 'The Whole Book' he states:

Critics dealing with manuscript miscellanies, especially those whose first training was as literary scholars...fall with enthusiasm upon the idea of the 'guiding intelligence' that must have controlled the choice and arrangements of contents and have been responsible for the subtle strategies of organization that turn an apparent miscellany into a continuing thematic meta-narrative. To acknowledge that all kinds of random factors might have been operating, and might have been much more important in determining what went into the miscellanies, is by contrast so negative, so dispiriting, so pusillanimous, and of course so unproductive.⁶

Pearsall's point does require some consideration. We must be careful to avoid seeking a 'guiding intelligence' where there was evidently not one. However, to assume that every miscellany is a completely random collection without any organisational intention is as problematic as assuming that every manuscript had a guiding intelligence, and there are numerous examples of manuscripts which clearly have a shaping agenda.⁷ As Hanna states:

There are plural literary canons, dependent on a good many variables – geography, gender, profession, and political affiliation leap immediately to mind – and miscellaneous books testify to highly individualistic canon-creating efforts.⁸

⁶ Derek Pearsall, 'The Whole Book: Late Medieval English Manuscript Miscellanies and their Modern Interpreters' in *Imagining the Book*, ed. by Stephen Kelly and John J Thompson (Brepols, Turnhout, 2005) pp.17-30, p.18.

⁷ Numerous examples of such manuscripts can be adduced, e.g. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Eng.Poet.A.1 (the well-known Vernon Manuscript), for which see Wendy Scase (ed), *The Making of the Vernon Manuscript* (Brepols, Turnhout, 2013). Books that are part of the same London milieu as Auchinleck include the religious collection in Cambridge, Magdalene College, MS Pepys 2498 and – by the same scribe – the texts in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Laud Misc. 622. The latter manuscript shares a text of *Kyng Alisaunder* with the Auchinleck manuscript. See Ralph Hanna, *London Literature 1300-1380* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005), and references there cited.

⁸ Ralph Hanna, 'Miscellaneity and Vernacular: Conditions of Literary Production in Late Medieval England' in *The Whole Book: Cultural Perspectives on the Medieval Miscellany*, ed. by Stephen G. Nichols and Seigfried Wenzel (Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1996) pp.37-53, p.47.

Chapter One – Introduction

Each miscellany is an individual item that has been created for a purpose; whereas some may indeed be random collections of whatever texts the scribe had to hand or knew by heart, others may indeed be organised for a purpose. In the case of the Auchinleck manuscript, the codicological evidence that will be discussed below points to a manuscript that has been carefully compiled at one time, following an order of contents that pre-dates the compiling of a manuscript. As I will show throughout this thesis, this codicological evidence, alongside the consistent interest in women's behaviour taken by the texts of the manuscript, indicates that, in the case of the Auchinleck manuscript, there may well have been a guiding intelligence supervising construction of the miscellany.

There has been only one study of the Auchinleck manuscript as a whole from a literary perspective, undertaken by Thorlac Turville-Petre. His conclusions, however, deserve reconsideration in the light of my proposition of a female audience for Auchinleck. He dismisses many shorter texts as irrelevant and only considers female readers when discussing two texts; *Seynt Mergrete* and *Seynt Katerine*. My study will show that these shorter, understudied texts are worthy of attention in their own right, and that the Auchinleck texts in general are well suited to the needs of the female reader. By reading each individual text within the context of the manuscript we can consider specific questions of audience, something which Susanna Fein considers important in her introduction to *The Auchinleck Manuscript: New Perspectives* (2016), the most recent collection of essays on the Auchinleck manuscript. In her introduction Fein states that an awareness of audience 'adds a crucial dimension to how we are able to understand the contents and their presentation in the book,' and can reveal how changes to textual redactions, that may initially seem inconsequential, highlight an overall theme that ties a potentially disparate miscellany together.⁹ As Arthur Bahr discusses in *Fragments and Assemblages: Forming Compilations of Medieval London*, 'aligning codicological with literary evidence often reveals more extensive traces of intentionality than we would otherwise have.'¹⁰ Such examinations of miscellanies have brought to the fore overall themes in other English manuscripts, for example the theme of healing the soul in the Vernon Manuscript and a theme of fall and redemption in Winchester College MS 33.¹¹ Thus, this thesis is a timely examination of narrative within manuscript context which,

⁹ Susanna Fein, 'Introduction: The Auchinleck Manuscript: New Perspectives', in *The Auchinleck Manuscript: New Perspectives*, ed. by Susanna Fein (York: York Medieval Press, 2016), pp. 1-10, p. 9. For a specific example of a seemingly inconsequential change that is revealed to be significant through manuscript context, please see the section on *Seynt Mergrete* in chapter four.

¹⁰ Arthur Bahr, *Fragments and Assemblages: Forming Compilations of Medieval London* (Chicago: Chicago Scholarship Online, 2013) p. 3.

¹¹ Ralph Hanna, 'Miscellaneity and Vernacularity', p.46.

Chapter One – Introduction

when taken into consideration with current research into the history of women's reading, suggests both new readings and a new intended audience for the Auchinleck manuscript.

Before turning to examine female readers in particular, it is important to first establish the variety of reading practises that were potentially used in 14th century England. Images, such as that which is found in an illustration from an early fifteenth-century copy of Bartholomeus Anglicus's *De proprietatibus rerum*, found in British Library MS Royal 17.E.iii, create an image of medieval reading as a 'communal activity, in which authoritative interpretation and explication lie with the master'.¹² Instances of silent reading, however, can be found as early as Augustine's *Confessions*, where – to highlight the peculiarity of this act – he notes that Ambrose reads silently.¹³ Silent reading, however, 'became common among clerics in the twelfth century and gradually spread to the laity' to the extent that by the late Middle Ages, forms of isolated reading such as meditative devotional reading were being practised by the laity.¹⁴

Literacy was not, however, the norm. As Manguel explains:

Coming together to be read to also became a necessary and common practice in the lay world of the Middle Ages. Up to the invention of printing, literacy was not widespread and books remained the property of the wealthy, the privilege of a small handful of readers. While some of these fortunate lords occasionally lent their books, they did so to a limited number of people within their own class or family. People who wished to acquaint themselves with a certain book or author often had a better chance of hearing the text recited or read out loud than of holding the precious volume in their own hands.¹⁵

Reading aloud was often used as a form of entertainment, especially during evenings. Records show that the Countess Mahaut of Artois, who lived at the same time as the Auchinleck's proposed compilation date, would have her lady in waiting read to her in the evenings, selecting a combination of both philosophical and entertaining works.¹⁶

There is thus some debate between scholars as to whether or not the authors and scribes of fourteenth century literature expected their texts to be read aloud or read silently,

¹² James Raven, Helen Small and Naomi Tadmor, 'Introduction: the practice and representation of reading in England' in *The Practise and Representation of Reading in England*, ed. by James Raven, Helen Small and Naomi Tadmor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp.1-21, p.1-2.

¹³ Alberto Manguel, *A History of Reading* (London: Flamingo, 1997) p.42-43.

¹⁴ Guglielmo Cavallo and Roger Chartier, *A History of Reading in the West* (France: Polity Press, 1999), p.17. Manguel, *A History of Reading*, p.41. Andrew Taylor, 'Into his secret chamber: reading and privacy in late medieval England' in *The Practise and Representation of Reading in England*, ed. by James Raven, Helen Small, and Naomi Tadmor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp.41-61, p.43.

¹⁵ Manguel, *A History of Reading*, p.116.

¹⁶ Manguel, *A History of Reading*, p.117.

Chapter One – Introduction

and whether they aimed their text at an individual reader or a public audience.¹⁷ The Auchinleck manuscript was thus created in a time where multiple models of reading were potentially used. The audience for the manuscript might be a private reader, reading silently in a quiet room, or it could be a group of hearers gathered to listen whilst one literate person reads aloud to the group. Alternatively, it could potentially be a combination of both. Private and public reading did not exist as a separate dichotomy.¹⁸ It could be that the manuscript was read both aloud to a group and privately by an individual within the same household.

The fourteenth-century reader can likewise not be defined by a specific single interest in genre. As Boffey and Thompson state that, although ‘devotional miscellanies containing mystical writings were increasing in number and being made available to some devout layfolk’ in the fifteenth century, ‘Middle English romance narratives seem to have remained the staple diet of another group of earnest-minded lay readers from the middle strata of medieval society whose interests were not so exclusively dominated by matters concerning the religious life.’ Boffey and Thompson consider the general requirements of this latter group to be material that gives a relatively straightforward and unambiguous form of spiritual or moral instruction, as well as providing entertainment leisure-time reading.¹⁹ As will be discussed below, the contents of the Auchinleck are primarily entertaining narrative poems, with clear interjections of spiritual and moral inspiration. The audience of the Auchinleck manuscript are therefore most likely to have belonged to this middle category.

Whether read aloud or in private, there is a good chance that Auchinleck was read by female readers as well as, or even instead of, male readers. Translations and editions of English texts specifically made for women in the twelfth century onwards indicate that the female reader did exist in late medieval England. Evidence from the fourteenth century, particularly before 1480, is less concrete.²⁰ A survey of what is known about the history of English female reading practices between the eleventh and fifteenth centuries disproves any suggestion that the women of the fourteenth century could not, or did not, read. Instead, as will be shown below, the research points out key trends in women’s reading

¹⁷ For examples of this contrasting point of view, see Magnuel, *A History of Reading*, p.116 and Paul Saenger, ‘Reading in the Later Middle Ages’, in *A History of Reading in the West*, ed. by Guglielmo Cavallo and Roger Chartier (France: Polity Press, 1999) pp. 120-148, p.133.

¹⁸ Cavallo and Chartier, *A History of Reading*, p.18.

¹⁹ Julia Boffey and John J. Thompson, ‘Anthologies and Miscellanies: Production and Choice of Texts’, in *Book Production and publishing in Britain: 1375-1475*, ed. by Jeremy Griffiths and Derek Pearsall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) pp. 279-316, p.291-292.

²⁰ Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, *Saints’ Lives and Women’s Literary Culture c.1150-1300: Virginity and its Authorizations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 2.

Chapter One – Introduction

material, all of which are found within the Auchinleck manuscript; use of vernacular Middle English, a mixture of the religious and romance genre popular in women's reading material, and a visible exemplary function to each narrative. For example, Chaucer depicts Criseyde sitting in a paved parlour with two other ladies, where they

Herden a mayden reden hem the geste
Of the siege of Thebes while hem leste.²¹

There has been consistent interest in the history of women's reading since Elizabeth Robertson's 1990 *Early English Devotional Prose and the Female Audience*, which examined the specifically female audience of a group of texts collectively named by Tolkien as the "AB" texts. The group includes *Ancrene Wisse*, a homily, *Sawles Warde*, the lives of Saint Katherine, Margaret and Juliana, and *Hali Meidenhad*.²² This was followed by further published works such as Carol M. Meale's 1993 *Women and Literature in Britain: 1150-1500* and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne's 2001 *Saints' Lives and Woman's Literary Culture, 1150-1300: Virginity and its Authorisations*, all of which discuss various aspects of the history of English female reading practices between the eleventh and fifteenth centuries.

The research undertaken by scholars such as Robertson, Meale and Wogan-Browne has brought to the fore the importance of the female reader to the development of English as a literary language. In fourteenth-century England, three languages were commonly spoken and written: Latin, French, and English.²³ The use of each language varies due to decade and locale; with a general outward spread from London. Additionally, gender and social status likely had an impact on the literary use of each language.²⁴ The female reader in particular would have hastened the development of English as a literary language since she was most likely untrained in Latin.²⁵ The use of English in manuscripts deliberately written for the female audience is something that is observed and discussed repeatedly in

²¹ Geoffrey Chaucer, 'Troilus and Criseyde', in *Book II*, ed. by B.A. Windeatt <<https://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=cme;idno=Troilus>>, ll. 83-84 [accessed 28/8/18].

²² Elizabeth Robertson, *Early English Devotional Prose and the Female Audience* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1990), p. 1.

²³ A detailed discussion of the development of the tri-lingual nature of England after the Norman Conquest can be found in M. T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: English 1066-1307* (London: Edward Arnold, 1979), p. 151-157.

²⁴ Elizabeth Robertson, "'This Living Hand': Thirteenth-Century Female Literacy, Materialist Immanence, and the Reader of the *Ancrene Wisse*", *Speculum*, 78 No. 1 (Jan 2003), pp. 1-36, p. 15.

²⁵ Robertson, *Early English Devotional Prose*, p. 2.

Chapter One – Introduction

studies of late medieval English female readers. The nature of female literacy did, however, change between the Norman Conquest and the fourteenth century.

It is accepted, thanks to the works of Michael Clanchy and Edward Freeman, that the majority of English people would know some Latin before and directly after the conquest. As the regular language of church services, even the poorest would know a smattering of the language.²⁶ Serious Latin learning, however, was restricted to the formally educated, as is shown by the thirteenth-century treatise of Walter of Bibbesworth which:

assumes that it is possible to teach yourself French but not Latin. Although cases can be found of Latin being learned without formal instruction, they are exceptions which prove the rule that it was difficult.²⁷

Although we do know of some aristocratic women from the eleventh and twelfth centuries who were fluent in Latin (William the Conqueror's wife Matilda, her daughter Adela, King Henry I's wife Maud, her sister in law Adela of Blois, for example), these women were an exception to the norm.²⁸ French was 'the normal language of polite society and courtly entertainment.'²⁹ Of the texts that are dedicated to women such as Eleanor of Aquitaine and Adeliza of Louvain for example, the majority are French and Anglo-Norman romances, providing additional evidence of the primarily French world of the active female reader.³⁰

It is hard to pinpoint exactly where women would learn to read, with potential options including convents, domestic households, and schools. There is evidence that Latin was in decline in convent teaching by the thirteenth century, with the fourteenth century seeing a shift towards learning French and the vernacular English instead.³¹ This is echoed in Hanawalt's observations about female education, where she notes that:

girls of the better class may also have received some education. A chandler's orphaned daughter, for instance, attended school from age eight to thirteen at a cost of 25s. for school fees. Other evidence indicates

²⁶ Robertson, "This Living Hand", p. 16.

²⁷ Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*, p. 153.

²⁸ Robertson, "This Living Hand", p. 16.

²⁹ Bella Millett, 'Women in No Man's Land: English recluses and the development of vernacular literature in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries', in *Women and literature in Britain, 1150-1500*, ed. by Carol M. Meale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 86-103, p. 92.

³⁰ Robertson, "This Living Hand", p. 17.

³¹ Jo Ann Heppner Moran, *The Growth of English Schooling, 1340-1548: Learning, Literacy and Laicization in Pre-Reformation York Diocese* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985) p. 69.

Chapter One – Introduction

an education of four or five years for girls. They learned English and perhaps French as well as accounting, but probably not much Latin.³²

At this time, female readers inhabited what Wogan-Browne describes as a ‘polyglot world of at least two languages’ which meant that ‘their literary culture must move across modern divisions between French and English.’³³

One of the earliest group of texts known to be written for English women in post-conquest England was the “AB” collection written for anchoresses in the first quarter of the twelfth century. The collection is atypical for the 12th century; Anglo-Norman was the dominant language for hagiography at this time. As Millett observes:

There is almost no evidence for hagiographical writing in English during the twelfth century, and little more for the first half of the thirteenth.

The AB texts are some of the earliest which make use of Middle English as a dominant language.³⁴ The collection contains *Ancrene Wisse*, *Swales Warde*, *Hali Meidenhað*, *Saint Katherine*, *Saint Margaret* and *Saint Juliana*, and emerged:

not from a struggling English vernacular literary tradition, but from a community infused with French secular literature... Furthermore, that community was not untouched by its Welsh neighbours... In thirteenth-century Herefordshire, a wealthy community on the Welsh border with a cathedral famed for its books and learning, the relationship between the four languages was intricate.³⁵

For all that they lived in a multi-lingual world, as Bella Millett observes:

the educational level of anchorites might fall anywhere on a continuum running from complete illiteracy to a high level of scholarship.³⁶

The rigorous form of religious devotion the anchoress pursued, however, demanded attention to prayer and contemplation whilst discouraging basic occupations such as weaving and sewing. The anchoress were expected to spend a vast amount of time reading; their lack of fluent Latin thus created a demand for a body of texts written in the language

³² Barbara A. Hanawalt, *Growing Up in Medieval London: The Experience of Childhood in History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 83.

³³ Wogan-Browne, *Saints' Lives and Women's*, p. 2.

³⁴ Bella Millett, ‘The Audience of the Saints’ Lives of the Katherine Group’, *Reading Medieval Studies*, 16 (1990), pp. 127-156, p. 127. See also Wogan-Browne, *Saints' Lives and Women's*, p. 6.

³⁵ Robertson, “‘This Living Hand’”, p. 15.

³⁶ Millett, ‘Women in No Man’s Land’, p. 88.

Chapter One – Introduction

most likely to meet the needs of groups of anchoresses with varying degrees of literacy: Middle English.³⁷

The AB texts, with their specific audience of female religious, provide evidence ‘of the ways in which a vernacular language could be developed to meet the needs of recluses.’³⁸ Additionally, the relatively large audience implies a common need for works written in vernacular English.³⁹ As Elizabeth Robertson explains:

English prose was threatened by the dominance of both French and Latin... but what is of greater importance is the fact that an audience that was relatively insignificant before the Conquest – those uneducated in Latin – became the primary audience for English literature. This uneducated audience plays a crucial role in both the survival and the development of English prose.⁴⁰

Robertson further explores this female orientated demand for vernacular English texts in her essay “‘This Living Hand: Thirteenth-Century Female Literacy, Materialist Immanence, and the Reader of the *Ancrene Wisse*’, where she states that the existence of the *Wisse* comments upon female literacy in England:

The fact that a translator was working in the thirteenth century to produce a variety of English versions of saints’ lives and homilies and that the audience for whom these texts were composed also read an English version of the *Wisse* tells us that at this period, at least in this locale, women readers were creating a demand for English texts.⁴¹

Robertson notes, however, that the author of the *Wisse* does not translate all Latin phrases into English, and assumes prior knowledge of the French romances.⁴² For all that it provides evidence that women spearheaded a demand for literature in Middle English, it also implicitly requires that the women for whom it was written could read some Latin and French as well. Millett, however, offers an explanation of why some Latin phrases were left untranslated or glossed, despite the likelihood of some of the *Wisse*’s readers being illiterate in Latin. She observes that the disjunction between the subject of the *Wisse* and some of the Latin phrases, which comment specifically upon grammar, suggests that the author of the *Wisse* is

³⁷ Robertson, *Early English Devotional Prose*, p. 8. Also see Millett, ‘Women in No Man’s Land’, p. 91.

³⁸ Millett, ‘Women in No Man’s Land’, p. 93.

³⁹ Millett, ‘Women in No Man’s Land’, p. 93.

⁴⁰ Robertson, *Early English Devotional Prose*, p. 2.

⁴¹ Robertson, “‘This Living Hand’”, p. 8.

⁴² Robertson, “‘This Living Hand’”, p. 10.

Chapter One – Introduction

not catering for the possible *clergesses* among his readers but speaking over their heads to his peers...perhaps in their capacity as possible spiritual directors.⁴³

The work is thus not inviting women to partake in reading Latin; rather it is separating them from the Latinate world of men.⁴⁴ This would agree with Robertson's conclusion that female reading became increasingly mediated by men during the thirteenth century; women's exposure to Latin became increasingly dependent on male tutors, such as is shown in the *Wisse*.⁴⁵ She ultimately concludes that:

Levels of both Latin and French literacy were high among upper-class secular and convent women for over a hundred years after the conquest. As the thirteenth century proceeded, however, aristocratic lay literacy in French remained high, while Latin literacy apparently declined for both aristocratic and convent women, although literacy levels varied from one locale to the next...In seeking to contextualise the female reader of the *Ancrene Wisse* historically, we find then: that she is likely to be reading English and French rather than Latin; she is likely to be dependent on the mediation of a male adviser through whom she receives the fruits of Latin learning; and that, because of that mediation, she is less likely to be granted a Latinate, bookish experience of the world.⁴⁶

Thus, it is clear that, despite initial Latin fluency for women in post-conquest England, their Latinate literacy decreased, driving forward a need for vernacular texts for female readers prior to the compilation of the Auchinleck manuscript early in the fourteenth century. That is not to say, however, that men did not read vernacular texts. By the beginning of the fifteenth century most classes of English reader preferred books in their native language, and the intended readership of vernacular texts 'comprised those who were not fully *litterati*: lay readers, but also nuns, novices and many of the secular clergy.'⁴⁷ Men too sought to experience texts in their own language, and the need or the laity to be taught to read, not just in the sense of the base skill but also in the various ways of reading, can be seen in devotional materials such as *Talking of the Love of God*, a treatise contained in the Vernon manuscript, which 'actually sets out in its preface the pace at which it should be read.'⁴⁸

Evidence from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries indicates that a desire for texts in Middle English continued to pervade and influence women's reading after the compiling

⁴³ Millett, 'Women in No Man's Land', p. 94-95.

⁴⁴ Robertson, "'This Living Hand'", p. 16.

⁴⁵ Robertson, "'This Living Hand'", p. 20.

⁴⁶ Robertson, "'This Living Hand'", p. 22-23.

⁴⁷ Taylor, 'Into his Secret Chamber', p.48.

⁴⁸ Taylor, 'Into his Secret Chamber', p.50.

Chapter One – Introduction

of the Auchinleck manuscript.⁴⁹ Carol Meale provides several examples of these texts in her article “...alle the bokes that I haue of latyn, englisch, and frensch”: laywomen and their books in late medieval England’, a detailed study of the books owned by and commissioned by women in fourteenth and fifteenth century England. After examining the wills of various medieval women, Meale observed the popularity of devotional and didactic works with female readers, commenting that:

Although some of the devotional and didactic works owned by women were written in French...the language of the majority is English, and the fact that many of these English texts were translations – whether commissioned or not – suggests that this was the vernacular with which women felt most at ease.⁵⁰

The need for vernacular books for women readers, seen so clearly in the history of the *Wisse* and its related texts for anchoresses, spread beyond the anchoress’ cell to influence lay women readers.

Research into the genre of books available to English women in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries suggests that the female reader was interested in a wide range of genre and topics. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne comments, ‘Little other than scholastic academic prose is excluded [from women’s books] (and that itself was not debarred to the learned and Latinate women of some convents.)’⁵¹ That being said, evidence from the wills of twelfth and thirteenth century women does indicate a sustained interest in saints’ lives over other genre.⁵²

It is not surprising that texts produced for the anchoress are of a religious nature, but these texts were not restricted to the anchoritic reader alone. Although she was the immediate intended audience of the AB collection, the works address all female readers. Millett draws attention to the first line of the AB *Seinte Iulienne*, which reads ‘Alle leawede men þe understonden ne mahen Latines ledene, liðeð ant lusteð þe liflade of a meiden þet is of Latin iturnd to Englische leode.’⁵³ This particularly depicts the audience of the AB texts as the non-Latinate lay person. Robertson draws further attention to the audience in her discussion of the AB *Saint Margaret*. She states that ‘Margaret’s life opens, “Hercneð

⁴⁹ Ralph Hanna, ‘Middle English Manuscripts and Readers’, in *A Companion to Medieval Poetry*, ed. by Corinne Saunders (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), pp. 196-216, p. 209.

⁵⁰ Carol M Meale, “...alle the boke that I haue of latyn, englisch, and frensch”: laywomen and their books in late medieval England’, in *Women and Literature in Britain, 1150-1500*, ed. by Carol M. Meale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 128-158 p. 138.

⁵¹ Wogan-Browne, *Saints’ Lives and Women’s*, p. 1-2.

⁵² Wogan-Browne, *Saints’ Lives and Women’s*, p. 3.

⁵³ Millett, ‘The Audience of the Saint’s Lives’, p. 132.

Chapter One – Introduction

alle þe earen + herunge habbeð: widewen wið þa iweddede, + te meidnes nomeliche”.⁵⁴ The text specifically addresses all women: widows, wives and maidens. Although written originally for the anchoress, these texts specify that the Saint’s lives are intended to be read by non-Latinate female readers.⁵⁵ As Robertson further comments, the *Wisse* stresses the importance of reading for *all* women:

Margaret’s life emphasizes the importance of reading a saint’s life or even simply having such a book in one’s possession; Teochimus, the supposed author, prays to Christ to save anyone who reads the life or who even holds the book in her hand.⁵⁶

Thus, Saint Margaret proclaims not only the suitability of the saint’s life as a text for women to read, but the intercessory power of the book in the life of the women who merely holds it.

That the act of holding a book was seen as powerful, however, could cause problems with trying to estimate female literacy as it implies that books had purposes beyond reading in late medieval England. Wills indicate that many women owned copies of *Saint Margaret*; the mere ownership of the text could invoke the Saint’s protection during childbirth, regardless of whether or not the woman had read the text.⁵⁷ *Saint Margaret*, however, was not the only text to be owned by women, a fact which challenges the notion that women used books purely as religious artefacts.

That a variety of religious texts, and not just *Saint Margaret*, were owned by women reveals that religion remained the primary interest for female readers. After illustrating numerous examples of wills and specific instances of female book patronage, Meale suggests that:

religion was by far the dominant reading interest of medieval women; they owned a variety of texts in addition to their service books, ranging from the lives of the saints, to didactic works such as *The Prick of Conscience* and *Pore Caitif*, to various of the treatises of the fourteenth-century mystics, Walter Hilton and Richard Rolle.⁵⁸

Meale follows this quotation with many specific examples of women who owned, commissioned and patronised religious texts. What started as recommended reading in the

⁵⁴ Robertson, *Early English Devotional Prose*, p. 94.

⁵⁵ Millett argues throughout ‘The Audience of the Saints’ lives of the Katherine Group’ that stylistic qualities of these texts indicate that they were to be read aloud and listened to rather than read silently by the individual.

⁵⁶ Robertson, *Early English Devotional*, p. 94.

⁵⁷ Don Skemer, *Binding Words: Textual Amulets in the Middle Ages* (Pennsylvania: Penn State Press, 2006) p. 241.

⁵⁸ Meale, “...alle the bokes’, p.137.

Chapter One – Introduction

twelfth and thirteenth centuries evidently developed into a common reading pattern in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

The evidence provided by the wills that Meale uses, however, cannot be taken as presenting a complete picture of *all* women's reading. As she herself explains:

Not only do they [wills] offer incomplete chronological and geographical coverage – that is, they have different survival rates from different periods and different parts of the country – but also they are limited as to the marital status and class of the women represented. The majority of extant wills were made by widows, by independent women.⁵⁹

Wills are only relevant in the cases of widows, as the property of any married woman belonged to her husband. They also tend to be limited to the social elite. Thus, whilst wills do provide evidence that women owned, and most likely read books, it is difficult to say exactly what was read, when and by whom. When it comes to unwed daughters and married women, and those women of less affluent social status, the question of their reading habits remains open to debate.⁶⁰ Kate Harris also observes that a book is far more likely to be listed in a will when its value is 'outweighed by devotional or liturgical content.'⁶¹ That these books frequently are accompanied by a request that the receiver pray for the soul of the deceased implies that these books are being used as symbols of devotion rather than reading materials. Harris also suggests that the book functions as a way of ensuring one is remembered after death:

John of Gaunt...refers to the books he leaves his son, Henry Beaufort, bishop of Lincoln, as 'mon messale & mon porthous qe furent a mon seigneur mon frere Prince de Gales qe Dieux assoile.' These terms of a bequest may at once provide a revelation of the testator's religious life and show that he envisaged the bequest extending that life.⁶²

V. J. Scattergood also comments that 'it does not follow necessarily that the recorded owners sought to possess the books in question.'⁶³ It appears books were given in wills as a method of ensuring one is remembered, both in prayer and in general life. Thus, wills

⁵⁹ Meale, "'...alle the bokes', p. 132.

⁶⁰ Meale, "'...alle the bokes', p. 132-134.

⁶¹ Kate Harris, 'Patrons, Buyers and Owners: The evidence for Ownership and the Role of Book Owners in Book Production and the Book Trade', in *Book Production and Publishing in Britain, 1375-1475*, ed. by Jeremy Griffiths and Derek Pearsall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) pp. 163-201.

⁶² Harris, 'Patrons, Buyers and Owners', p. 165.

⁶³ V.J. Scattergood, 'Literary Culture at the Court of Richard II', in *English Court Culture in the Later Middle Ages*, ed. by V.J. Scattergood and J.W. Sherbone (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983) pp. 29-44, p.36.

Chapter One – Introduction

provide evidence that a certain class and group of women owned books, but does not provide any guarantee that these books were read.

Although the above studies suggest that religious matter dominated women's reading practises, there is evidence that women generally enjoyed a variety of genre. By looking at the dedication of French romances to women, Roberta Krueger concludes that:

The number of works *en romanz*, or in the vernacular, dedicated to women suggests that women were indeed involved in the formation of northern courtly literature...as verse romance flourished from 1160 to 1300, numerous works contained dedications or allusions to female patrons or readers.⁶⁴

It is evident from these dedications that romance literature was popular with French female readers, and many of these French romances were brought to England and widely read at the French-speaking English court. The long *Romance of the Rose*, dated to c.1275, became one of the most influential romances upon English literature despite being written in vernacular French. It also contains the line 'Now tell me, not in Latin, but in French, what you want me to serve.'⁶⁵ The narrator and central character of this romance indicates that he (and thus the audience he speaks to) cannot understand Latin, therefore his audience could include women as well as men. Margaret Ferguson has also observed how language is gendered in late medieval commentaries on language, such as Caxton's translation of Vergil's *Eneydos*. She states that

the lower-status woman in his prologue serves as an emblem for the variability of the "mother tongue" itself and for the emasculated condition which that variability seems, in Caxton's view, to foster.⁶⁶

The depiction of vernacular English as female contrasts with learned language such as Latin as male, reinforcing the position of women as the less learned speaker of vernacular English. As English took over from French as the dominant vernacular language in England, there was a demand for the French romances to be translated for the English reader, suggesting once more a female reader. Even if devotional texts appear to be the mainstay of English women's literary consumption, there was still an interest in romance literature that developed alongside the desire for religious vernacular texts.

⁶⁴ Roberta K. Krueger, *Women Readers and the Ideology of Gender in Old French Verse Romance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 2.

⁶⁵ Jean de Meun, 'The Romance of the Rose' in *The Romance of the Rose*, ed. by Charles Dahlberg (London: University Press of New England, 1986), pp. 89-354 (1.5839, p. 117).

⁶⁶ Margaret M. Ferguson, *Dido's Daughters: Literacy, Gender, and Empire in Early Modern England and France* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2003), p. 89.

Chapter One – Introduction

Evidence for a contemporary belief in the benefits of reading for women can be seen in the number of literary texts which suggest that female reading was commonplace in the fourteenth and fifteenth century. *Le Livre du Chevalier de la Tour Landry*, for example, was originally written in 1372 and translated into English as early as 1422. The prologue states:

Therefore I concluded that I wold doo make a lytel booke/ wherin I wold doo be wretton the good maners and good dedes of good ladyes and wimmen/ and of theyr lyues/ soo that for theyr vertues and bountees they ben honoured/ And that after theyr dethe ben renommed and preysed and shal be vnto the ende of the worlde for to take of them good ensample and contenance/ And also by the contrarye I shall doo wryte and set in a book the myshappe and vyces of euylle wimmen/ whiche haue vsyd theyr lyf/ and now haue blame/ To the ende/ that the euylle maye bee eschewed by which they myght erre/ Whiche yet ben blamed/ shamed/ and dyffamed/ And for this cause that I haue here sayd/ I haue thought on my wel belouyed doughters whome I see so lytel to make to them a litil book/ for to lerne to rede to thende that they maye lerne and studye/ & vnderstonde the good and euylle that is passyd/ for to keep them fro hym whiche is yet to come.⁶⁷

The prologue to the Knight's text explicitly states he is writing this book, which he will fill with examples of good and bad female behaviour, so that his daughters can learn the social and 'spiritual benefits to be gained from the acquisition of the skill of reading', a belief Meale considers to be familiar 'from the time of Jerome onwards.'⁶⁸ Towards the end of the prologue, the Knight states that he has written two books, one for his sons and one for his daughters, indicating his belief that the learning requirements of both are segregated by gender. Another European writer, Christine de Pizan, one of the most prolific female writers of the fifteenth century also recommended reading to women. She considered the saints' tales to be particularly appropriate for women, making a connection between subject matter and the ability of the book to educate and modify behaviour.⁶⁹

Specific to England, Chaucer in particular provides many literary depictions of women reading within his texts, some of which echo this connection between subject and behaviour modification. As Meale cites, Criseyde's desire to read Saints' lives comes directly after she has been listening to the Romance of Thebes with her ladies, in response to Pandarus' desire for her to do 'to May some observaunce':

⁶⁷ William Caxton, 'The Book of the Knight of the Tower', in *The Book of the Knight of the Tower Translated by William Caxton*, ed. by M. Y. Offord (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), pp. 3-192, p. 12.

⁶⁸ Carol M. Meale, 'Introduction', in *Women and Literature in Britain: 1150-1500*, ed. by Carol Meale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1996), pp. 1-6, p. 2.

⁶⁹ Meale, 'Introduction', p. 2.

Chapter One – Introduction

“Be ye mad?
 Is that a widewes lif, so God yow save?
 By God, ye maken me right soore adrad!
 Ye ben so wylde, it semeth as ye rave.
 It satte me wel bet ay in a cave
 To bidde and rede on holy seyntes lyves;⁷⁰

Chaucer, through Criseyde’s words, also recognises the connection between reading and the moral behaviour of women. That Criseyde read the romance, however, also suggests that women read a variety of different genres. A further hint from Chaucer that women read beyond religious texts can be found in the Nun’s Priest prologue, who states that:

This storie is also trewe, I undertake,
 As is the book of Launcelot de Lake,
 That women holde in ful greet reverence.⁷¹

For this remark to be effective (and understood) it must have a basis in fact. Meale provides evidence of this when she points out the connections between Arthurian romance and the wills that women wrote, which contained copies of texts other than saints’ tales. She views this as proof of what Chaucer is suggesting: women did not read Saints’ tales alone.⁷²

Alongside the references to female characters reading, critics have researched the potential female audience of Chaucer’s narratives. Nicola F. McDonald discusses the implied female audience of the *Legend of Good Women* alongside evidence of female readership in her 2000 article ‘Chaucer’s “Legend of Good Women”, Ladies at Court and the Female Reader’. She notes that the text is initially dedicated to Queen Anne of Bohemia in the F manuscript.⁷³ This dedication is later removed from the G manuscript presumably because of the death of Anne prior to the G manuscript’s production.⁷⁴ She also examines the frequent use of directives to the woman in many of Chaucer’s texts. In particular, she references the following lines from *Dido*:

⁷⁰ Geoffrey Chaucer, ‘Troilus and Criseyde’, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by Larry D. Benson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 471-586, ll. 113-118.

⁷¹ Geoffrey Chaucer, ‘The Nun’s Priest’s Tale’, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by Larry D. Benson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 252-262 (ll. 3211-3213).

⁷² Meale, “...alle the bokes”, p. 139.

⁷³ This observation is made in an earlier essay by V. J. Scattergood, who also comments that there are only four English books in all of the book lists that survive from the court of Richard II, and that ‘in the Prologue to *Confessio Amantis* Gower makes the point that ‘fewe men endite/In oure Englissh’ (22-3). In the English court, men were not commonly reading literature written in vernacular Middle English. The same cannot be said, however, of men out with the aristocratic courtly audience. Scattergood, ‘Literary Culture’, p.36-38.

⁷⁴ Nicola F. McDonald, ‘Chaucer’s “Legend of Good Women”, Ladies at Court and the Female Reader’, *The Chaucer Review*, 35 (2000), pp. 22-42, p. 23.

Chapter One – Introduction

O sely wemen, ful of innocence,
 Ful of pite, of trouthe and conscience,
 What maketh yow to men truste so?⁷⁵

McDonald also considers the line “ye may be war of men, if that yow liste”⁷⁶ from *Philomela*. She acknowledges that a fictional audience does not constitute solid proof of female readership, but also comments that ‘implied audiences are also not necessarily fictions, simply by virtue of their being implied.’⁷⁷ Chaucer’s poem, then, provides evidence that a female reader or listener was certainly something that was considered possible in the century after the compilation of the Auchinleck manuscript.

The apologies of many well-known continental medieval authors for misogynistic sentiments within their work provide further evidence that male authors were aware that women may access and read their work. In 1285, for example, Jean de Meun ‘apologises to his female readers for anything said against women,’ in his continuation of *The Romance of the Rose*, a text that despite its continental origins was known in England through translations by English writers.⁷⁸ Chaucer himself, writing one hundred years after De Meun and forty after the composition of Auchinleck, also ‘begged forgiveness from his female readers for his depiction of the false Criseyde in *Troilus and Criseyde*.’⁷⁹ The very existence of these apologies, even if they were intended ironically, illustrates that these authors not only knew that women did read, but that they expected women to have access to their works. Most prominently, Christine, the female reader character of Christine de Pizan’s c.1405 *Book of the City of Women* encounters and laments the proliferation of misogynistic sentiments; she cannot recall a book without them. As Schibanoff describes, these sentiments are ‘fixed’. Although the writers offer apologies for the remarks that could offend women, they make no efforts to remove them.⁸⁰ The presence of the remarks in source texts cannot be ignored, and the influence of the ‘fixed’ nature of misogyny in medieval literature is visible throughout the Auchinleck texts, particularly *The King of Tars*, *The Life of Adam and Eve*, *The Seven Sages of Rome*, as will be discussed in chapter three of this thesis. Christine’s self-reflective character, and the apologies of male writers,

⁷⁵ Geoffrey Chaucer, ‘The Legend of Good Women’, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by Larry D. Benson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 587-630 (ll. 1254-1256).

⁷⁶ Chaucer, ‘The Legend’, l. 2387.

⁷⁷ McDonald, ‘Chaucer’s “Legend”, p. 24.

⁷⁸ Susan Schibanoff, ‘“Taking the gold out of Egypt”: the art of reading as a woman’, in *Feminist Readings in Middle English Literature: The Wife of Bath and All her Sect*, ed. by Ruth Evans & Lesley Johnson (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 221-245, p. 222.

⁷⁹ Schibanoff, ‘“Taking the gold”, p. 222.

⁸⁰ Schibanoff, ‘Taking the gold’, p. 223-224.

Chapter One – Introduction

however, provide evidence that there was an active reader in fourteenth and fifteenth century England.

In addition to the evidence of texts such as *Le Livre du Chevalier de la Tour Landry* and Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, some extant manuscripts, particularly from the fifteenth century, are inscribed with the names of their female owners and readers. For example, Anne Neville, Duchess of Buckingham, commissioned a psalter in the fifteenth century in which prayers are specifically intended for a woman called 'Anna', proving that the manuscript was commissioned for her own personal use.⁸¹ McDonald also discusses the evidence for female readers found in two of the extant manuscripts of *The Legend of Good Women*. The first is Trinity College Cambridge manuscript R.3.19, an unadorned fifteenth century manuscript with a 'distinctive mixture of didactic, devotional, and recreational material that characterises this and other composite anthologies [and] points to the reading habits of the mercantile household.'⁸² One of the texts within the manuscript is the courtesy poem *The Good Wyfe Taught Hyr Douwghtere* which is a conduct text that teaches the mother how to educate her daughter to regulate her own behaviour. It is considered to have been written specifically for the female reader. McDonald argues, with debt to Felicity Riddy's earlier work on *The Good Wyf*, that the

regulatory ethos of the courtesy text extends naturally to the *Legend*. Although the frame of reference is changed, the women of the *Legend* are uniformly noble and exotic; Chaucer's poem is similarly preoccupied with the consequences of errant female behaviour.⁸³

Two poems in Trinity R. 3.19, in the opinion of McDonald, remind us that 'virtuous womanhood was learned behaviour'.⁸⁴ This manuscript not only provides evidence for female readership in the century that followed the production of Auchinleck, but illustrates another manuscript that women had access to which takes a significant interest in guiding female behaviour, and spreads this concern across more than one text within the manuscript.

⁸¹ Meale, "'...alle the bokes', p. 136. In a mistake that has proved common and damaging to the history of women's reading, the psalter was initially assumed to have been commissioned by Anne for her husband. It was only later that the inscription of 'Anna' was noted and the reader consequently corrected. The assumption of the male reader unless categorically stated otherwise is an issue that has prevented women's reading habits from being explored until recently, with many scholars still demanding greater evidence that a reader was female than is needed to argue for a male audience. A male reader is still often assumed unless definitively proven otherwise.

⁸² McDonald, 'Chaucer's "Legend', p. 34.

⁸³ McDonald, 'Chaucer's "Legend', p. 35. See also Felicity Riddy, 'Mother Knows Best: Reading Social Change in a Courtesy Text', *Speculum*, 71 (1996), pp. 66-86, p. 77.

⁸⁴ McDonald, 'Chaucer's "Legend', p. 36.

Chapter One – Introduction

The second manuscript which McDonald discusses is Cambridge University Library MS Ff.1.6, more commonly called the Findern manuscript. The large anthology differs from Auchinleck in that it was slowly produced and added to by at least forty different scribes over a period of 100 years (c.1446-1550).⁸⁵ This is in opposition to Auchinleck, which was compiled and completed to a predetermined plan over a short period of time.⁸⁶ Although the association of the manuscript with the Findern family remains controversial, its link with female readers is unquestionable following the identification of the names of five women written on the manuscript's pages. Two appear as scribal signatures, and the others belong to women who lived amongst the landholders of the Findern family estate.⁸⁷ Although a very different entity than the Auchinleck in terms of structure and production, the Findern manuscript provides evidence of a distinct and vibrant community of female readers and writers in fifteenth century England.

The famous Vernon manuscript is another miscellany which shares numerous texts with the Auchinleck, including the romance *The King of Tars*. Although Meale acknowledges that, due to the lack of concrete evidence of a reader we can only rely on circumstantial evidence when considering the intended reader of Vernon, she believes that 'the balance of probability is in favour of female ownership of the...manuscript.'⁸⁸ Determining a potential intended reader for Auchinleck is similarly reliant on circumstantial evidence, as there are no signatures or references contemporary with the manuscript's production to indicate who read it.⁸⁹ Like Vernon, however, the circumstantial evidence fuses together to suggest a distinct possibility of a female reader, or multiple female listeners in a communal setting. I will now discuss the details of the manuscript's production with reference to this circumstantial evidence.

As briefly mentioned previously, the Auchinleck manuscript dates to the first half of the fourteenth century, which has been ascertained through palaeographical research, including the hand of the scribes and the style of illumination. This has been further narrowed to 1330-1340 due to the contents of some of the texts, which make reference to contemporary politics. For example, *Pe Simonie* prays for the young King Edward III,

⁸⁵ McDonald, 'Chaucer's "Legend', p. 36.

⁸⁶ For further information on the production of Auchinleck, see below.

⁸⁷ McDonald, 'Chaucer's "Legend', p. 36

⁸⁸ Meale, "...alle the bokes', p. 141.

⁸⁹ There is a list of signatures on f.107r that indicate the book was read by all members of the Browne family, including four women. The handwriting, however, is from the fifteenth century and thus is likely the mark of a later owner. It, nor the other six medieval names written on the manuscript, are contemporary with the manuscript's compilation. Burnley and Wiggins, 'The Auchinleck Manuscript', [27th February 2017].

Chapter One – Introduction

advising him to avoid the mistakes of his unpopular father King Edward II.⁹⁰ This unusually specific date is helpful to this thesis in two ways. Firstly, it places the manuscript in the middle of previous research done into women's literary habits. By knowing what women read before and after the compilation of Auchinleck, we can compare the contents with other manuscripts that were, without doubt, written for the female reader. Secondly, the specific date provided allows for the examination of the specific social, legal and religious concerns which impacted the lives of the women who hypothetically would have read this manuscript at the time of its production. We are able to discern that the texts provide examples of conduct for the female reader that are grounded in the legal and social expectations others would have of her in everyday fourteenth century life.

The Auchinleck manuscript is considered a large manuscript. As it currently stands, the manuscript is 250mm by 190mm, making it slightly longer and narrower than a modern A4 page. The manuscript currently has 334 leaves, but damage to both the beginning and end of the manuscript has resulted in debate about the original width. For example, Judith Crouse Mordkoff estimates the original number of leaves at over 400, whilst Brian Murdoch believes the number to be smaller, estimating an original number of approximately 386.⁹¹ Some of the missing leaves have been found as fragments, often within the bindings of other manuscripts and early books.⁹² The large scale of the manuscript suggests that it was unlikely to be used primarily as an object of protection; it is hard to picture any mother clutching a book this heavy and large to her chest during childbirth. Instead, the larger size suggests that Auchinleck was intended to be read as the large size makes it more likely to be easily legible and easily used. Conversely, however, this large size makes it less likely the manuscript would have been used privately. It seems more likely to have been a book used to entertain a group of listeners rather than the individual reader.

There are six hundred and fifty-eight decorated initials which are spread throughout the manuscript and commonly found in each booklet, though some leaves have higher occurrences than others, for example fol. 36v with eight decorated initials, versus fol. 38v

⁹⁰ Burnley and Wiggins, 'The Auchinleck Manuscript', [2nd March 2017].

⁹¹ Judith Crouse Mordkoff, 'The Making of the Auchinleck Manuscript: The Scribes at Work' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Connecticut, 1980) p. 12. Brian Murdoch, *Gregorius: An Incestuous saint in Medieval Europe and Beyond* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 53.

⁹² D. Pearsall and I.C. Cunningham, *The Auchinleck Manuscript: National Library of Scotland Advocates' MS.19.2.1* (London: Scolar Press, 1997), p. vii. Currently known fragments of the Auchinleck are Edinburgh University Library MS. 218, St Andrews University Library MS. PR2065 A.15 and R.4, and London University Library MS. 593. Though separate from the manuscript, they can be seen in position within the Pearsall and Cunningham facsimile, which provides a useful visual context of how the pages fitted into the larger manuscript.

Chapter One – Introduction

with none. Six hundred and forty-two of these initials are simple slightly enlarged initials that have been decorated with loops and lines in standard ink. Nine are decorated in a similar manner but are enlarged, taking up around six lines of text. Five initials are widened and accented through many layers of ink, but have no further decoration. Finally, there are two extensively decorated initials. One includes drawings of foliage, and extends from the top of the leaf to just over half way down the inside margin on fol. 384r. The other can be found on fol. 170r, which extends from the top of the leaf down the entire inside margin and three quarters of the way across the bottom margin. It contains foliage, spiral decorations and a picture of a knight holding a spear. This particular initial marks the start of *Sir Beues of Hamtoun*.

Additional decoration can be found in six extant miniatures in the manuscript. There were once a larger number of small miniatures in the manuscript; at least a further thirteen have been lost to miniature hunters. Those that do remain are found at the start of texts and appear to show either illustrations of scenes from the upcoming text or illustrations in-keeping with the current text. For example, the miniature on fol. 7r appears to show the baptism scene of the text it heads, *The King of Tars*, whilst the miniature on fol. 72r shows a picture of God, which seems appropriate as it heads *The Paternoster*. The miniatures that are present use a muted colour palette, and do not show evidence of illumination. The simplicity and basic style of the initials and miniatures suggest that this was not an expensive manuscript to commission. It does not have the bright colour scheme and illumination that we have come to expect from deluxe manuscripts.

There are six hands visible in the manuscript, all of which are very similar in style. Each writes in a neat and legible early fourteenth century bookhand, which has developed from *textura*.⁹³ This hand indicates that the Auchinleck manuscript, despite its lack of overtly expensive decoration, would still have been a relatively costly product to commission. David Bell summarises why this hand was an expensive choice.

a *textura* script such as *textualis prescissa*, the best of Gothic book-hands, which demands not only beauty and balance, but requires that the bottom of each minim...be cut off cleanly at precisely ninety degrees, takes a long time to write. To produce a book like this takes time and money.⁹⁴

As Bell explains, this particular book-hand, which provides clear and legible text, was not cheap to produce. This initially seems to contradict earlier statements about the lack of

⁹³ A.J. Bliss, 'Notes on the Auchinleck Manuscript', *Speculum*, 26 (1951), pp. 652-658, p. 652.

⁹⁴ David N. Bell, *What Nuns Read: Books and Libraries in Medieval English Nunneries* (Michigan: Cistercian Publications Inc., 1995), p. 16.

Chapter One – Introduction

decoration, which would suggest that Auchinleck was an inexpensive manuscript. I would suggest, however, that the contradiction between expensive bookhand and inexpensive decoration helps to elucidate the purpose of Auchinleck. That money was spent on legible writing, and not beautiful pictures, I argue, suggests that the commissioner intended this manuscript to be read. It was not to be admired as an object of beauty.

The layout of the pages also suggests that Auchinleck was not a deluxe manuscript with a very high production cost. The layout of the leaves in *The Legend of Pope Gregory*, the first extant text, is one column of text per leaf, which does leave some free space. After this text, however, the layout changes to two columns of text per leaf. This style is maintained consistently throughout the remainder of the manuscript, except in *The Battle Abbey Roll*, where it changes to a four-column layout. Both of these changes save space; after *The Legend of Pope Gregory* the number of lines per leaf increases from approximately forty-four to approximately eighty-eight lines, reducing the number of vellum sheets required per text by half.⁹⁵ Likewise, by moving to a four-column layout for the text which is entirely a list of names, with no long lines, the scribe reduces the amount of vellum required for *The Battle Abbey Roll* by a further half. As vellum was expensive, this can be seen as a cost cutting measure that will have reduced the overall expense of Auchinleck.⁹⁶ The desire to fill each page fully combined with the lack of decoration suggests the commission was for a less wealthy patron.

Despite this evident desire to fill the page, however, there are still large sized margins left on every manuscript page. This results in a well-spaced manuscript that is pleasant to look upon. Whilst limiting the cost of the manuscript may have been a factor, this has not been to the detriment of the legibility of the text. The evidence in the scribal hand and layout strongly suggests that, whilst the owner of Auchinleck may not have been extremely wealthy, they were willing to spend money to create a legible manuscript. Once again, the design and appearance of the manuscript is focused on its function as a useful object, rather than its appearance as a work of art. The Auchinleck manuscript was commissioned to be read.

The physical structure of the Auchinleck manuscript is one of the reasons it has sustained heavy interest from codicologists for decades. Each leaf of text is initially bound

⁹⁵ These numbers are approximations. Line number is affected by scribal hand and the use of miniatures throughout the manuscript, so it is not possible to give an exact number.

⁹⁶ *Pe Simonie*, the final extant text within the manuscript, returns to the original single column layout on f.328r. There is a convincing explanation for this. As will be discussed below, the Auchinleck scribes did not complete the texts in the order they were bound; this text, along with *The Legend of Pope Gregory*, may have been one of the first to be produced, prior to the decision to move to a two-column layout.

Chapter One – Introduction

into a quire; a grouping of an average of seven leaves. These quires are then bound together into booklets, sometimes referred to as fascicles, of varying sizes. Some booklets have just one quire, whilst larger ones such as booklet five contain ten quires. The extant manuscript contains twelve booklets; it is likely the original manuscript contained additional booklets, given the estimated number of leaves missing. This booklet structure is useful for this study as it allows an easy way to take a sample of the texts in order to illustrate their particular interest in women. The manuscript is too large to perform a close reading of every text within the limitations of this thesis; instead I will choose two booklets as a case study and compare their texts, presenting these booklets as representative of the large manuscript.

The provenance of the manuscript is widely accepted to be London. O. D. Macrae-Gibson observes that the participle ending –and(e), which is considered a ‘Northern’ form, is present in a group of fourteenth century manuscripts, which includes the Auchinleck.⁹⁷ He discusses the dialects of the six scribes, noting in particular that one appears to have a strong preference for the ‘northern’ present participle and another a preference for southern features.⁹⁸ Macrae-Gibson considers three possible explanations for this before settling on the idea of a leapfrog migration to London from the Midlands, as demonstrated by Ekwall. If, as Ekwall illustrated, ‘immigration into London was highest from Norfolk, where the –and(e) participle is well attested,’ it can be seen to explain the presence of Northern and Southern forms in the Auchinleck manuscript.⁹⁹ It seems very plausible that a London-born and Norfolk-born scribe could end up working in the same area of London. Hanna narrows the location to the original West End which

appears to have been a particularly vibrant place for cultural interchanges in the early and mid-fourteenth century. Well stocked with intelligent, educated, and writerly bookmen, it also provided an entrepot for exchanges between a variety of elites, governmental, country, and City mercantile. The Auchinleck MS, with its Yorkshire touches and connections to royal and Civic governmental books, most likely should be conceptualised within this locale of interpenetration and cross-fertilisation.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ O.D. Macrae-Gibson, ‘The Auchinleck MS: Participles in -and(e)’, *English Studies*, 52 (1971), pp. 449-454, p. 13.

⁹⁸ Macrae-Gibson, ‘The Auchinleck MS’, p. 15.

⁹⁹ Macrae-Gibson, ‘The Auchinleck MS’, p. 19.

¹⁰⁰ Ralph Hanna, *London Literature, 1300-1380* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 129.

Chapter One – Introduction

Hanna convincingly posits a specific locale for the manuscript which places it within an area of London that was inhabited by merchants.¹⁰¹ Manguel too observes that, in the fourteenth century, books were passing from the nobility and the clergy to those of the merchant; ‘if the nobles read, then they would read.’¹⁰²

Critics have extensively debated what type of workshop produced the Auchinleck manuscript, and have not yet been able to agree on a firm answer. Laura Hibbard Loomis, who initially hypothesised that Chaucer owned the Auchinleck manuscript, published an article entitled ‘The Auchinleck Manuscript and a Possible Bookshop of 1330-1340’ in 1942. She observes that almost all that was known about manuscript production had been discovered by examination of individual pieces, and that the plain manuscripts compiled prior to 1400 had received little attention.¹⁰³ Focusing on the Auchinleck, she suggests that the presence of five different scribal hands within the manuscript was a ‘strong indication that it was produced by professional scribes, working in some sort of a lay bookshop.’¹⁰⁴ She argues that few wealthy households would have been able to afford to employ five scribes, except perhaps royalty, though there is nothing in the manuscript which suggests it belonged to someone who could afford luxury.¹⁰⁵ Evidence from the Paris tax lists of 1292 and 1313 show that secular scribes and illuminators were gathered in a working community around the University. So why, Loomis postulates, would the same not be the case in London, the largest of all English cities?¹⁰⁶ She concludes that the evidence from Auchinleck is so compelling that:

there must have been in England, and probably in medieval London itself, a bookshop where, for English laymen, texts of many kinds were newly copied, and some newly translated into English.¹⁰⁷

For Loomis, the evidence pointed, most certainly, towards the existence of a large-scale lay bookshop. Roland N. Walpole agreed with Loomis, claiming that there is strong evidence that the development of the English cycle of Charlemagne romances took place within Loomis’s proposed bookshop:

¹⁰¹ The significance of the mercantile area is discussed below in chapter five.

¹⁰² Manguel, *The History of Reading*, p.156-7.

¹⁰³ Laura Hibbard Loomis, ‘The Auchinleck Manuscript and a Possible Bookshop of 1330-1340’, in *Adventures in the Middle Ages: A Memorial Collection of Essays and Studies*, ed. by Helen Bullock (New York: Franklin Burt, 1962) p. 155.

¹⁰⁴ Loomis, ‘The Auchinleck Manuscript’, p. 154. Loomis incorrectly states that five scribes wrote the Auchinleck manuscript. It is now accepted that there were six.

¹⁰⁵ Loomis, ‘The Auchinleck Manuscript’, p. 155.

¹⁰⁶ Loomis, ‘The Auchinleck Manuscript’, p. 159-160.

¹⁰⁷ Loomis, ‘The Auchinleck Manuscript’, p. 187.

Chapter One – Introduction

we can be sure that Brit. Mus. Add. MS 38662, along with Brit. Mus. Add. MS. 40142 and their companion texts of the Edwardes MSS., was, about the year 1330, lodged on the shelves of this London bookshop as one of the treasured source-books of the Master, that purveyor of romance for users of the common English tongue.¹⁰⁸

Derek Pearsall and I.C. Cunningham jointly commented upon the size of the bookshop in the introduction to their Auchinleck facsimile. They stated that:

the bookshop produced a series of booklets or fascicles, consisting of groups of gatherings with some integrity of contents (note the pious nature of the romances in the first two groupings), which were then bound up to the taste of a particular customer, at which point catchwords would be supplied.¹⁰⁹

For Pearsall and Cunningham, the structure of the manuscript suggests that the large bookshop produced booklets that were written ahead of time. Customers could then choose the booklets they desired, and have them bound together in a manuscript to meet their personal taste.

N. Jacobs is also in agreement with the large bookshop hypothesis. He examines redactions of *Sir Degaré*, *Lay le Freine* and *Sir Beues of Hamtoun* for similarities. In his article, he looks for resemblances in passages within the three romances, which he suggests illustrate that the manuscript was written in a large bookshop that had many copies of romances available for scribes to use. He states that:

The existence of a common prologue to *Orfeo* and *Freine*...may suggest, in the light of other abundant evidence for systematic redaction in the Auchinleck scriptorium, that these two texts are associated in a similar process of redaction; if so, it seems possible that the couplet in question is part of a body of stock narrative phrases circulating in the scriptorium.¹¹⁰

Writing in 1982, however, forty years after Loomis first proposed the existence of the large bookshop, Jacobs is forced to admit that there are problems with the theory. In order to account for all the similarities and changes between the three texts, there would have to have been more than one exemplum text of each romance within the bookshop.

That the *Freine* and *Beves* lines which descend from the archetype of all surviving versions were part of *Degarré* from the beginning cannot be finally demonstrated.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ Roland N. Walpole, 'The Source of Charlemagne and Roland and the Auchinleck Bookshop', *Modern Language Notes*, 60 (1945) pp. 22-26 (p. 22-26).

¹⁰⁹ Pearsall and Cunningham, *The Auchinleck Manuscript*, p. ix.

¹¹⁰ N. Jacobs, 'Sir Degarré, Lay le Freine, Beves of Hampton and the Auchinleck Bookshop', *Notes and Queries*, 227 (1982) pp. 294-301, p. 296.

¹¹¹ Jacobs, 'Sir Degarré', p. 299

Chapter One – Introduction

Though he admits this, Jacobs is still convinced that the texts were created in the Auchinleck bookshop, considering the size of this scriptorium and the high number of scribes working there. He believes that the scale of the scriptorium and the ‘known capacity of the Auchinleck scribes for redaction’¹¹² explains the changes in text that he has been unable to fully comprehend.

As with all uncertain theories, the large bookshop hypothesis has been contested. Pearsall states that ‘the claims that have been made for the existence of a London bookshop in the 1330s, on the evidence of collaborative activity in the Auchinleck manuscript, are probably exaggerated.’¹¹³ Mordkoff, for example, suggests that the Auchinleck manuscript was produced in a monastic scriptorium. She states that ‘there is no evidence whatsoever that such scriptoria as suggested by Loomis existed in England before the 15th century.’¹¹⁴ Instead, through an examination of the scribal hands, collaborative writing within the manuscript and the use of the individual booklets, Mordkoff concludes that the manuscript had to be a product of a monastic scriptorium.¹¹⁵ There is, however, no concrete evidence that this was the case, and Mordkoff’s theories are challenged by the observations of Gisela Guddat-Figge, who states convincingly that the miniatures of Auchinleck were completed in the same workshop as that of the Queen Mary Psalter.¹¹⁶ This fact suggests that the manuscript was produced by a commercial workshop rather than a monastery, as we would expect the latter manuscript to be completed in its entirety within the monastery.

Further, more sustained, challenges to the large bookshop theory have predominantly come from scholars who envision a different version of a lay scriptorium, an idea which has gradually come to the fore and for which most critics are now generally agreed. The concept of the extent of the bookshop was challenged by Judith Weiss, who rejected Walpole’s earlier claim that the Edwardes manuscripts were upon the shelves of the bookshop.¹¹⁷ Timothy Allen Shonk further refuted the idea of an expansive bookshop in his doctoral dissertation, which disagrees with both Mordkoff’s monastic theory and the large bookshop theory. He claimed that there is no evidence for either, and suggests an

¹¹² Jacobs, ‘Sir Degarré’, p. 299.

¹¹³ Derek Pearsall, ‘Introduction’, in *Book Production and Publishing in Britain 1375-1475*, ed. by Jeremy Griffiths and Derek Pearsall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp.1-10, p.6.

¹¹⁴ Mordkoff, ‘The Making of the Auchinleck’, p. 2.

¹¹⁵ Mordkoff, ‘The Making of the Auchinleck’, p. 246.

¹¹⁶ Gisela Guddat-Figge, *Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Middle English Romances* (München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1976) p. 19.

¹¹⁷ J. Weiss, ‘The Auchinleck MS and the Edwardes MSS’, *Notes and Queries*, 16 (1969), pp. 444-446, p. 444-445.

Chapter One – Introduction

alternative bookshop, much smaller in size than previously speculated. He suggested that this bookshop was owned and run by scribe one who ‘having accepted a contract for a large volume, hired professional scribes to assist him.’¹¹⁸ Shonk developed this argument further in a later article, where he convincingly argues against the idea of a large bookshop, citing both manuscript evidence and historical evidence of book-making and ownership in the early fourteenth century. He concludes with a detailed description of a small bookshop, likely no larger than one room, belonging to a single scribe who took commissions for written work including manuscripts.¹¹⁹ Shonk’s hypothesis about a small bookshop fits well with my argument that this manuscript was carefully constructed to guide models of behaviour in the female audience. The theory of a large bookshop, with a stock of manuscript booklets ready and waiting for customers would go against my arguments that small changes unique to Auchinleck texts were deliberately made for the guidance of the female audience. It also goes against some of the more general facts about manuscripts from the fourteenth century. Such a vast line of production would suggest a high demand for manuscripts, and a level of regular purchasing which there is not concrete evidence for; the numbers of extant manuscripts from this period (even taking into account a low survival rate) do not seem to match the expected productivity of such an establishment. The smaller bookshop not only fits far better with our current understanding of manuscript production than the large model, but it also suggests a far more intimate and personal experience of commissioning a manuscript that would allow for the sustained development of themes such as the regulation of female sexuality, and the insertion of a consistent notion of guidance for female behaviour throughout. As Ralph Hanna observes, in pre-1450 England, ‘all books are probably “bespoke”, the product of special orders.’¹²⁰ We know from the history of reading research presented above that manuscripts were being produced for the female reader; such a distinct purpose is more likely to be achievable in Shonk’s small bookshop.

The language of the Auchinleck manuscript, predominantly Middle English, is significant to the hypothesis that the manuscript was written for a female reader or group of female listeners. As already discussed, female readers played a significant role in driving forward the demand for literature in Middle English, so the fact that every text in

¹¹⁸ Timothy A. Shonk, ‘A Study of the Auchinleck Manuscript: Investigations into the Processes of Book Making in the Fourteenth Century’ (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Tennessee, 1981), p. 133.

¹¹⁹ Timothy A. Shonk, ‘A Study of the Auchinleck Manuscript: Bookmen and Bookmaking in the Early Fourteenth Century’, *Speculum*, 60 (1985), pp. 71-91, p. 91.

¹²⁰ Hanna, ‘Miscellaneity and Vernacularity’, p.47.

Chapter One – Introduction

the manuscript is written in Middle English (with the exception of some Latin insertions in *The Harrowing of Hell*, *Speculum Gy de Warewyke* and *Dauid þe King*, and Anglo-Norman macaronics in *The Sayings of the Four Philosophers*) is significant.¹²¹ Furthermore, every romance in the manuscript, with the exception of *Floris and Blancheflour*, is in its earliest extant Middle English translation, whilst the origin of all texts is, in general, imported; they are not local London work.¹²² The scribes and/or commissioners of the Auchinleck have thus taken an active interest in translating contents into the Middle English language. Though we cannot be certain that this was done deliberately for a female reader, the strong impact women had upon the use of Middle English as a literary language cannot be ignored in the face of so many new translations in one of the earliest extant manuscripts written entirely in Middle English.

Despite being known, and sometimes dismissed, as a ‘romance’ manuscript, the Auchinleck manuscript contains a variety of contents.¹²³ Of the forty-three texts which remain in the manuscript, there are a significant number of religious narratives. There are six hagiographies (*The Legend of Pope Gregory*, *The Life of Adam and Eve*, *Seynt Mergrete*, *Seynt Katerine*, *The Life of Saint Mary Magdalene*, and *Anna Our Leuedis Moder*) found alongside one piece of liturgical writing (*The Paternoster*), one sermon (*Speculum Gy de Warewyke*), and ten further religious and didactic poems (*Saint Patrick’s Purgatory*, *þe Desputisoun Bitven þe Bodi & þe Soul*, *The Harrowing of Hell*, *The Clerk Who Would See the Virgin*, *On the Seven Deadly Sins*, *The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin*, *How Our Lady’s Sauter was First Found*, *The Sayings of Saint Bernard*, *Dauid þe King* and *The Four Foes of Mankind*). This means that religious texts equal forty-two percent of the manuscript’s contents. This is closely followed by the sixteen romances (*The King of Tars*, *Sir Degaré*, *Floris and Blancheflour*, *Guy of Warwick*, *Reinbrun*, *Sir Beues of Hamtoun*, *Of Arthour & Of Merlin*, *Lay le Freine*, *Roland and Vernagu*, *Otuel a Knight*, *Kyng Alisaunder*, *Sir Tristem*, *Sir Orfeo*, *Horn Childe & Maiden Rimnild*, *Amis and Amiloun* and *King Richard*), which make up a further thirty seven percent of the manuscript. The remaining nine texts are four items of secular poetry (*The Seven Sages of Rome*, *The Sayings of the Four Philosophers*, *þe Wenche þat Loued þe King* and *A Penniworþ of Witt*), two debate poems (*The Thrush and the Nightingale* and *The*

¹²¹ Pearsall and Cunningham, *The Auchinleck Manuscript*, p. viii.

¹²² Hanna, *London Literature*, p. 104.

¹²³ Boffey and Thompson dismiss the Auchinleck from their studies of miscellanies as a ‘major romance collection’, despite the fact the manuscript as a whole functions as an example of their statement that English secular and religious texts were usually published together. Boffey and Thompson, ‘Anthologies and Miscellanies’, p. 79.

Chapter One – Introduction

Alphabetical Praise of Women), one political poem (*Pe Simonie*), one historical epic (*The Anonymous Short English Metrical Chronicle*) and the mystifying *Battle Abbey Roll*: a list of the surnames of the Barons who came from Norman France after the conquest of 1066. Thus, it can be seen that the contents of the Auchinleck manuscript are predominantly religious texts and romances, the two genres identified earlier as being most commonly found in the lists of books own and patronised by female readers.¹²⁴

The high number of religious and romance texts within Auchinleck has led some critics to try and group the Auchinleck texts by genre, and to use these genres to establish thematic coherence in individual booklets. For example, Micael Vaughan, in his 2005 essay ‘Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales and the Auchinleck MS: Analogous Collections?’ argues that the contents of the first extant booklet of Auchinleck, which are all religious in nature, illustrate that the scribes who compiled the manuscript deliberately thought of booklet one as a ‘religious booklet’. This is, however, a problematic argument as he is forced to admit when he comments that ‘the *lais Sir Orfeo* and *Le Freine* are not in the same booklet.’¹²⁵ As both are Breton Lai, we would expect them to be situated together if the manuscript was organised by genre as Vaughan suggests. The first booklet is atypical of the manuscript; the rest contain a diverse and seemingly disparate mixture of genre. Bahr also makes the important observation that the booklets are simultaneously individual items and fragments of a larger piece of work; once bound, the distinction between booklets disappears.¹²⁶ Thus, any attempt to group texts by the ‘theme’ of a booklet is a flawed attempt at imposing an organisational schematic upon the manuscript. The coherency for which I argue is found in broader themes such as female sexuality and conduct, rather than generic consistency, echoing Hanna’s statement that ‘modern generic (and print-driven) expectations may be of very limited application to the prenational Middle English literary scene.’¹²⁷

Of the texts that retain their original start pages within the manuscript, all show numeration that is contemporary with their production. This is one fact that contributes to the conclusion of Mordkoff, A.J. Bliss and Ralph Hanna that the manuscript remains in its original order of compilation, and has not had any additional pieces inserted or the order changed during rebinding.¹²⁸ The numeration is, however, not perfect; there are occasions

¹²⁴ For a visual of these percentages, please see appendix two.

¹²⁵ Micael F. Vaughan, ‘Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales and the Auchinleck MS: Analogous Collections?’, *Archiv für das Studium der neueren Sprachen und Literaturen*, 2 (2005), pp. 259-274, p. 270.

¹²⁶ Bahr, *Fragments and Assemblages*, p. 107-108.

¹²⁷ Ralph Hanna, ‘Miscellaneity and Vernacularity’, p.51.

¹²⁸ Other factors, including the use of catchwords and scribal marks, will be discussed in detail below.

Chapter One – Introduction

when a number is skipped or repeated, and instances where a text is not numbered. Examples include extant texts twelve and thirteen (*The Life of Saint Mary Magdalene* and *Anna Our Leuedis Moder*), which are both numbered seventeen by the scribe. The consequence of the scribe's flaws in numeration, combined with the fact that there is no extant table of contents for the Auchinleck manuscript, is that we cannot say with any certainty exactly how many pieces have been lost. As the above scholars argue, however, this does not alter the fact that the remaining texts are preserved in the original order of compilation, forgiving the few numeration mistakes made by the scribe. This strengthens my argument for a contextual reading of the manuscript as it confirms that the texts were initially bound in the same order, allowing for readings that take into account the proximity of other texts around them.

A further unique factor that codicologists have been able to ascertain about Auchinleck is the high level of planning that went into the large manuscript. Bliss, for example, examines the frequent catchwords that are present throughout the manuscript as evidence for a distinct and coherent compilation plan that must have existed prior to completion of all texts. He explains that:

either the order of the articles had been planned in advance, so that any scribe who completed an article and a gathering at the same time was able to write a catchword for the guidance of the binder; or the scribe who was to write, or who was perhaps already writing, the next article was working so close at hand that he could be consulted about the order of the articles...the catchwords provide evidence of close collaboration between the scribes.¹²⁹

Catchwords are present throughout the Auchinleck manuscript. For example, the words 'as priueliche as it' appear on the bottom of f.11v, and the first line of the first column of text on f.12r begins 'as priueliche as it may be.' The presence of these catchwords illustrates that when one scribe reached the end of a text he was aware of what would follow, even if it was written by another scribe (as it was in many cases). Eight booklets in total display catchwords that link to the next booklet, and the others are likely to have been lost during the rebinding process the manuscript underwent in the 1820s and 1970s.¹³⁰ The catchwords, thus, provide further evidence that Auchinleck was a carefully compiled piece rather than a miscellany put together without much forethought or planning. The catchwords also provide further proof that the manuscript remains in the original compilation order produced in the fourteenth century, unlike other manuscripts which have

¹²⁹ Bliss, 'Notes on the Auchinleck', p. 657.

¹³⁰ Burnley & Wiggins, 'The Auchinleck Manuscript', [12th March 2014].

Chapter One – Introduction

been reordered and added to during rebinding processes. That we can see evidence that there was a plan for the compilation of Auchinleck is further encouragement to seek out a purpose behind this plan, such as the creation of a conduct book for women. That the book remains in its original order is an advantageous codicological fact which assists this study, as it allows for easy comparison of the treatment of texts and a consideration of their proximity to one and other.

Scribal marks made throughout the manuscript provide further additional evidence that there was a plan for the organisation of the texts of Auchinleck prior to the writing of every text. Mordkoff and Cunningham jointly examine the signatures in their article ‘New Light on the Signatures in the Auchinleck Manuscript,’ where they observe that, although contemporary with one and other, the signatures do not follow a logical sequence.¹³¹ This indicates that the scribes did not necessarily work through manuscript texts in chronological order. That they were able, then, to use catchwords to ensure a deliberate order of texts within the finished product illustrates that a plan must have been established before work began. The Auchinleck manuscript was a deliberately planned compilation of medieval texts, and the significant coherency in the manuscript is discussed in detail by Hanna in his 2005 monograph *London Literature, 1300-1380*. He too observes that:

although [the texts are] certainly preserved in an intended order, fixed by the consecutively numbered texts, and imposed by scribe I at the end of the work, these pieces are almost certainly not preserved in anything like the order of their production [prior to their initial binding]... That being said, it is possible to see in the book a somewhat more coherent structure... than merely the constituent production pieces.¹³²

Hanna considers scribe one not just the general editor who cobbled together a miscellany of texts at the end of the copying process, but a man who deliberately compiled texts in a set order. The texts of Auchinleck, he argues, were specifically chosen to suit the purpose of the manuscript and preserved in a distinct order. When this strong evidence for a deliberate planned order of texts is combined with the circumstantial evidence that Auchinleck was a women’s book found from the linguistic research and trends in genre discussed above, the possibility that Auchinleck was deliberately compiled for a female reader becomes significant. We have evidence of such deliberate planning of miscellanies in the fourteenth century; Boffey and Thompson consider it most unlikely that the combination of texts in Bodleian MS Fairfax 16 ‘should have been the fruit of piecemeal

¹³¹ I.C. Cunningham & J.E.C. Mordkoff, ‘New Light on the Signatures in the Auchinleck Manuscript’, *Scriptorium*, 36 vol. 2 (1982), pp. 280-292, p. 290.

¹³² Hanna, *London Literature*, p. 104.

Chapter One – Introduction

or random collecting’. They make similar claims about MS Tanner 346.¹³³ This level of planning is also far more coherent than seen in other household miscellanies, such as the Findern manuscript discussed above, which further suggests that there was a distinct audience in mind during the compilation of the manuscript.

Recent scholarship has suggested a family readership for the Auchinleck manuscript which consisted of both male and female readers. Turville-Petre, in what has so far been the only literary study of the entire manuscript, suggested that Auchinleck was for the family because the Saints’ tales were for the women and the chivalric romances were for the men.¹³⁴ Not only does this statement ignore the prolonged female interest in romances as illustrated by the history of reading evidence above, but it also assumes, in a rather reductive manner, that the medieval woman would not read a text with a male protagonist. Although it is impossible to formulate statistics about the gender of medieval readers in relation to the gender of the protagonist, evidence from modern day viewing patterns clearly illustrates that women regularly access and enjoy media with a male protagonist.¹³⁵ The idea that medieval women would only read texts with a female protagonist additionally ignores the fact that the title and the protagonist that is commonly named in said title have historically been assigned by male critics working over a century ago. As this thesis argues when discussing *The Legend of Pope Gregory*, our reliance on these titles can be misleading and may yet require revision.

Some critics have considered an individual text or group of texts in the light of the overall themes I study here, but none have done so in light of alternative research and without following the interest in the regulation of female behaviour through all texts in the manuscript. Siobhain Montserrat Bly’s doctoral dissertation contains an extensive discussion of Josian’s role as both Saracen and woman in *Sir Beues of Hamtoun*.¹³⁶ As her thesis is focused on the representations of Saracens within the manuscript, she does not discuss any other women within the manuscript. Hanna also considers the role of women when he concludes that

the danger of female sexuality (or the alternative imperative of chastity, occasionally with a frisson of incest) appears repeatedly in

¹³³ Boffey and Thompson, ‘Anthologies and Miscellanies’, p. 279.

¹³⁴ Thorlac Turville-Petre, *England the Nation: Language, Literature and National Identity, 1290-1340* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996) p. 129.

¹³⁵ Victoria McNally, ‘Why 2016 is the Year We Need to Stop Pretending Women Aren’t Geeks’, <<http://www.mtv.com/news/2683640/geek-media-numbers-breakdown/>, 2015> [4th March 2017].

¹³⁶ Siobhain Montserrat Bly, ‘Stereotypical Saracens, the Auchinleck Manuscript, and the Problems of Imagining Englishness in the Early Fourteenth Century’ (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Notre Dame, 2001), p. 91.

Chapter One – Introduction

Auchinleck romance as a destabilising motif... Auchinleck heroines are a great deal too prone to forwardness, indeed to engendering the narratively complicating claim of their own supposed lack of chastity.¹³⁷

Hanna draws his evidence from the representation of female sexuality in the Auchinleck romances, and notes that female behaviour, particularly as it surrounds sexual conduct, is a consistent theme throughout these texts. I will argue that the manuscript's interest in female sexuality expands beyond the romances, and this consistent theme is symptomatic of the sustained interest in female conduct present throughout all Auchinleck texts. More recently, Cathy Hume argues that the Auchinleck's redaction of *The Life of Adam and Eve* is a story of family values which treats the first family as an exemplum for society.¹³⁸ As is discussed below, however, there are specific references in the text that suggest that, whilst the family may have enjoyed the text in general, this narrative had a particular interest in reforming the behaviour of women. Whilst Fein's book provides some fascinating and convincing examinations of some of the individual Auchinleck texts, and revises some of the codicology with reference to new modern understandings of manuscript history, it does not examine texts within the context of the manuscript and their proximity to one and other. This thesis will argue that, when looked at together, the sustained interest in regulating female behaviour that is present across all texts of the manuscript, regardless of genre, suggests a particular meaning for the female reader of the Auchinleck manuscript.

A sustained critical reading of the entire manuscript is, unfortunately, not within the scope of this thesis. As Bahr explains in the introduction of his examination of booklet three,

Auchinleck is big enough that no scholarly treatment of publishable length can fully grapple with all its texts and contexts, so we are free to focus on those most congenial to our own interests and interpretations.¹³⁹

This thesis will focus on representative texts contained within booklets one and three of the manuscript. Selecting the first extant booklet will allow this thesis to establish that an interest in female behaviour and the control of female sexuality is found within the first texts of the manuscript.¹⁴⁰ Booklet one will then be contrasted with booklet three, selected

¹³⁷ Hanna, *London Literature*, p. 132.

¹³⁸ Cathy Hume, 'The Auchinleck's *Adam and Eve*: An Exemplary Family Story', in *The Auchinleck Manuscript: New Perspectives*, ed. by Susanna Fein (York: York Medieval Press, 2016) pp. 36-51, p. 36.

¹³⁹ Bahr, *Fragments and Assemblages*, p. 106.

¹⁴⁰ It is unfortunate that we do not have access to the very first booklet. *The King of Tars*, the second text in the first booklet of the manuscript, is numbered five. This suggests that the first booklet has been lost.

Chapter One – Introduction

because it is very similar in size to booklet one; both have a similar number of texts, were originally made up of six quires, and contain seventy-six and seventy-four leaves respectfully.¹⁴¹ The statistical similarities between booklets one and three makes them ideal to be compared; the other booklets vary greatly in size, with some only containing a few leaves. In terms of damage, both booklets one and booklets three are fairly intact, with no extensive missing pages, which again helps to allow for a broad and even comparison of the texts of the two booklets. Bahr and Hanna have pointed out that booklet three is atypical of the manuscript; it contains no texts copied by scribe one (who completed most of the Auchinleck texts) and it starts with a shorter text than the other Auchinleck booklets, which typically open with a long text.¹⁴² Hanna's 'top-heavy' structure, however, is also not found in booklet one, and scribe one's control of the structure of booklet three can be seen in the catchwords scattered throughout.¹⁴³ It is thus evident that scribe one was still in control of the compilation of booklet three. Also, as I propose throughout my discussion below, the shorter length of any text within booklets one and three does not negate their interest in female conduct nor potential use for the female reader. Indeed, as Emily Runde has shown, the two shorter didactic texts which begin booklet three are of particular significance to the female reader as they are of practical use to her as a mother, a role for women which Auchinleck praises.¹⁴⁴

The similarities between booklets one and three can also be seen in their content. Booklet one contains *The Legend of Pope Gregory*, *The King of Tars*, *The Life of Adam and Eve*, *Seynt Mergrete*, *Seynt Katerine*, *Saint Patrick's Purgatory*, *Þe Desputisoun Bitven þe Bodi & þe Soul*, *The Harrowing of Hell* and *The Clerk Who Would see the Virgin*. Booklet three contains *On þe Seven Deadly Sins*, *The Paternoster*, *The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin*, *Sir Degaré*, *The Seven Sages of Rome*, *Floris and Blanche flour*, *The Sayings of the Four Philosophers* and *The Battle Abbey Roll*. Both contain a mix of religious, didactic and romance texts, with slightly more hagiographical narratives in booklet one and slightly more romance narratives in booklet three.

I have divided my thesis into three parts; 'Rape Instigators and Abduction Victims', 'Good Wives and Dangerous Distractions', and 'Secularised Saints and Stripping Virgins', grouping the texts into categories by the role of the lead female character within each

¹⁴¹ Booklet two, the obvious choice to contrast with booklet one, is a very short booklet with fewer texts. The statistical similarity between booklets one and three allows for an even comparison.

¹⁴² Bahr, *Fragments and Assemblages*, p. 109. Hanna, *London Literature*, p. 76.

¹⁴³ Bahr, *Fragments and Assemblages*, p. 110.

¹⁴⁴ Emily Runde, 'Scribe 3's Literary Project: Pedagogies of Reading in Auchinleck's Booklet 3', in *The Auchinleck Manuscript: New Perspectives*, ed. by Susanna Fein (York: York Medieval Press, 2016) pp. 67-87, p. 82.

Chapter One – Introduction

narrative. The first chapter, ‘Rape Instigators and Abduction Victims’, will discuss *The Legend of Pope Gregory*, *Sir Degaré* and *Floris and Blancheflour*, all of which depict an unmarried woman who is subjected to rape and/or abduction. It will begin by discussing rape and abduction as they were understood in the fourteenth-century law contemporary with Auchinleck, and will also consider some of the literary and religious concerns which surrounded rape at this time. Having established legal and social perceptions of rape in fourteenth century England, I then turn to *The Legend of Pope Gregory*, where I discuss how knowledge of contemporary law is used to depict a woman as guilty for her own rape. I will also discuss how the woman’s lack of proper male guidance leaves society at risk of incest as she is free to make incorrect choices and behave inappropriately, threatening patriarchal social structure. *Sir Degaré* also discusses the dangers faced by women who lack male authority figures to control their impulses, an issue that once again finds the woman guilty of her own rape. With *Floris and Blancheflour*, I turn my attention to abduction, seen as synonymous with rape at this time. I explore Blancheflour’s depiction as a good and obedient woman in contrast with the women of both *The Legend of Pope Gregory* and *Sir Degaré*, and discuss how she is rewarded rather than punished as her behaviour conforms to the perceived ideal set out through the guidance of male authorities.

The next chapter, entitled ‘Good Wives and Dangerous Distractions’, discusses three of the Auchinleck texts: *The King of Tars*, *The Life of Adam and Eve* and *The Seven Sages of Rome*. These texts represent women in the role of fiancé and wife. The chapter begins with a discussion of the contemporary legal understanding of the marriage ceremony, with a focus on female consent. I also discuss the considerable background of misogynistic literature about wives that influences these three narratives. Having illustrated the literary background and legal background that informs depictions of wives in Auchinleck, I then turn my attention to *The King of Tars*, which provides an excellent example of the doctrine of female consent in action, revealing how it could be used by women to bring about relationships of their choosing and simultaneously damage established social orders by counteracting feudal marriage structures. My work on *The Life of Adam and Eve* builds upon that of Hume to show that, whilst the text is interested in the family unit, this interest is overshadowed by specific references to Eve’s disobedience. *The Seven Sages of Rome* provides an interesting concluding text for this chapter, presenting a microcosm of the manuscript as a whole with a mixture of short stories which both praise and condemn women, leading to the eventual death of the evil wife.

Chapter One – Introduction

The final chapter, ‘Secularised Saints and Stripping Virgins’, discusses the specific model the virgin martyr saints and Marian tales provided for women who had not chosen the religious life. It begins by considering how narratives which seem to recommend virginity can provide models of behaviour for women in ordinary life, before discussing four texts: *Seynt Mergrete*, *Seynt Katerine*, *The Clerk Who Would See the Virgin*, and *The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin*. In my discussion of *Seynt Mergrete*, I show how the text can act as a guide for mothers through an examination of some significant changes to her vita, specific to the Auchinleck manuscript, which emphasise the importance of the role of motherhood. I follow this by considering how the Auchinleck representation of *Seynt Katerine* discusses levels of chastity and shows concern with the exposure of the female body to the audience. The woman’s naked body and its potential effect on both the individual man and society at large is echoed in both *The Clerk Who Would See the Virgin* and *The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin*, both of which use the figure of the Virgin Mary in order to educate women about the need to protect their bodies from the male gaze.

In this analysis, I will show that interactions with the historical and cultural context in which Auchinleck was written allows each narrative to use female characters as a way to comment upon the behaviour of contemporary women. These representations are consistent across both booklets of the manuscript, spanning different genre in order to create a constant interest in the regulation of female behaviour across the entire manuscript. Having established this consistent interest in women’s conduct, I will consider how these depictions would have affected the potential female reader of the manuscript. Ultimately, I demonstrate that the manuscript’s consistent interest in female behaviour, particularly when combined with the codicological evidence that suggest the manuscript was a “woman’s book”, makes it likely the Auchinleck manuscript was deliberately compiled as a proto-conduct book for the female reader, or for a group of female listeners.

Chapter Two – Rape Instigators and Victims of Abduction

Introduction

One of the dominant themes of the manuscript which particularly relates to female readers is the representation of rape and abduction. Such representations occur in a variety of Auchinleck texts including *Sir Beues of Hamtoun* and *Of Arthur & of Merlin*. The three I have selected for this study are the hagiographical *The Legend of Pope Gregory*, the Breton lay *Sir Degaré*, and the romance *Floris and Blancheflour*. These are the three texts in booklets one and three that depict sexual assault and abduction. The chapter will situate each narrative within the context of fourteenth century rape law.

In order to understand the legal context of these rape narratives, I must clarify exactly what is meant by the word rape. Even today, it is a surprisingly misunderstood word with a variety of subtle, but important, linguistic changes that affect its legal definition. Christopher Cannon summarises rape as an incident where:

...an act of sexual intercourse occurs and there is mental disorder, development or physical disability, force or violence, fear of bodily injury either immediately or as threatened for the future, unconsciousness of the nature of the act, intoxication or anaesthetization, or an artificially induced belief that the person committing the act is the person's spouse.¹⁴⁵

Although not a legal definition, Cannon's is the most thorough and all-encompassing I have encountered. Legal definitions vary and often lack the 'artificially induced belief' which is important when considering fictional worlds where magic is an active force upon a character's reality. Hereafter in this thesis, I will define the word rape as Cannon does. The equivalent Middle English word, however, has a much more ambiguous meaning.

Raptus, the medieval English legal term which covered rape, conflated sexual assault with what modern audiences would call abduction and/or elopement. Modern scholars consider the legal term to be one of the most slippery terms in use in fourteenth century England.¹⁴⁶ For our hypothetical female audience, *raptus* had an entirely different

¹⁴⁵ Christopher Cannon, 'Chaucer and Rape: Uncertainty's Certainties', in *Representing Rape in Medieval and Early Modern Literature*, ed. by Elizabeth Robertson & Christine M. Rose (Hampshire: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 225-279, p. 258.

¹⁴⁶ Caroline Dunn, 'The Language of Ravishment in Medieval England', *Speculum*, 86 Vol. 1 (2011), pp. 79-166, p. 80 & 87. See also James A. Brundage, 'Rape and Seduction in Medieval Canon Law', in *Sexual Practices & the Medieval Church*, ed. by Vern L. Bullough & James Brundage (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1982), pp. 141-148, p. 144), Christopher Cannon, 'Raptus in the Champaigne Release and a Newly Discovered Document Concerning the Life of Geoffrey Chaucer', *Speculum*, 68 Vol. 1 (1993), pp. 74-94, p. 75 & 78, Caroline Dunn, *Stolen Women in Medieval England: Rape, Abduction, and Adultery, 1100-1500*

Chapter Two – Rape Instigators and Victims of Abduction

set of associations than those evoked in modern definitions. In order to understand how the law of *raptus* functioned in fourteenth century England, we must first examine how it developed throughout the thousand years between the end of the Roman occupation and the dating of the Auchinleck manuscript.

Rape law in Britain first developed from the example set by ancient Roman laws. There were two words which Roman law used as the basis for sexual crimes: *raptus* and *stuprum*, neither of which initially included rape as defined by Canon. The first is derived from the classical Latin *rapere*, which means ‘to tear, snatch, carry off, seize, plunder, hurry, seize quickly.’¹⁴⁷ The second is derived from *stupare*, which means ‘to defile, to ravish.’¹⁴⁸ The definitions found in classical Latin suggest a clear distinction between both verbs, with *rapere* covering cases of abduction and *stupare* covering cases of sexual assault and rape. Diana Moses and James Brundage, however, have examined evidence of Roman law in practise and concluded that the words were not historically used in such a precise manner.

At its most basic level, *stuprum* denoted sexual intercourse where one of the participants was used by another as a means of gratifying their lust, in a union that was not authorised by law through the act of marriage or concubinage. Moses explains that

Stuprum did not itself mean forcible sex. While the meaning of *stuprum* was not antithetical to the use of force to procure the sex, it did not include it either; rather, the idea of force had to be supplied through other words and phrases... On the other hand, the term *stuprum* did not *exclude* the possibility that force was involved either – the word was neutral as to the details of the circumstance under which the sex occurred probably because the aspect of the act that imparted shame to the victim was his or her having been used; whether the victim had consented to this use was irrelevant.¹⁴⁹

In Roman law, *stuprum* itself only referred to sexual misconduct which resulted in the shaming of one of the participants. It was necessary to add additional words ‘such as the

(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 19, Kathryn Gravdal, ‘Chretien de Troyes, Gratian, and the Medieval Romance of Sexual Violence’, *Signs*, 17 Vol. 3 (1992), pp. 558-585, p. 565, Kim M. Phillips, ‘Four Virgins’ Tales: Sex and Power in Medieval Law’, in *Medieval Virginites*, ed. by Anke Bernau & Ruth Evans (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003), pp. 80-101, p. 83, Andrew Prescott, ‘Chaucer and Rape Revisited’, paper given at University of Glasgow, April 2013, Sue Sheridan Walker, ‘Common Law Juries and Feudal Marriage Customs in Medieval England: The Pleas of Ravishment’, *University of Illinois Law Review*, Vol. 1 (1984), pp. 705-718, p. 709, Sue Sheridan Walker, ‘Punishing Convicted Ravishers: Statutory Strictures and Actual Practice in Thirteenth and Fourteenth-Century England’, *Journal of Medieval History*, 13 vol. 3 (1987), pp. 237-250, p. 237.

¹⁴⁷ *Collins Latin Dictionary & Grammar* (Glasgow: HarperCollins Publishers, 1997), p. 181.

¹⁴⁸ *Collins Latin Dictionary*, p. 207.

¹⁴⁹ Diana C. Moses, ‘Livy’s Lucretia and the Validity of Coerced Consent in Roman Law’, in *Consent and Coercion to Sex and Marriage in Ancient and Medieval Societies*, ed. by Angeliki E. Laiou (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks, 1993) pp. 39-82, p. 46.

Chapter Two – Rape Instigators and Victims of Abduction

phrase “per vim,” some form or derivative of “violo,” or some form of “rapio,” in order to denote forced intercourse.¹⁵⁰ *Stuprum per vim* was the standard phrase used when prosecuting forced coitus.¹⁵¹

Alternatively, an act of rape could be punished under Roman *raptus* law. Primarily,

raptus consisted in the abduction and sequestration of a woman against the will of the person under whose authority she lived.¹⁵²

Though forced coitus could be a part of this crime it was, again, not the primary concern of the law. *Raptus* was more concerned with the forced removal of the woman from her home than the act of rape. Moses suggests that forced coitus never became a primary meaning of *raptus*.¹⁵³

A third term which was used in ancient Rome that has some familiarity to regulations about sexual intercourse was *incestum*, which was the predecessor of the sin/crime of incest. Rather than specifically relating to sex with a family member, *incestum* covered a large variety of sexual misdeeds, with a focus on pollution and sexual incontinence. The charge of *incestum* was applied, for example, to adulterous relationships or the act of intercourse with a vestal virgin. The wider meaning of pollution persisted into medieval understandings of the word incest, as did the more specific meaning of a holy virgin’s loss of virginity; in medieval England incest could apply to intercourse with nuns as well as with family members.¹⁵⁴ Of the three words, *raptus*, *stuprum*, and *incestum*, it was *raptus* that the Christian writers borrowed in their discussions of violent acts in gender relations.¹⁵⁵ Thus, the origin of the conflation of rape and abduction that will be seen in Christian law can be found within Roman understandings of sexual violence in gendered relationships.

Evidence from early medieval Europe suggests that the medieval law of *raptus*, as in the Roman period, conflated abduction with rape, in some cases even privileging the former over the latter. For example, Canon 30 of St Basil, who lived circa 330-379, discusses the nature of abduction both with and without *stuprum* (all forms of unlawful

¹⁵⁰ Moses, *Livy’s Lucretia*, p. 46.

¹⁵¹ Moses. *‘Livy’s Lucretia’*, p. 50.

¹⁵² James A. Brundage, *‘Rape and Marriage in the Medieval Canon Law’*, *Revue de droit canonique*, 28 (1978), pp. 62-75, p. 63.

¹⁵³ Moses, *‘Livy’s Lucretia’*, p. 50.

¹⁵⁴ Elizabeth Archibald, *Incest and the Medieval Imagination* (Online: Oxford Scholarship, 2001) p. 13.

¹⁵⁵ David G. Hunter, *Marriage in the Early Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), p. 9.

Chapter Two – Rape Instigators and Victims of Abduction

coitus, including rape).¹⁵⁶ The Emperor Constantine I also focused on abduction when, on the 1st April 326, he ‘issued a strongly worded edict (CTh IX. 24.1) forcefully attacking the practice of abduction marriage or bride theft.’¹⁵⁷ The edict read:

If someone who has not previously made any agreement with a girl’s parents should seize her although she is unwilling or if he should lead her away when she is willing, hoping for the protection from the response of one whom, on account of the fault of frivolity and the fickleness of her sex and judgement, our ancestors completely excluded from making legal complaints...the girl’s response shall be of no use to him according to the ancient law, but rather the girl herself shall be made guilty by association in the crime... And if voluntary assent is revealed in the virgin, she shall be struck with the same severity as her abductor; impunity shall not be offered to those girls who are abducted against their will either, since they too could have kept themselves at home til their marriage day and, if doors were broken down by the abductor’s audacity, they could have sought help from the neighbours by their cries and could have defended themselves with their efforts...But if any slave should bring forth into public the fact that the crime of abduction has been neglected by deception or disregarded by an agreement (between the abductor and the girl’s parents), he shall be rewarded with Latin status, or if he already has Latin status, he shall become a Roman citizen.¹⁵⁸

This particular edict states that the man who removes a girl from her parent’s protection, regardless of her consent, is guilty of abduction. The girl is also to be found guilty of her abduction if she consented; even if she did not, she is still guilty of failing to make enough effort to defend herself. The edict is thought to be part of a larger collection of legislation addressing sexual conduct and immorality.¹⁵⁹ Although sexual immorality appears to be a social concern which Constantine is particularly interested in, the offer of citizenship to a slave shows a particular concern about abduction;

that he considers *raptus* a particularly heinous offence is indicated by the fact that this is one of the few cases where delation of a master by his own slave is not only encouraged, but actually rewarded.¹⁶⁰

Although CTh IX. 24. 1 is described as a *raptus* law, it is clear from the above translation that rape was not of concern to Constantine. His interpretation of *raptus* law followed

¹⁵⁶ Angeliki E. Laoui, ‘Sex, Consent and Coercion in Byzantium’, in *Consent and Coercion to Sex and Marriage in Ancient and Medieval Societies*, ed. by Angeliki E. Laoui (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks, 1993), pp. 109-226 (p. 134).

¹⁵⁷ Judith Evans-Grubbs, ‘Abduction Marriage in Antiquity: A Law of Constantine (CTh IX. 24.I) and its Social Context’, *The Journal of Roman Studies*, 79 (1989), pp. 59-83, p. 59.

¹⁵⁸ Evans-Grubbs, ‘Abduction Marriage’, p. 60.

¹⁵⁹ Evans-Grubbs, ‘Abduction Marriage’, p. 60.

¹⁶⁰ Evans-Grubbs, ‘Abduction Marriage’, p. 60.

Chapter Two – Rape Instigators and Victims of Abduction

earlier Roman interpretations and privileged abduction over sexual assault, to the point where rape was not mentioned.

The focus on abduction over rape was, however, changed by Justinian I in the sixth century. As Brundage describes, he altered the meaning of *raptus* by specifically describing it ‘as a sexual crime against unmarried women, widows or nuns,’ rather than focusing solely on the removal of the woman’s body.¹⁶¹ His attitude reveals that dual meanings circulated simultaneously and ecclesiastical laws now listed both abduction and rape under the same legal heading of *raptus*. Justinian’s specification that only unmarried women, widows, or nuns could be victims of rape, however, implied that married women were unable to be raped in the eyes of the law. For Justinian, the potential victims of rape were ‘single’ women, who could yet be married. Although not specifically mentioned, Justinian’s focus on unmarried women implies that there is a difference between the body of the unmarried woman and the body of the married woman, and that the law must consider that difference. Justinian’s words, released approximately two hundred years later than Constantine’s, suggest that the legal perception in Medieval Europe was gradually shifting from the focus in Roman law on *raptus* as abduction, to a Christian law definition of *raptus* as a sexual crime.

Justinian’s words, with their emphasis on *raptus* as forced sexual intercourse, aligns with what historians know of Anglo-Saxon law, which focused on the damage done to the female body by rape. Anglo-Saxon law considered rape to devalue a woman to the extent that financial restitution had to be made, which could be achieved through the marriage of the rapist to the victim or through monetary compensation.¹⁶² That Anglo-Saxon society was concerned with gaining restitution for the physical damage to the woman’s body suggests that the Anglo-Saxons were operating on a definition of *raptus* as sexual assault rather than abduction. The practise of requiring financial restitution suggests that Anglo-Saxon society felt that women’s bodies had a financial value that was damaged by forced coitus. The commodification of women as objects which could be assigned financial worth echoes the implied monetary value of the female body found in Justinian’s distinction between the unmarried (thus valuable) body and the married. The commodification of the female body is an idea which would be intensified in later medieval law.

¹⁶¹ Brundage, ‘Rape and Marriage’, p. 64.

¹⁶² Corinne Saunders, *Rape and Ravishment in the Literature of Medieval England* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2001), p. 41.

Chapter Two – Rape Instigators and Victims of Abduction

Sexual violation remained the predominant understanding of *raptus* in post-conquest England. The 1187-1189 treatise *Tractatus de Legibus et Conuestudinibus Regni Henrici Secundi*, known as Glanvill due to its attribution to Ranulf de Glanvill, continues to interpret *raptus* as rape.¹⁶³ This treatise, however, was out of touch with the rest of Europe, which was moving to add abduction back into *raptus* law. A key text which shows this change is the *Decretum Gratiani*, a treatise written circa 1140 by the canonist and jurist Gratian. It became one of the most important collections of canon law in the Middle Ages, and was frequently used as a central reference book.¹⁶⁴ Gratian stated (summarised by Gravidal) that, in order for *raptus* to occur,

Unlawful coitus must be completed; (2) the victim must be abducted from the house of her father; (3) the abduction and coitus must be accomplished by violence; and (4) a marriage agreement must not have been negotiated previously between the victim and the ravisher.¹⁶⁵

Whilst Gratian does not completely ignore forced coitus, he emphasises the requirement for a woman to be removed from the house of her father. The return of abduction as a key concept of the criminal act complicated the notion of *raptus*.

The confusion that ensued from such changes can be seen in the adjustments to English law made in response to such ideas. In the thirteenth century, less than 100 years prior to the compilation of the Auchinleck manuscript, the *Statutes of Westminster* officially brought abduction back into English rape law. The first, written in 1275, reads:

And the King prohibiteth that none do ravish, nor take away by force, any Maiden within Age, neither by her own consent, nor without; nor any Wife or Maiden of full Age, nor any other Woman, against her Will;¹⁶⁶

This short description mentions both a sexual assault in the word ‘ravish’ and an abduction in ‘take away by force.’ It seems that either rape or abduction, or a case of both, would qualify to be tried under this statute. The second, written ten years later in 1285, made no attempt to clear this confusion. It reads:

It is Provided, That if a Man from henceforth do ravish a Woman, married, Maid or other, where she did not consent, neither before nor after, he shall have Judgment of Life and Member. And likewise where a Man ravisheth

¹⁶³ Saunders, *Rape and Ravishment*, p. 53.

¹⁶⁴ Alcuin Blamires, *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 83.

¹⁶⁵ Gravidal, ‘Chretien de Troyes’, p. 567.

¹⁶⁶ ‘3 Edw. I. Stat. Westm. Prim. C13’, in *The Statutes of the Realm: Vol I* (Ontario: TannerRitchie Publishing, 2007), p. 199.

Chapter Two – Rape Instigators and Victims of Abduction

a Woman, married Lady, Demosel, or other with Force, although she consent after, he shall have such Judgement as before is said.¹⁶⁷

The use of the word ‘ravish’ further complicates the conflation between rape and abduction within these statutes’. As suggested in my discussion of the history of female reading, post-conquest England was a multi-lingual country. Latin was the primary language of the law, whilst, as a result of the Norman Conquest, French was spoken frequently alongside the vernacular Middle English. As such, there are dual French and English versions of the Statutes. The French versions read:

Et le Rey defent q[ue] nul ne ravie ne prenge a force damoysele dedenz age.¹⁶⁸

Purveu c[e]st que si home ravist femme, espouse, damoisele, au femme desoremes.¹⁶⁹

Ravie and *ravist* are both forms of the Old French verb *ravir*, which derived from the Latin *rapio*, *rapere*. Its common meanings are ‘to run at great speed, to carry off by force; or to be carried off at great speed.’ In her ground-breaking study of rape in French literature and law, Kathryn Gravdal examines the development of the word in the context of French rape law. She states that the verb develops connotations of sexual force which are additional to those of swiftness and carrying off. From this, *ravissant* develops by the twelfth century to mean ‘someone or thing that carries others off by force.’ *Rap* (c.1155) and *rat* (c.1235) swiftly followed, designating abduction by violence or abduction for the purpose of forced coitus.¹⁷⁰ Gravdal highlights that *ravir* has a dual meaning that is comparable with the meaning of the English *raptus*. Therefore, the word used in the French version of the Statutes is one that means both rape and abduction, as does the English word ‘ravish’ which derives from it. Even the second *Statute*, which initially seems only to discuss rape, can be seen to conflate rape and abduction together by using a word with ambiguous meaning; ravish. Thus, it is possible to see that, as Cannon states, ‘Westminster I lumped rape and abduction together...and Westminster II furthered the ensuing confusion by using language that made no distinction at all between these two categories of wrong.’¹⁷¹ By the

¹⁶⁷ ‘13 Edw. I. Stat. Westm. Prim. C.34’, in *The Statutes of the Realm: Vol I* (Ontario: TannerRitchie Publishing, 2007), p. 89.

¹⁶⁸ ‘3 Edw I Stat. Westm. Prim. C.13’, p. 31.

¹⁶⁹ ‘13 Edw. I. Stat. Westm. Prim. C.34’, p. 89.

¹⁷⁰ Kathryn Gravdal, *Ravishing Maidens: Writing Rape in Medieval French Literature and Law* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), p. 4.

¹⁷¹ Cannon, ‘Raptus in the Chaumpaigne’, p. 79.

Chapter Two – Rape Instigators and Victims of Abduction

time of the Auchinleck manuscript, the law had blurred the distinction between abduction and rape.

Evidence of the impact upon court causes that was caused by the lack of legal distinction between rape and abduction can be found in the court documents of late medieval England, where the ambiguity has caused problems for historians examining the events surrounding each document. One particularly well studied example is the possible rape of Cecily Chaumpaigne by Geoffrey Chaucer, where the ambiguity has left legal and literary historians debating whether the charge from which Cecily Chaumpaigne released Chaucer was rape or abduction. These studies initially focused on the deed of release, where Chaumpaigne released Chaucer from ‘*ommodas acciones tam de raptu meo tam de aliqua re vel causa*’ (‘all manner of actions as they relate to my rape or any other thing or cause’).¹⁷² It is the translation of *raptus* that has split scholars into three camps: those who believe that the word means abduction without connotations of sexual violence, those who are sure that rape is the only acceptable translation, and those who believe it could mean either.¹⁷³

Cannon challenged the results of these previous studies by criticising their reliance on standard Latin dictionaries, stating that *raptus* was so malleable

That the historical dictionaries are able to provide examples to support all the contradictory definitions advanced over the years. *Raptus* as well as *rapere* could mean either “abduction” or “forced coitus” in classical and Medieval Latin texts; and since it could be one or the other, it was sometimes the case that it might be (deliberately or accidentally) so ambiguous as to mean both.¹⁷⁴

Cannon claims that it is not possible to use historical dictionaries to understand the use of *raptus*. Instead, he compares the Chaumpaigne release to others from the same period and a second Chaucer document found in the court records, in the hopes that an examination of the patterns in court documents may reveal a common meaning for *raptus* that the dictionaries do not. He concludes that the term most probably refers to sexual assault.

A more recent study by Caroline Dunn, however, reveals that *raptus* is as ambiguous in the court documents as it is in the dictionaries. In her article ‘The Language of Ravishment in Medieval England,’ Dunn investigates 1213 references to *raptus* produced in Medieval England between 1200 and 1500, comparing their linguistic patterns. She initially illustrates the existence of a variety of meanings of *raptus* by

¹⁷² Martin M. Crow & Clair C. Olson, *Chaucer Life-Records* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p. 343.

¹⁷³ Cannon, ‘Raptus in the Chaumpaigne’, p. 75.

¹⁷⁴ Cannon, ‘Raptus in the Chaumpaigne’, p. 78.

Chapter Two – Rape Instigators and Victims of Abduction

offering four examples. The first, dating from 1346, states ‘feloniously ravished (*rapuit*) and carnally lay with [Sibyl Norman] against her assent and will.’ The second, from 1350, states ‘ravished (*rapuerunt*) and abducted John.’ The third, from 1374, states ‘ravished (*rapuit*) and abducted Christina.’ The final, originating between 1375 and 1376, states ‘ravished (*rapuit*) ten marks of silver.’¹⁷⁵ All of these examples tie *raptus* with the notion of abduction/seizing, with only the first explicitly stating that any felonious sexual crime took place.

Having examined the language of the court documents, Dunn found that forty-six percent of the use of the word *raptus* and its varying forms referred to abduction, with forty-three percent unclear about the exact crime committed. Nine percent of cases specifically addressed rape, and two percent clearly addressed both rape and abduction.¹⁷⁶ In her analysis of these results, Dunn states that

In the thirteenth century...most allegations of abduction avoided the ambiguous terms of *rapuit* and *raptus* in favour of other terminology, but the fourteenth century shows a dramatic reversal, with a clear majority of abduction references employing a form of *raptus*.¹⁷⁷

Her evidence has revealed that, while *raptus* became the preferred word for abduction cases, it is still difficult to tell whether a case refers to abduction, rape or both. The evidence shows that the meaning of the term was conflated.¹⁷⁸

The clarity of the legal documents is also blurred by the medieval legal process which erases the victim’s voice. Each victim would require a lawyer, who Phillips refers to as a narrator, who would present the case in the form required within the courts, effectively creating a ‘synthesis’ of her voice which obeyed required forms and was translated into Latin.¹⁷⁹ Cannon, Dunn and Phillips all show that individual cases are complex and claim they rarely provide the entire picture. Andrew Prescott, however, has begun to question our understanding of this ambiguity by claiming that the legal approach used by claimants can distinguish between rape and abduction. He suggests that appeals were regularly brought forward by women and illustrate cases where *raptus* meant rape. Alternatively, *raptus* cases brought by men were prosecuted as a trespass, indicating abduction as they took

¹⁷⁵ Dunn, ‘The Language of Ravishment’, p. 88.

¹⁷⁶ Dunn, ‘The Language of Ravishment’, p. 91.

¹⁷⁷ Dunn, ‘The Language of Ravishment’, p. 104.

¹⁷⁸ It cannot be considered a coincidence that the turning point Dunn discusses happens at the same time as the changes in legislation that blurred rape and abduction together.

¹⁷⁹ Kim M. Phillips, ‘Four Virgins’ Tales: Sex and Power in Medieval Law’, in *Medieval Virginites*, ed. by Anke Bernau and Ruth Evans (Cardiff: University of Wales press, 2003), pp. 80-101, p. 82.

Chapter Two – Rape Instigators and Victims of Abduction

issue with the loss of property.¹⁸⁰ This difference in method of prosecution suggests that the public and the legal system did perceive a difference between rape and abduction after all. The ambiguous wording of the statutes and of legal documents themselves, however, still illustrates a system that struggled to define abduction and rape as separate crimes.

The vocabulary which surrounds rape in non-legal sources, such as poems, biblical translations, and letters, has been less thoroughly studied. This is the language, however, of the Auchinleck manuscript, which is not a legal text. I have thus examined the various words for rape that are found in four modern sources which trace the meaning and use of Middle English words: Julie Coleman's *Love, Sex and Marriage: A Historical Thesaurus*, the *Middle English Dictionary* and the *Oxford English Dictionary* online combined with *Historical Thesaurus of the Oxford English Dictionary*.¹⁸¹ The etymology of terms for sexual assault reveal that there are seven different semantic forms which are used in Middle English to describe forced coitus.¹⁸²

First, the Latin word *stuprum* can be seen within vernacular English. 'Stupre' developed from the Latin *stuprum* and the Old French *stupre*. Coleman's dictionary, the OED and the MED all date the first written use of 'stupre' to 1382 as a noun meaning forced sex, rape, or violation.¹⁸³ It is found in the early version of the Wycliffite Bible. Genesis 32.12 reads: "Þe sonnes of Iacob answerden to Sychym...in tretchory, waxing cruel for þe stupre of þe syster." Additionally Genesis 34.27 reads "Takyng Dyne here syster from þe house of Sychym...þey destruyden þe cyte into vengauce of þe stupre."¹⁸⁴ It is an unusually explicit and rare word that, after the Wycliffite bible, is not seen again until 1564, in Thomas Becon's *The worckes*.¹⁸⁵ Words that derive from 'stupre' are 'stupration', first seen in John Bellenden's 1533 *Livy's History of Rome* as a noun meaning forced sex/violation of a woman, 'suprate', first seen in Edward Hall's 1548 *The vnion of the two noble and illustrate famelies of Lancastre [and] York* as a transitive verb meaning to violate a woman, 'stuprous', first seen in Michel de Montaigne's 1603 *The*

¹⁸⁰ Prescott, *Chaucer and Raptus*.

¹⁸¹ Although I have included information from Coleman's dictionary, it should be noted that she does not cite her sources for the dates she provides.

¹⁸² Hereafter, these will be referred to as the *OED*, Coleman's *Thesaurus* and the *MED*.

¹⁸³ Julie Coleman, *Love, Sex, and Marriage: A Historical Thesaurus* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1999) p.174. Oxford University Press, 'Oxford English Dictionary Online', <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/192236?rskey=BLBCY&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid>>, [Accessed 28th August 2018]. University of Michigan, 'Middle English Dictionary', <<https://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?size=First+100&type=headword&q1=stupre&rgxp=constrained>>, [Accessed 28th August 2018].

¹⁸⁴ MED, <<https://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=byte&byte=198898636&egdisplay=compact&egs=198899458>>, [Accessed 28th August 2018].

¹⁸⁵ OED, <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/192236?rskey=BLBCY&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid>>, [Accessed 28th August 2018]

Chapter Two – Rape Instigators and Victims of Abduction

essayes, or morall, politike, and militarie discourses of Lord Michaell de Montaigne,¹⁸⁶ and ‘stuprated’, first found in Nathan Bailey’s 1727 *Universal Etymological English Dictionary*. The rarity of ‘stupre’ and its derivatives in written documents suggests that these words were not in frequent use and was not a common vernacular word for forced coitus in late Medieval England. All of these words also appear to enter circulation after the Auchinleck manuscript was compiled.

Secondly, there are those words that developed from *raptus*, ‘rape’ and its derivatives, many of which have little or nothing to do with sexual assault as per the modern definition. The earliest usage of the word *rape* is found in OE in the *Domesday Book*, which states “De his hidis jacent III hidae & dimidia in Rap de Hastings”. This is a historical reference to the ‘six administrative districts into which Sussex was formally divided.’¹⁸⁷ ‘Rape’ as a noun with a meaning of haste or speed is first found in the romance *King Horn*, dated to circa 1225. It reads ‘Horn him wok of slape, So aman þat hadde rape.’¹⁸⁸ This meaning of speed or haste is also found twice in the romance *Arthur and Merlin*, and once in the romance *Bevis of Hampton*, both contained within the Auchinleck manuscript. In 1325 the word ‘rape’ appears in the *Statutes of the Realm* as a noun meaning the act of taking by force, the seizure of property by violent means, robbery, plundering.¹⁸⁹ The Auchinleck additionally contains a version of ‘rape’ as a noun which means a blow or strike in the romance *Roland and Vernagu*, which reads ‘Þai gun anoper firt & stoness to gider þrewe; Gode rappes for þe nones Þai 3auen wiþ þe stoness.’¹⁹⁰ ‘Rape’ can also refer to a medieval dish made of grated or pounded ingredients as is demonstrated in the 1381 *Curye on Inglysch*.¹⁹¹ ‘Rape’ as a verb with the meaning to seize prey is found in Thomas Wimbeldon’s 1387 *Redde Rationem Villicationis Tue*, which reads ‘Rauenes fisches haueþ sum mesure. Whan þey hungreþ, þey rapeþ; but when þey beþ fulle, þey spareþ.’¹⁹² The 1390 *Eleven Pains of Hell* found on British Library Additional 2283

¹⁸⁶ OED, <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/192235?redirectedFrom=stupration#eid>>, <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/192234?redirectedFrom=stuprate#eid>>, <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/192238?redirectedFrom=stuprous#eid>>, [Accessed 28th August 2018]

¹⁸⁷ OED, <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/158147?rskey=NucXib&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid>>, [Accessed 28th August 2018].

¹⁸⁸ OED, <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/158144?rskey=NucXib&result=2#eid>>, [Accessed 28th August 2018].

¹⁸⁹ OED, <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/158145?rskey=NucXib&result=3#eid>>, [Accessed 28th August 2018].

¹⁹⁰ MED, <<https://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=byte&byte=155098654&egdisplay=compact&egs=155102050>>, [Accessed 28th August 2018].

¹⁹¹ OED, <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/158150?rskey=NucXib&result=4&isAdvanced=false#eid>>, [Accessed 28th August 2018].

¹⁹² MED, <<https://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=byte&byte=155080024&egdisplay=compact&egs=155085658>>, [Accessed 28th August 2018].

Chapter Two – Rape Instigators and Victims of Abduction

introduces ‘rape’ as a noun meaning carry off, transport, when it reads ‘Þe visions of seynt poul wan he was rapt in to paradys.’¹⁹³ ‘Rape’ can also refer to turnips, radishes or rape seed plants, as is demonstrated by the 1398 translation of Bartholomeus’s *De Proprietatibus Rerum* by John Trevisa, which reads ‘Euerich herbe wiþ a roote if nicge birussgubge haþ seed þat is nought norrishhyng, as it fareþ in pasnepis and in rapis.’¹⁹⁴ Robert Mannyng of Brunne uses ‘rape’ as a verb meaning to fix or set in his c.1400 *The Chronicle of England*, which reads ‘He mad delay; Þe tyme he wild not rape, no set a certeyn day.’¹⁹⁵ Dated to the same year, the *Cursor Mundi* found in British Library Cotton Vespasian A.3 uses ‘rape’ as a noun meaning booty or prey when it reads ‘Ded sal rug us til his rape.’¹⁹⁶ In a will registered at York in 1404, ‘rape’ is used as a noun meaning a rasp.¹⁹⁷ C.1410, the romance *The Tale of Gamelyn* found in British Library MS Harley 7334 also uses ‘rape’ as an adjective meaning quick to anger when it states ‘Than byspak his broþer, þat rape was of rees, ‘Stond stille, gadelyng, and hold right þy pees.’¹⁹⁸ The meanings of rape that do not relate to food are all similar to those originally seen in the Latin *rapere*.

The MED and the OED consider the first instance of ‘rape’ as a noun meaning the act of abducting a woman or sexually assaulting her both to be found in John Lacy’s 1425 *Treatise on the Ten Commandments*, which reads ‘Agaynes þis commandement [the seventh] dooth he þat useth any rauen...Rape is of nonnes or maydenes & wedues, etcetera.’¹⁹⁹ Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde*, however, is dated to the 1380s and uses rape in what has been considered one of the earliest uses in English literature. This use is, however, complex and ambiguous. Elizabeth Robertson considers this ambiguity, and the ensuing confusion in how rape was understood, to be ‘foundational to the elusive and

¹⁹³ MED, <<https://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=byte&byte=155080024&egdisplay=compact&egs=155085658>>, [Accessed 28th August 2018].

¹⁹⁴ OED, <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/158148?rskey=NucXib&result=5&isAdvanced=false#eid>>, [Accessed 28th August 2018].

¹⁹⁵ MED, <<https://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=byte&byte=155080024&egdisplay=compact&egs=155085658>>, [Accessed 28th August 2018].

¹⁹⁶ MED, <<https://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=byte&byte=155054245&egdisplay=compact&egs=155058769>>, [Accessed 28th August 2018].

¹⁹⁷ OED, <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/158146?rskey=NucXib&result=6#eid>>, [Accessed 28th August 2018].

¹⁹⁸ MED, <<https://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=byte&byte=155067097&egdisplay=compact&egs=155067642>>, [Accessed 28th August 2018].

¹⁹⁹ MED, <<https://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=byte&byte=155054245&egdisplay=compact&egs=155058769>>, [Accessed 28th August 2018]. OED, <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/158145?rskey=NucXib&result=3#eid>>, [Accessed 28th August 2018].

Chapter Two – Rape Instigators and Victims of Abduction

ambiguous character for which *Criseyde* is famous.²⁰⁰ Her discussion captures the ambiguity of the word and the different interpretations that make defining it difficult, even in fictional literature. The last recorded use of ‘rape’ as a word meaning haste or speed was in 1676 in Elisha Coles’ *An English Dictionary*, after which this meaning became obsolete.²⁰¹ The use of ‘rape’ as a verb meaning the act of taking something is still considered current by the OED, with the most recent example cited as Tolkein’s use of the verb in his novel *Silmarillion*. He states ‘few of the Teleri were willing to go forth to war, for they remembered the slaying at the Swanhaven, and the rape of their ships.’²⁰² Without context, and sometimes even with context (as we will see below), the word *rape* could be as ambiguous as the *raptus* term it developed from.

Another ambiguous term was *ravish*. As was suggested above by the examination of the bi-lingual *Statutes of Westminster*, *ravish* and its variations developed from the Old French verb *ravir*, which carried with it dual meanings of abduction and sexual violence. The earliest form of *ravish* is dated to c.1325 by the *MED*. The *Gloucester Chronicle* (A Version) reads ‘þou...mid þi reuerye Rauisest France & oþer londes,’ indicating that *ravish* meant conquered.²⁰³ At almost the same time, c.1330, the version of *Sir Degaré* in the Auchinleck manuscript itself reads ‘He was aboute wiz maistri/For to rauisse me awai,’ showing a meaning of *ravish* to be rape and/or abduction.²⁰⁴ These were multiple meanings in use simultaneously, as both the *Historical Thesaurus* and the *MED* illustrate, although with chronologically later entries in both dictionaries.

In her examination of the French *ravire*, Gravdal discusses its development beyond the sphere of the law mentioned above. She notes that a new version of the word *ravissement*, appears in the fourteenth century to refer to ‘the state of being “carried away” emotionally; a state of exultation.’²⁰⁵ The use of a secondary meaning of ‘the state of exultation’ can be seen not long after the Auchinleck manuscript was compiled can be seen in additional Middle English forms of *ravish*. The *MED* records *ravishing* as to refer to a

²⁰⁰ Elizabeth Robertson, ‘Public Bodies and Psychic Domains: Rape, Consent, and Female Subjectivity in Geoffrey Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde*’, in *Representing Rape in Medieval and Early Modern Literature*, ed. by Elizabeth Robertson and Christine M. Rose (New York: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 281-310, p. 282.

²⁰¹ OED, <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/158144?rskey=NucXib&result=2&isAdvanced=false#eid>>, [Accessed 28th August 2018].

²⁰² OED, <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/158145?rskey=NucXib&result=3#eid>>, [Accessed 28th August 2018]. In my opinion, most people now would consider this meaning to be old fashioned, and it is not as current as the OED entry makes it seem.

²⁰³ MED, <<https://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=byte&byte=155569794&egdisplay=compact&egs=155579813>>, [Accessed 28th August 2018].

²⁰⁴ MED, <<https://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=byte&byte=155569794&egdisplay=compact&egs=155579813&egs=155593120>>, [Accessed 28th August 2018].

²⁰⁵ Gravdal, *Ravishing Maidens*, p. 5.

Chapter Two – Rape Instigators and Victims of Abduction

time when a person is transported to or from a place. This is demonstrated in an early version of Wyfcliffite's *Bible*, which reads 'Ȝe ben maad as a brond rauyshid of brennyng.'²⁰⁶ The *Bible* also uses forms of *ravish* to mean theft and speed when it states 'My breþern passeden beside me as a strem þat raueshemele passeþ in valeis,' 'Raueynes [L rapineae] of vnpitouse men shul drawen þem doun,' and 'Ȝe ben maad as a brond rauyshid of brennyng,' illustrating multiple meanings of *ravish* used within the same text.²⁰⁷ Once more, without context, it is impossible to determine the exact meaning of each word. As was suggested in the discussion of the *Statutes*, *ravish* has become a word without a specific meaning. Middle English forms of *stuprum*, *rapare*, and *ravir* developed and maintained the ambiguity suggested in the English laws.

There are additional Middle English words, which have not developed from the basic Latin stems mentioned above, that also meant forced coitus in the late medieval period in England. Forms of *violate* suggest forced coitus, but these also display ambiguous meanings. The OED dates *violation* to 1433, with a definition of a transgression or breach of rights/rules, including the law.²⁰⁸ The first recorded use of *violate* in a sexual context is in 1450, where it is used to describe the act of raping a woman.²⁰⁹ The word *violaten* is also found in c.1450 in an *Alphabet of Tales*. It reads 'I hafe violatt & fylid many mens wyvis & þer chuldre.'²¹⁰ At the same time, *violate* was used to describe the failure to keep a promise or oath in Ranulf Higden's *Polychronicon*.²¹¹ The multivariate meanings of *violate* highlights the ambiguity of the term. It was another word with multivariate meanings, one of which was rape.

The definition of the word *defile* exposes further disagreement between the dictionaries that surrounds its use to denote rape. The *MED* consider it to mean forced coitus, with the first source being *The Book of Margery Kempe*, dated to c.1438, which says 'Sche was euyr a-ferd to a be rauschyed er defilyed...Sche durst ful euyl slepyn any nyth, for sche wend men wolde a defylyd hir.'²¹² *The Book of Margery Kempe* is, however,

²⁰⁶ MED, <<https://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=byte&byte=155569794&egdisplay=compact&egs=155606750>>, [Accessed 28th August 2018].

²⁰⁷ MED, <<https://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=byte&byte=155567130&egdisplay=compact&egs=155567751>>, [Accessed 28th August 2018].

²⁰⁸ OED, <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/223631?redirectedFrom=violation#eid>>, [Accessed 28th August 2018].

²⁰⁹ OED, <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/223627?rskey=q6GoRC&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid>>, [Accessed 28th August 2018].

²¹⁰ OED, <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/223627?rskey=q6GoRC&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid>>, [Accessed 28th August 2018].

²¹¹ OED, <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/223627?rskey=q6GoRC&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid>>, [Accessed 28th August 2018].

²¹² MED, <<https://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=byte&byte=38786362&egdisplay=compact&egs=38791808>>, [Accessed 28th August 2018].

Chapter Two – Rape Instigators and Victims of Abduction

the only source provided by the *MED* for this particular meaning of *defile*, suggesting that the word was not widely used in this way. The earliest additional meanings are dated to c.1425, with one example from John Lacy's *Treatise on the Ten Commandments* which reads 'The woman þat taketh anoþer man þen hir howsboonde, scho defilizth hir howsboonde bed.'²¹³ Additional meanings of "to infect with disease or dirt," "to make dirty/befoul," "to pollute morally or spiritually," "to desecrate," "to violate an oath or agreement," and "to slander" also appear between 1425 and 1500. The *MED* suggest that Margery Kempe's use of *defile* to mean forced coitus was unusual, and that the use of the word to indicate pollution was more common. The *OED* also seems reluctant to describe *defile* as rape, defining it as 'to violate the chastity of, to deflower, to debauch,' and citing the 1475 *Ludus Coventriae* as the earliest example of this meaning.²¹⁴

The word *oppression* carried a variety of meanings according to both the *OED* and the *MED*. It first occurred in the 1382 Wycliffite *Bible*, which uses the word in multiple ways. It shows that the word was used to denote: exerting physical pressure in 'The litil boot schulde serue hym for the cumpanye of peple, lest thei oppressiden hym;' crushing in 'þe hous...falling oppressed þi fre children & ben deade;' overwhelming in 'þou wendist þee not to see derknessis & pur3 bure of rennyng watris not to bed oppressed;' afflicting or distressing in 'Jhesu of Nazareth...thorw passide in...heeling alle men oppressed of the deuyl;' retaining, stopping or suppressing in 'Pharisees...bigunnen greuously to azenstonden and oppresse his mouthe of many thingis, aspiynge him and sekinge to take sum thing of his mouth, that thei schulden accuse him;' and finally raping in 'He wolde not assenten to þe preieris of hir, but more my3ti by strengþis oppressed hir & lay with hir.'²¹⁵ The various alternative meanings of *oppression*, coupled with the phrasing used in the *Bible* suggest this may have been a polite euphemism, much like the use of 'making love' to denote consensual coitus in modern society. All twelve sources that the *MED* cites which use *oppression* to denote rape follow similar phrasing; the word is used as a way of describing a threat or crime in a less than violent manner. For example, Chaucer's *Franklin's Prologue and Tale* uses the word when discussing Lucretia: 'to be oppressed of hir madenhede.'²¹⁶ The word, whilst strongly associated with rape, is used to describe the

²¹³ *MED*, <<https://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=byte&byte=38786362&egdisplay=compact&egs=38791808>>, [Accessed 28th August 2018].

²¹⁴ *OED*, <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/48862?rskey=ojyeBP&result=3&isAdvanced=false#eid>>, [Accessed 28th August 2018].

²¹⁵ *MED*, <<https://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=byte&byte=130915605&egdisplay=compact&egs=130925689>>, [Accessed 28th August 2018].

²¹⁶ *MED*, <<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?typeid=id=MED30776&egs=all&egdisplay=open>>, [20th March 2013].

Chapter Two – Rape Instigators and Victims of Abduction

violent act when the victim was a lady who was associated with a high moral status; a victim who is generally perceived innocent such as Lucretia. This marked association of *oppression* with noble ladies whose reaction to rape is considered appropriate to their social status suggests there was a complimentary element to this word when it was associated with rape. Its use not only described the violent act, but simultaneously praised the lady's defence and reaction to rape. Coleman claims that this word was only used in the context of forced coitus until c.1450, which the sources in the *MED* agree with. The sexual meaning disappeared fairly quickly in favour of meanings that are similar to those used today. Forced coitus was only one of many meanings used for *oppression* in Medieval England.

The final word of Middle English that has been considered by the sources to mean rape is *abuse*. The word, however, does not appear in the English language until 1430, according to the *OED*.²¹⁷ This is over a century after the compilation of the Auchinleck, therefore it does not appear in any Auchinleck text, whether referring to vague sexual abuse or explicit sexual assault.

The evidence provided by this examination of the non-legal Middle English vocabulary which surrounds rape suggests that, in a way that mimics the legal language discussed above, the common vernacular language surrounding rape conflated it with robbery, kidnapping, pre-marital/extra-marital sexual relations, and haste. Consequently, it can be difficult to be sure if words used to describe encounters between men and women refer to rape, abduction, theft, and/or speed. This ambiguity of meaning can be further complicated by individual texts which fail to provide the specific context required to confirm the meaning of the word. What is certain is that the linguistic histories of Latin, French and Middle English words which denote forced coitus highlight a widespread ambiguity, the source of which can be seen in the initial alterations to *raptus* law made by ecclesiastical legislation.

This ambiguity forces all readers to be cautious when approaching Middle English tales of rape and abduction. It illustrates that we will encounter variant words used to describe scenes of sexual assault and abduction, some of which may leave us unclear as to what has occurred to the victim. This ambiguity is also added to by the tendency of humans to use euphemisms when discussing topics of a sexual and/or disturbing nature. Our sources will actively use words that obscure sexually explicit events. Stephen Ullman

²¹⁷ OED, <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/822?rkey=TMNGxE&result=2&isAdvanced=false#eid>>, [Accessed 28th August 2018].

Chapter Two – Rape Instigators and Victims of Abduction

points out how offensive words are obscured by texts, using terms for “prostitute” as an example. He explains that prostitution is an area which provokes:

great social anxiety, and direct reference to it could well cause embarrassment or offence. General terms like *girl* or *woman*, can be used to avoid direct reference to the distasteful subject.²¹⁸

By understanding society’s tendency to use euphemisms to cover the distasteful, alongside the context of the extremely ambiguous status of rape and abduction in the law and language of fourteenth century England, we can expect to find various words and phrases, both direct and indirect, which describe rape within the Auchinleck texts.

The ambiguities found in language and law are further reflected in the primary sources that discuss the status of female consent in fourteenth century England. As discussed above, English law developed from the precedents set down by Roman law, and it is there that we can find the earliest evidence for condemnation of sexual activities that is similar to what would have been seen in fourteenth century England. In 18 B.C., Augustus’ *lex Julia de adulteriis coercendis* took steps to punish sexual misconduct by criminalising consensual *stuprum*.²¹⁹ This concern with sexual misconduct recognised that the difference between *stuprum* and *stuprum per vim* was distinguished by the consent of the passive partner.²²⁰ It was understood that consent played an important part in distinguishing the nature of the sexual act. This concern, however, did not displace the legal interest in the marital and social status of both partners, which placed higher importance on the woman’s social status than her consent.²²¹ Though female consent was given a role in defining the difference between *stuprum* and *stuprum per vim*, the law was more concerned with identifying the appropriate punishment for the active partner by assessing the comparative status of the passive partner. Whether or not the woman had consented could alter the severity of the man’s punishment, but it still remained sexual misconduct nonetheless.

Social attitudes towards women who were raped, however, are more difficult to discern. There is evidence that some in Roman society believed that women desired to be raped. Ovid’s *The Art of Love* (which was still widely read in the thirteenth century) reads:

You may use force; women like you to use it; they often wish to give unwillingly what they like to give. She whom a sudden assault has taken by storm is pleased, and counts the audacity as a compliment. But she who, when

²¹⁸ Stephen Ullman, *Semantics: an Introduction to the Science of Meaning* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1962), p. 231.

²¹⁹ Moses, ‘Livy’s Lucretia’, p. 46.

²²⁰ Moses, ‘Livy’s Lucretia’, p. 46.

²²¹ Laoiu, ‘Sex, Consent and Coercion’, p. 116.

Chapter Two – Rape Instigators and Victims of Abduction

she might have been compelled, departs untouched, though her looks feign joy,
will yet be sad.²²²

Ovid's poetry, given as *advice* to lovers, puts forward the myth that women desire to be raped. That this is given as fact, not as part of a story, shows a general disregard for a woman's consent; if she refuses to give it, she is just playing. No does not mean no.

The early ecclesiastical legislation that developed from Roman law gave more importance to female consent. The canons of the early fourth-century father illustrate this attitude. Canon 30 of St Basil differentiates between consent and non-consent: 'if the abduction does not involve force, if the woman is a widow under her own authority...and if there is no *stuprum* beforehand, then there is no punishment for the man or woman.'²²³ Canon 30, with its interest in consent, lays the groundwork for the development of new laws that acknowledge consent. It allows for abduction with intent to marry, as long as it does not involve pre-marital intercourse, does not intrude upon the rights of her family to arrange her marriage, and as long as the woman freely consents to it.

Although canon law began to recognise that that women's consent plays a role in the act of abduction, establishing whether or not she acquiesced to her abduction only occurred in order to determine the appropriate legal reaction to the crime. In this case, it provides a way to establish if it is possible to have the abductor and his victim marry in order to resolve the disruption that the abduction has caused to the normal social order (that is, where marriage is arranged between the groom and/or his family, and the bride's family). In other cases, such as in Canon 38, consent was used as a way to measure how the woman should be punished:

A girl follows a man without the consent of her parents. If her parents then change their views, a marriage can take place. Nevertheless, the girl, who is considered guilty of fornication, is punished by not being able to take communion for three years.²²⁴

This extract from Canon 38 discusses what we consider elopement: the act of two consenting adults marrying in secret. Under medieval English law, as dictated by the canons, however, a situation as described in the quote above would still be considered abduction, regardless of the woman's consent prior to the 'abduction'. The establishment

²²² Ovid, 'The Art of Love', in *Ovid: The Art of Love and Other Poems*, ed. by J.H. Mozley (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1939), pp. 11-178, p. 59.

²²³ Laoiu. 'Sex, Consent and Coercion', p. 134.

²²⁴ Laoiu. 'Sex, Consent and Coercion', p. 134.

Chapter Two – Rape Instigators and Victims of Abduction

of the status of female consent was only used as a way to establish how *she* should be punished for her actions.

The idea that a woman's consent to an abduction could be used to determine the appropriate legal response and punishment for those involved is also seen in the legislation of Constantine I in the fourth century, who considers female consent even less important than the canons above do. Constantine was responsible for passing some of the harshest laws for abductors, ordering that they be executed by crucifixion, burning, or being thrown to beasts. As Laiou explains in her essay 'Sex, Consent and Coercion in Byzantium,' which considers the role of consent in fourth century Byzantium, Constantine wrote that

The consent or otherwise of the woman plays no role in the punishment of the man, nor, indeed, does her consent make it possible to correct the crime by marriage... However, the same disadvantages do not protect her if she consented to her abduction. If the consent was overt, she is to suffer the same punishment as the man. If she claimed she had been forced, this too will avail her only little. Constantine does not admit the possibility of non-complicity of the girl in abduction.²²⁵

For Constantine, female consent is only relevant in determining the appropriate punishment for her. He completely dismisses the possibility that a woman could be entirely against her abduction, citing that she would call for help or stay inside and thus remain out of danger. Ecclesiastical writings diminish the importance of female consent; they assume all women consent to their own abductors, and therefore are to be considered guilty alongside the abductor.

Constantine's legislation was replaced by that of Justinian I in the sixth century, who took a different view on consent which further diminished its importance in any case of abduction. Where Constantine had declared that all woman consented in some manner, Justinian considered it impossible that a woman could consent to any abduction. His edict states that all men involved in an abduction should be subject to death regardless of the woman's consent:

Furthermore, a woman who appears to have consented did not truly consent, for "unless a man solicited her and deceived her by his detestable arts, he would not have been able to induce such dishonour."²²⁶

Justinian claims that a woman could never truly consent to an abduction; any words that seemed to grant consent were not to be considered such because they were coerced by his

²²⁵ Laiou. 'Sex, Consent and Coercion', p. 141.

²²⁶ Laiou. 'Sex, Consent and Coercion', p. 142.

Chapter Two – Rape Instigators and Victims of Abduction

trickery. Justinian eliminates any interest in consent from ecclesiastical law as he does not perceive it to have legal merit. In the eyes of the law, women have changed from being unable to refuse consent, to being unable to give consent because they lacked the mental capacity to protect themselves from seduction.

As shown above, Justinian appeared to have an understanding of the economic potential of the female body by specifying rape as a crime that happens to women of ‘economic value’, i.e. single women who could still participate in the economic trade that was marriage. The commodification of the female body was an idea that became linked with the dismissal of female consent. By the twelfth century, the idea of the female body as a commodity with economic value was well established in law and society.²²⁷ As Eskow states, ‘Traditional prescriptions against rape protected female chastity as a valuable asset – not of the chaste woman, but of her father, who could trade his daughter’s virginity for economic or social gain from a prospective suitor.’²²⁸ The concern with protecting the economic rights of male kin is both illustrated and authorised by the canonist Gratian, who redefined *raptus* in his *Decretum Gratiani*, discussed above. Ecclesiastical writing surrounding *raptus* changed the emphasis from the sexual assault of women, found in Anglo-Saxon society, to the removal of the woman from the control of her male kin. Sexual assault is no longer enough in the eyes of the law. In order to meet Gratian’s conditions, the economic worth of the woman would have had to have been damaged by both rape and abduction. The concern here is not for the safety of the woman nor the violation of her consent, but on the removal of her economic potential from her father’s control and the consequential disruption of the marriage trade of medieval England. As Rubin explains, the inability or refusal of a woman to participate within the marriage trade disrupted the social norms and the economic agreement between the groom and the bride’s male kin.²²⁹ By removing the woman from the control of her male kin, the economic potential of marriage was threatened as her family either no longer possessed her body to trade, and/or her body was ‘damaged’ (i.e. the loss of virginity through rape) by her experience and thus devalued. This perhaps helps to explain why the rape of virgins was

²²⁷ Kathleen Coyne Kelly & Marina Leslie, ‘Introduction: The Epistemology of Virginity’, in *Menacing Virgins: Representing Virginity in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, ed. by Kathleen Coyne Kelly & Marina Leslie (London: Associated University Presses, 1999), pp. 15-25, p. 17.

²²⁸ Lisa R Eskow, ‘The Ultimate Weapon? Demythologizing Spousal Rape and Reconceptualising its Prosecution’, *Stanford Law Review*, 3 (1996), pp. 377-709, p. 680. See also Suzanne Edwards, ‘The Rhetoric of Rape and the Politics of Gender in the *Wife of Bath’s Tale* and the *1382 Statute of Rapes*’, *Exemplaria*, 23 (2011), pp. 3-26, p. 3.

²²⁹ Gayle Rubin, ‘The Traffic in Women: Notes on the “Political Economy” of Sex’, in *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, ed. by Rayna R. Reiter (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975) pp. 157-210, p. 182.

Chapter Two – Rape Instigators and Victims of Abduction

seen as different from and more severe than the rape of sexually experienced women. Kim M. Phillips' summarises, 'the loss of virginity, like abduction in the minds of those who helped to shape parliamentary statutes, was an offence they could comprehend. The rape of a sexually experienced woman was more problematic: what was seized in the latter instance, and from whom?'²³⁰ Crucially, Gratian's writings take little interest in the role of woman's consent, beyond that she must not agree to marriage before being abducted (i.e. modern elopement). His concern is with protecting male rights, rather than the female's right to consent.

Some legal sources also illustrate that, in the late medieval period in England, society still compensated rape victims, echoing Anglo-Saxon law. Crucially, however, this compensation is given as restitution for the loss of virginity, rather than to all victims of rape. In her discussion of Rose le Savage, who was kidnapped and raped by John de Clifford in the fifteenth century, Phillips observes that, because she was a virgin, the crown found John guilty and forced him to pay £10 in compensation.²³¹ She also presents another case where, in 1453, Isabella Alan was paid twenty marks by Robert Chew after he (by all accounts with her consent) took her virginity outside of marriage.²³² This took place without a court order, suggesting that there was a general understanding within society that virginity had a monetary value. Compensation would contribute to a dowry, which would in turn make the woman more attractive on the 'marriage market'.²³³

There are also biblical precedents which calls for compensation for the loss of virginity, as well as the marriage of the victim to her rapist. Deuteronomy 22: 25-29 reads:

Sin autem in agro reppererit vir puellam quae desponsata est et adprehendens concubuerit cum illa ipse morietur solus puella nihil patietur nec est rea mortis quoniam sicut latro consurgit contra fratrem suum et occidit animam eius ita et puella perpressa est sola erat in agro clamavit et nullus adfuit qui liberaret eam si invenerit vir puellam virginem quae non habet sponsum et adprehendens concubuerit cum ea et res ad iudicium venerit dabit qui dormivit cum ea patri puellae quinquaginta siclos argenti et habebit eam uxorem quia humiliavit illam non poterit dimittere cunctis diebus vitae suae.

[But if a man find a damsel that is brethothed, in the field, and taking hold of her, lie with her, he alone shall die: The damsel shall suffer nothing, neither is she guilty of death: for as a robber riseth against his brother, and taketh away his life, so also did the damsel suffer: She was alone in the field: she cried, and there was no man to help her. If a man finds a damself that is a virgin, who is

²³⁰ Phillips, 'Four Virgins' Tales' p. 86.

²³¹ Phillips, Four Virgins' Tales, p. 86.

²³² Phillips, Four Virgins' Tales, p. 86.

²³³ Phillips, Four Virgins' Tales, p. 87.

Chapter Two – Rape Instigators and Victims of Abduction

not espoused, and taking her, lie with her, and the matter come to judgment: He that lay with her shall give the father of the maid fifty sicles of silver, and shall have her to wife, because he hath humbled her: he may not put her away all the days of his life.]²³⁴

The idea that virginity had a monetary value can be traced back to the Bible.

Thus, it is possible to see that, by the late medieval period, concerns with consent and the value of the female body had altered the meaning of *raptus*. Having originally meant abduction alone, it was now conflated with the meaning of the phrase *stuprum per vim* to create a law that was ultimately ambiguous. *Raptus* could mean either rape, abduction, or both. There was no need to distinguish between them, as they all devalued the female body and damaged the economic potential she held for her male kin. The two *Statutes of Westminster* that made up rape legislation contemporary with the Auchinleck Manuscript appear to disregard female consent as inconsequential to the crime. Examining the legislation alone suggests that the primary concern of *raptus* legislation was correcting the damage to the marriage trade and the financial damage caused by rape.

The ambiguous definition of *raptus* in late medieval England, as is shown by the legal, linguistic and literary sources above, allows for the inclusion of abduction narratives to this chapter which discusses the theme of sexual violence. In addition to rape, this chapter can also consider narratives which include abduction and/or elopement. There are three narratives within booklets one and three of the Auchinleck manuscript which include an incident that could be examined under the law of *raptus*. Both *The Legend of Pope Gregory* and *Sir Degaré* feature sexual assaults which, in modern terms, would be classified as rape. The third text, *Floris and Blancheflour*, features the abduction of a woman against her will which, in medieval law, would also be tried under *raptus* legislation. Therefore, these three texts are ideal case studies for examining the treatment of *raptus* in Auchinleck narratives.²³⁵ The way the texts represent the consent of the woman is particularly interesting, as the narratives suggest that disregard of female consent was not as universal as legislation and historical sources would indicate. Rather, the notion of female consent appears to be intertwined with the representation of individual sexual behaviour. The female victim of *raptus* is always presented as a person with a recognisable

²³⁴ Deuteronomy 22. 25-29. Vulgate, Douay-Rheims English Translation. http://vulgate.org/ot/deuteronomy_22.htm [Accessed April 28th, 2018].

²³⁵ Elsewhere in the manuscript, *Sir Beues of Hamtoun*, *Of Arthour & of Merlin*, *Kyng Alisaunder*, *Sir Tristrem*, and *Sir Orfeo* are additional Auchinleck romances which feature rape and/or abduction. This illustrates that sexual assault is a prominent theme throughout the entire manuscript, not just booklets one and three.

voice, but whether or not her non-consent is respected entirely depends on her sexual behaviour.

The Legend of Pope Gregory

The Legend of Pope Gregory is the first text in the extant manuscript, and as such has unfortunately suffered some damage which makes it difficult for us to assess fully the role of rape in the text. The opening leaves, containing approximately 270 lines, are missing. The text is also incomplete at the end, with a stub left over showing that one leaf has been cut out of the manuscript. There are three other extant versions of *The Legend of Pope Gregory* in Middle English. They can be found in MS. Cotton Cleopatra D IX f.153v, MS. Vernon fol.45r, and MS. Rawlinson Poetry 225.²³⁶ These can be used to reconstruct the damaged text. The most recent edition, published in 1914 by Carl Keller, *Die Mittelenglische Gregoriuslegende*, contains the four Middle English redactions of the poem side by side. As such, it allows a useful comparison of the different texts and reveals a demonstrable similarity between the Auchinleck version and the Vernon version. We are therefore able to use the Vernon (which Murdoch considers the archetype of English redactions) to explore the lines missing from the Auchinleck.²³⁷ Keller's edition also reveals how the text was titled by contemporary scribes. The Cotton heads the poem 'De s[an] c[t]o Gregorio p[a]pa' and the Rawlinson begins 'Hic incipit Nateuitas beati Gregorii pape.' Most interesting of all is the title of the Vernon redaction, which is listed in the index as 'Off þe VVadur and þe modur off seynt Gregory and hou he was gete.'²³⁸ The relevance of this different title will be discussed below.

For clarity, it is important to state that the Gregory featured in this text, usually referred to as Gregorius, should not be confused with the historical Pope Gregory the Great. Murdoch, in his monograph *Gregorius: An Incestuous Saint in Medieval Europe and Beyond*, and Elizabeth Archibald, in her monograph *Incest and the Medieval Imagination*, conclude that this is a fictional text which relates to no specific Gregory.²³⁹ *The Legend of Pope Gregory* is presented to the audience in the form of a narrative poem, with guiding thoughts and meditations throughout.²⁴⁰

²³⁶ Carl Keller, *Die Mittelenglische Gregoriuslegende* (New York: G.E. Stechert & Co, 1914), p. VI

²³⁷ Murdoch, *Gregorius*, p. 54.

²³⁸ Murdoch, *Gregorius*, p. 54.

²³⁹ Murdoch, *Gregorius*, p. 7-8. Archibald, *Incest*, p. 113.

²⁴⁰ For a short summary of the plot of *The Legend of Pope Gregory*, please see appendix three.

Chapter Two – Rape Instigators and Victims of Abduction

The women in this text live under the subjugation of men, a lifestyle which conforms with the generally accepted role of women in fourteenth-century England.²⁴¹ There are numerous instances, for example, where the sister's autonomy is subjugated to a man's desire to control, own, and possess the female body. At the very beginning of the text, the dying Earl gives the sister to his son, her twin brother, along with the land he rightfully inherits:

Ffor þe bi houep forte kepe
 Mi Castels and my toures alle
 Ac for þi suster I mai wel siche
 Til a Mon mid londes riche
 And nou woldeþ me fro hire fet
 As þou art mi sone I bore
 And cleymest al myn heritage
 Whon icham to deþe I brought
 Do þi suster non outrage
 And I preye þe for my sake
 Þat þou hire kepe and hold in ore
 Til heo haue a lord I take
 Sone I beseche þe of no more²⁴²

There is an element of good parenting in these lines; the Earl clearly desires a happy life for his daughter and sees a good marriage as a way to achieve this. The text follows conventional views of women as marriageable rather than those who can inherit. Her 'happiness', however, is something that the Earl considers to be out with her control. Although she is present in this scene she remains silent. The Earl gives no advice to her personally, nor does he appear to consider that she may not wish to marry. Rather, he illustrates how women in the period were legally understood to be under the protection of their male kin; he orders his son to 'keep her and hold her'. The wording is possessive of the sister, equating her with a valuable object that needs to be guarded carefully. The phrases 'do þi suster non outrage' and 'hold in ore' have a dual purpose; they foreshadow the subsequent incest which will occur between the twins, and also place importance on the sister's virginal sexual state by suggesting she could be damaged. There is an implicit understanding between the two men that she must be cared for and protected in order to survive. This opinion is in agreement with Angela M. Lucas's observation that, in feudal England, 'the young unmarried women were carefully guarded as valuable assets, their

²⁴¹ For numerous primary sources illustrating the expected subjugation of women, please see Blamires, *Woman Defamed*, p. 17-198.

²⁴² 'The Legend of Pope Gregory', in *Die Mittelenglische Gregoriuslegende*, ed. by Carl Keller (New York: G.E. Stechert & Co, 1914), pp. 1-195, l. 59-72.

Chapter Two – Rape Instigators and Victims of Abduction

virginity a precious saleable commodity to be used to the best advantage when their time came to enter the marriage market.²⁴³ Although the Earl's attitude stems from a place of loving concern, this interchange between father and son denies the female voice by treating her as a valuable possession and excluding her from a conversation concerning her future.

The subtle objectification of the sister through her exclusion from conversations directly affecting her can also be seen in the interchange between the brother and the Knight, which also takes place within the sister's earshot. The Knight begins:

Pe ladi shaltou sende to me
 Til heo beo out of serwe I brouȝt
 Bi him þat sit in Trinitie
 Me schal hire kepe and ȝeme soft²⁴⁴

To which the narrator confirms that her brother:

bitauȝt hir þe kniȝt,
 Þat trewe was in tong & tale,
 To kepe þat leuedi ariȝt
 Wiþ blisse & wiþ euerliche hale.²⁴⁵

As before, the objectification is masked behind loving concern. Once more possessive words are used; 'kepe' and bitauȝt'. That the Knight is required to 'kepe þat leuedi ariȝt' repeats the earlier suggestion that she requires a man to care for her. 'Hale' and 'bliss' also echo this concept. The conversation again takes place between the two men; the woman is silent and the decisions about her future are made by men.

The expectation that men will possess women is most obvious when the Duke desires to marry the sister. Having had her lack of virginity kept a secret, the Duke operates under the knowledge that she is 'honourable'. His desire to have her as his wife appears to be based on his knowledge of her as a rich *virgin*:

Do was sche knowen, þat leuedi,
 Bi alle þe londes side
 & maiden clene hold of hir bodi
 Pereof þe word sprong wide.²⁴⁶

²⁴³ Angela M. Lucas, *Women in the Middle Ages: Religion, Marriage and Letters* (Sussex: The Harvester Press Limited, 1983), p. 85.

²⁴⁴ 'The Legend of Pope Gregory', l. 248-251.

²⁴⁵ *The Legend of Pope Gregory*, Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, MS Advocates 19.2.1, fol. 1r, l. 9-12.

²⁴⁶ *The Legend of Pope Gregory*, MS Advocates 19.2.1, fol. 2r, l. 205-208.

Chapter Two – Rape Instigators and Victims of Abduction

‘Clene’ is an ambiguous word; a non-virgin can still be chaste. In this sense, however, it implies that she is still thought of as virginal. As we will see in the fourth chapter below, the word is heavily associated with the Virgin Mary. The text makes it explicit that the sister’s sexual status is important to the Duke. Her body has become a symbol for the land and wealth she has inherited. By owning her body, the Duke will bolster his own economic and political position. By becoming an heiress, she has become an object of even greater value to men than she was before.

The importance placed on the economic potential of the sister’s seemingly undamaged body is evidence of both the application of value to female virginity and the subsequent aspects of medieval marriage that mimic mercantile trade. In *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, Claude Levi-Strauss considers the existence of marriage as an extension of a gift exchange economy, and incest as a socially constructed taboo which encourage the widening of kinship bonds beyond the immediate family. As Gayle Rubin summarises in her essay *The Traffic in Women*, which examines the impact of Levi-Strauss’ gift exchange theory on women from a feminist stance, ‘he argues that the incest taboo should best be understood as a mechanism to ensure that such exchanges take place between families and between groups.’²⁴⁷ Although not worded in a modern anthropological manner, Augustine shows a medieval understanding of this notion in *The City of God*, where he explains that

The underlying purpose [of incest prohibitions] was that one man should not comprise many relationships in his one self but that these connexions should be severally distributed among individuals and in this way serve to weld social life more securely by covering in their multitude a multiplicity of people. For father and father-in-law are terms describing two relationships. Thus, when each individual has one person for a father and another for a father-in-law, love extends over a greater number of people.²⁴⁸

The pragmatic result of gift exchange and the incest taboo in patrilinear society was that marriage became the predominant way for families to establish greater power, and there is much evidence to show that ‘the marriage of heiresses resulted in accumulations of power in the hands of the existing nobility and in the rise of new families to wealth and influence.’²⁴⁹ The medieval women’s body, in the ranks of the nobility at least, was inextricably tied to land. The exchange of women of a high social status through marriage

²⁴⁷ Rubin, ‘The Traffic’ p. 173.

²⁴⁸ Augustine, ‘The City of God Against the Pagans’, in *Saint Augustine: The City of God Against the Pagans Vol IV*, ed. by T. E. Page, E. Capps, W. H. D. Rouse, L. A. Post & E. H. Warmington (London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1966), pp. 409-517, p. 503.

²⁴⁹ Jennifer C. Ward, *English Noblewomen in the Later Middle Ages* (London: Longman, 1992) p. 4.

Chapter Two – Rape Instigators and Victims of Abduction

allowed for the expansion and acquisition of lands by creating binding ties between families, ties which could not be easily broken. The woman is, however, not a broker of this transaction. ‘She is a conduit of a relationship rather than a partner to it;’ there is ‘a distinction made between gift and giver.’²⁵⁰ We can observe how the Duke objectifies the sister, turning her into an object through which he can acquire wealth and land:

A riche douke of miȝt strong,
 Of Rome he was, as ȝe may here,
 For coueitise of hir lond,
 He walkd hir wedde & haue to fere.
 Pan gan sche sike & sorwe among
 & dreri was in hir chere.
 ‘Ywis sche seyde ‘he hap wrong;
 Y loue him nouȝt in hert dere.’²⁵¹

As far as he is concerned, his bride *needs* to be a wealthy land owner in order to make a trade equitable with his own position. This time, the audience hears her voice as she laments that she does not love him. The Duke, however, refuses to listen, silencing her refusal through a show of force. When she tries to fight her objectification, he forces her to be silent.

The text, therefore, shows two types of objectification of women by men. The first is the objectification which occurs within the family unit, passively accepted by the sister. The second is a more violent objectification, which both the sister and the narrative overtly condemn as inappropriate. The brother’s familial objectification of his sister, however, is also condemned as inappropriate. Prior to the rape scene, the audience is given many warnings about the close relationship between the siblings.

We ben he seide of one blod
 Vr love schal neuere parten a twinne
 Hire wille schal beo don vche a del
 And heo schal sitte by my syde
 Wiȝ ioye schal hire kepe well
 As a ladi þat is lad in pryde...
 Þe Maiden þer wiȝ him bi lafte
 Bi twene hem þer rose no strif
 Heo weoren boþe leoue and sauhte
 He louede hire as his owne lyf
 Heo Coruen boþe wiȝ o knyf
 And of o Coope dronken same
 Joye and blisse was heore lyf
 Astounde heo liuiden in mucche game

²⁵⁰ Rubin, ‘The Traffic’, p. 174.

²⁵¹ *The Legend of Pope Gregory*, MS Advocates 19.2.1, fol. 2r, l. 225-232.

Chapter Two – Rape Instigators and Victims of Abduction

Pe child fule ofte his suster custe
 Wiþ loue trewe and herte god
 Whon þe fend þer of wuste
 Wiþ his art he torned heore mod.²⁵²

The closeness of two adult siblings is very unusual, and the lines above depict an increasingly inappropriate affection between the pair.²⁵³ The Karl-Heinz Spieß, in his study of European nobility, observes that brothers and sisters did grow up together until the approximate age of seven, when they started to follow gender segregated paths according to the roles they would play in the future. This was very much a physical separation of the children and ‘usually, they lived a considerable distance from each other until the end of their lives, with only very sporadic personal contacts.’²⁵⁴ Jennifer Fellows summarises that ‘children were suckled by wet-nurses, and often reared away from the parental home from an early age.’²⁵⁵ Furthermore, Philips observes that romances imitated historical precedence when she states that ‘Early education [of sons] was in women’s hands but boys then moved to masculine training, often in another household,’ and cites examples of this in Lancelot’s story, *Sir Degaré* and *Floriant and Florete*.²⁵⁶ These twins, however, act more like a married couple than adult siblings. The crowning of the sister alongside the brother (an act for which I have found no historical precedence) invokes the image of a royal wife; the sharing of the cup equally reads as an intimate gesture.

The reported kissing is more difficult to interpret as words like kiss and embrace carried a less sexualised connotation than is seen today.²⁵⁷ For example, the God of Love in *The Romance of the Rose* informs the narrator ‘I want you to do homage to me from now on: You will kiss me on my mouth, which no base fellow touches.’²⁵⁸ Here there is no romantic or homosexual attraction between the two men; the kiss is a display of respect from the narrator, and the instruction to kiss the God’s mouth rather than foot is a mark of

²⁵² ‘The Legend of Pope Gregory’, l. 75-104.

²⁵³ Though the age of the siblings is never specified, one suspects that they are in their teenage years. Wardship legally came to an end at the age of 14 for girls, and 21 for men, which gives us some sort of estimate to the age of the twins as young adults. Jennifer Ward, *Women of the English Nobility and Gentry 1066-1500* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), p. 15-16.

²⁵⁴ Karl-Heinz Spieß, ‘Maintenance Regulations and Sibling Relations in the High Nobility of Late Medieval Germany’, in *Sibling Relations and the Transformations of European Kinship, 1300-1900*, ed. by Christopher H. Johnston & David Warren Sabean (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2001) pp. 47-64, p.54.

²⁵⁵ Jennifer Fellows, ‘Mothers in Middle English Romance’, in *Women and Literature in Britain, 1150-1500*, ed. by Carol M. Meale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 41-60, p. 43.

²⁵⁶ Helen Phillips, ‘Rites of Passage in French and English Romances’, in *Rites of Passage: Cultures of Transition in the Fourteenth Century*, ed. Nicola McDonald and W.M. Ormrod (York: York Medieval Press, 2004), pp. 83-108, p. 88.

²⁵⁷ Similar discussions can be seen in the scholarship surrounding the difficulties of interpreting Pandarus’s interactions with Criseyde in Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde*.

²⁵⁸ De Lorris, ‘The Romance of the Rose’ in *The Romance of the Rose*, ed. by Charles Dahlberg (London: University Press of New England, 1983), pp. 29-87, p. 54.

Chapter Two – Rape Instigators and Victims of Abduction

the respect the God has for the nobility of the narrator. Commentaries of the time do, however, display a concern about the dangers of kisses. For Aquinas, for example, ‘chastity has reference to sexual acts themselves; purity to sexual signs such as impure looks, kisses, and touches.’²⁵⁹ J. Russell Major claims that it was in the late thirteenth century, prior to the writing of the Auchinleck manuscript, that a change in attitude towards kissing began to take hold. He explains that ‘the change in attitude toward kissing may explain why the English began to abandon the kiss of peace around the middle of the thirteenth century.’²⁶⁰ If, as Major claims, the non-sexual kiss started to grow uncommon as early as 1250, then the actions of the twins are at best archaic, and at worst alarmingly affectionate. However, even if Major is incorrect, as Glenn Burger states, “attempts to police...apparently stable boundaries, however vigilant, cannot erase the private and institutional forces...that cross and blur them. We therefore should be wary of the desire to view the Middle Ages as a kind of mythical site of discursive purity whose lines are naturally and deeply etched in stone.”²⁶¹ It is likely that, to our mid-fourteenth century reader these kisses, particularly when combined with the other acts above, would suggest an inappropriate level of affection between the twins regardless of the audience’s personal opinions upon the act of kissing. Furthermore, Murdoch has also observed that ‘the girl’s great attachment to her brother is underlined by her excessive grief when he dies.’²⁶² When these small instances of close affection are combined and considered in the light of the normal distance between historical adult siblings, the narrative does appear to suggest a threat of incest prior to its occurrence.

The concern with the twins’ constant proximity to each other is most obvious in their sleeping arrangements:

Heo lyzen bope up a Chaumbre a niht
 Heore bed nas not fer a twynne
 Be fend of helle dude al his miht
 Heore loue to *turnen* in to synne.²⁶³

The use of a double negative in ‘nas not’ emphasises that the sleeping arrangements were not acceptable for twins. Though sharing rooms and even beds was common in Medieval England, arrangements for post-pubescent individuals were normally segregated by

²⁵⁹ Pierre J. Payer, *The Bridling of Desire: Views of Sex in the Later Middle Ages* (London: University of Toronto Press, 1991), p. 159.

²⁶⁰ J. Russell Major, “‘Bastard Feudalism’ and the Kiss: Changing Social Mores in Late Medieval and Early Modern France”, *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 3 (1987), pp. 509-535, p. 514.

²⁶¹ Anne Barbeau Gardiner and Glenn Burger, “The Medieval Kiss”, *PMLA*, 2 (1993), pp. 333-335, p. 335.

²⁶² Murdoch, *Gregorius*, p. 8.

²⁶³ ‘The Legend of Pope Gregory’, l. 109-112.

Chapter Two – Rape Instigators and Victims of Abduction

gender.²⁶⁴ The subversion of this norm, which appears particularly emphasised in the double negative of ‘Heroe bed nas not fer a twynne’, highlights the blurred boundaries between spouse and sibling that the twins are occupying. This suggests that, prior to the Devil’s interference, the twins are already transgressing normal social laws. It is notable that sharing a bed also leads to incest in the Old French romance *Dit de la bourgeoisie de Rome*, where a mother shares a bed with her son and, prompted by the devil, has sexual intercourse with him despite knowing it is a sin.²⁶⁵ The dangers of close proximity between men and women is also discussed by the Latin redaction of *Seynt Mergrete*, where the devil states

And when they are sleeping, I come and excite them from sleep...those indeed who I am not able to move from sleep, I make them sin in sleep.²⁶⁶

Although in this particular instance it is not clear that the devil is talking specifically of intercourse between the genders, it is evident that, approximately three hundred years prior to the writing of *The Life of Pope Gregory*, there was concern that the devil could act upon the sleeping form. The implication that follows from such a belief is that sleeping could be dangerous, and the devil could thus exploit close proximity between the two genders to enact sin between the sleeping figures. Although the brother in *The Legend of Pope Gregory* currently possesses his sister in a socially sanctioned manner, his failure to maintain strict non-sexual boundaries gives the devil the opportunity to lure him into sin.

Where the brother is portrayed as being lured into sin through physical possession by the devil, the sister’s desire for social status leads her to ‘consent’ to rape. During the rape scene, the narrative describes that the sister:

Heo pouzte zif ich loude grede
Pen schal my broþur foule beo schent
And zif I lete him don þis dede
Vr soules schule to pyne beo dempt
Pe beste red hire þouhte to do
Heo lay stille and no word nolde speke
Bote soffrede him his wille do²⁶⁷

The text makes it explicit that the sister does not offer resistance to her brother’s advances, but allows him to do *his* will. She does debate over whether to call for help, but her

²⁶⁴ Megan Leitch, “‘grete lust to slepe”: Sex, Gender and Sleeping Positions in Medieval Insular Romance”, paper given at Leeds International Medieval Congress, July 2015.

²⁶⁵ Kathryn Gravdal, ‘Confessing Incests: Legal Erasures and Literary Celebrations in Medieval France’, *Comparative Literature Studies*, 32 2 (1995), pp. 280-295, p. 283.

²⁶⁶ Robertson, *Early English Devotional*, p. 109.

²⁶⁷ ‘The Legend of Pope Gregory’, l. 125-131.

Chapter Two – Rape Instigators and Victims of Abduction

hesitation does not arise from her own safety. Rather, she shows concern for her brother's reputation, and decides not to stop him for fear over what gossip could do to *his* authority as Earl. Her own safety is not a deciding factor. Although she displays agency in her ability to make a decision about whether or not to allow incest to occur, she does not act as an individual. Rather, she acts as an extension of the society represented in this text, which consistently put his needs and desires above her own.

Her decision to allow her brother to satisfy his desires makes this scene very complex contextually as it is difficult to know how the medieval audience would react. The use of a double negative 'no word nolde speke' emphasises that she has made a decision to *not* interfere, but does so by placing emphasis on *her* will. She is actively engaging her right to consent, and choosing not to withhold it. The Statutes examined above suggest that, legally, by refusing to offer active non-consent and physical resistance, the sister is as guilty of rape as her brother is.²⁶⁸ However, sources well-known to contemporary readers can also be used to find her innocent of rape. Augustine places great importance on the role of the mind in these rape narratives, and states that if consent is extracted from a woman under duress, then it is not valid.²⁶⁹ It is the true desire in the mind that is important. This viewpoint suggests that the medieval audience might have interpreted this coitus as (modern) rape, as the sister is forced to comply because of her desire to protect her brother (and by extension herself, her family, and her vassals) from the shame of incest. The conflicting sources discussed above make it difficult to understand how our medieval reader would see the sister's role.

The potential confusion created by these conflicting sources is, however, resolved by the text itself, which judges her as guilty of her own rape through her consent. The double negative emphasising her choice not to object strongly suggests that the narrator views her as a willing participant. Textual evidence suggests that, rather than a victim of rape, the sister is a wilful agent in her own devaluation. The devil's involvement and the sister's consent make her culpable, and consequently *The Legend of Pope Gregory* mitigates an interpretation of incest as male tyranny over the women, as is often found in father-daughter incest narratives (and will be discussed later).

In direct opposition to this scene is the second threat of rape in the narrative, in which the sister is portrayed fully as a victim. When the sister refuses the Duke's proposal, she does so on the grounds that she does not love him. His response to her refusal is an

²⁶⁸ Cannon, 'Chaucer and Rape' p. 260.

²⁶⁹ Augustine, 'Concerning the City of God Against the Pagans', in *Augustine: Concerning the City of God Against the Pagans*, ed. by Henry Bettenson (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1927) pp. 5-1091, p. 28.

Chapter Two – Rape Instigators and Victims of Abduction

overt expression of the rights of the marriage trade (and thus his own desire) over the desire of the female:

He seye he miȝt no þing spede
 No nouȝt wiþ hir his wille do,
 Bateyle on hir he gan bede
 Wiþ alle þat miȝt ride & go
 & seyð he wald oway hir lede
 ȝif þat he miȝt comen hir to;
 Abouten hir he sett his segge²⁷⁰

The passage illustrates that the Duke has no interest in gaining the sister's consent to the marriage. This time the verb 'wille' is used only in relation to the Duke, highlighting that his desire takes precedence. He acknowledges that she has the ability to consent when he comments on the possibility of her refusal, but considers this unremarkable and unrelated to his desires. If necessary he 'wald oway hir lede', an image strikingly similar to the wording of the 1285 statute, which speaks of women 'carried away' and who 'go away.'²⁷¹ There is no ambiguity in the Duke's proposal; he completely ignores the rights of women to refuse a marriage, and starts to use violence as a means to over-ride her non-consent.

The narrative, however, does not condone the Duke's disregard for female consent; he is portrayed as a 'bad' character. He is described as acting out of 'coueitise'; the desire for objects belonging to others: 'For coueitise of hir lond,/He wald hir wedde & haue to fere.'²⁷² This description directly follows a longer description of the sister's good deeds, and how she is beloved by all. The contrasting descriptions work to depict him as selfish and discourteous. He is, of course, eventually defeated at the hands of Gregory, the 'hero' of this text, who marries the sister with her consent. The depictions of the Duke contrast with the surprisingly positive depictions of the sister and Gregory. Rather than rewarding the man who uses violence to achieve his marriage, the narrative uses the contrast between the Duke's method of making marriage and Gregory's method, which occurs after he deals with the Duke, to critique conventions of sexual violence found within courtly love. The Duke is an example of a figure common in romance literature; the bad noble cast as a rapist.²⁷³ The Duke's failure is not, however, a critique of any possession of the female body. Rather, the narrative emphasises that it is unacceptable for a stranger to force his

²⁷⁰ *The Legend of Pope Gregory*, MS Advocates 19.2.1, fol. 2r, l. 229-235.

²⁷¹ '13 Edw. I. Stat. Westm. Prim. C.34', p. 89.

²⁷² *The Legend of Pope Gregory*, MS Advocates 19.2.1, fol. 2r, l. 228-229.

²⁷³ Gravdal, 'Chrétien de Troyes' p. 563.

Chapter Two – Rape Instigators and Victims of Abduction

way into possessing the female, thus critiquing the efforts of the Duke to violently ignore the woman's right to consent.

The third scene which describes a sexual relationship between the sister and a man is a return to the pattern of the first; the sister is again depicted as at fault for what occurs. When the Lady first meets Gregory as an adult Knight, she briefly recognises him as her son. This, however, she disregards because of sexual desire:

De leuedi þat was so trewe of loue,
 Per sche lay bifor þe rode,
 Þe cloþ if silk sche newe aboue
 Þat sche him ʒaf into þe se flode.
 Þe comely leuedy feir of hewe
 Loked on him wiþ eyʒen to
 Bot noþing sche him knewe
 So long he hadde ben hir fro.
 Hir eyʒen on him fast sche þrewe
 & seyʒe wele sche loued him þo;
 Þe cloþ of silk sche seyʒe al newe
 Þat sche him ʒaf, þan hir was wo.²⁷⁴

This scene immediately subverts contemporary patriarchal social structures by creating a scenario where the woman is able to step into the role of broker in the marriage trade. She becomes both trader and traded, contradicting Rubin's observation that 'if women are for men to dispose of, they are in no position to give themselves away.'²⁷⁵ The position the sister now inhabits is one that inevitably threatens patriarchal social structures as it allows her to assert her agency in a decision that will affect herself and wider society, including the people she rules over. The small but significant dismissal of her recognition of the silk thus criticises female agency as it results in her failure to recognise her own son. Maisch, in his interpretation of Hofmannsthal's *Oedipus and the Sphinx*, considers Oedipus's failure to recognise his parents in a dream as 'an expression of a psychological defence against unacceptable impulses, unconscious, yet painful to the consciousness.'²⁷⁶ We can read the sister's failure to recognise the cloth that *she* chose to send with her baby as her subconscious repression of the unacceptable impulse to copulate with her son, and a moment where she is unable to resist her body's sexual desires. Without male guidance, she is free to act upon her sexual desires and choose to ignore the warning sign that their marriage will be incestuous. This moment also speaks to a cultural fear of the dangers to social structure posed by unmarried, orphaned (or at least, lacking in male kin) women,

²⁷⁴ *The Legend of Pope Gregory*, MS Advocates 19.2.1, fol. 4r, l. 545-556.

²⁷⁵ Rubin, 'The Traffic', p. 175.

²⁷⁶ Maisch, *Incest* (London: Andrew Deutsch, 1973), p. 18.

Chapter Two – Rape Instigators and Victims of Abduction

that dates back to the beginnings of Christianity. Ambrose writes to Augustine of his concerns that the daughter of a wealthy widow ‘would have found herself with considerable wealth at her disposal, and was free to do with it as she pleased.’²⁷⁷ The widow would be a woman who is no longer dependent upon male guidance, thus is likely to make incorrect and potentially dangerous choices. Though the sister’s choice is an act that demonstrates her female agency, it is represented as guided by sexuality, consequently suggesting that without male control a woman cannot make the correct decision. Once again, the sister is portrayed as guilty.

The devil’s involvement in the rape, however, cannot go ignored. In her overview of medieval attitudes to rape, Archibald concludes that ‘incest was seen as the most extreme manifestation of lust and bodily appetite, the constant enemies of the soul.’²⁷⁸ The use of the devil as the catalyst to turn a bad situation of uncomfortable sibling proximity into an abhorrent one where two children are condemned to hell, allows the audience to sympathise with the siblings. Rather than desiring their descent into hell, the audience has reason to desire their forgiveness for incest. The interference of the devil brings a sense of threat for the audience; he can affect anyone. The devil’s involvement, however, also drives home the guilt of the sister. Murdoch has observed the parallels of *The Legend of Pope Gregory* with the story of Adam and Eve; a woman is tempted by the devil and leads a man to sin.²⁷⁹ The sister has become a pseudo Eve, actively choosing to sin (‘Bote soffrede him his wille do’) where her brother, as Adam, passively sins (‘De child was ful harde bi set’).²⁸⁰ The text conjures up images of the fall, and in doing so reminds the reader of women’s weakness when confronted by the devil.²⁸¹ The consequences of the sister’s active role, versus the passive roles of her brother and Gregory, encourages the reader to view her as the guilty party.

Despite the sympathy that the devil’s involvement may inspire in the reader, the text ultimately considers the unguided woman dangerous to society, and thus suggests that women must be controlled by men. Without a man’s guidance, the Lady chooses to allow incest to occur. When her brother is possessed by the devil, she chooses to allow coitus rather than risk their social status by telling the world of his incestuous desires. When she

²⁷⁷ Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), p. 344.

²⁷⁸ Archibald, *Incest*, p. 4.

²⁷⁹ Murdoch, *Gregorius*, p. 24-27.

²⁸⁰ ‘The Legend of Pope Gregory’, l. 117&131.

²⁸¹ Murdoch also observes that *The Legend of Pope Gregory* is often seen alongside *The Life of Adam and Eve*. The Auchinleck manuscript is no exception to this, and further parallels between the sister and Eve will be discussed in chapter 3 below.

Chapter Two – Rape Instigators and Victims of Abduction

meets Gregory, she pushes her doubts aside in response to her sexual desire. Every time the Lady displays the agency to make a choice without male guidance, she makes the wrong one. Male control of female sexuality is thus represented as necessary. This need for control, however, is not so all-encompassing that it demands the complete objectification of women. The depiction of the Duke illustrates that there is an acceptable level of control which must take into account law (the Duke has no legal right to the sister) and female autonomy (the Duke ignores the consent of the sister). Even if her consent is ultimately used to condemn her as complicit and guilty in incest, the sister's ability to consent to acts is acknowledged and her guilt is viewed as something which can, ultimately, be forgiven by God.

That the sister is forgiven is essential to the text as it is the ability to gain forgiveness that separates the Christian incest story from the classical myths, such as that of Oedipus. Archibald explains in detail that the Oedipus tale was surprisingly infrequently retold in a society where incest stories were popular. She states that

one reason for the comparative neglect of Oedipus may be that for medieval audiences the violent reactions of Oedipus and Jocasta would have been a prime example of *accidia*, one of the Seven Deadly Sins, the fatal despair [*wanhope*] which turns the victim away from God, from hope and repentance and grace, and leads to death and damnation.²⁸²

The sister is finally able to achieve forgiveness when she meets Gregory after his ascension to pope. He offers her advice on how to absolve herself of her sins:

Pe pope was wys of resound
 Penaunce he dude his Modur take
 He let hire pruyde fallen a doun
 Londes and rentes heo dude forsake
 An hous of Ordre in þe toun
 To his Modur he lette make
 Pat 3it stondeþ of Religioun
 Pe Nonnes wereþ þe cloþus blake.²⁸³

Gregory instructs his mother to join a nunnery; such penance implicitly resolves the three mistakes she has made during the text. Committing to a holy order demands the relinquishing of her social status, which she had so strongly desired to maintain that she had willingly consented to incest. It removes her from the company of men, taking control of her weakness to give in to sexual desire. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, by

²⁸² Archibald, *Incest*, p. 106.

²⁸³ 'The Legend of Pope Gregory', l. 1463-1470.

Chapter Two – Rape Instigators and Victims of Abduction

joining a religious house, the sister's sexual status moves from socially abhorred unmarried non-virgin to socially approved nun. By passively accepting her son/the Pope's order to become a nun, the sister manages to regain the acceptable sexual status of a chaste woman. The return of her chaste state should not be underestimated. Wogan-Browne observes of virginity that

Though virginity remains the highest entry level, chaste widows or wives whose husbands have agreed to their taking a vow of celibacy, can become honorary virgins and brides of Christ. Technically intactness can be written in and out as needed: it is (to use a distinction made in Middle English) a condition of 'maydenhede', but not always a prerequisite for spiritual 'virginitie'.²⁸⁴

The sending of the sister to become a nun should not be dismissed as a quick way of providing her with a suitably happy ending and effectively 'removing' her character from the narrative by secluding her away from society. Her decision (however led) restores her sexual status. Becoming a nun is not a punishment; it is a position of honour for her. That being said, her acquiescence to her son is an act which finally returns control of her body to approved patriarchal authorities: the male head of both her family and the Church.

The ability of the sister to gain forgiveness is also important to the overall moral of the story, which Murdoch sees as a model of how to survive with sin. He says 'the tale of Gregorius is of inherited sin and thus of an inherited sinfulness through which an extreme sin is incurred, even if not necessarily deserved, but which is coped with, expiated, and ultimately forgiven, offering therefore a model for coping with sin in general.'²⁸⁵ Though Murdoch is speaking primarily of Gregory whom he views as the main character of this text, the same conclusion can also be drawn concerning the sister. God's forgiveness may perhaps be even stronger in her tale, as she is repeatedly cautioned not to give into despair about her sinful state. Upon hearing of her brother's death, she falls into despair and the knight cautions:

Y not no gayneþ it þe nouzt,
 Þi feir rode to make it bare,
 & sle þiself wiþ idel þouzt'²⁸⁶

²⁸⁴ Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, 'The Virgin's Tale', in *Feminist Readings in Middle English Literature: The Wife of Bath and All Her Sect*, ed. by Ruth Evans & Lesley Johnson (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 165-194, p. 168.

²⁸⁵ Murdoch, *Gregorius*, p. 24.

²⁸⁶ *The Legend of Pope Gregory*, MS Advocates 19.2.1, fol. 1v, l. 170-173.

Chapter Two – Rape Instigators and Victims of Abduction

The knight tells the sister that she must not give into despair, a warning that echoes the narrator's lines at the beginning of the poem:

Bot God is hende and Merciable
 To Mon þat is in sunne I brought
 3if he wol ben of herte stable
 And to him torne al his þouht,²⁸⁷

The opening lines of the narrative specifically tell the audience that the text will be about forgiveness, and suggests that there is no sin so large that forgiveness cannot be gained. When discussing the Old French redaction, medievalist Friedrich Ohly states that the Gregorius legend questions 'the *individual's* response to the experience of living under the burden of guilt.'²⁸⁸ There is, however, direct opposition between the way Gregory and his Father/Uncle seek forgiveness and the way that the Sister does. Gregory passively sins as he is unaware of the nature of the relationship with his Wife/Mother, but actively seeks forgiveness by choosing to be chained to the rock in penance. Similarly, his Father/Uncle passively sins because he is possessed by the devil, but actively seeks forgiveness by going on crusade.²⁸⁹ The sister, however, actively sins then passively waits for forgiveness to be bestowed by men.²⁹⁰ The text creates a specifically gendered model of response for women which reinforces patriarchal controls over the female body. When living with guilt, she must passively wait until she is afforded the opportunity to relinquish control of her sexuality (aka her guilt) and pass control over it to a man, restoring patriarchal social norms.

The importance of despair to the narrative, however, also points to the importance of the sister to this text. Early on in the narrative, the narrator warns against despair:

Pis folk I telle forte warne
 Pat heo fallen in no wonhope
 Ffor þorwh a sunne mon mai sporne
 Heuene was mad for vre note.²⁹¹

²⁸⁷ 'The Legend of Pope Gregory', l. 17-20.

²⁸⁸ Friedrich Ohly, *The Damned and the Elect: Guilt in Western Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 4.

²⁸⁹ Leviticus 20 specifies that those who commit incest with their sister should be exiled; as his sin remains secret, the decision to go on crusade to the holy land can be seen a voluntary exile that the brother undertakes.

²⁹⁰ For a further discussion on the gendering of penance in *The Legend of Pope Gregory* please see my essay 'Active Absolution and Passive Penance: The Gendering of Forgiveness in the Auchinleck Manuscript's *Legend of Pope Gregory*', *eSharp*, 24 (2016), pp. 1-15.

²⁹¹ 'The Legend of Pope Gregory', l. 33-36.

Chapter Two – Rape Instigators and Victims of Abduction

The narrator pauses the narrative for this interjection about *wanhope* which, as it takes up an even number of lines, does not appear to have been placed in the narrative purely to fit the rhyme scheme. This interjection emphasises that the moral lesson of this narrative is not about the avoidance of incest, but the avoidance of despair. Curiously, however, it is primarily the sister who displays the sin of despair. Though Gregory is upset when his guilt is revealed, he immediately actively seeks penance; there seems to be no risk of him falling into despair. All mentions of *wanhope* are related to the sister. Given the importance of despair to the narrative, that the major demonstration of the sin of *wanhope* falls to the sister suggests that this text is about her as much as it is about her son.

There is a profound difference between the way this text approaches gender difference within the sinful act. Murdoch views *The Legend of Pope Gregory* as a Saints' life, written as exemplum for the medieval reader. 'As an exemplary life in the strictest sense...Gregorius offers a pattern of extremity against which more ordinary, but still inevitably sinful lives can be set for explanation and for comfort, rather than for imitation on the literal level.'²⁹² Whilst *The Legend of Pope Gregory* is extreme, the text does not become unrelatable; the possibility of incest was a very real anxiety to the medieval audience. Archibald states that 'the frequent use of the incest theme by clerical writers shows that incestuous desire was not regarded as a rare and barbaric perversion, but rather as a constant danger for all, rich and poor, powerful and humble, male and female.'²⁹³ For a male audience, the text is both a warning against the danger of incest and a lesson in seeking forgiveness. For our hypothetical female audience, however, the text offers far more advice. It is not just a text on the dangers of incest, surviving sin and seeking forgiveness; it provides explicit counsel on how to avoid sin (that goes further than the simple 'don't do it' men receive), how to conform to sexual expectations, and how a woman should act.

Whether or not this text can actually be considered hagiographical is debatable. In the context of the Auchinleck manuscript it has often been labelled such as that fits the perception of the first booklet as a 'religious booklet'; it is certainly a text with an explicit religious message. As discussed however, there is no real Saint Gregory, nor are there records of any belief in the story as true; there are no cults, no relics, and no holy places. Consequently, this narrative does not have the counterparts to a Saint's life Gail Ashton observes as necessary to the genre. She states that '*corpus* (text) and corpse were both saintly relics; the hagiographical text brought together body, book and the divine word.

²⁹² Murdoch, *Gregorius*, p .29.

²⁹³ Archibald, *Incest*, p. 7.

Chapter Two – Rape Instigators and Victims of Abduction

The intention of the hagiographer is, therefore, to validate saintly work and to ensure the veneration of the subject.²⁹⁴ For *The Legend of Pope Gregory* there is not this background of corpse and relic; there is no saint to be venerated. Instead, we have a narrative that is focused predominantly on the actions of the Sister; Gregory's plot line moves the story on in time and allows the Sister to gain her forgiveness, but the narrative begins and ends with her story, not his. The poem starts with her birth, and finishes with her seclusion from society and inevitable death from old age.²⁹⁵

Her story is, however, similar to that of other female heroines of Middle English romances. Murdoch finds the lack of condemnation of infanticide troubling when he considers the text as a hagiography.²⁹⁶ There are, however, additional readings that must be applied to the 'abandonment' of the baby Gregory in the boat that Murdoch does not consider. As he observes, the abandoned child is a trope of the romance genre, but the reason for this abandonment is more nuanced than generic conventionality. The abandonment, rather than being viewed as potential infanticide, can be read as an act which protects the child. As Fellows observes:

Women's grosser physical nature is evidenced in the more obvious manifestations of her sexuality – her ability to bear children, and the related function of menstruation. Notions of uncleanness were associated with both of these functions... Yet conjugal fidelity was seen as the next most desirable state for those unable to aspire to virginal perfection, and the chief end of marriage... was considered to be procreation.²⁹⁷

In the case of *The Legend of Pope Gregory*, the child is born out of wedlock to a father who is not present in the baby's life. By losing her virginity in a non-socially sanctioned manner, the sister is viewed as giving into her sexuality and the 'uncleanness' of the female. By placing the child in the boat, rather than risking the child's death, the sister is actually sending it away from an unhealthy upbringing with an 'unclean' mother who cannot be tempered, controlled, and purified due to the non-existence of a positive, socially

²⁹⁴ Gail Ashton, *The Generation of Identity in Late Medieval Hagiography: Speaking the Saint* (London: Routledge, 2000) p. 2.

²⁹⁵ Gaunt observes, in his study of the French *La Vie de Saint Grégoire*, that the sister fails again to recognise her son when she visits him as Pope. As the end of the Auchinleck *Legend of Pope Gregory* is missing we cannot be certain that the same is true in this case. Certainly, the other Middle English redaction does not specify that she does not recognise him. Simon Gaunt, *Gender and Genre in French Medieval Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 201.

²⁹⁶ Brian Murdoch, 'Sin, sacred and secular: Hartmann's *Gregorius*, the *Incestuous Daughter*, the *Trentalle Sancti Gregorii* and *Sir Egamour of Artois*', in *Blüzeit: Festschrift für L. Peter Johnson zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. by Mark Chinca, Joachim Heinze & Christopher Yoing (Tübingen: Max Neimeyer Verlag, 2000) pp. 309-320, p. 309 and 314.

²⁹⁷ Fellows, 'Mothers', p. 42-43.

Chapter Two – Rape Instigators and Victims of Abduction

sanctioned, father figure in the boy's life. What Murdoch views as a trope of romance, is not an act of potential infanticide, but one which protects the child.

Rather than describing this text as a romance-influenced hagiography, we can consider it a hagiographically influenced romance written for a female reader. It is a text which offers far more advice to the female than the male reader. Its focus is predominantly on the actions of the sister, and it stylistically crosses two genres popular with female readers.

Focusing on the Auchinleck redaction, it is evident that the focus of *The Legend of Pope Gregory* is on the woman, not the man. I have come to the conclusion that the current title of this particular Gregorius redaction, put in place by modern scholars decades ago, is misleading. It places emphasis on Gregory, who is not the central character. Archibald, in her examination of the Gregorius legend, does not recognise the female-centric stance of *The Legend of Pope Gregory*. She interprets Gregory as the protagonist, and states that she does not know of any extended medieval text which focuses on the woman in a mother-son incest relationship.²⁹⁸ Her examination of the Gregorius legend, however, is based directly from Hartmann's redaction, which whilst telling the same basic story, is significantly different to the Auchinleck redaction. That she does not view the legend as female-centric highlights the importance of this specific redaction in context with the larger manuscript. The unique focus on the sister is particularly apt in a manuscript that was intended for a female audience.

My interpretation of the manuscript as female centric is ultimately strengthened by the original titles of this text. As mentioned above, the name of the Vernon manuscript's redaction, 'Off þe VVadur and þe modur off seynt Gregory and hou he was gete' suggests that contemporary scribes/readers of *The Legend of Pope Gregory* were aware of a textual focus on the sister, rather than Gregory himself. This name is even more significant when we consider the arguments that the Vernon manuscript was compiled for a female reader.²⁹⁹ If we cast a wider net than the English versions of Gregory's story, we find a manuscript now residing in Poland with the title 'Gregorius: a sister conceives and bears a child by her brother and is afterwards married, in an unusual but agreeable story.'³⁰⁰ Given the evidence from this manuscript and from the text itself, perhaps it is time to start

²⁹⁸ Archibald, *Incest*, p. 134.

²⁹⁹ Sarah McNamer, 'Lyrics and Romances', in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Women's Writing*, ed. Carolyn Dinshaw & David Wallace (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) pp. 195-209, p. 203.

³⁰⁰ Murdoch, *Gregorius*, p. 1. Unfortunately, Murdoch does not provide the catalogue information for this manuscript, or any further details on it.

Chapter Two – Rape Instigators and Victims of Abduction

considering the Auchinleck redaction of the text *The Tale of the Mother of Pope Gregory*, rather than a narrative interested in him alone.

Sir Degaré

Sir Degaré is the fourth text of the third booklet in the manuscript, and also contains incidents of assault and incest strikingly similar to those in *The Legend of Pope Gregory*. The extant text is in good condition. A miniature has been removed from the beginning of the romance, which has damaged the first two lines, and removed seven later lines which were on the reverse of the miniature. The end of the text is also missing due to the removal of a page. As the Auchinleck redaction is one of six versions, it is not difficult to reconstruct these missing lines. The Auchinleck is accepted as the earliest known Middle English redaction of this narrative, though some scholars consider it to be based on a lost Breton original called *Lai d'Esgaré*.³⁰¹ It has not received much critical attention, suffering generally under a past tendency to consider it poor quality.³⁰² To the best of my knowledge, it has not been studied in context with the other texts in the Auchinleck manuscript.³⁰³

As in *The Legend of Pope Gregory*, *Sir Degaré* also presents a family relationship where the male, in this case the King, threatens to cross the line between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour regarding the woman under his protection:

And þo þe maiden of age wes,
Kynges sones to him speke,
Emperours and dukes eke,
To hauen his doughter in marriage
For loue of here heritage.
Ac þe kyng answered euer,
Pat o man sschal here halden euer,
But 3if he mai in turneyng
Him out of his sadel bring³⁰⁴

Although no incest occurs between the King and the Princess, his possessive nature can be seen as a transgression of normal social boundaries; he refuses to let her go. The text makes it evident that she is a valuable commodity on the marriage market through the list

³⁰¹ Anne Laskaya & Eve Salisbury, *The Middle English Breton Lays* (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2001), p. 90.

³⁰² Laskaya & Salisbury, *The Middle English Breton Lays*, p. 89.

³⁰³ A brief plot summary of *Sir Degaré* can be found in appendix four.

³⁰⁴ *Sir Degaré*, Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, MS Advocates 19.2.1, fol. 78r, l. 26-36.

Chapter Two – Rape Instigators and Victims of Abduction

of rejected suitors, and as such the King's determination to keep her breaks the marriage trade in the same way that it would if there was actual incest occurring. He prevents the distribution of his land through patrilinear norms. The Princess herself seems to be acutely aware of her father's transgressive behaviour and how it is damaging the normal order of society. When she discovers her pregnancy, she states:

Lo, now ich am wiȝ quike schilde.
 ȝif ani man hit vnderȝete,
 Men wolde sai bi sti and street,
 Pat mi fader þe king hit wan.³⁰⁵

Her fear of being thought incestuous highlights the damage her father's actions have caused; he has given people reason to suspect them of incest which, in her eyes, will be enough to condemn them when she is found to be an unmarried non-virgin. James Simpson observes the inappropriate possessiveness of the King when he states that 'a father's incestuous and violent possessiveness of his daughter is the transgression that drives this narrative.'³⁰⁶ There is a sense of violence to this incestuous relationship that is not found in *The Legend of Pope Gregory*, which is typical of the father-daughter incest narrative. Archibald observes that it is not uncommon to see a:

growth of mutual affection between sons and their unrecognized mothers (e.g. Gregorius), and between brothers and sisters (e.g. Gregorius' parents, or Canace and Machaire); but no such developing mutual love is attributed to fathers and daughters. This may be because there is almost never any doubt about their close relationship, and the father is clearly in control of the situation.³⁰⁷

The motif of father-daughter incest simultaneously highlights and critiques the patriarchal control of women. The daughter's fear of her father illustrates his complete control over her body; she belongs to him due to patriarchal social structures, despite the fact that such ownership also threatens those structures.³⁰⁸ This is not read as something arising from mutual affection or lust; it is the pinnacle of absolute power by the kinsman over the body

³⁰⁵ *Sir Degaré*, MS Advocates 19.2.1, fol. 79r, l. 165-169.

³⁰⁶ James Simpson, 'Violence, Narrative and Proper Name: *Sir Degaré*, '*The Tale of Sir Gareth of Orkney*', and the *Folie Tristan d'Oxford*', in *The Spirit of Medieval English Popular Romance*, ed. by Ad Putter & Jane Gilbert (London: Pearson Education Limited, 2000), pp. 122-141, p. 129.

³⁰⁷ Archibald, *Incest*, p. 145.

³⁰⁸ Incestuous fathers are usually found in a position of power/rule over society, encouraging the audience to read their sin as an abuse of power.

Chapter Two – Rape Instigators and Victims of Abduction

of the woman.³⁰⁹ The Princess's intense fear may also reflect a medieval attitude of revulsion to offspring produced from father-daughter incest. Archibald has observed that very few medieval father-daughter incests end in pregnancy, and in virtually all of these cases the mother kills her child at birth.³¹⁰ The treatment of father-daughter incest, in comparison to that between siblings or a mother and son, is much harsher and far less forgiving.

At first it appears that this is where the similarities end. In *The Legend of Pope Gregory*, the rape scene turns into consensual extra-marital coitus, whilst the rape scene in *Sir Degaré* is one of the most violent representations of rape in Middle English literature.³¹¹ The violence is particularly emphasised by the stark contrast between it and the initial impressions the audience has of the knight. At first, the narrator describes this fairy knight in a positive manner:

Toward hire comen a kniȝt,
Gentil, ȝong and iolif man;
A robe of scarlet he hadde vpon;
His visage was feir, his bodi ech weies;
Of countenaunce riȝt curteis,
We farende legges, fot and honde;
Per nas non in al þe kynges londe
More apert man þan was he.³¹²

This description is extremely flattering. Time is taken to illustrate his appearance, documenting him as the most attractive man in the Kingdom. The word 'scarlet' conveys an image of a bright hue; such pigmentation suggests the extreme wealth of the knight as brightly dyed cloth was expensive to purchase. Furthermore, the bright colour could recall meanings assigned to the colour red in late medieval England. 'A fifteenth-century interpretation of the *Paternoster*,' for example, claims that 'red signifies rightness in Love.'³¹³ As is discussed before, the idea that the Knight is right in matters of love is particularly important to this text. Overall, the reader's initial impression is consequently positive; the description creates an expectation of honourable chivalric behaviour. Through

³⁰⁹ Archibald also observes that in texts where the incestuous relationship between a father and daughter is consummated, the father is usually depicted as the villain and is regarded as a 'lost cause', exempt from the contrition and forgiveness usually found in medieval incest narratives. Archibald, *Incest*, p. 146.

³¹⁰ Archibald, *Incest*, p. 146.

³¹¹ It is disappointing that modern critics such as Arthur Bahr still refuse to acknowledge this is sexual assault. In his summary of *The Legend of Pope Gregory* and *Sir Degaré*, Bahr states that 'both works tell of a mother who conceives a son under shameful circumstance and so send him away,' effectively victim-blaming the sister and the Princess. Bahr, *Fragments and Assemblages*, p. 123.

³¹² *Sir Degaré*, MS Advocates 19.2.1, fol. 78v, l. 90-97.

³¹³ Andrew Morrall, 'Siben Farben uund Künsten frey': The Place of Color in Martin Schaffner's Universe Tabletop of 1533', *Early Science and Medicine* 20 (2015) pp.478-515, p.490

Chapter Two – Rape Instigators and Victims of Abduction

the presence of common markers the audience is encouraged to recognise him at once as a fairy or otherworldly man: ‘the westward direction, the heat of the sun, the unnatural sleepiness of the company, and the presence of a single ‘chastein tre’ in the glade.’³¹⁴ If the audience is familiar with romances, this will bring on expectations of good things; traditionally in romances such as *Sir Launfal*, the arrival of the fairy brings on the fulfilment of wishes. The appearance of the Knight, the markers of the supernatural interjection and the traditional role of the supernatural visitor encourage the audience to expect a positive experience for the Princess.

The knight initially speaks of a long-lived love for the Princess, which is in keeping with the reader’s first impression. He states ‘Iich haue iloued þe mani a 3er,’³¹⁵ This is undone, however, when he says ‘Pou best mi lemman ar þou go,/Weþer þe like3 wel or wo.’³¹⁶ This is a surprisingly explicit threat that is unexpected from what initially appears to be a good Knight, and one that directly contradicts audience expectations of a fairy visitor. The Knight’s actions are an exception to Mark Amsler’s assertion that ‘in romance narratives, good knights don’t sexually violate women.’³¹⁷ *Sir Degaré* subverts romance gender norms by replacing the wandering Knight and fairy mistress with a wandering Princess and fairy Knight. Through this subversion, the text challenges expectations by not only threatening the Princess, but actually carrying out the violent attack.

The violence of this attack is made explicitly clear, as the Princess’s reaction is described in detail:

Do no þing ne coude do 3he,
But wep and criede and wolde fle;
And he anon gan hire atholde³¹⁸

She is shown weeping, crying and trying to run. This fulfils the expectations of non-consent as examined by Brundage, who states that ‘strenuous resistance was not something that the canonists insisted upon: the victim must at least cry out in protest, but active combat by the victim was not something that they expected; weeping and wailing were sufficient resistance.’³¹⁹ The text refers to behaviours that would be legally required to

³¹⁴ Corinne Saunders, *Magic and the Supernatural in Medieval English Romance* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2010) p. 198.

³¹⁵ *Sir Degaré*, MS Advocates 19.2.1, fol. 78v, l. 105.

³¹⁶ *Sir Degaré*, MS Advocates 19.2.1, fol. 78v, l. 107-108.

³¹⁷ Mark Amsler, ‘Rape and Silence: Ovid’s Mythography and Medieval Readers’, in *Representing Rape in Medieval and Early Modern Literature*, ed. by Elizabeth Robertson & Christine M. Rose (Hampshire: Palgrave, 2001), pp.61-96, p. 64.

³¹⁸ *Sir Degaré*, MS Advocates 19.2.1, fol. 78v, l. 109-111.

³¹⁹ Brundage, ‘Rape and Seduction’ p. 144.

Chapter Two – Rape Instigators and Victims of Abduction

illustrate her non-consent to the act. Unlike in the case of Gregory's wife/mother/aunt, whose coerced consent invites debate about her guilt, the Princess in *Sir Degaré* makes the obvious protestations of non-consent legally required to ensure this is viewed as rape. These cries have been used by Fellows as examples of what she considers to be the 'rather surprising degree of sympathy' shown towards unwed mothers, and proof of the text's desire to create sympathy for the 'innocent and defenceless victim.'³²⁰

When reading the Auchinleck redaction of *Sir Degaré*, however, the narrator contradicts Fellow's reading of the text as desiring sympathy for the Princess. Despite the evidence, which appears to make this an incontestable scene of rape, even by medieval legal standards, the narrative never refers to the act as a criminal one. Instead, the narrator's focus immediately returns to images of love and goodness. Just after he has committed the act, the knight once more calls the Princess his 'lemman', a term of affection usually translated as 'lover'.³²¹ The image of an affectionate bond between the rapist and his victim continues throughout the text, and the narrative appears to emphasise affectionate love over the criminal reality to which is only briefly alluded. When the narrator tells that the Princess 'seththen 3e tok a paire gloue/ Pat here lemman here sent of fairi-londe,'³²² he illustrates the extent of the acceptance of this façade of the pair as 'lovers'. Where previously the knight was the only one to use the term *lemman*, here the narrator adopts and uses the name. This use of the word *lemman* changes the reader's view of the Princess. Although, as Fellows observes, we initially view her as 'the innocent and defenceless victim of rape' who feels real 'fear and anxiety' when she finds herself pregnant, I would argue that this emotional reaction is short lived.³²³ The narrative encourages the audience to forget the violence of the scene and accept the courtly love façade as reality. This scene also suggests that there has been further contact between the knight and the Princess after their initial meeting. The gift casts the knight in the role of chivalric lover,³²⁴ and blurs the distinctions between forced and voluntary sex, and between love and violence.³²⁴ The representation of this rape briefly illustrates a violent crime, then overwhelmingly insists it is the beginning of a loving relationship. In transforming a violent act into love, the text here recalls the advice given to men in Ovid's *The Art of Love*, and the more contemporary *On Love* by Andreas Capellanus, who writes that 'should

³²⁰ Fellows, 'Mothers,' p. 49 and 56.

³²¹ The word 'lemmen' is also used in line 3280 of Chaucer's *The Miller's Tale*, where it also translates as lover but has an undercurrent of force behind it. Geoffrey Chaucer, 'The Miller's Tale', in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by Larry D. Benson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) pp. 66-76 (l. 3280).

³²² *Sir Degaré*, MS Advocates 19.2.1, fol. 79r, l. 194-195.

³²³ Fellows, 'Mothers', p. 49.

³²⁴ Gravdal, *Ravishing Maidens*, p. 11.

Chapter Two – Rape Instigators and Victims of Abduction

you find a suitable spot you should not delay in taking what you seek, gaining it by rough embraces.³²⁵

The idea that the two have a loving relationship continues throughout the narrative. At the end, Degaré insists that his father returns to the castle of the King, a return that results in the marriage of the fairy and the Princess. Unlike during the rape scene, the Princess does not speak after confirming that the fairy is Degaré's father. She then swoons and, silenced by the text, does not give her view of her marriage:

As sone as the lady saw that knyght,
 Wonther wel sche knew the knyght;
 Anon sche chaungyd hur colowr aryght,
 And seyde, "My dere sun, Degaré,
 Now thou hast brought thy father wyth the!"
 "Ye, madame, sekyr thow be!
 Now well y wot that yt ys he."
 "I thank, by God," seyde the kyng,
 "Now y wot, wythowtt lesyng,
 Who Syr Degaré his father was!"
 The lady swounyd in that plass.³²⁶

With the King leading the response, the narrative glosses over the details of the marriage and adopts a happy tone. The couple are described as 'father and his mother dere', and the narrative's focus is constantly on the success of Degaré.³²⁷ Rape is transformed from a violent attack to a long-standing betrothal between the fairy and the Princess, and marriage becomes a convenient response to rape which legitimises the deserving hero.

This 'solution' to the problem of the illegitimate relationship between the fairy and the Princess has an established precedent in fourteenth-century England. Rape was a form of immoral sexual activity, through which the rapist, and very often the victim, became guilty of adultery and fornication. Marriage became one way to resolve the issues caused by this illicit sexual activity; without it the woman, whose inappropriate sexual state of unmarried non-virgin is publicly known, is unlikely to find another husband and her father is left burdened with worthless 'property'.³²⁸ Brundage suggests that the prevalent use of this solution can be seen in many fourteenth-century English legal documents, which show that:

³²⁵ Andreas Capellanus, 'On Love', in *Andreas Capellanus on Love*, ed. by P.G. Walsh (London: Duckworth, 1982), pp. 33-325, p.223.

³²⁶ 'Sir Degaré', in *The Middle English Breton Lays*, ed. by Anne Laskaya & Eve Salisbury (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2001), pp. 101-129, l. 1079-1089.

³²⁷ 'Sir Degaré', l. 1096.

³²⁸ Gravidal, 'Chrétien de Troyes', p. 566. Walker, 'Punishing convicted ravishers', p. 242.

Chapter Two – Rape Instigators and Victims of Abduction

A considerate [sic] number of case that did proceed to the complaint state fail to show further action, which may well indicate that the cases tendend [sic] to be settled before the trial, often one suspects by agreement to marriage.³²⁹

Evidence found within court documents suggests that marriage was considered a suitable solution to the social disorder caused by rape. From a pragmatic point of view, Dunn feels that privately settling through an agreement to marry may have been the best option for medieval women who had little to gain from going to trial; even if the claim was upheld and the perpetrator found guilty, there was no monetary compensation, only personal satisfaction.³³⁰ She also argues, and this is strengthened by further evidence from both Walker and Cannon, that there was a general public anxiety that *raptus* could be willingly constructed by a man and/or a woman in order to bring about a marriage of their choice and to escape marriage strictures. This manipulation of *raptus* law would allow women a new degree of control over their lives.³³¹ The ambiguity of *raptus* in legal documents, and the lack of information on the resolution of petitions brought forward, makes it impossible to determine with any certainty how often rape was resolved by marriage, but there is evidence to suggest that it was certainly a known outcome of rape accusations.

Sir Degaré is consequently a text which contradicts itself and problematises the notion of sexual assault by inextricably intertwining it with romantic attachment. The sister/aunt/mother/wife in *The Legend of Pope Gregory* is clearly guilty of a misdemeanour for which she is punished by the loss of her virginity. By taking holy orders, she is reconciled through faith with the patriarchal society in which she lives. For this Princess, however, things seem far less satisfactory or justified. For the act of getting lost in the woods, she is raped and forced to marry her rapist. The violence and her voice entirely disappears in order to bring about this marriage. It is initially hard to reconcile the moral of the rape victim forgiven and welcomed back into society with the violent and objectifying treatment of the Princess in *Sir Degaré*.

In my view, however, that the silencing of the Princess in all scenes but the rape scene reveals that *Sir Degaré* can also be seen as a tale of punishment, forgiveness, and reconciliation with society that mirrors *The Legend of Pope Gregory*. The scene in which the Princess expresses herself is the only scene in the text where she is outside of the control of a man; at all other times her father, her son or her rapist speak for her. Her sudden agency reveals that she has willingly left the controls of normal patriarchal society:

³²⁹ Brundage, 'Rape and Marriage', p. 72.

³³⁰ Dunn, *Stolen Women*, p. 76.

³³¹ Dunn, *Stolen Women*, p. 77. Cannon, 'Raptus in the Champaigne', p. 81. Walker, 'Punishing convicted ravishers', p. 237.

Chapter Two – Rape Instigators and Victims of Abduction

And seide, þat hii moste alizte
 To don here nedes and hire rizte.
 Þai alizt adoune alle þre,
 Tweie damaiseles & ssche,
 And longe while þer abiden,
 Til al þe folk was forth iriden.³³²

Although the Princess has what appears to be an innocent reason for stopping, she stays for a long time without patriarchal protection and neither she nor her ladies take care to avoid being left behind; they willingly allow themselves to wander alone in the woods. Dunn's research into medieval English rape does reveal that 'most women were out-of-doors and away from home when they were spied by alleged rapists.'³³³ Thus, there is an element of realism in the depiction of the rape in the forest. More pertinently, many contemporary sources warn women to take care when in public. Augustine, for example, states:

When you go anywhere, walk together; when you come to the place to which you were going, stand together. In walking, in standing, in deportment, and in all your movements let nothing be done which might attract the improper desires of any one, but rather let all be in keeping with your sacred character... For it is not only by touch that a woman awakens in any man or cherishes towards him such desire, this may be done by inward feelings and by looks... When, therefore, you are together in the church, or in any other place where men also are present, guard your chastity by watching over one another, and God, who dwells in you, will thus guard you by means of yourselves.³³⁴

Augustine warns against the dangers of travelling alone in the public sphere as a woman, and advises that women do so in groups 'watching over one another.' Although the Princess travels into the forest with her handmaidens, they do not pay appropriate attention as is emphasised by their falling asleep.³³⁵ They open themselves up to danger, a fact that the medieval reader would have been aware of due to the well-established literary symbolism of the forest in medieval romance. Building upon classical and biblical beginnings, French romance shaped the forest as an area of adventure, danger and transformation. By the fourteenth century the portrait of the forest already has 'a complex set of thematic associations...referring both to the archetypal world of romance and to historical reality,' that individual authors could draw on.³³⁶ As Saunders' explains:

³³² *Sir Degaré*, MS Advocates 19.2.1, fol. 78v, l. 53-58.

³³³ Dunn, *Stolen Women*, p. 64.

³³⁴ Augustine, 'Epistulae', on *New Advent*, ed. by J.G. Cunningham, 'Letter 211', <<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1102211.htm>>, [Accessed 5th November 2015].

³³⁵ For further evidence of warnings against women walking alone, please see Proverbs 7: 10-12.

³³⁶ Corinne J. Saunders, *The Forest of Medieval Romance: Avermus, Broceliande, Arden* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1993) p. 132.

Chapter Two – Rape Instigators and Victims of Abduction

It is in the forest that the ambiguities of human nature become apparent: here the boundary between sexual desire and love is blurred, and irrationality and chivalric behaviour begin to blend into each other; here the passage from hunt to otherworld may as easily present a situation of nightmare as one of wish-fulfilment, and adventure may fade into spiritual vision.³³⁷

The audience for Auchinleck's *Sir Degaré* would recognise the forest as a place of danger, adventure, and transformation. It is a place that represents the 'other' that is not bound by the laws of normal human society.³³⁸ Consequently, by entering the forest alone the Princess makes the mistake of walking into danger. In effect, she removes herself from the patriarchal protection of established human society.³³⁹ She is not the traditional wandering Knight whose role is to explore and to go on adventures and quests. She subverts norms because of her gender, and consequently her adventure in the forest is an unwelcome expression of female agency. Thus, the text demands that she is punished for this transgression and chooses a gendered way to do so. Her role as transgressor of gender norms explains why the text never treats her as a victim. She is punished for her mistake, earns forgiveness through her acceptance of her rapist as husband, and is allowed to return to an acceptable role in society, which, just like Gregory's mother, comes with the resolution of her problematic state as an unwed non-virgin. By entering the forest, she moves into a 'state of betwixt and between... [that] allows some human essence to be experienced, which is individual, but illuminated by the appreciation that it can be shared and experienced by every human.'³⁴⁰ The Princess's transgression, though individual to her, can be shared and experienced by the reader, and thus is particularly appreciated by a female audience for whom it provides a lesson about behaving within social accepted norms.

Further legitimisation of the rape as an acceptable form of sexual intercourse can also be seen in Degaré's very existence. The fairy appears, through some prophetic magic from his heritage, to know that the Princess will conceive a child from their one meeting, and that a boy will be born. He tells her:

'Lemman' he seide, 'gent and fre,
Mid schilde I wot þat þou schalt be;

³³⁷ Saunders, *The Forest*, p. 132-133.

³³⁸ Saunders, *The Forest*, p. 46.

³³⁹ Of course, as we have seen in *The Legend of Pope Gregory*, and as Archibald also observes, staying at home is not necessarily any safer. Archibald, *Incest*, p. 231.

³⁴⁰ Miri Rubin, 'Introduction: Rites of Passage', in *Rites of Passage: Cultures of Transition in the Fourteenth Century*, ed. by Nicola F. McDonald & W.M. Ormrod (York: York Medieval Press, 2004), pp. 1-12, p. 5.

Chapter Two – Rape Instigators and Victims of Abduction

Siker ich wot hit worth a knaue.³⁴¹

He has already admitted that he has loved the Princess for a long time, but only now has come forward to copulate with her. It is true that his patience can be explained by the need to wait for her to be alone in his domain (the forest), but it also indicates that sexual desire is not the reason for his actions. He displays the power of foresight, and appears to have raped the Princess with the explicit desire to conceive a child. This desire to conceive is surprisingly in keeping with canonical writings about the purpose of sexual intercourse within marriage. That intercourse should take place in order to procreate, and not to satisfy lust, is discussed in numerous examples in medieval writings, such as the following example, taken from Augustine's *Contra Faustum Manichaeum*:

The exercise or indulgence of the bodily appetites is intended to secure the continued existence and the invigoration of the individual or of the species. If the appetites go beyond this, and carry the man, no longer master of himself, beyond the limits of temperance, they become unlawful and shameful lusts, which severe discipline must subdue.³⁴²

As suggested by the above quotation, and as can be found in the writings of many medieval theorists, sex for lust or love was unacceptable in Medieval Christian teachings.³⁴³ Following the teachings of John the Baptist, sex was considered acceptable only within marriage and then only for the procreation of children. Although the intercourse between the Knight and the Princess is out of wedlock, his intention appears to be procreational.

In a similar manner to the separation of the Sister and Gregory in *The Legend of Pope Gregory*, the separation of the Princess from Degaré via the trope of the boat once more ensures the removal of the child from his unclean mother. Reading her as part of a loving relationship, where sexual intercourse is completed out of wedlock, highlights once again women's weakness to capitulate to their baser sexual urges. As the father disappears and the pregnancy and birth progresses without influence from men (in this case, there is not even the knight present in the pregnancy; it is just the Princess and her handmaiden), the child must once more be ushered away from the unclean and socially condemned family he has been born into. The enforced separation protects him from the dangerous influence of his inappropriate family and allows him to create a personal identity separate from the female/his mother. He becomes a man, rather than the son of his mother (and, if

³⁴¹ *Sir Degaré*, MS Advocates 19.2.1, fol. 78v, l. 115-117.

³⁴² Augustine, 'Contra Faustum Manichaeum', on The Gnostic Society Library, 'Book 22', <<http://gnosis.org/library/conf2.htm>>, [Accessed 4th November 2015].

³⁴³ Augustine, 'Contra Faustum', [Accessed 4th November 2015].

Chapter Two – Rape Instigators and Victims of Abduction

gossip is believed, grandfather). The desire for procreation and the need to protect the hero from the threat of incest that hangs over his family further reconciles the audience with the violence of this act. Although the princess has been let down by the failure of appropriate control (she should have been given in marriage), she has nevertheless disobeyed the laws of patriarchy by leaving (or perhaps even abducting herself from) the safety of her male kin. She must thus be punished. Meanwhile, the Knight's intention is not lust but to beget a child. She becomes guilty, whilst he remains (relatively) innocent.

Individually, both texts tell stories about the dangers of incest and the likelihood that women will fall into sin. When read in context with one and other, the contrast in the wedding scenes of both *The Legend of Pope Gregory* and *Sir Degaré* depict women as especially susceptible to sin. In *The Legend of Pope Gregory*, the sister fails in her responsibility to recognise the cloth which she gave to her baby son. Degaré, however, manages to avoid incest when he remembers to have his mother try on the magic gloves through which he is able to recognise her true identity. The gender difference between these two instances of token recognition merits further examination. In *The Legend of Pope Gregory*, it is the woman who is expected to recognise the cloth; the responsibility is placed on her to prevent the incest. As shown above, she is developed as a character incapable of making the correct decision when it comes to sexual matters, and her failure to recognise the cloth is an example of this. In *Sir Degaré*, however, the responsibility for recognition is given to the man. Although the mother places the gloves in his cradle and thus must have been familiar with their appearance, it is the magic within the gloves that allows for recognition.³⁴⁴ Thus it is the male fairy and the son in this relationship that have the duty to prevent incest, which they both achieve in time to prevent the consummation of the marriage.³⁴⁵ When read in contrast with *The Legend of Pope Gregory*, the gendered responsibility for recognition provides yet another message about the requirement for control of female sexuality; when tempered with the guidance of men, cardinal sins like incest *can* be avoided.

As with *The Legend of Pope Gregory*, *Sir Degaré* is a tale that takes consistent interest in controlling women. The King's inappropriately possessive relationship with his daughter and his refusal to allow her to go to seemingly appropriate suitors is depicted as

³⁴⁴ The Mother does not recognise the gloves by their appearance prior to trying them on.

³⁴⁵ Whilst recognition scenes like these are not uncommon in Middle English romances, *Sir Degaré* is distinct from the others in giving the son the task of recognising his mother. In most other romances (i.e. *Sir Eglamour*, *Richars li Biaus*, *Parise la Duchesse*), this role is given to the woman. That this particular romance directly contrasts with the failed recognition of the Sister in *The Legend of Pope Gregory* could be taken as explanation for the selection of *Sir Degaré* over the various other, extremely similar, romances that would have been available to the scribes at the time of compilation.

Chapter Two – Rape Instigators and Victims of Abduction

damaging to the social norms of patrilinear society. Though the fairy Knight's act is portrayed as violent, it is not condemned as wrong. Although things may have happened in the wrong order, the rape restores the disorder caused by inappropriate familial relationships and over-active female agency. The magic which Saunders' refers to as 'the enigmatic hand of destiny' can be seen to resolve the threat to social order created within the narrative, despite the violence involved in this resolution.³⁴⁶ Magic provides infallible ways for Degaré to avoid incest and justification that legitimises the rapist's actions. It conveniently resolves all the problems which threatened the social structures in *The Legend of Pope Gregory*. It is, however, an absolute power that is only available to the male characters. They suffer few consequences, whilst their female counterparts, in order to emphasise the weakness of women, are unable to utilise any such power. The power of magic thus reflects the subordinate position of women in society; they are unable to access it, and must instead depend on men to wield power for them.

Just as in *The Legend of Pope Gregory*, female agency is portrayed as existent but dangerous and flawed. Where the sister in *The Legend of Pope Gregory* was depicted as incapable of making correct decisions without male guidance which leads to her suffering, the Princess in *Sir Degaré* is punished for rebelling against male control (even if that rebellion is very passive). Both women are depicted as female bodies acting outside of the socially accepted male control, and thus they must be punished, tamed, and brought back into a subservient position under the authority of men. Their autonomy, represented through their non-consent, is only of interest to the narrative as evidence to find them guilty, justifying sexual violence to the reader.

Yet, like the sister in *The Legend of Pope Gregory*, the Princess too is ultimately forgiven for the actions which led to her rape, and incest she invites upon her family. Once again, the absolution she receives is brought about by the success of her son. In her discussion of the iconography of the cult of the Virgin Mary and Saint Anne, Mulder-Bakker states that 'they are mothers of the key figures in salvation history; their attributes are these children.'³⁴⁷ The sister and the Princess are in the same position. Although they are forgiven and restored to functioning roles in medieval patriarchal society, their primary function in both texts is to give birth to sons. They are defined by the sexual status of mother. Even though the conceptions are unconventional and sordid, these women are remembered because of the achievements of their sons. Their individuality disappears as

³⁴⁶ Saunders, *Magic and the Supernatural*, p. 183.

³⁴⁷ Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker, 'Introduction', in *Sanctity and Motherhood: Essays on Holy Mothers in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker (London: Garland Publishing Inc, 1995) p. 7.

Chapter Two – Rape Instigators and Victims of Abduction

they inhabit, for the reader, that approved sexual status and societal role. For our hypothetical female reader, the general approval of motherhood is evident. The warnings about the models of behaviour presented by the sister and the Princess are against their unconventionality, not their roles as mothers. Motherhood is portrayed as beneficial to society.

Floris and Blancheflour

The final text examined in this chapter is the romance *Floris and Blancheflour*, which is the only of the three texts to feature abduction instead of sexual assault; although rape is implicitly threatened in the narrative, it does not actually occur. The text can be found towards the end of the third booklet of the manuscript, following *The Seven Sages of Rome*. The Auchinleck redaction of *Floris and Blancheflour* is one of four extant Middle English versions, all of which appear to have had different Middle English sources which have been lost. It is thought that these missing sources would have been translated from the Old French *Floire et Blancheflor*, composed c.1160-1170.³⁴⁸ Unfortunately, all four of the extant Middle English texts have been damaged at the beginning, so we are reliant on the French romance to fill the gap.³⁴⁹

Like the sister and the Princess in *The Legend of Pope Gregory* and *Sir Degaré*, Blancheflour is a virgin at the beginning of *Floris and Blancheflour*. The value of her virginity, however, is more prominent in this romance than in the previous examples. From the beginning of the text the word ‘maid’ is used either as an honorary title as in line 123 (Pat faire maide Blancheflour,) or as an identifying proper noun used instead of her actual name, as in line 146 (Pat faire mai to hauen to quene.)³⁵⁰ Through these uses of the word maid, the reader is constantly reminded of Blancheflour’s sexual status. It is also a title bestowed upon Saint Margaret, Saint Katherine and the Virgin Mary within the Auchinleck manuscript. This indicates that Blancheflour is to be considered a more positive role model than the sister and the princess discussed above.

³⁴⁸ Erik Kooper, *Sentimental and Humorous Romances: Floris and Blancheflour, Sir Degrevant, The Squire of Low Degree, The Tournament of Tottenham and The Feast of Tottenham* (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2006) p. 1.

³⁴⁹ A plot summary of *Floris and Blancheflour* can be found in appendix five.

³⁵⁰ *Floris and Blancheflour*, Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, MS Advocates 19.2.1, fol. 100v, l. 123 & 146.

Chapter Two – Rape Instigators and Victims of Abduction

Using images that are commonly associated with purity and cleanliness, the description of Blancheflour emphasises her good qualities and value as a virtuous maiden. On bidding goodbye to Floris as he sets off to find Blancheflour, the King says:

“Herewith thow may that swete thing
Wynne, so may betide,
Blancheflour with the white syde,
Blancheflour, that faire may.”³⁵¹

Blancheflour is described as being white skinned. There was a belief in Medieval England that, as Katie Walter describes: ‘physical symptoms displayed on the skin reveal interior dispositions.’³⁵² Blancheflour’s white, clear complexion implicitly emphasises her purity and her virginal state.³⁵³ Even her name, which can be translated to mean white flower, invokes images of the white lily that is often used to describe maidens in romances and is heavily associated with the Virgin Mary, the ultimate figure of chastity.³⁵⁴ Throughout the text, the audience is constantly reminded of Blancheflour’s sexual status, which is displayed in a positive light.

The magic artefacts in the work also underscore the virgin’s positive qualities. The fountain in the Admiral’s garden, for example, highlights the requirement of virginity as a qualification for marriage, particularly to nobility such as the Admiral. The text explains the power of the fountain as follows:

3if þe[r] come3 ani maiden þat is forleie,
& hi bowe to þe grounde
For to waschen here honde,
Þe water wille 3elle als hit ware wod
And bicom on hire so red so blod.
Wich maiden þe water fare3 on so,
Hi schal sone be fordo,
And þilke þat beþ maidens clene,
Þai mai hem wassche of þe rene;
Þe water wille erne stille and cler,
Nelle hit hem make no daunger.³⁵⁵

³⁵¹ ‘Floris and Blancheflour’, in *Sentimental and Humorous Romances: Floris and Blancheflour, Sir Degrevant, The Squire of Low Degree, The Tournament of Tottenham and the Feast of Tottenham*, ed. by Erik Kooper (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2006) pp. 11-38, l. 360-363.

³⁵² Katie Walter, *Reading Skin in Medieval Literature and Culture* (Online: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013), p. 5.

³⁵³ See the discussion of the Sultan’s changing skin tone in Chapter Two: *The King of Tars*.

³⁵⁴ Tom Perna, ‘Mondays with Mary: The Flowers of the Blessed Virgin Mary’,

<<https://tomperna.org/2014/03/03/mondays-with-mary-the-flowers-of-the-blessed-virgin-mary/>> [Accessed 30th Mary 2017].

³⁵⁵ *Floris and Blancheflour*, MS Advocates 19.2.1, fol. 101v, l. 300-309.

Chapter Two – Rape Instigators and Victims of Abduction

The use of magic to confirm the sexual state of the woman as a virgin, and the desire to kill any woman who does not conform to this approved state, emphasises that society values the virginal state and punishes single women who transgress this norm. The scream of the fountain, along with the water turning red, evokes the moment of initial penetration when a woman's virginity is taken. It reflects the expected pain and subsequent blood seen from the breaking of the hymen. In fourteenth-century England, because women's blood was associated with impurity and disease, the image of the blood on hands portrays these women not just as unworthy, but as polluted and thereby as a threat to society.³⁵⁶ Virginity is so important to this text that it provides a test for women to undertake to prove their virginity. The need for such a test suggests that a woman's virginity is always in doubt; that magic is required to prove the virginity of the maidens in the text casts doubt upon the words of women. The text questions whether women can be trusted, and highlights the real social concern that non-virgins can masquerade as virgins without being detected.³⁵⁷

The narrative makes a clear and concentrated effort to praise virginity and, in turn, praise Blancheflour for maintaining this sexual status. Like the women who have gone before her, however, her virginity does not protect her from an act of *raptus*, nor does it prevent her objectification through the use of possessive words and phrases to describe her relationship to men: 'And see the that ilke same thief [the merchant]/For Blanchefloure he it [the jewelled cup] geef.'³⁵⁸ See also:

Nou euerich word he [Floris] hap him told,
 Hou þe maide was fram him sold,
 And hou he was of Speyne a kings sone,
 And for hir loue þider icome
 For to fonde wiȝ som ginne.³⁵⁹

The King of Spain, the merchant who purchases Blancheflour, and even Floris himself all refer to Blancheflour as a possession when they discuss winning and selling her; the use words such as 'wynne' and 'fram him sold'. The text describes the merchant as a thief as if she were an object to be stolen, whilst Floris refers to her as sold *from* him; both these images suggest that the narrative views her as belonging to Floris. This narrative uses these possessive words in a similar manner to both *The Legend of Pope Gregory* and *Sir Degaré*.

³⁵⁶ Peggy McCracken, *The Curse of Eve, the Wound of the Hero: Blood, Gender, and Medieval Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003) p. 71.

³⁵⁷ We may further question the validity of this magical test. As Coyne Kelly points out, the magical tree which follows the fountain has been rigged by the Admiral. That even magic tests are not fool-proof serves as a reminder that there is no test of female virginity that can be considered to be perfectly accurate. Kathleen Coyne Kelly, *Performing Virginity and Testing Chastity in the Middle Ages* (Routledge: London, 2000) p. 9.

³⁵⁸ 'Floris and Blancheflour', l. 183-186.

³⁵⁹ *Floris and Blancheflour*, MS Advocates 19.2.1, fol. 101r, l. 205-209.

Chapter Two – Rape Instigators and Victims of Abduction

The use of trading terminology is perhaps unsurprising, given that Blancheflour is literally turned into an object of trade, but even the hero Floris uses these words to describe her. As such, Floris appears to mirror the Earl in *The Legend of Pope Gregory*; he does feel affection for Blancheflour and wants what he sees as best for her happiness, but this affection does not mean that he diverts from the patriarchal view of women as objects to be controlled by men.

It is possible to trace many similarities between *Floris and Blancheflour* and the two previous texts examined in this chapter, including placing a value upon female virginity and treating the woman as an object that belongs to men. There is one large difference, however, between the two texts. Where the sister and the Princess are blamed for their rapes, Blancheflour not only escapes sexual assault, but manages to come away from her abduction as an approved heroine, blameless in the crime.

When Blancheflour is abducted, her non-complicity in the plan is evident as the narrative portrays the discussion between the King and Queen that results in their decision to sell her. As she is not involved, her innocence is evident and she epitomises the quote from Rubin mentioned earlier: ‘if women are for men to dispose of, they are in no position to give themselves away.’³⁶⁰ Blancheflour therefore is innocent of any involvement in her abduction. Furthermore, she is not persuaded to consent to the abduction after it has taken place. In her first piece of dialogue, she tells Claris:

Ich ihere, Clarice, wizoute gabbe,
 De ameral wil me to wiue habbe;
 Ac pilke dai schal neuer be
 Pat men schal atwite me
 Pat ischal ben of loue vntrewe
 Ne chaungi loue for non newe
 For no loue ne for non eie,
 So doþ Floris in his contreie
 Nou [I] schal swete Florice misse,
 Schal non oþer of me haue blisse.’³⁶¹

Blancheflour’s refusal to consent to marry the Admiral is made explicitly clear through her claim that men shall never doubt her love and her statement that no man will ‘have bliss’ of her. When the narrative allows Blancheflour’s voice to be heard, she forcefully asserts her non-consent. There is no ambiguity. This allows the reader to view her as innocent of blame within the context of the Statutes; she can neither be found to blame for arranging the abduction, nor does she consent to it after the crime has taken place. Her recognition of

³⁶⁰ Rubin, ‘The Traffic’, p. 175.

³⁶¹ *Floris and Blancheflour*, MS Advocates 19.2.1, fol. 102v, l. 483-492.

Chapter Two – Rape Instigators and Victims of Abduction

the damage that would be done to her reputation if she were to consent also illustrates that she is aware that her virginity belongs to Floris. She recognises herself as a stolen object, and is completely complicit in the patriarchal ownership of her body. Although she is allowed to express non-consent, it is done within the confines of patriarchal society's expectations. Unlike the sister in *The Legend of Pope Gregory* and the Princess in *Sir Degaré*, Blanche flour's voice is only related at the moment in is sanctioned by patriarchal society; the moment where she must express non-consent to her abduction. Thus, her use of her agency is within patriarchal social structures, and having used her voice correctly, she is able to walk away from her abduction without suffering the sexual assault she is threatened with.

Her active voice, however, is only expressed within the context of her abduction. Sarah McNamer claims that Blanche flour is an example of the 'positively portrayed wooing women who actively seeks union with her beloved and persists in pursuing that goal, despite numerous obstacles.'³⁶² Though it is true that Blanche flour is portrayed positively, I do not agree that she is a 'wooing woman'. In neither words nor deeds does she seek out marriage with Floris; he is the one who actively pursues her. As a child, it is he who insists they cannot be separated, he is the one who sets out on a quest to seek her, and he is the one who forces entry into the forbidden tower. Though she does express love and loyalty to him, she does not make any plans to try and escape the tower and return to him, as can be seen in the previous quotation. Blanche flour's voice, whilst expressing desire for Floris, is not aligned with any physical action. She is the epitome of the damsel in distress in the tower, faithful to her true love and patiently waiting for rescue. Her role in this relationship is passively to allow Floris to save her, not actively seek rescue by him. Her activity is solely restricted to her refusal to consent to her abduction by the Admiral; the only action that patriarchal society allows her.

The concern with the proper management of the household seen in *The Legend of Pope Gregory* and *Sir Degaré* is also found in *Floris and Blanche flour*. As with the twins in *The Legend of Pope Gregory*, both Floris and Blanche flour are brought up in unusually close proximity:

“Feire sone,” he seide, “thow shalt lerne,
Lo, that thow do ful yerne.”
Florys answerd with wepyng.
As he stood byfore the kyng;
Al wepyng seide he:

³⁶² McNamer, 'Lyrics and Romances', p. 205.

Chapter Two – Rape Instigators and Victims of Abduction

“Ne shal not Blanche flour lerne with me?
 Ne can y noight to scole goon
 Without Blanche flour,” he said than.³⁶³

At only seven years old, Floris is determined that Blanche flour and he will not be separated, even for education. This is the same age that Spieß identifies as the normal age for the segregation of children by gender into paths preparing them for their future lives.³⁶⁴ This also goes against the norm that Daniel T. Kline observes: ‘Medieval education focused primarily upon training boys in basic literacy for ecclesiastical and professional duties; girls had access to more informal instruction.’³⁶⁵ As such, *Floris and Blanche flour* depicts another medieval royal household that is diverting from the norm. The household in disarray also hints towards incest. When Floris and Blanche flour are babies, the narrative states that ‘The Cristen woman fedde hem thoo.’³⁶⁶ The sharing of the same nursemaid suggests that incest has taken place, as medieval medical beliefs allow us to read this as children sharing the same blood. Peggy McCracken explains that breast milk was thought to consist of blood, and that:

The child acquires certain of the customs of the one who suckles him. If the one who cares for him has evil customs or is of base condition, he will receive the impress of those customs because of having sucked her polluted blood.³⁶⁷

This belief about breast milk perhaps explains Floris’s genuinely Christian countenance and belief, even though he technically should be pagan. He inherits these qualities from Blanche flour’s mother. As both babies, however, consume the same milk they consequently share the same blood. Though the text never explicitly states that their relationship is incestuous, it is possible to see that their obsession with each other, combined with their unusual upbringing and the sharing of ‘blood’, creates a family unit that, if not socially unacceptable, is socially abnormal.³⁶⁸

The abnormal upbringing creates problems further for the children’s future. The King and Queen of Spain plan many schemes to bring an end to the love between Floris and Blanche flour, which prevents Floris from being able to ‘wyfe after the lawe.’³⁶⁹ The

³⁶³ ‘Floris and Blanche flour’, l. 13-22.

³⁶⁴ Spieß, ‘Maintenance Regulations’, p. 53.

³⁶⁵ Daniel T. Kline, ‘Female Childhoods’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Women’s Writing*, ed. by Carolyn Dinshaw & David Wallace (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) pp. 13-20, p. 16.

³⁶⁶ ‘Floris and Blanche flour’, l. 3.

³⁶⁷ McCracken, *The Curse*, p. 4 & 71.

³⁶⁸ In the French original, the children are often referred to as looking like brother and sister, they are so similar. The use of breast milk is perhaps a hangover from this original incestuous notion. Gaunt, *Gender and Genre*, p. 88-89.

³⁶⁹ ‘Floris and Blanche flour’, l. 40.

Chapter Two – Rape Instigators and Victims of Abduction

text does not state what prevents them from being able to marry legally; possible reasons could be that their union is (technically) an illicit interfaith marriage between Christian and Pagan, or that the difference in rank between the son of the King and the daughter of a slave goes against norms. Small details of the Auchinleck redaction, however, appear to resolve these problems. The religion of the Spanish King (and thus his household) is assumed to be the same as in the French romance, but both the King and Queen contradict this assumption when they, through directly reported speech, quote Christian phrases. She twice invokes ‘God’s love’ when interceding with him to save the lives of the children, and he himself says ‘Jhesu thee of care unbynde.’³⁷⁰ The reference to God could refer to pagan or Christian gods, but the specific mention of Jesus suggests that this is a Christian household. Furthermore, there is no mention of Floris converting to Christianity at any point before the marriage in Babylon. These lines and the missing conversion suggests there is no religious impediment to the marriage.

Details from the Auchinleck redaction also suggest that slavery also could not be an impediment. We cannot be certain that Blancheflour’s mother is a slave; like the pagan household, her role as a Christian slave of a pagan king is assumed from the French text. Her role as a nursemaid, and the respect she is given does suggest, however, that she is fulfilling the role of Lady in Waiting rather than slave; she is a servant, but a noble one. This perhaps also explains why it would be considered acceptable for her daughter to play with, and to be educated alongside the Prince. Most importantly, a Christian household, which I assert this particular royal couple are, would be unlikely to own slaves.

I would like to suggest that it is the potential incest, not religion or rank that poses the greatest impediment to the marriage. Floris and Blancheflour cannot marry because their relationship would be bordering on incestuous, since they suckled from the same breast and been raised together like brother and sister. The quick ‘disappearance’ of the impediment when it when it becomes apparent that Floris will not be persuaded to give up Blancheflour also suggests that incest is the most likely issue. Papal dispensations for incestuous marriages were frequently distributed at this time, particularly among the nobility.³⁷¹ Although a dispensation would not have been required for Floris and Blancheflour to marry as they were not technically related to any degree, the specific details in Auchinleck and its sustained interest in both incest and medieval medical theories highlight the threat of potential incest within this text. As specific details to the

³⁷⁰ ‘Floris and Blancheflour’, l. 300 & 338.

³⁷¹ Archibald, *Incest*, p. 42.

Chapter Two – Rape Instigators and Victims of Abduction

nature of the impediment are scant, however, and it is difficult to say with absolute certainty that incest is the problem.

Although the text does pass comment on the theme of correct family units, its main focus is devoted to the praise of virginity. This is evident from the constant reminder of Blanche flour's sexual status, and the association of virginity with purity and non-virginity with pollution. The text encourages women to accept the patriarchal control of their bodies; Blanche flour is the only women of the three *raptus* victims who cannot be found culpable in her case, and is the only one who does not have to endure the reforming punishment of sexual assault.

Conclusion

The three *raptus* texts of booklets one and three of the Auchinleck manuscript clearly engage with *raptus* laws in fourteenth century England. The two crimes of rape and abduction are portrayed in the same manner in the romances discussed above, all of which describe the victim of the crime as a possession of men. The three texts recognise the existence of violence against women through scenes of rape and abduction and, particularly in the two rape scenes, make no effort to hide the violence behind these attacks. *Sir Degaré* is unusually violent, with detailed descriptions of the pain and violation that the Princess undergoes when she is raped. In *The Legend of Pope Gregory*, the rape scene is clearly mentally distressing for the sister, whose indecision as to the best course of action is evident. Even for Blanche flour, whose experience is the least violent, the distress she undergoes is evident in her passionate speech defying the Admiral's intentions.

All three texts also acknowledge the power of female consent by dedicating some small number of lines to the direct expression of the female voice. The sister's internalised thoughts are relayed to the reader, as are the Princess's cries of non-consent and Blanche flour's decision to resist the Admiral. The texts, however, explore the notion that female consent could be either dangerous or beneficial to society by both praising and condemning it. The Sister is condemned for consenting to her rape, even though it was because of her desire to save her brother's social status. The Princess is condemned for exercising her agency by wandering away from protection and leaving herself open to attacks where her non-consent cannot be defended. Both of these women can be seen to refuse their place in patriarchal social structure through their decisions respectively to enter the brother's bedchamber and the dangerous forest. Their choice to step outside normal

Chapter Two – Rape Instigators and Victims of Abduction

social boundaries thus illuminates female agency as dangerous when unregulated by men. *Blancheflour* provides the opposite viewpoint. She is the only female character who accepts her role as an object of marriage trade, and embraces her position in patriarchal order. Thus, she is able to escape rape. When read together, the texts illustrate that acceptance of patriarchal controls is necessary, and such acceptance is for the good of both the individual woman and wider society.

Incest further complicates the representation of *raptus* in these texts. Two of the texts, *The Legend of Pope Gregory* and *Sir Degaré* explicitly engage with incest, and *Floris and Blancheflour* appears to do so implicitly. By reading the latter in the context of the other contents of the manuscript, however, the incestuous undertones become more prominent as all three texts discuss the damage to the established marriage trade that incest causes. *The Legend of Pope Gregory* illustrates how a case of incest destroys the normal inheritance structure as it brings about wars over who should control the land. It also illustrates how incest can lead to deadly sin through the existence of children whose parents are unknown. *Sir Degaré* shows how incest, even when only threatened, stops the marriage trade dead and creates problems for the maintenance of normal power structures. *Floris and Blancheflour* shows how incest through improper upbringing can create problems that impact upon inheritance; the King of Spain nearly loses his only living heir because of Floris's unlawful desire for his 'sister'. The incest represented in these romances segregates families from the society around them and threatens the safety of the wider nation as a whole.

Unexpectedly, this insular representation of incest shows one difference between French and English romances. Gravdal observes that, in French romances:

in which the female character is ubiquitous but carefully confined to the private space of the home, the heinous incest story is one medieval narrative that projects the heroine out from the setting of a patriarchal home. The incest narrative afforded the medieval poet a wealth of gendered plot possibilities otherwise absent from romance or lyric texts of this time.³⁷²

That incest sends the female character away from the safety of the home is evidently not the case in English literature. Both *The Legend of Pope Gregory* and *Sir Degaré*, in presenting mother-son incest, fall into standard patterns:

³⁷² Gravdal, 'Confessing Incests', p. 289.

Chapter Two – Rape Instigators and Victims of Abduction

When the incestuous marriage is averted in the nick of time...the stories are... cliff-hanging romances; when mother-son incest does occur, the story becomes exemplum...about the sinfulness of mankind, the value of contrition and penance, and the possibility of divine forgiveness.³⁷³

There is no adventure or agency granted to the sister and the princess, whose narratives are examples of what Archibald considers ‘staple’ incest narratives. Rather, incest works to remove agency and silences the woman. With the exception of *Blancheflour*, whose ‘incest’ is debatable, the women’s voices lose all power and they become pawns for men, with their right to consent unacknowledged or superseded. The threat of incest is one so strong that it consumes the right of the woman to use her voice. It is more dangerous than *raptus* and must be resolved, even if that resolution comes at the cost of female agency.

The presence of incest in all three households indicates that these are not smoothly functioning households. All three portray the problems that occur when gender segregation, correct relationships, and patriarchal social structures are not maintained. It appears, however, to be the women who suffer for this failure of the household; the men get away relatively lightly.³⁷⁴ The maintenance of the household was, traditionally, a female role. As conduct literature of the time emphasises, ‘the regulation of the self and of the household are complementary activities, the feminine version of the self-control required of elite men as a prerequisite to control of others.’³⁷⁵ Conduct literature suggested that the state of the house could be seen in the state of the woman. Both of our sinful women are those who are brought up in houses where the threat of incest looms. Even *Blancheflour*, for all she is depicted as innocent, commits fornication after her reunion with *Floris*, a lesser sin that appears to reflect the threat of incest which hangs over her and the Spanish King’s household. As *Blancheflour*’s threat is *much* less, the sin within her is much less. All three texts depict this basic principle of the conduct books; where the household is flawed, the woman is inevitably flawed as well. Megan Leitch has shown that Middle English romances tended to depict sleeping within the parameters provided by conduct books in a much more explicit manner than did French romances, suggesting that the authors of Middle English romances were well versed in conduct literature. This lends

³⁷³ Archibald, *Incest*, p. 107.

³⁷⁴ Perhaps this is not true of the brother in *The Legend of Pope Gregory*, who dies on the crusade he is required to take for penance. His death, however, happens ‘off-screen’; the reader is informed it has happened but is not witness to any of the pain or discomfort of his death. In the context of crusade, his death was for the glory of god and he consequently takes on the role of martyr. Consequently, I am not convinced that we can consider his death as severe a punishment as his sister’s prolonged suffering.

³⁷⁵ Sarah Salih, ‘At home; out of the house’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Women’s Writing*, ed. by Carolyn Dinshaw & David Wallace (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 124-160, p. 134.

Chapter Two – Rape Instigators and Victims of Abduction

further weight to the notion that the predicaments encountered by the sister, the Princess, and Blanchefflower are result from their sinful, incestuous, households.³⁷⁶

The treatment of female sexuality within these three texts is consistent across the board. *The Legend of Pope Gregory* establishes the value of female virginity to the marriage trade, *Sir Degaré* echoes this and legitimises the loss of virginity by marrying the victim to the rapist, and *Floris and Blanchefflower* uses symbolic magical items, imagery such as ‘white skin’, titles such as ‘maiden’, to illustrate how testing for virginity was essential in establishing the worth of a particular woman. Through this praise, they also explicitly and implicitly condemn non-virginity in non-married women by associating them with pollution, and explicitly discussing how their ‘value’ is now null and void. The texts all write the condemned woman out of each narrative by erasing her voice and removing all opportunities to directly report her speech. The exception to this is Blanchefflower, whose speech continues to be directly reported as she avoids raptus. Virginity becomes associated with purity and goodness, but also with the right to express consent and to become agents. Given that virginity was ‘a potentially crucial entry-qualification for all the occupations officially available to women’ (wife or nun), the explicit importance of virginity within these Auchinleck texts teaches women to maintain it.³⁷⁷ The manuscript depicts, however, that the only way to do this is to hand control of female sexuality to (correct) men. As such, sexuality is consistently controlled by men in these three texts.

There is one, final, unique feature about Blanchefflower that separates her from the Princess and the sister; her explicit status as an educated woman. Her upbringing alongside Floris gives her an education equal to that of a Prince, which we can assume makes her one of the most highly educated female characters in Middle English romance. It is never explicitly said that the sister and the Princess are not educated, but Blanchefflower receives the same education as her male companion. Thus, her education can be read as more thorough and complex. She is likely even to be competent in Latin reading, rare for a woman in fourteenth century England. The fact that the educated woman is the only woman who is positively represented would be of particular interest to a manuscript aimed at the female reader, who must have some education in order to be able to access Auchinleck. Blanchefflower appears to be an implicit advocate for female education. Even if the manuscript was to be read to those who could not personally read, Blanchefflower’s educated nature encourages self-improvement; the listening to of texts for the improvement

³⁷⁶ Leitch, “‘grete lust’.

³⁷⁷ Wogan-Browne, ‘The Virgin’s Tale’, p. 165.

Chapter Two – Rape Instigators and Victims of Abduction

of the mind. Where the other women are confused by their agency and the power of their voice, Blancheflour appears to have grasped a better understanding of society's requirements of her to accept her role in the marriage trade, and only to use her voice to affirm that role. Her voice is powerful only because it does exactly what it is required to do; refusing to consent to *raptus* and maintaining her sexual integrity. As an educated woman, her ability to navigate her *raptus* faultlessly is rewarded by good marriage. Her literacy is thus a two-edged sword – it grants Blancheflour agency but also encourages her to accept society's norms.

By encouraging women to read or listen to texts with a consistent representation of female sexuality as belonging to men, romances thereby become a tool with which women can be persuaded to accept their own repression. Susan Bordo considers that any feminist analysis of power structures needs to consider:

power “from below,” as Foucault puts it; for example, of the mechanisms that shape and proliferate – rather than repress – desire, generate and focus our energies, construct our conceptions of normalcy and deviance.³⁷⁸

Having accepted that female audiences did exist in fourteenth century England, and that they could have had access to the Auchinleck manuscript, it is possible to see this consistent portrayal of the necessity of control by men as an example of one of Foucault's mechanisms of regulation which ‘effects distributions around the norm.’³⁷⁹ These texts, though entertaining, all shape women's attitudes by encouraging their acceptance of patriarchal control and by constructing non-conforming female sexuality as dangerous to individual women. They distribute what those ‘below’ power structures should accept as the norm. The representation of sexuality in the *raptus* narratives of the Auchinleck manuscript is consistent, and the models of behaviour for female readers are very clear. Education and the power of the female voice were positive things, but these had always to be tempered and controlled by the desires of patriarchal society. When this was not the case, violence against women became a punishment for those who transgressed from accepted social norms.

³⁷⁸ Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* (London: University of California Press, 2003 [1993]) p. 167.

³⁷⁹ Michel Foucault, ‘Right of Death and Power over Life’, on ‘Caring Labor: An Archive’, <<https://caringlabor.wordpress.com/2010/08/06/michel-foucault-right-of-death-and-power-over-life/>> [Accessed 30th May 2017].

Chapter Three – Good Wives and Dangerous Distractions

Introduction

The three female characters discussed in chapter two all occupied the same sexual status at the beginning of their tale: maiden. As their stories continued, they eventually progressed to two other sexual states medieval women could legitimately occupy; wife and nun. Considering that by the end of *The Legend of Pope Gregory* the sister is approaching fifty years old, it is unsurprising that she is placed in a nunnery as there is a potential that she would not have been able to have children.³⁸⁰ In her younger years, however, she encounters pressure from her male advisors to marry. For the younger women of *Sir Degaré* and *Floris and Blancheflour*, marriage is the resolution of their troubled single lives. These narratives, however, do not describe entering into marriage and the role of the wife in any great detail. Marriage is the end point for the Princess and Blancheflour. This chapter will look at the texts that pick up where *Sir Degaré* and *Floris and Blancheflour* end; those that use marriage to provide models of wifely behaviour.

A basic survey of medieval antifeminist literature reveals that depictions of a happy married life are rare in medieval literature, despite the ‘happy ever after’ tone of the marriages at the end of the previously discussed texts. The three texts discussed in this chapter, *The King of Tars*, *The Life of Adam and Eve*, and *The Seven Sages of Rome*, mirror the previous chapter by providing examples of both good and bad wives. Weaving the narratives together reveals a strict code of conduct for married women, similar to the behavioural restrictions set out for their single counterparts.

The three texts discuss the role of the woman at the moment of engagement, alongside three models of wifely behaviour; the good, the disobedient, and the evil. There is a distinct difference to be found between the two types of undesirable wife; the disobedient is the one who, often going against her husband’s advice, makes ignorant mistakes which bring shame, discomfort or loss to the family. The evil wife, however, maliciously plots against her husband for personal gain. Though both provide examples of

³⁸⁰ In my opinion, she could be no younger than twelve when she gives birth to Gregory, who is likely to be at least fourteen when he goes on his adventure and marries her. Twenty years pass with Gregory’s penance, and then an unspecified amount of time passes before she goes to visit him as Pope (realistically at least one year). This makes the sister at least forty-seven (and most likely older) at the end of the text; too old to bear children thus too old to become a wife.

Chapter Three – Good Wives and Dangerous Distractions

the bad wife, the latter appears to receive a worse ending as maliciousness is more severely punished than foolishness.

As was seen in the chapter above, the Auchinleck manuscript builds upon current laws and cultural perceptions in order to create its conduct based narratives. Before beginning textual analysis, I will first discuss the legal and fictional sources that inform the models of behaviour set out by Auchinleck's marriage narratives.

As with *raptus*, there are many legal sources that tell us how the law viewed the act of marriage in fourteenth-century England. One word that crops up repeatedly in discussion of those sources is also prevalent in the *raptus* cases: consent. Just as female consent played a pivotal role in *raptus* cases, female consent was also considered important to the canon laws surrounding marriage. Prior to the twelfth century, marriage in England was considered to be a private affair between two individuals. It was an agreement that placed importance on the right of both parties to choose their marriage partner.³⁸¹ As was discussed in chapter two, however, the Norman Conquest changed the economic system and placed a financial value upon the female body. For marriage, Resnick explains, this meant that:

Marriages, at least among the members of the nobility, were usually arranged for economic or political advantages... The desires of the betrothed couple were almost irrelevant.³⁸²

The change from private affair to economic deal, summarised by Resnick above, is surprisingly not reflected by late medieval canon law. As the evidence below will show, there was a clear conflict between private matter and public financial issue where marriage was concerned in fourteenth century England.

The marriage ceremony as we know it began with the Gregorian movement within the Catholic faith, which examined marriage in order to ban the clergy from entering into it. This required the ability to define what marriage was, and thus the Church began to

³⁸¹ Michael M. Sheehan, 'Choice of Marriage Partner in the Middle Ages: Development and Mode of Application of a Theory of Marriage', in *Marriage, Family, and Law in Medieval Europe: Collected Studies*, ed. by James K. Farge (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996) pp. 157-191, p. 93. Also, Shannon McSheffrey, "'I will never non ayenst my faders will": Consent and the Making of Marriage in the Late Medieval Diocese of London', in *Women, Marriage and Family in Medieval Christendom*, ed. by Constance M. Rousseau and Joel T. Rosenthal (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1998) pp. 152-174, Jacqueline Murray, 'Individualism and Consensual Marriage: Some Evidence from Medieval England', in *Women, Marriage and Family in Medieval Christendom*, ed. by Constance M. Rousseau and Joel T. Rosenthal (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1998) pp. 121-152.

³⁸² Iwen M. Resnick, 'Marriage in Medieval Culture: Consent theory and the Case of Joseph and Mary', *Church History*, 69 (2000), pp. 350-371, p. 351.

Chapter Three – Good Wives and Dangerous Distractions

shape the rules which constituted a binding union.³⁸³ Although introduced to clarify rules for the clergy, the need for a definition of marriage also appears to have been required by lay society. Sherman notes that ‘by far the most common matrimonial cause in the medieval Church courts was the suit brought to enforce a marriage contract.’ He also states that, in 1143, a Papal rescript held that,

a marriage constituted by mere exchange of words would prevent the parties from contracting a marriage solemnly celebrated in the church.³⁸⁴

This meant that, according to canon law, a prior marriage contracted merely by words held enough legal standing to act as an impediment to any future marriages. The emphasis was on the words said, not the location of the ceremony, witnesses, or consent of any other interested party. Thus, the canon law only placed importance upon the consenting words of the man and woman, and only required words to contract a legally binding union.

This focus on the consent of the man and women was echoed by Gratian in his *Decretum*, written around 1150. He said:

‘To the question ‘May a daughter be given in marriage against her will?’ there is a clear answer. ‘By these authorities it is evident that no woman should be married to anyone except by her free will.’³⁸⁵

This is one example of many in the *Decretum* where Gratian voices the importance of a woman’s right to choose her marriage partner and to willingly consent to the arrangement.³⁸⁶ He specifies that her consent must not be agreement for an economic or lustful purpose, but should be informed by marital affection; ‘an emotion-colored assent to the other as husband or wife.’³⁸⁷ Gratian not only spoke out for the right of women to refuse a marriage, but also considered affection as a necessity in making a legal marriage. The *Decretum* was studied and clarified throughout the following century by ‘hundreds of decisions in marriage cases,’ and ‘published in decretal letters made by the ruling popes, most notably Alexander III (1159-1181) and Innocent III (1198-1216).’³⁸⁸ Pedersen warns, however, that Gratian’s idea of free consent, should not be overestimated. He states that:

³⁸³ Resnick, ‘Marriage in Medieval Culture’, p.351.

³⁸⁴ Charles P. Sherman, ‘A Brief History of Medieval Roman Canon Law in England’, *University of Pennsylvania Law Review and American Law Register*, 68 (1920), pp. 223-258, p. 247.

³⁸⁵ Sheehan, ‘Choice of Marriage Partners’, p. 96.

³⁸⁶ For further reading on Gratian’s view of consent see Murray, ‘Individualism’, p. 124-125.

³⁸⁷ John T. Noonan Jr, ‘Power to Choose’, *Viator*, 4 (1973), pp. 419-434, p. 425.

³⁸⁸ Frederick Pedersen, *Marriage Disputes in Medieval England* (The Hambledon Press: London, 2000) p. 2.

Chapter Three – Good Wives and Dangerous Distractions

The church realised that the parties could be under some pressure to marry, but as long as no undue force had been exercised to persuade them to marry – as long as the pressure was not of such a kind as to make “a constant man” change his mind – the church would allow it.³⁸⁹

As Pedersen suggests, in order for consent to be deemed forced, there had to be prevalent evidence of said force. Later in the *Decretum*, Gratian also indicates his belief that parents should also consent to the match. This places the consent of the bride and groom on a level with their parents; their wishes are not more important than the families. That being said, we cannot deny that Gratian does emphasise the importance of free and affectionate consent between the bride and groom.³⁹⁰

There were flaws in Gratian’s *Decretum*. Initially titled *Concordia discordantium canonum* (The Harmony of Discordant Canons), the initial purpose of the *Decretum* had been to reconcile the conflicting canons of the first millennium of Christianity.³⁹¹ In his writings on marriage, however, Gratian further complicated matters by discussing marriage in two stages – the initiation and the consummation – which left some ambiguity as to at what point a marriage was unbreakably contracted. The Parisian masters took Gratian’s work and modified his ideas, reworking his two stages into a distinction between future tense and present tense. Thereafter:

The focal point of any marriage case heard by an ecclesiastical court became the nature of the consent, whether it was a statement of an intent to marry here and now – which was known as a *verba de presenti* – or a promise to marry at some time in the future – which was known as a *verba de futuro*.³⁹²

The Parisian masters clarified his statement on initiation and consummation by focusing on the words spoken by the bride and groom alone. This act thus places a stronger emphasis on the nature of their consent than Gratian gave. The consent of the bride and groom became the focal point of any marriage case brought before an ecclesiastical court.³⁹³ The notion of free consent became the most important part of the Church’s teachings about marriage.³⁹⁴

A variety of sources that are specific to England echo the interest in consent found in both the original *Decretum* and the scholarly alterations which followed. Peter Lombard,

³⁸⁹ Pedersen, *Marriage Disputes*, p. 3.

³⁹⁰ Sheehan, ‘Choice of Marriage partner’, p. 96.

³⁹¹ Pedersen, *Marriage Disputes in*’ p. 1.

³⁹² Pedersen, *Marriage Disputes in*’ p. 4.

³⁹³ Pedersen, *Marriage Disputes in*’, p. 4.

³⁹⁴ Pedersen, *Marriage Disputes in*, p. 6.

Chapter Three – Good Wives and Dangerous Distractions

for example, wrote his *Libri IV Sententiarum* a decade after the *Decretum* was released.³⁹⁵ Though he disagreed with parts of Gratian's argument, he also claimed that consent created a marriage. Like the Parisian masters, Lombard also made a distinction between tense, 'providing the words that would become the exemplar: I take you as my husband, I take you as my wife.'³⁹⁶ His concern with differentiating between present and future consent is a small difference; that the emphasis is once more placed on the consent of both man and woman is evident.³⁹⁷ Without consent there could be no marriage.

Although the canonists differed in some small details, the pivotal notion of free consent to marriage was ultimately adopted by Popes Alexander III and the Decretals of Gregory IX in 1234, which 'included an affirmation that consent alone formed the bonds of marriage.'³⁹⁸ This emphasis on consent became one of the most important developments in marriage law in late medieval Europe. Through it, the Church had created and applied throughout Europe a legally binding union where either party could escape the rule of the family in order to choose their marriage partner.

England was no exception to papal control; marriage law was entirely governed by the Church. English law appears to have embraced the notion of free consent early. The 1008 ecclesiastical codes of Ethelred state that the widow has a right to freely choose a new husband, and the legislation of Cnut widened this to all women. Pedersen concludes that 'by the time of the post-conquest Council of Westminster (1175), the English church fully embraced the principle that only the consent of the parties constituted marriage.'³⁹⁹

As well as being found in the legal documents of post-conquest England, there is evidence that the principle of consent was widely disseminated in secular writing throughout England. Numerous English pastoral manuals, dating between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries, state the importance of free consent to marriage.⁴⁰⁰ In the 1160s, Bishop Bartholomew of Exeter 'wrote a penitential that highlighted Saint Paul's affirmation of the widow's freedom to remarry,' something that was reaffirmed by King John in the Magna Carta.⁴⁰¹ Between 1208 and 1213, Robert of Flamborough wrote his *Liber poenitentialis* which focuses on consent. He was also one of the earliest writers to acknowledge that clandestine marriages based on the exchange of words of consent alone, with no witnesses

³⁹⁵ Sheenan, 'Choice of Marriage partner', p. 97

³⁹⁶ Murray, 'Individualism', p. 125.

³⁹⁷ R. H. Helmholz, *Marriage Litigation in Medieval England* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1974), p. 26.

³⁹⁸ Murray, 'Individualism', p. 126.

³⁹⁹ Pedersen, *Marriage disputes*, p. 6.

⁴⁰⁰ Murray, 'Individualism', p. 129-130.

⁴⁰¹ Murray, 'Individualism', p. 130-131.

Chapter Three – Good Wives and Dangerous Distractions

and not performed in the church, were legally binding.⁴⁰² Thomas of Chobham, subdean of Salisbury, wrote *Summa confessorum* (c.1215), which taught that consent of the heart was just as necessary as verbal consent to establish an indissoluble union, and insisted that the law applied to all men and women, whether lord or serf.⁴⁰³ He also believed, in his understanding of the legislation, that marriage did not require any formal ritual beyond free given present consent; neither a witness nor a priest was required.⁴⁰⁴ Richard Wetheringsett, between 1215 and 1222, stressed that mutual consent was essential and that priests needed to establish its existence carefully in his *Qui bene presunt*. He also urged that the laity be educated in this regard.⁴⁰⁵ In 1220, John of Kent's *Summa de penitentia* 'extended the freedom to consent to the formation of all marriages,' and spoke out against the dangers of coercion to marriage.⁴⁰⁶ Ten years prior to the approximate date of Auchinleck's compilation, in 1320, William of Pagula's *Oculus sacerdotis* provided the formulaic words to be said in order to contract a marriage. Murray states that the words were simply 'I take you as my wife...I take you as my husband,' and argues that the need for formulaic words shows that:

by the early fourteenth century writers were aware of the ambiguity of language, and that the courts had been faced with cases that had revolved around the exact meaning of specific words exchanged by a couple. Pagula's manual would have lessened the confusion by providing the very phrases that formed an indissoluble marriage bond.⁴⁰⁷

By the time of the Auchinleck manuscript, our hypothetical reader is likely to be well aware of the power of her consent in making a marriage.

Even if she has not had access to these large formal documents in person or through her religious acquaintances, there are some less formal pamphlets surviving which also disseminated knowledge of the correct words of consent. The anonymous *Quinque verba* (ca. 1300) provided the proper form of words as seen in the *Oculus sacerdotis*, and also provided words in the future tense which formed a betrothal rather than a marriage.⁴⁰⁸ As even a parish priest could have accessed this pamphlet, it is certain that the laity, and as such our reader, would have been fully versed in the requirement of free consent to marriage.

⁴⁰² Murray, 'Individualism', p. 132.

⁴⁰³ Murray, 'Individualism', p. 133-134.

⁴⁰⁴ Pedersen, 'Marriage Disputes' p. 6.

⁴⁰⁵ Murray, 'Individualism', p. 134.

⁴⁰⁶ Murray, 'Individualism', p. 131.

⁴⁰⁷ Murray, 'Individualism', p. 138.

⁴⁰⁸ Murray, 'Individualism', p. 138.

Chapter Three – Good Wives and Dangerous Distractions

One of the best examples of the doctrine of consent in action in England can be found in the fifteenth-century personal letters of the Paston family. After deciding to marry the family steward, Richard Calle, against the wishes of her parents, Margery Paston relied heavily on her right to give and withhold consent to show the binding state of her arrangement with him:

And the Bysschop seyde to her ryth pleyndly, and put her in rememberawns how she was born, wat kyn and frendds that ssche had, and xuld have mo yf sche wer rulyd and gydyd aftyr hem; and yf she ded not, wat rebuke, and schame, and los yt xuld be to her, yf sche wer not gydyd be them, and cause of forsaking of her for any good, or helpe, or kownfort that sche xuld have of hem; and seyde that he had hard sey, that sche loved schecheon [*such one*] that her frend[es] wer not plesyd with that sche xuld have, and therfor he had her be ryth weel avysyd how sche ded, and seyde that he woold undyrstand the words that sche had seyde to hym, wheyther that mad matrimony or not. And sche rehersed wat sche had seyde, and seyde, yf thoo words mad yt not suher, she seyde boldly that sche would make that suerher or than sche went thens, for sche seyde sche thowgthe in her conschens sche was bownd, wat so ever the words wern... And than Calle was exameynd aparte be hym sylfe, that her words and hys acordyd, and the tyme, and wher yt xuld a be don.⁴⁰⁹

Margery and Calle are able to use the formulaic words of consent as a justification of the formal, binding nature of their marriage. No ceremony was required to make their marriage official. Murray observes that this letter, although unlikely to present the norm in fifteenth-century England, ‘presents a fine and detailed account of the implementation of the doctrine of consensual marriage.’⁴¹⁰ This acts as evidence that the doctrine of consent was taken seriously by the Church, even if the match was not desired by the parents. Although Margery’s parents disapproved of the match, they could not stop it. They did, however, carry out their threat to abandon Margery; Margaret Paston removed her daughter from her will which is an example of how parents could exercise the threat of poverty to strongly influence their child’s marital decision. At the same time, however, Margaret’s will reveals that she left money to John Calle, her grandson, which suggests that Margery was not completely disowned and abandoned by her parents.⁴¹¹

It is unlikely, however, that parents frequently had no say in the marriage of their children, particularly within the ranks of the nobility. Payling has shown the importance of marriage in his discussion of the marriages of heiresses. He states:

⁴⁰⁹ James Gairdner, *The Paston Letters* (Chatto & Windus: London, 1904), vol. 5, p. 38-39, letter 721.

⁴¹⁰ Murray, ‘Individualism’, p. 122.

⁴¹¹ Gairdner, *The Paston Letters*, vol. 6, p. 52, letter 978.

Chapter Three – Good Wives and Dangerous Distractions

The most important of these rules – male primogeniture and preference for the direct female over the collateral male heir – protected estates from dissipation by partition between sons and provided frequent opportunities to families which survived in the senior male line to consume the lands of those which failed.⁴¹²

This statement shows how concerned the nobility were with the marriages of heiresses. It implies that, despite the law, the fathers of noble daughters had a large part in controlling their marriage choice. Weiss makes a similar remark in her discussion of women in Anglo-Norman romance when she comments

the nobler she [the woman] was, the more her choice of husband was controlled by others, concerned with questions of land, money and rank – and this despite the attempted insistence by canon lawyers that she should give her full and free consent to a match.⁴¹³

It is clear from historical records that heiresses customarily married men ‘whose inheritance or expectations equalled or exceeded their own,’ but this should not be assumed to imply that these daughters did not consent to the marriages arranged for them.⁴¹⁴ As Cootz states, and McShreffery echoes, ‘for most women, finding a husband was the most important investment they could make in their economic future.’⁴¹⁵ We must not, and should not, view marriage practises as a rigid dichotomy between marrying for money/parental wishes and marrying for love. It is likely that marriage operated in a middle ground between these two opposites stances, where personal feeling and parental desire worked alongside each other.⁴¹⁶ In a similar way as marriage to the rapist, obedience to family wishes would often have been the best option for a medieval woman to have a happy future.

The sources above have revealed a lot about how the medieval woman entered into marriage and the legal realities of this act. They show, however, nothing about the nature of marriage itself. Where becoming a wife was of interest to the legal authorities, how to be a wife was of more concern to cultural authorities. Whether by a rebellious declaration of love, or a match arranged entirely by her parents, many medieval women would enter a marriage and become a wife; it was a common route for women to take through life. Thus,

⁴¹² S. J. Payling, ‘The Economics of Marriage in Late Medieval England: The Marriages of Heiresses’, *The Economic History Review*, 54 (2001), pp. 413-429, p. 413.

⁴¹³ Judith Weiss, ‘The Power and the Weakness of Women in Anglo-Norman Romance’, in *Women and Literature in Britain, 1150-1500*, ed. by Carol M. Meale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 7-23, p. 8.

⁴¹⁴ Payling, ‘The Economics of Marriage’, p. 413.

⁴¹⁵ Stephanie Cootz, ‘The World Historical Transformation of Marriage’, *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 66 (2004), pp. 974-979, p. 977.

⁴¹⁶ McShreffery, “‘I Will never non’”, p. 155.

Chapter Three – Good Wives and Dangerous Distractions

it is hardly surprising to find plenty of literature that discusses how to be a good wife. Despite the many sources that exist which discuss contracting a marriage, as Leyerle summarises:

Little writing survives from the Middle Ages in which details of ordinary life engage the sustained interest of authors, most of whom theorize about marriage, or attack it, or follow literary tradition rather than observe actuality.⁴¹⁷

Literature tends to discuss how people should live their lives, rather than the way they actually live them. For women, seen as flawed and weak creatures, the literary examples of disobedient or evil wives vastly outnumber those of good wives. They discuss how women should not live their lives, as opposed to the way they actually lived them. This is particularly prominent within the first and third booklets of the Auchinleck manuscript, where only one of the nine wives discussed is a good wife.⁴¹⁸

There is no doubt that the treatment of the wives of Auchinleck is not a unique creation of this manuscript; it is symptomatic of a wider literary tradition. Women ‘were of vast interest to classical and medieval writers’ as a source of satire, which means we can expect exaggeration to an extreme.⁴¹⁹ In romance, the role of the woman (who is to become the wife) is complex. As is shown above, women were normally constructed as the possession of men and, as Gaunt explains:

if the possession of a woman is a sign of male prestige and status, women should be drawn inexorably towards the right man, the hero...but if women are fickle, voraciously sensual and lacking in judgement, as the misogynistic tradition of the Church fathers suggests, or passive objects of exchange, as in the feudal model of marriage, how can they be relied upon to behave properly?⁴²⁰

Medieval sources suggest that they could not be. Literary history prior to the fourteenth century frequently discussed wives and women, helping to shape a culturally accepted stereotype of wives as unintentionally dangerous or wilfully evil. Blamires, in *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended: An Anthology of Medieval Texts*, traces the roots of antifeminist stereotypes in various sources including ancient satire, scripture, and the works of early physiologists such as Aristotle and Galen. I do not have the space to fully explore all these sources, so will restrain myself to examples from late medieval Europe:

⁴¹⁷ John Leyerle, ‘Introduction’, *Viator*, 4 (1974), pp. 413-418, p. 415. *Hali Meidhad* is a notable exception to this.

⁴¹⁸ As will be shown below, even her status as a good wife could be debated.

⁴¹⁹ Leyerle, ‘Introduction’, p. 415.

⁴²⁰ Gaunt, *Gender and Genre*, p. 113-114.

Chapter Three – Good Wives and Dangerous Distractions

those that develop from this vast history and those that may have directly influenced the Auchinleck texts due to their popular contemporary circulation.

For some medieval commentators, the dangers and risks of wives to men were a topic to be explored in a literal manner. Walter Map, inserts the ‘dissuasion of Valerius to Rufinus the Philosopher that he Should Not Take a Wife’ into his *De Nugis Curialium* (c.1180), where he states that

You are all on fire with your passion, and, led astray by the beauty of a comely head, you fail to see that what you are wooing is a chimera: yes, you refuse to learn that the three-formed monster is adorned with the face of a noble lion, polluted with the body of a stinking goat, armed with the tail of a rank viper... The first wife of the first Adam, after the first making of man, by the first of sins broke the first fast against the command of God. Disobedience was the parent of this; and on this side doomsday, she will never cease to stimulate women to be unwearied in following out what they have derived from their mother. Friend, a disobedient wife is a reproach to her husband: be on your guard... The truly good woman, who is rarer than a phoenix, cannot be loved without the bitterness of fear and care and frequent disaster. But bad women, who swarm in such numbers that no place is clear of their malice, when they are loved, punish (sting) bitterly and give themselves over to vexing even to the dividing of the body from the soul... The banner of chastity was won by Lucretia and Penelope and the Sabine women, and it was a very small troop that brought the trophy home. Friend, there is no Lucretia, no Penelope, no Sabine *left*: mistrust all... Finally, amongst so many millions, did ever one woman sadden a constant and earnest suiter by a permanent denial? Did she consistently silence the suppliant’s words? No, her answer has some taste of favour in it, and however hard it is, it will always contain in some nook of its wording a concealed stimulus to your petition. Every one of them refuses, none goes on refusing.⁴²¹

Map uses various commonly practised techniques to disparage wives and persuade Rufinus not to take a wife. He compares women to monsters, painting a grotesque picture. He recalls Eve and her role in the fall of man. He describes bad women as a ‘swarm’, recalling the monstrous imagery and adding the idea that they are taking over the world around men. When he recalls three good women – Lucretia, Penelope and the Sabine women – he immediately dismisses them by claiming no such women live in the world anymore. He accuses women of saying no when they mean yes, and of never refusing a man’s offer, quotes examples of three good wives, then dismisses them as no longer relevant. By setting his work in the past he is able to counter three famous good women with countless

⁴²¹ Walter Map, ‘De Nugis Curialium’ in *Walter Map’s De Nugis Curialium*, ed. by James R. Montague (London: Honourable Society of Cymmddorion, 1923) pp. 1-259, p. 162-168.

Chapter Three – Good Wives and Dangerous Distractions

examples of bad. By doing so, he claims that all living women are unsuitable wives who live to torment their husbands.

A particularly influential work was Andreas Capellanus' *De Amore*, dated to c.1185. In particular, book three condemns women extensively as he 'launches', as Blamires puts it, into an extreme misogynistic tirade against women that offers no forgiveness to any woman.⁴²² It is detailed and long, but the topic sentences of the section provide a useful summary of Capellanus's arguments:

You could never find the reciprocated love you look for in a woman... There is no woman to be found who is bound to you with such affection and firm constancy that she will remain loyal to her love if some man approaches her with the slightest offer of gifts... Again, every woman is by nature not only miserly but also an envious backbiter of other women, a grabber, a slave to her belly, fickle, devious in speech, disobedient, rebellious against prohibitions, marred with the vice of pride, eager for vainglory, a liar, a drunkard, a tongue-wagger who cannot keep a secret... Woman is miserly because there is no imaginable wickedness in the world she does not boldly do at the prospect of a gift, and she cannot for all her plenty bring herself to help a person in need... As a general rule, every woman is also known to be envious, always eaten with jealousy at another's beauty and discontented with her material lot... So reasonably enough it follows that a woman is a slanderer, because slander is the outcome of nothing but envy and hate... Every woman is also disfigured with the vice of greed, for she strains every sinew to steal all the possessions not only of other men but also of the husband to whom she is happily wed... Further, a woman is habitually such a slave to her belly that there is nothing he would blush to approve if she were sure of excellent food. Woman is also found fickle as a general rule... This is why you should never feel certain of a woman's promise or oath, because there is no lasting loyalty in her... Every woman is further polluted by the vice of disobedience... Pride also regularly mars the female sex... The again every woman seems to look down on other women, a trait clearly stemming from arrogance alone, for no man could despise another except through haughty pride... Vainglory also seriously preoccupies women. All women are known to be also liars. Moreover all women are drunkards, fond of drinking wine. All women are also free with their tongues, for not one of them can restrain her tongue from reviling people, or from crying out all day long like a barking dog over the loss of a single egg, disturbing the whole neighbourhood for a trifle... Besides this, no woman can keep a secret... Every woman in the world is also lustful... Again, no woman is joined to a lover with such chaste loyalty, or is so united to her husband, that she does not welcome another as lover, especially if a wealthy man emerges... The female sex is likewise disposed to every evil.⁴²³

What is perhaps most noticeable about this tirade of antifeminist sentiment is the continued reference to *all* women. Capellanus considers all women to be the same, and this discursive

⁴²² Blamires, *Woman Defamed*, p. 116.

⁴²³ Capellanus, 'On Love', p. 307-321.

Chapter Three – Good Wives and Dangerous Distractions

list comes out of a discussion of the prospect of marriage. For Capellanus, the notion of the wife drives forward a discussion of the evils of all women.

Another example of the prevalence of misogynistic ideas that circulated in the society in which the Auchinleck scribes lived, is Richard de Bury's *Philobiblon* which was written c.1344-45, five to fifteen years after the Auchinleck manuscript. He wrote that within the home of the layman:

Our [clerics] place is usurped by pet dogs, or by hunting hawks, or by that two-legged animal with whom clerics were long since forbidden to live together, and whom we have always taught our pupils to shun even more than a snake or a cockatrice... She points out that we are the only items in the household that are unnecessary; she complains that we serve no domestic purpose whatever; and she advises that we should quickly be exchanged for expensive hats, fine silk fabrics and deep-dyed scarlets, frocks and fancy furs, wool and linen.⁴²⁴

The beastly imagery that places the wife lower than a hunting animal and worse than the hated snake is a very explicit example of the medieval writer's distaste towards wives. Though de Bury is speaking of women in general, it is the woman within the household whom he turns to as a basis for his generalisations about the entire gender. The danger of the wife is particularly emphasised when he links what he views as the crimes of women to household affairs. He finds the wife presents a perfect female caricature to condemn.

In fictional literature wives are also frequently discussed. As early as the twelfth century, the figure of the evil or unruly wife who destroys the household was so engrained in medieval culture that it was used in some texts as an extended metaphor for the destruction of a positive item or attribute. An example of this can be seen at the beginning of *Sawles Warde*, written circa 1190, which reads:

Pis hus þe ure Laured spekeð of is seolf þe mon. Inwið, þe monnes wit I þis hus is þe huse-laurd, ant te fulitohe wif mei beon Wil ihaten, þet ga þet hus efter hire, ha diht it al to wundre, bute Wit ase laurd chasti hire þe betere ant bincome hire ofte muchel of þet ha walde. Ant tah walde al þet hird folhin hire oueral, 3ef Wit ne forbade ham, for alle hit beoð untohene ant rechelese hinen, bute 3af he ham rihte.⁴²⁵

The metaphor of the soul as a house develops from Mathew 24:42:

⁴²⁴ Blamires, *Woman Defamed*, p. 1.

⁴²⁵ 'Sawles Warde', in *Medieval English Prose for Women: Selections from the Katherine Group*, ed. by Millett & Wogan-Brown (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992) pp. 86-130, p. 86.

Chapter Three – Good Wives and Dangerous Distractions

But this know ye, that, if the goodman of the house knew at what hour the thief would come, he would certainly watch and would not suffer his house to be broken open.⁴²⁶

The author of *Sawles Warde* develops this passage, where the house becomes the soul, the husband the protector, and the thief the devil, by adding a wife and allowing her to take on the role of Will. She becomes responsible for reducing the house to chaos. The wife is depicted as a risk to the good order of the household, and the good order of the soul. Alongside the wife, the servants (who ‘walde al þet hird folhin hire oueral’ if not for the husband’s interference) also pose a risk to the order of the house. The unruly servant is a secondary risk to the smooth running of the household and can be clearly seen in a number of Auchinleck texts. This will be explored further in my discussion on *The Seven Sages of Rome* below, where the unruly servant is used by the evil wife in her efforts to deceive her husband.

The domination of tales of evil wives and the rarity of good wife stories in the literature which informs the Auchinleck manuscript is noted in some examples, such as the anonymous poem *De Conigue Non Decucenda* (c.1222-50). In its discussion of family life, it states:

“Whose wife is good is blest” it’s said,
But “good-wife” tales are rarely read.
She’ll either nag or fornicate –
His lordship she’ll not tolerate.

Of good wives there’s a scarcity –
From thousands there’s not one to see.⁴²⁷

Rather than observing that the lack of good wife tales stems from a literary history of antifeminist tradition, or hypothesising that stories of good wives would not make interesting reading material, the poem takes the lack of good wives in literature as symptomatic of the reality for married men. These six lines consequently summarise the treatment of wives in late medieval literature. Where good stories exist, they are vastly outnumbered by the bad.

In the genre of fabliau, the deceitful wife is a stock character that dominates these tales of trickery, and the role of the wife as a trickster influences the Auchinleck texts. In the anonymous *El Libro de Los Enganos E Los Asayamientos de Las Mugerres* (c.1253),

⁴²⁶ Matthew 24. 43. Vulgate. [Accessed 31st August 2018].

⁴²⁷ Blamires, *Woman Defamed*, p. 127.

Chapter Three – Good Wives and Dangerous Distractions

we are told of a wife who tricks her husband and prevents her adultery from being exposed, another wife who agrees to sexual intercourse with a strange man without seeing him and, when he turns out to be her husband, claims it was a trap to test his fidelity, and a further wife who tricks a man into undergoing humiliating toils so that he may better understand women.⁴²⁸

Other authors lament the nagging nature of wives. Jehan le Fèvre's translation of the *Liber laentationum Matheoluli*, known as *The Lamentations of Matheolus* (c.1371-2) was written approximately thirty years after the Auchinleck was compiled. In it, Mathieu states his opinions on wives from an autobiographical perspective:

A nagging wife couldn't care less whether her words are wise or foolish, provided that the sound of her own voice can be heard. She simply pursues her own ends; there's not a grain of sense in what she says; in fact she finds it impossible to have a decent thought. She doesn't want her husband to be the boss and finds fault with everything he does. Rightly or wrongly, the husband has no choice; he has to put up with the situation and keep his mouth shut if he wants to remain in one piece. No man, however self-disciplined or clear-sighted he may be, can protect himself adequately against this. A husband has to like what the wife likes, and disapprove of what she hates and criticize what she criticizes so that her opinions appear to be right. So anyone who wishes to immolate himself on the altar of marriage will have a lot to put up with.⁴²⁹

Although Mathieu appears to be more dejected and resigned to his fate as a husband than some of the others mentioned here, it is evident that he considers his wife to blame for all of his troubles.

One of the most influential texts on late medieval English literature (particularly the romance genre) is *Le Roman de La Rose*, dated to c.1275 and written by two authors, Guillaume de Lorris who began the work and Jean de Meun who finished it more than forty years after de Lorris's death. As discussed above, the English court spoke French in the thirteenth century, so the romance was as popular in England as it was in France.⁴³⁰ This long text, which was translated to English by Chaucer c.1370, personifies sins and experiences in life as a group of women, all of whom are ugly in appearance:

In the middle I saw Hatred, who certainly seemed to be one who incites anger and strife. In appearance the image was choleric, quarrelsome, and full of malice; it was not pleasing, but looked like a woman crazy with rage...Beside

⁴²⁸ Blamires, *Woman Defamed*, p. 130-135. This text is considered a source for *The Seven Sages of Rome*, discussed below.

⁴²⁹ Blamires, *Woman Defamed*, p. 178.

⁴³⁰ Charles Dahlberg, *The Romance of the Rose by Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 1.

Chapter Three – Good Wives and Dangerous Distractions

her, to the left, was another image of the same size. I read her name, Felony, beneath her head...I looked back to the right and saw another image named Villainy, who was of the same nature and workmanship as the other two...Covetousness was painted next. It is she who entices men to take and to give nothing, to collect valuable possessions; it is she who, in her great passion for heaping up treasure, loans money at usury to many...There was another image, called Avarice, seated side by side with Covetousness. This image was ugly; dirty, badly shaped, thin and miserable-looking, she was green as a shallot; she was so discoloured that she looked sick...Envy was portrayed next. She never laughed in her life nor enjoyed anything unless she saw or heard a report of some disaster...Next, quite close to Envy, Sorrow was painted on the wall. Her color seemed to show that she had some great sorrow in her heart...Old Age, shrunken by a good foot from her former stature, was portrayed next. She was so old, so far fallen into her second childhood, that she could hardly feed herself...Next was traced an image of what seemed to be a hypocrite; it was called Pope-Holiness...The last portrayed was Poverty, who wouldn't have a penny if she had to hang herself.⁴³¹

This long and influential allegory uses women to portray what is undesirable in life. The descriptions are, as Blamires describes, 'insistently female'.⁴³² De Lorrís, at the beginning of the text, establishes a link between the undesirable in life and the female form. This is then followed by expressions such as 'a man in high place can have no vice so harmful as avarice.'⁴³³ By representing the undesirables as female, de Lorrís develops the link between women and the harm that they can do to men.

When de Meun resumes writing the *Romance* after the death of de Lorrís, he too associates women with images of evil. Instead of using them as ugly allegories of the undesirable things in the world, he uses images of the monstrous serpent:

O child who gather flowers and fresh, clean strawberries, here lies the cold serpent in the grass. Fly, child, for he poisons and envenoms every person that comes near. O child, seeking along the earth for flowers and new strawberries, the evil chilling serpent, who goes about here hiding himself, the malicious adder who covers up and conceals his venom, and hides it under the tender grass until he can pour it out to deceive and harm you; O child, give thought to avoiding him. Don't let yourself be seized if you want to escape death, for it is such a venomous animal in body, tail and head, that if you approach it you will find yourself completely poisoned, for it treacherously corrodes and pierces whatever it reaches, without remedy. No treacle may cure the burning of that venom. No herb or root is worth anything against it. The only medicine is flight.⁴³⁴

⁴³¹ De Lorrís, 'The Romance', p. 32-37.

⁴³² Blamires, *Woman Defamed*, p. 149.

⁴³³ De Lorrís, 'The Romance', p. 46.

⁴³⁴ De Meun, 'The Romance', p. 280.

Chapter Three – Good Wives and Dangerous Distractions

In this extract, Nature compares the snake in the grass to women; although the snake is described as male, the line ‘protect yourselves from women if you love your bodies and souls’ which leads into this quote leaves the reader in little doubt that the snake represents the woman.⁴³⁵ It is also an image which recalls the serpent who tempted Eve and the subsequent fall of man. It reminds the reader that women are treacherous, deceiving and easily fooled. Additionally, there is the section of the romance where the allegorical figure Friend relates the claims of a husband:

I formed evil gauntlets with my own hands and deceived myself cruelly when I ever accepted your faith, the day of our marriage. For me you lead this life of riot! For me you lead this life of luxury! Who do you think you go around fooling? I never have the possibility of seeing these quaint little games, when thee libertines, who go around spying out whores, greedy for pleasure and hot with desire, gaze and look upon you from top to bottom when they accompany you through the streets...Didn't I take you to serve me? Do you think that you deserve my love in order to consort with these dirty rascals just because they have such gay hearts and find you so gay in turn? You are a wicked harlot, and I can have no confidence in you. The devils made me marry.⁴³⁶

Where the wife barely responds, the husband's speech is directly reported within the romance. His accusations make it clear that he views his wife as a deceitful creature.

These accusations, however, are not necessarily accepted as accurate by the text. Friend reports, prior to delivering the husband's tirade against his wife, that:

It is the same in marriages, where we see that the husband thinks himself wise and scolds his wife, beats her, and makes her live a life of strife. He tells her that she is stupid and foolish for staying out dancing and keeping company so often with handsome young men. They undergo so much suffering when the husband wants to have control over the body and possessions of his wife that good love cannot endure.⁴³⁷

Although Friend by no means justifies the wife's flirtatious behaviour, he does indicate that the actions of the husband, which are extreme, have had their role to play in the destruction of the love that once existed between them. Equally, the important character of La Vieille, the old woman and source for the Wife of Bath, provides ‘a set of worldly-wise instructions’ for young women that advises against the use of ‘love’ as a means of accumulating wealth and discusses the inconstancy and cruelty of husbands, providing a voice against anti-feminist views.⁴³⁸

⁴³⁵ De Meun, ‘The Romance’, p. 279.

⁴³⁶ De Meun, ‘The Romance’, p. 156-157.

⁴³⁷ De Meun, ‘The Romance’, p. 156.

⁴³⁸ Charles Dahlberg, *The Romance*, p. 399.

Chapter Three – Good Wives and Dangerous Distractions

Earlier in *The Romance*, during De Lorris's writing, the God of Love commands the narrator to:

Honor all women and exert yourself to serve them. If you hear any slanderer who goes around detracting women, take him to task and tell him to keep quiet. If you can, do something that is pleasing to ladies and girls, so that they will hear good reports told and retold about you. By this means you can rise in people's esteem.⁴³⁹

The God of Love expects his vassal to be respectful to women. Likewise, after his comparison of women to snakes, Nature clarifies that:

It was never my intent to say, that you should not hold women dear or that you should flee from them and not lie with them. Instead I recommend that you value them highly and improve their lot with reason. See that they are well clothed and well shod, and labor always to serve and honor them in order to continue your kind so that death does not destroy it. But never trust them so much that you tell them anything to keep quiet about. Certainly allow them to go and come, to keep up the household and the house if they know how to take care of it; or if it happens by chance that they know how to buy or sell they can busy themselves with such activity; or if they know about any trade let them do it if they need to; and let them know about the things that are open and that don't need to be hidden. But if you abandon yourself so much that you give them too much power, you will repent it later, when you feel their malice.⁴⁴⁰

The Romance of the Rose, thus, treads a line between an utter condemnation of all women by linking them with allegorical images of undesirable traits, and a recognition of the desirability of love with a woman and the need for marriage to continue the human race. *The Romance* tries to address man's unavoidable requirement for inherently evil women, by providing a middle ground for the men who must marry them. Significantly, encouraging men to interact with women but warning that this must be done with caution is similar to the depictions of men in the Auchinleck manuscript. As is seen in *The Legend of Pope Gregory*, and will be further discussed below in *The King of Tars*, men who mistreat women are condemned by the manuscript. Although women were objectified and 'owned' by the male authorities which surrounded them, the manuscript demonstrates that there was a demonstrable difference between acceptable ownership and unacceptable control.

The Romance of the Rose is not the only text which does, in some way, praise women. Blamires' monograph, *The Case for Women in Medieval Culture*, provides an excellent summary and analysis of the medieval literary examples of good women. It is

⁴³⁹ De Lorris, 'The Romance', p. 60.

⁴⁴⁰ De Meun, 'The Romance', p. 280.

Chapter Three – Good Wives and Dangerous Distractions

important to note, however, that most of his sources feature single women (nuns being an obvious example) rather than wives. There are of course a few exceptions. Blamires notes that in *Livre des manières* by Étienne de Fougères (c.1170), the author:

lauds the happiness of wives and their pleasure in children (despite their cost and their mortality), and concludes with an encomium on the Countess of Hereford who lost *her* children but is a model of cheerful charitable behaviour.⁴⁴¹

In the *Miroir des bonnes femmes*, a thirteenth century French prose text that was a source text for the more famous *The Book of the Knight of the Tower*, also praises wives.⁴⁴² This praise, however, is only when they have a positive influence on their husband's religion:

Women, who were wives of non-believers, ministered to Jesus. This shows that a woman should do good works even if her husband is an evil man...
When a husband is with God a wife should obey her husband in all things.
When he is dissevered from God, she should not leave God... Prudent wives often bring salvation to their husbands.⁴⁴³

This particular model of wifedom is very specific to the conditions under which a good wife may go against her husband's wishes, and is of great significance to the Auchinleck's *The King of Tars* which features this scenario. The *Miroir* echoes the Augustinian argument found in *Dives and Pauper*, that a wife should obey God over an errant husband.⁴⁴⁴ Rather than focus on what it means to be a good wife, the text provides an example of the only time a wife can be disobedient and not consequently be labelled a disobedient wife, the one exception to the rule of 'be obedient.' This is a rare discussion of the good wife.

In almost all cases where good women are discussed, the sources will turn to the Virgin Mary as an ideal wife rather than to a human wife. Her example, for instance, silences the thrush's criticism of women in the debate text *The Thrush and the Nightingale*. When women are held up to scrutiny, it is the Blessed Virgin who is brought forth as their defence, and it is her chastity that proves the ultimate weapon against the Thrush's arguments.⁴⁴⁵ As far as wives are concerned, their goodness is limited as they are sexually

⁴⁴¹ Alcuin Blamires, *The Case for Women in Medieval Culture* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), p. 21.

⁴⁴² Kathleen Ashley, 'Medieval Courtesy Literature' and Dramatic Mirrors of Female Conduct', in *The Ideology of Conduct: Essays on the Literature and the History of Sexuality*, ed. by Nancy Armstrong & Leonard Tennenhouse (London: Methuen, 1987), pp. 25-38, p. 33.

⁴⁴³ Blamires, *The Case for Women*, p. 30.

⁴⁴⁴ Augustine, 'Dives and Pauper', in *Dives and Pauper*, ed. by Priscilla H. Barnum (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980) p. 70.

⁴⁴⁵ Blamires, *The Case for Women*, p. 22. The text *The Thrush and the Nightingale* is actually found in Auchinleck towards the end of the manuscript, the significance of which is discussed in chapter five.

Chapter Three – Good Wives and Dangerous Distractions

impure, and they are rarely brought forward as an example of a good woman. The number of wives within literature of good women is consequently very small.

There is a stark difference in the treatment of women between the legal sources that discuss consent to marriage and the cultural sources that discuss models of wifehood. Where the first gives a surprising amount of autonomy to women (even if this was not always followed through by families), the latter devalues all women by generalising almost all wives under the heading of bad. Within the three texts about medieval wives in the first and third booklets of the Auchinleck manuscript - *The King of Tars*, *The Life of Adam and Eve*, and *The Seven Sages of Rome* - we will find this generalisation of the wife as bad by mirroring the dichotomy seen in chapter two, albeit in a reversed pattern. Where we began with two bad maidens and ended with one good, this chapter begins with one good wife, then traverses through the disobedient to the seemingly downright evil. In these three texts, however, we can see the passivity, fickleness, lack of judgement, and sensuality that was typical of representations of women in fourteenth century England. Thus, we find three models of wifehood for our hypothetical medieval female reader.

The King of Tars

The King of Tars is normally considered a romance due to its setting and knightly battle scenes. The narrative, however, contains a religious miracle, causing critics to fit it into their attempts to consider booklet one thematically linked by religion. Unusually for a romance, it also features a female character as the main protagonist.⁴⁴⁶ Rather like *The Legend of Pope Gregory*, the text crosses between the genres of romance and hagiography, and refuses to be neatly defined as one or the other. The text is the second extant text found in the first booklet of the manuscript, and it follows directly after *The Legend of Pope Gregory*. It is in fairly good condition, though the end of the text is missing due to a lost quire.

Other redactions of *The King of Tars* do exist in the Vernon manuscript (MS English Poetry A.1) and the Simeon manuscript (MS Additional 22283). They differ greatly from the Auchinleck redaction and cannot feasibly be used as a replacement for the missing leaves. Judith Perryman, who produced an edition of *The King of Tars* in 1980, believes that there were no more than 176 lines left to the Auchinleck redaction.⁴⁴⁷ I concur

⁴⁴⁶ Gaunt, *Gender and Genre*, p. 71-72.

⁴⁴⁷ Judith Perryman, *The King of Tars* (Heidelberg: Winter Verlag, 1980) p. 9.

Chapter Three – Good Wives and Dangerous Distractions

with Perryman's opinion: the final scene in the extant text is a battle to convert the Saracen people to Christianity, after the major social disturbances of the narrative have been resolved. It makes sense that this is the final battle, after which the Christians would have been rewarded with peaceful lives.⁴⁴⁸

The representation of the lead female character in *The King of Tars* immediately differs from those that were seen in chapter two. Unlike the sister, the Princess, and to a large extent, Blancheflour, the Princess of Tars is offered the opportunity to take control of her own future; her male authority figure allows her to exercise her agency. Less than one hundred lines into the poem, the King explicitly recognises his daughter's right to consent to marriage, even if he dislikes the match:

Y nold hir ʒiue a Sarazin
 For alle þe lond þat is mine;
 Þe deuel him arst todrawe.
 Bot sche wil wiþ hir gode wille
 Be wedded to him hirsclue to spille;
 Hir þouʒtes nouʒt y no knawe,
 Ac y schal wit ar þan ʒe pas.⁴⁴⁹

It is evident that the King does not wish his daughter to marry a Saracen. He likens it to a spiritual suicide when he states 'be wedded to him hirsclue to spille,' illustrating that he believes that agreeing to this marriage would condemn his daughter to eternity in hell. Despite his passionate feelings, however, he acknowledges that his daughter has the right to choose and sends for her. When he asks her opinion, however, he explicitly guides her answer:

His douhter anon was brouʒt in plas,
 & he axed hir biliue,
 'Douhter, þe Soudan of Damas
 ʒernes forto se þi fas,
 & wald þe haue to wiue.
 Waldestow, douhter, for tresour,
 Forsake Ihesus our saueour.
 Pat suffred woundes fiue?⁴⁵⁰

When he questions his daughter, the King explicitly states the risks to her soul that would come from making the wrong choice. Though we can read this bias as the concern of a loving father, the question is laden with inference; he reminds her that to marry the Sultan

⁴⁴⁸ A full summary of the plot can be found in appendix six.

⁴⁴⁹ *The King of Tars*, Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, MS Advocates 19.2.1, fol. 7rb, l. 43-49.

⁴⁵⁰ *The King of Tars*, MS Advocates 19.2.1, fol. 7rb, l. 50-57.

Chapter Three – Good Wives and Dangerous Distractions

will be to abandon Jesus ‘her saviour’. Her free choice is guided by her father towards the answer he desires. That being said, she appears to have no hesitation in answering no, and behaves as a good Christian woman throughout the text. It therefore is likely that, even without her father’s guidance, she would have answered no. As discussed above, we know it is likely she would have listened to her father’s advice; marriages against parental wishes were still unusual.⁴⁵¹

Although the religious barrier between the Princess and the Sultan makes her answer rather obvious, the Princess still provides an example of a maiden deferring to her male authority figure. Her father suggests that her answer should be no by warning her of eternal damnation and she gives into his request, remaining within the expectations of patriarchal society. The Princess and the King thus create a working example of Peter Lombard’s opinions on consent; her consent is important, but deferential to the consent of her parents.⁴⁵² This deference by daughters to their father’s advice can be seen within sources from late medieval England. Margery Sheppard of East Ham said, in 1486, ‘I will do as my fader will have me, I will never have non ayenst my faders will.’⁴⁵³ Although this is a late example, taking place over one hundred years after the compilation of *Auchinleck*, it is a working demonstration of the model of behaviour demonstrated by the Princess’s action. She defers to her father, despite the fact she doesn’t have to. After examining evidence from the deposition books of 1450 England, McSheffrey has noted that ‘young men often acted independently in their marriage choices, whilst young women were more reliant on and subject to the involvement of parents and others in making this pivotal decision.’⁴⁵⁴ The Princess’s reaction is thus not only legal, but socially encouraged and expected.

This contemporary view of marriage as requiring the consent of the woman, however, is not shared by the Sultan, who follows a feudal model of marriage. When hearing of the Princess’s refusal, he gathers his barons and says:

‘Lordinges’ he seyð, ‘what to red?’
 Me haþ be don a gret misdeed
 Of Tars, þe Cristen king.
 Y bede him boþe lond & lede
 For his douhter, worþliche in wede,
 To han wed hir wiþ ring.
 &he me sent word ogain

⁴⁵¹ Cootz, ‘The World Historical’, p. 977.

⁴⁵² See above.

⁴⁵³ McSheffrey, ‘I will never non’, p. 156.

⁴⁵⁴ McSheffrey, ‘I will never non’, p. 160.

Chapter Three – Good Wives and Dangerous Distractions

In bateyl y schuld arst be sleyn
& meni an heye lording.⁴⁵⁵

Rather than the partnership presented by the Christian King and Princess, the Sultan views marriage arrangements as trade. His expectations mirror Lévi-Strauss's theories of gift exchange as applied by Rubin, in that their marriage would create a lasting union between the two families. Rubin summarises:

The result of a gift of women is more profound than the result of other gift transactions, because the relationship this establishes is not just one of reciprocity, but one of kinship. The exchange partners have become affines, and their descendants will be related by blood.⁴⁵⁶

As with the Duke in *The Legend of Pope Gregory*, marriage (from the Sultan's perspective) objectifies the Princess by denying her agency and turning her body into an object that can be traded for land, property etc. In his anger, the Sultan does not perceive the refusal as an act of the Princess; rather, he is angry at her father's refusal of the equitable trade he offered. By refusing to accept the Sultan's offer, the King has broken trade agreements between men and insulted the Sultan. War becomes an inevitable conclusion.

The Sultan's perception of marriage as a trade draws attention to his interest in riches and worldly goods, something that our readings of Auchinleck have highlighted as a marker used to identify characters who negatively influence society. For example, the Duke in *The Legend of Pope Gregory* and the Admiral in *Floris and Blancheflour* all display more interest in money and treasure than their 'good' counterparts.⁴⁵⁷ The medieval reader would have recognised avarice as one of the seven deadly sins. In the Auchinleck texts, when a character explicitly demonstrates the sin of avarice they inevitably trouble society in some way. Avarice identifies the character who the audience is to interpret as the villain of the narrative. This is particularly emphasised by its contrast between the Sultan, the King and the Princess in *The King of Tars*. Although she is wealthy in her own right, when the Princess rejects wealth in preference for her faith she actively disassociates herself with avarice. Instead of seeking wealth, she follows the teachings of Christian father's such as Tertullian, who instructs Christian women that:

⁴⁵⁵ *The King of Tars*, MS Advocates 19.2.1, fol. 7a-7vb, l. 121-129.

⁴⁵⁶ Rubin, 'The Traffic', p. 173.

⁴⁵⁷ Though we can assume the 'good' characters are also of wealth, being of noble and royal blood respectively, their interest and desire for worldly goods is not spoken of, thus appears to be less consistent than the 'bad' characters.

Chapter Three – Good Wives and Dangerous Distractions

The lives of Christians are characterized less by gold than by iron, for the robes are being prepared for the martyrs, and the angels who will bear them up are being made ready. Go forth adorned with the ointments and ornaments of the prophets and the apostles, taking radiance from your simplicity, your rosy complexion from your chastity; paint your eyes with modesty and your mouth with silence; hang on your ears the word of God and fasten round your necks the collar of Christ. Bow your head to your husbands and that will be ornament for you.⁴⁵⁸

The Princess's rejection of wealth, consequently, encourages readers of the manuscript to identify her as a positive role model. She is far removed from de Bury's wife, who desires to exchange the cleric for fancy frocks and furs. Her distaste for wealth allows the female reader to interpret her as a heroine from whom she can learn. This suggests that she will potentially provide a model of good wifeness.

When the marriage trade is broken and the flow of wealth amongst the nobility of Christendom interrupted, war becomes a tool to help restore the transference of property. Peace is only achieved when the trade pattern is restored through the Princess's decision to marry the Sultan after all:

'Moder, it is nouȝt long ago
For me were slawe kniȝtes þro,
Pritti þousende & seuen.
Forþi y will suffer no lenger þrawe
þat Cristen folk be for me slawe,
Wiþ þe grace of God in heuen.⁴⁵⁹

The Princess openly states that she is agreeing to the marriage in order to bring about peace and an end to the killing of Christian people. This statement of cause allows the Princess to reject worldly goods and maintain her status as a positive model for good, despite agreeing to marry a rich pagan. Her decision allows for the cessation of violence; the Sultan stops the killing and gives the riches he initially promised to the king. Now that he is to receive the physical object which he values, the Princess's body, normal trade is restored. From his perspective, the objectification of the Princess is complete as he is able to buy her body as he originally desired.

The act of consenting to the Sultan, however, places the Princess in an interesting liminal zone where she is both objectified and autonomous at the same time. Although her body is objectified and purchased by the Sultan, she has taken control of the trade and used it to achieve her own desires of peace. She turns a trade into an act of Christian charity,

⁴⁵⁸ Blamires, *Women defamed*, p. 5-58.

⁴⁵⁹ *The King of Tars*, MS Advocates 19.2.1, fol. 8va, l. 268-273.

Chapter Three – Good Wives and Dangerous Distractions

where she donates her body and virginity in order to save the lives of other Christians. In doing this, she avoids the danger of being ‘puffed up by virtue’ that Augustine observes when discussing the danger of pride to virtuous Christians.⁴⁶⁰ Instead, the Princess recognises the value of her virgin body and relinquishes it, along with her virtue. Thus, she is both objectified and autonomous. She is acquiescent to the needs of patriarchal society, but also fights against this society by circumventing her objectification to achieve her own goal of peace. The overwhelming theme is that of *good* Christian behaviour; everything the Princess chooses to do is controlled by her faith; God consequently controls her consent.

Despite this moment in which she displays her agency, the restoration of the marriage trade inevitably results in the complete objectification of the Princess. Even though she initially takes an active role in the bargaining, it is her body alone that causes the cessation of violence. She is forced to objectify herself through the act of donating her body, and she becomes an object of trade. The Princess finds that her consent is problematic within a society that operates a patrilinear social structure. When she is granted her choice, her right to consent disrupts the norms of the society depicted within the text by stalling the marriage trade. She is then forced to consent, bringing about the restoration of the marriage trade. At this point, she disappears as an active agent and becomes passive. She is transformed into a body which maintains no sense of the individual. Her loss of control over herself is perhaps most poignantly symbolised by the Sultan’s decision to dress her in the riches she had previously rejected:

Into chaumber sche was ladde,
& richeliche she was cladde
As heþ(b)en wiman were.⁴⁶¹

This is a direct violation of the Christian teachings she appeared to follow before and explicitly reveals that she no longer controls her body. She has been reduced to an object, used to maintain the normal processes of patrilinear society.

The failure of the Sultan to understand that the woman’s body and mind are separate can also be seen when he orders her to convert:

Sche lerd þe heþen lawe.
& þei sche al þe lawes couþe,
& seyð hem openliche wiþ hir mouþe,
Ihesu forʒat sche nouʒt.⁴⁶²

⁴⁶⁰ Augustine, *The City of God*, p. 63-65.

⁴⁶¹ *The King of Tars*, MS Advocates 19.2.1, fol. 9ra. l. 381-384.

⁴⁶² *The King of Tars*, MS Advocates 19.2.1, fol. 9vb, l. 504-507.

Chapter Three – Good Wives and Dangerous Distractions

The Sultan is pleased with the actions which he sees her body perform, which are in line with his faith. His failure to accept the agency of the female mind prevents him from understanding. He reduces her to the actions of her body.

The Sultan is not alone in his efforts to reduce the Princess to a body; an object over which he has control. Her body is used in an almost identical manner by the character of Jesus within the poem, who also uses her as an object with which he can alter pagan society. Jesus tells her:

‘mi swete wiȝt,
No þarf be noþing drede,
Of Teruagaunt no of Mahoun.
Þe lord þat suffred passioun
Schal help þe at þi need.⁴⁶³

These are all the details she receives of Jesus’s plan. She is told to be quiet and wait. Although she is promised help, she is not allowed to be active and save herself, despite the precedent of the virgin martyrs.⁴⁶⁴ Her autonomy is diminished as Jesus stills any potential action she could take. Rather than being an active martyr, she is turned into a passive vessel for conversion. The narrative again views her in terms of the potential sexuality of her body rather than the potential activity of her mind; it is her ability to bear a child that will show God’s true power, not her ability to make decisions about her faith, to voice that faith, and to die for that faith. As Perryman summarises: ‘Rather than being treated as a genuine heroine she is presented more flatly as just an instrument of God.’⁴⁶⁵ Even at the moment of the Sultan’s conversion she is not allowed an active role as teacher, despite the sanctioning of women’s voices when they speak of faith, as is seen in *Seynt Katerine* below and texts such as *The Book of the Knight of the Tower* which advised that ‘euery goode woman ought to Incyte and meue her lorde to worship god and the chirche.’⁴⁶⁶ It is the (conveniently imprisoned rather than executed) priest who is responsible for converting, christening and teaching the Sultan. The Princess, alternatively, becomes the silent female depicted in patristic and theological texts, including the Bible itself as in Timothy:

⁴⁶³ *The King of Tars*, MS Advocates 19.2.1, fol. 9va, l. 452-456.

⁴⁶⁴ Examples of these women include Saint Margaret of Antioch and Saint Katherine, both of whom demonstrate this active self-sacrifice in their vita which follow shortly after *The King of Tars*.

⁴⁶⁵ Perryman, *The King of Tars*, p. 58.

⁴⁶⁶ Caxton, *The Book*, p. 106.

Chapter Three – Good Wives and Dangerous Distractions

Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to use authority over the man: but to be in silence.⁴⁶⁷

The Princess falls silent. Fundamentally, her only role is to bring the child into the world; to provide the catalyst for conversion. Her body is required; her agency is not.

The silence of the Princess after the marriage is perhaps the strongest illustration of how the text exemplifies the objectification of the traded woman as discussed by Rubin in ‘Traffic in Women’. After her role as a vessel for conversion, the Princess disappears from the story (except for a few lines which state her family are delighted to hear of her happiness). The story does not finish there, however, but launches into a lengthy tale of chivalric warfare and sword-point conversion, during which the Sultan and the King of Tars join forces. In her disappearance, the Princess epitomises the role of women as a traded object rather than a trader. Rubin states:

If it is women who are being transacted, then it is the men who give and take them who are linked, the woman being a conduit of a relationship rather than a partner to it. The exchange of women...does imply a distinction between gift and giver. If women are the gifts, then it is men who are the exchange partners. And it is the partners, not the presents, upon whom reciprocal exchange confers its quasi-mystical power of social linkage.⁴⁶⁸

If the woman’s role in marriage is to be the gift exchanged between two male characters, then the Princess’s disappearance and silence can be understood as part of this role. *The King of Tars*, rather than a story about the legitimacy of female consent and the existence of female autonomy, becomes instead a story about how women can be used by men to create kinship ties and by God to inspire conversion. The Princess becomes the bond that unites her father and husband together in a Christian cause. She becomes the source of a new homosocial bond between two men. The outcome of *The King of Tars* (presumably a win for Christianity) allows the text to demonstrate how women can be used for the advancement of men within structures of Christian patriarchal society.

The influence of Aristotelian medical theory is also present within *The King of Tars*, as it was in *Floris and Blancheflour*. As Gilbert persuasively argues in her essay ‘Putting the pulp into fiction: the lump-child and its parents in *The King of Tars*’, the knowledge of Aristotelian conception theory demonstrated by *The King of Tars* allows the text to criticise the father’s ‘unclean’ religious nature. To summarise Gilbert’s argument, she recognises that the Auchinleck text differs from the analogues that inspired the

⁴⁶⁷ 1 Timothy 2. 11-12. Vulgate. [Accessed 31st August 2018].

⁴⁶⁸ Rubin, ‘The Traffic’, p. 174.

Chapter Three – Good Wives and Dangerous Distractions

romance; the child of the analogues is described as bestial rather than shapeless.⁴⁶⁹ The Auchinleck, however, describes the child as:

...lim no hadde it non.
 Bot as rond of flesche yschore
 In chaumber it lay hem bifore
 Wiþouten blod & bon.
 For sorwe þe leuedi wald dye
 For it hadde noiþer nose no eye,
 Bot lay ded as þe ston.⁴⁷⁰

Rather than the bestial child of the analogues, Auchinleck describes the baby as lacking in ‘form’; it is a lump of ‘matter’. Aristotelian conception theory, widely disseminated at this time, believed that the mother provided the basic matter during conception.⁴⁷¹ The father then:

Through his seed, supplies the ‘life or spirit or form’, that vital principle which transforms the matter into a human child and animates it. As the Princess knows, it is this second element that the lump lacks:

3if it were cristned ariȝt
 It schuld haue fourmeto se bi siȝt
 Wiþ lim & liif to wake. (760-2)

Fourme here has its technical sense. Shapeless, lifeless chunk of flesh, the lump-child is a factional approximation to Aristotelian matter, the result of a conception in which the paternal role has failed.⁴⁷²

As Gilbert suggests, a popular medieval theory of conception blames the failed conception on the father. The sultan’s Saracen faith means that ‘the paternity lacking...represents not so much biological fatherhood (he ‘begot’ the child) as the right to be named as the child’s father.’⁴⁷³ The problem with this birth therefore, does not stem from the mother, but from the father. The technicalities of the birth, where the lump is lacking in ‘fourme’, use contemporary medical theory to cast blame upon the father.

⁴⁶⁹ Jane Gilbert, ‘Putting the pulp into fiction: the lump child and its parents in the King of Tars’, in *Pulp Fictions of Medieval England: Essays in Popular Romance*, ed. by Nicola McDonald (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004) pp. 102-123, p. 105.

⁴⁷⁰ *The King of Tars*, MS Advocates 19.2.1, fol. 10rb, l. 578-585

⁴⁷¹ Elizabeth Robertson, ‘The Corporeality of Female Sanctity in *The Life of Saint Margaret*’, in *Images of Sainthood in Medieval England*, ed. by Renate Blumen-Kosinski & Tímea Szell (London: Cornell University Press, 1991) pp. 268-287, p. 270.

⁴⁷² Gilbert, ‘Putting the pulp into fiction’, p. 105. Further discussion of the presence of Aristotelian theory can be found in Jane Gilbert, ‘Unnatural Mothers and Monstrous Children in *The King of Tars* and *Sir Gowther*’, in *Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts in Late Medieval Britain: Essays for Felicity Riddy*, ed. by Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, Rosalynn Voaden, Arlyn Diamond, Ann Hutchison, Carol M. Meale & Lesley Johnson (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000) pp. 329-344, p. 334.

⁴⁷³ Gilbert, ‘Unnatural Mothers’, p. 335.

Chapter Three – Good Wives and Dangerous Distractions

Gilbert's understanding of the use of Aristotelian theory, which she suggests is specific to Auchinleck, can be explored further when *The King of Tars* is examined within the context of *The Legend of Pope Gregory* and *Sir Degaré*. In the previous text, the scribe/writer has made use of the classic romance trope where a mother abandons her child to the sea in order to remove Gregory and Degaré from their sexually impure mothers. In *The King of Tars*, however, it is the father who is impure. The Princess, bound by the rules of obedience to her husband, cannot remove the child from his influence. Thus, religious power combines with medical theory to highlight the spiritually impure nature of the Sultan.⁴⁷⁴ His impurities are made particularly obvious in the moment of his baptism, which uses crude imagery to emphasize them:

His hide, þat blac & lobely was,
Al white bicom, þurth Godes gras,
& clere wipouten blame.⁴⁷⁵

The racist implications of the above passage, where the Sultan's black skin is washed white, combined with the symbolic representation of the Sultan as a 'hepen hounde' in the Princess's dream, others the Saracen as something out with social norms. The intense desire he (and his fellow 'villains') display is 'an eruption of the normally repressed animal sexual energy of the civilized male' that Lina Williams's finds in her study of the monster in horror films.⁴⁷⁶ Although *The King of Tars* is written earlier than William's subject matter, the villain of this text also depicts a sexuality that is unacceptable and out of control, as is illustrated by the Sultan's visual monstrosity. The careful depiction of the sultan as a monster, then, reinforces the impurities he has brought to the conception of the child. When he is baptised, his animalistic sexuality is brought under control by the removal of the religious impediment and the legitimisation of his marriage. This welcoming of the Sultan into civilisation is reinforced through the double image of the skin washed white and the restoration of 'form' to the child; both acts remove the monstrous from the text.

The Sultan's ability actively to resolve his own unclean state, however, differs from the experience of the unclean mother. As Fellows observes, actual medieval 'women were able to exercise little control with regard to their children.'⁴⁷⁷ Our unclean mothers, as

⁴⁷⁴ I use the term socially sanctioned loosely, as there is the issue of mixed religion which the text has not yet solved. The text has strongly foreshadowed, however, that a solution to this issue is coming.

⁴⁷⁵ *The King of Tars*, MS Advocates 19.2.1, fol. 12rb, l. 928-930.

⁴⁷⁶ Linda Williams, 'When the Woman Looks', in *Re-Vision: Essays in Feminist Film Criticism*, ed. by Mary Ann Doane, Patricia Mellencamp & Linda Williams (Maryland: University Publications of America, 1984) pp. 61-66, p. 90.

⁴⁷⁷ Fellows, *Mothers*, p. 43.

Chapter Three – Good Wives and Dangerous Distractions

represented by the sister and the *Sir Degaré* Princess, are dependent on the men around them to ‘clean’ them by resolving their unsanctioned sexual states; the women must send their children away to protect them from their own impurities. The one unclean father, however, is able to quickly resolve his own impurity in an active manner. Thus, when read in context with each other, these three Auchinleck texts speak specifically to women about the risks of engaging in unsanctioned sexual intercourse due to the lack of a valid marriage. For the male reader of these texts, not much is lost. For the woman, however, unsanctioned intercourse results in the painful loss of the child which she is not able to resolve independently.⁴⁷⁸

Despite the issues of the ‘unclean’ Sultan and initially problematic religious issues within this marriage, *The King of Tars*, the first Auchinleck text which features a wife for an extended period of time, recalls the positively represented female submission to patriarchal control present in *Floris and Blancheflour*. Although *The King of Tars* allows the woman to demonstrate her agency and condemns the behaviour of the man who forces her consent, the Princess’s agency always acts within the confines of patriarchal control. When she chooses not to marry the Sultan, her father directs and surreptitiously controls the decision. When she chooses to marry the Sultan, she acts to end a war, but the very act of doing so forces her to relinquish control over her body and accept the objectification she initially passively protested. The text also introduces a new level of patriarchal control that circumvents the desires of the family and replaces it with the desires of Jesus and God. In order to be a good Christian woman, the Princess is forced to surrender her agency to her faith, and to allow her body to be used as an object through which a catalyst for conversion is created.

Due to her willingness to surrender her agency and become obedient to her husband and the Christian God, the Princess becomes a good wife, a status rarely achieved by the female characters in the Auchinleck manuscript. Although her disobedience to her husband’s command to convert may initially appear symptomatic of bad behaviour, this is the one situation in which her disobedience is sanctioned because ‘her obedience is owed to the supreme patriarch’.⁴⁷⁹ As discussed above, numerous sources allowed for women to be first faithful to God, and then to their husbands. For example, as quoted above, Grigsby’s *Miroir* reads:

⁴⁷⁸ For a more in-depth study on ‘passive’ and ‘active’ penance, and the gendered nature of these ideas, please see my article ‘Active Absolution’, pp. 1-15.

⁴⁷⁹ Anke Bernau, ‘Gender and Sexuality’, in *A Companion to Middle English Hagiography*, ed. by Sarah Salih (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2006) pp. 104-121, p. 110.

Women, who were wives of non-believers, ministered to Jesus. This shows that a woman should do good works even if her husband is an evil man... When a husband is with God a wife should obey her husband in all things. When he is dissevered from God, she should not leave God... Prudent wives often bring salvation to their husbands.⁴⁸⁰

Therefore, despite her initial disobedience to her husband, the Princess turns out to be a good wife, and provides a model of how to behave within the difficult situation of having a pagan husband. When this impediment disappears, she becomes so obedient and silent she virtually disappears from the text. She becomes the epitome of the good wife, providing a positive model of wifedom to the female reader.

Like *Blancheflour*, the Princess illustrates that the act of surrendering her agency and sexuality to the control of patriarchy (both earthly and heavenly) allows women to achieve a positive ending. As Hodgart summarises, it is apparent that *The King of Tars* is an encomium in disguise. It ‘embodies myth: it sets out to praise the ideal woman, but in fact prescribes how women, in men’s opinion, ought to behave.’⁴⁸¹ With this good model of wifedom comes, ultimately, a dull story which suggests that, as I theorised above, good wives simply are boring subjects to write and read about. Eve, on the other hand, provides a far more interesting model of wifedom for the female audience to learn from.

The Life of Adam and Eve

The second text in this chapter is *The Life of Adam and Eve*, which is the third text in the first booklet, following directly after *The King of Tars*. It is a religious text that narrates the creation, life and death of Adam and Eve. The text suffers from damage; as the end of *The King of Tars* is missing so too are the beginning lines of *The Life of Adam and Eve*. Murdoch estimates that 120 lines are missing.⁴⁸² In terms of the narrative, the missing section appears to explain the build up to the fall of Lucifer. There is also a small section missing midway through the poem which covers the birth of Cain and the murder of Abel. Approximately 170 lines are lost at this point.⁴⁸³ A fragment of lost quires from *The Life of Adam and Eve*, ff.3-4, have been recovered and are now housed in Edinburgh University Library (Edinburgh U.L.MS.218). The Auchinleck redaction is one of two extant Middle

⁴⁸⁰ Blamires, *The Case for Women*, p. 30.

⁴⁸¹ Matthew Hodgart, *Satire* (New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 2009) p. 80.

⁴⁸² Brian Murdoch & J.A. Tasioulas, *The Apocryphal Lives of Adam and Eve: Edited from the Auchinleck Manuscript and from Trinity College, Oxford, MS 57* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2002) p. 4.

⁴⁸³ Murdoch & Tasioulas, *The Apocryphal Lives of Adam and Eve*, p. 4.

Chapter Three – Good Wives and Dangerous Distractions

English versions of this text. The other exists in Trinity College Oxford Manuscript 57, and is longer, with more imagery and description than is present in the Auchinleck redaction. The Auchinleck is the earlier of the two redactions, with the Trinity College manuscript dated to around 1375.⁴⁸⁴

Before beginning my analysis of the text, I wish first to visit Cathy Hume's convincing discussion of how the fourteenth century reader would have responded to *The Life of Adam and Eve* as an exemplary text. The phrase 'life' is a generic term which, as has been conclusively demonstrated by Paul Strohm, functions as a signpost to the medieval reader that this is a Saint's life.⁴⁸⁵ Interestingly, 'legend' also has a similar function. The two Auchinleck texts we see these phrases in, *The Legend of Pope Gregory* and *The Life of Adam and Eve*, are both damaged at the beginning and thus have lost their original titles. As discussed above, I feel there is a case to revisit the modern naming of *The Legend of Pope Gregory*. Hume demonstrates, however, that *The Life of Adam and Eve* is 'retrospectively described as a 'liif', within the narrative, and is thus a text 'readers would expect exemplary lessons to emerge from.'⁴⁸⁶ This use of 'life' to identify this narrative as part of this exemplary genre creates an expectation within the modern critic, and potentially the original reader, that exemplary lessons will be evident in the text. The question follows, what are these lessons, and to whom were they addressed. Hume considers the intended reader(s) of the text to be the family unit; she states that the strengths portrayed in the close relationship between Adam, Eve and Seth set an example for the family, whilst the 'easy' writing style is accessible to an audience of children.⁴⁸⁷ I wish to build upon her readings of the characterisation of Eve, and her relationship with Adam, in the context of the themes previously discussed, to illustrate an additional reading: that although the work does provide exemplary lessons for the whole family, *The Life of Adam and Eve* takes a greater interest in regulating the behaviour of the women of the household than that of the men or boys.

The characterisation of Eve in *The Life of Adam and Eve* is in direct opposition to the characterisation of the Princess in *The King of Tars*. Where the Princess turned away from worldly goods in order to maintain her faith, Eve is represented as desiring comfort

⁴⁸⁴ A summary of the plot of *The Life of Adam and Eve* can be found in appendix seven.

⁴⁸⁵ P. Strohm, 'Passioun, Lyf, Miracle, Legende: Some Generic Terms in Middle English Hagiographical Narrative', *Chaucer Review*, 10 (1975), pp. 62-75, p. 155-156.

⁴⁸⁶ Hume, 'The Auchinleck *Adam and Eve*', p. 40-41.

⁴⁸⁷ Hume, 'The Auchinleck *Adam and Eve*', p. 47-48.

Chapter Three – Good Wives and Dangerous Distractions

and the illusion of ‘more’.⁴⁸⁸ Though there are not worldly treasures in the setting of this story, her desire for comfort can be seen as equivalent to that of the other characters within Auchinleck texts that portray the sin of avarice.

‘Sir’ quap Eue to Adam þo,
 ‘Þat wold bring me more wo,
 So long penaunce for to take.
 Bot ich it miȝt an ending make.
 Ȝif mi penaunce weren ybroke,
 Þan wold God ben aroke,
 & be wroper þan he is,
 & dede eft amis.’⁴⁸⁹

Through Eve’s desire for comforts, which is to such an extent that she tries to persuade Adam that breaking penance would be worse than not undertaking it at all, her desire for the elusive concept of ‘more’ is demonstrated. Thus, the text immediately marks Eve as a villain within the text. When read in context with the rest of the Auchinleck texts, the portrayal of avarice creates an expectation that she will be the one to disrupt the world the narrative has created.

Eve’s desire for more is also evident through her wish to avoid poverty and the discomfort it brings. When Adam suggests that they take forty days penance, Eve laments that his idea will ‘bring me more wo,/So long penaunce for to take.’⁴⁹⁰ Hume reads Eve as ‘displaying her own understanding of penance’, but this reading seems at odds with the lines above.⁴⁹¹ Rather than seeing the purpose of suffering, Eve’s concerns are focused on how penance will make her more miserable than her current state. Eve’s established association with original sin and the fall of man combines with the marker of avarice to create a negative view of the character; there is no doubt that our hypothetical reader will have approached this text with a negative expectation of Eve due to the theological texts which condemn her circulating at this time.⁴⁹² Auchinleck’s careful use of avarice reinforces this expectation. The obvious contrast to the Princess of Tars featured directly

⁴⁸⁸ It is difficult to specify exactly what Eve wants more of; she is depicting as desiring more, in order to display the sin of avarice which marks her as an Auchinleck villain, but she is not living in an established society with wealth. Therefore, she cannot specify what more she wants except for comfort. That she wants, however, is indisputable.

⁴⁸⁹ *The Life of Adam and Eve*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Library, MS 218, fol. 2ra l. 199-206.

⁴⁹⁰ *The Life of Adam and Eve*, MS 218, fol. 2r, l. 200-201.

⁴⁹¹ Hume, ‘The Auchinleck Adam’, p. 45.

⁴⁹² For examples of the standard condemnation of Eve in medieval texts please see Blamires, *Woman Defamed*, p. 44-45, 51, 59, 61, 62, 76, 86, 101, 105, 236. See also: Heloise. ‘Letter 4’ in *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise*, ed. by Betty Radice (London: Penguin Books, 2003) pp. 63-71, p. 67, Capellanus, ‘On Love’, p. 311, 313-314, 317, Giovanni Boccaccio, ‘The Corbaccio’, in *The Corbaccio Giovanni Boccaccio*, ed. by Anthony K. Cassell (London: University of Illinois Press, 1967) pp. 1-77, p. 35.

Chapter Three – Good Wives and Dangerous Distractions

before Eve paves the way for a reading of Eve that is perhaps more nuanced than is usually seen; this is not another rendition of her simply as the cause of the fall, but is one that illustrates the weakness of women to commit the sin of avarice and the requirement for the regulation of women by male authority figures.

The desire for more that negatively marks Eve's character entices her to eat the fruit of knowledge. The serpent tells her:

‘ete þou & Adam of þisk
& 3e schul ben also wiis
As God, þat sitt in trinitie
& witen alle his priuite.⁴⁹³

The serpent persuades Eve to eat the forbidden fruit by tempting her with the idea that she will have more than what she currently has. Hume observes that this section of *The Life of Adam and Eve* is ‘unusually brief’ and lacks the ‘well-developed wicked motivations’ usually associated with Eve's temptation and the subsequent fall of man. She states that, although Eve's actions are described as ‘Adam's ‘wiues enticement’ (line 102)...she does not flatter or threaten, and Adam and Eve's pride in aspiring to be as wise as God is left implicit.⁴⁹⁴ When read alongside the Princess of Tars, however, there are visible parallels between the temptation of the Princess and the temptation of Eve. Even though what Eve is to gain is knowledge, not physical wealth, both women are offered the opportunity to gain more than they currently have. Where the Princess refused, Eve gives into temptation.

The role of avarice within *The Life of Adam and Eve*, however, is more significant than in previous Auchinleck texts because it is a woman who is suffering from it. Although the relatively minor characters of the Duke and the Sultan both display avarice, texts of the period often emphasise a strong association between the sin and women. Capellanus, for example, makes the following statement about greed in *De Amore*:

Every woman is also disfigured with the vice of greed, for she strains every sinew to steal all the possessions not only of other men but also of the husband to whom she is happily wed. Once she has grabbed them, she strives to keep them so that they will aid no one. Such is the greed that prevails over a woman that she does not believe she is opposing the decrees of divine or human law; she seeks to become rich at the expense of others. In fact woman thinks that refusing gifts to all, and zealously keeping things gained by fair means or foul, is the greatest of virtues and a quality which all should praise. No woman is an exception to this rule, not even a queen.⁴⁹⁵

⁴⁹³ *The Life of Adam and Eve*, MS 218, fol. 1r, l. 83-86.

⁴⁹⁴ Hume, ‘The Auchinleck Adam and Eve’, p. 42.

⁴⁹⁵ Capellanus, ‘*On Love*’, p. 311.

Capellanus considers greed to be a sin to which women inevitably succumb. He is one of many medieval writers who claim that women are likely to fall to these temptations. In its representation of the first two wives in Auchinleck, the manuscript then establishes two contrasting models of wifhood. Where the Princess, who provides the good model of wifhood, refuses temptation, Eve becomes a model of a bad wife by failing to resist avarice and falling to temptation, which leads her to disobey both her husband and God.

The contrast between Eve and the Princess goes beyond their personal response to temptation. Where the Princess routinely acquiesces to the desire of men and male figures, Eve repeatedly disobeys them. In both scenes where she is tricked by the devil, she disobeys explicit instructions male figures give her. Having reluctantly agreed to follow Adam's instructions and undertake penance, Eve subsequently fails to maintain her promise:

Of þat tiding Eue was glad
& dede as þe fende hir bad;
Out of þe water sche cam anon
& wiþ þe fende dedde hir to gon.
þo Adam hadde of Eue a siȝt,
He wistwele anonriȝt
þat þe fende hir hadde ouercomen
& out of hir penaunce ynomen;⁴⁹⁶

Eve disobeys by refusing to wait for Adam to release her from penance. When she arrives at the seashore where Adam has submerged himself, he instantly recognises the devil for what he is and understands that Eve has been tricked once again into committing sin by failing to obey the orders of her husband. The deception by the devil, however, does not release Eve from her culpability in disobeying her husband.⁴⁹⁷ There is no explanation of how Adam recognises the devil when Eve does not. Her inability to recognise the devil suggests a susceptibility to sin that is not apparent in Adam; as the only difference is their gender, Eve's susceptibility suggests that all women are susceptible to sin. This was a commonplace idea in late Medieval Europe, as is shown by Tertullian's *De Cultu Feminarum*, which links all women with the faults of Eve, her guilt, and her avarice:

And do you not know that you are (each) an Eve? The sentence of God on this sex of yours lives in this age: the guilt must of necessity live to. *You* are the devil's gateway: *you* are the unsealer of that (forbidden) tree: *you* are the

⁴⁹⁶ *The Life of Adam and Eve*, MS 218, fol. 2r-2v, l. 259-266.

⁴⁹⁷ Similarly, she is deceived by the serpent in the Garden of Eden, but is still blamed for the fall of man despite the deception.

Chapter Three – Good Wives and Dangerous Distractions

first deserter of the divine law: *you* are she who persuaded him whom the devil was not valiant enough to attack. *You* destroyed so easily God's image, man. On account of *your* desert – that is, death – even the Son of God had to die. And do you think about adorning yourself over and above your tunics of skins? Come, now; if from the beginning of the world the Milesians sheared sheep, and the Serians spun trees, and the Tyrians dyed, and the Phrygians embroidered with the needle, and the Babylonians with the loom, and the pearls gleamed and onyx-stones flashed; if gold itself also had already issued, with the cupiditas (which accompanies it), from the ground: if the mirror, too, already had licence to lie so largely, Eve, expelled from paradise, (Eve) already dead, would have also coveted *these* things, I imagine! No more, then, ought she *now* to crave or be acquainted with (if she desires to live again), what, when she *was* living, she had neither had nor known. Accordingly these things are all of the baggage of women in her condemned and dead state, instituted as if to swell the pomp of her funeral.⁴⁹⁸

Eve's avarice is evident from her initial objection to penance. When she is tricked into abandoning her penance, she contravenes the explicit instructions given to her by her husband, she becomes not only the first sinner, but also the first disobedient wife.

The inherently disobedient nature of Eve is a weakness the devil exploits throughout the text. During the initial sin, the text reads:

Eue of þe nadder þe appel nam,
 & to Adam anon hom came
 & seyð 'do as ich þe rede,
 & it schal be þe best dede
 þat euer ȝete þou dest, ywis.
 Ete of þe appel þat here is,
 & þou schalt be, wiþouten lesing,
 Also wise of alle þing
 As he þat it þe forbede.⁴⁹⁹

The last line makes it explicit that Eve knows that God has forbidden them to eat the fruit. Her greed and her disobedience, however, supersede this knowledge and reinforce the association of Eve with the physical desires of the body and a wilful appetite.⁵⁰⁰ This depiction of the fall as a case of disobedience is conventional and was repeated by many texts.⁵⁰¹ One particular example I wish to highlight is found in the conduct book, *The Book of the Knight of the Tower*. Landry uses Eve as a model of negative behaviour for his daughters to avoid:

⁴⁹⁸ Tertullian, 'De Culta Feminarum', on 'ANCL II', ed. by S. Thelwall, (1869), <http://www.tertullian.org/anf/anf04/anf04-06.htm#P263_52051>, [Accessed 21st April 2017].

⁴⁹⁹ *The Life of Adam and Eve*, MS 218, fol. 1v, l. 91-99.

⁵⁰⁰ Robertson, 'The Corporeality of Female Sanctity', p. 270.

⁵⁰¹ Blamires, *Woman defamed*, p. 101 & 105. See also Capellanus, *On Love*, p. 313 & Boccaccio, 'The Corbaccio', p. 35.

Chapter Three – Good Wives and Dangerous Distractions

And yf she had not falle in to the synne of inobedyence there had be no fysshe
in the see ne beest on therthe/ ne byrde in thayer/ but that they had al be vnder
her obeisaunce.⁵⁰²

Landry, like the author of the Auchinleck redaction, draws upon this conventional emphasis of Eve's disobedience to create a model of the disobedient wife. Eve is the opposite of the Princess of Tars because she refuses to acquiesce to those rules set down by the men around her, Eve is lured into sin by the devil. She represents the bad wife, who, through her disobedience, is out of control.

For all that Eve is a woman out of control, the text does not explicitly mention her sexuality. Lust and vanity do not seem to play a part in this particular depiction of her life. This Eve is not a seductress; she is weakened by her sinful desire for comfort and her tendency to disobey orders. Despite this lack of sexual sin, however, the punishment for her disobedience is still played out physically upon her body, demonstrating a link between the female body and sin. Upon discovering that she has been tricked for a second time, Eve internalises her own blame and expresses her guilt as something which has physically affected her body:

Icham wers þan ich was,
For now ichaue eft agilt,
Seþþen we wer out of paradis pilt.
Perfore ichil now biginne
Oþain penaunce for to winne,
& wende & won in þisternesse,
Out of alle liþtnesse;
Þe foule flesche þat haþ agilt,
In þesternesse it schal be pilt.⁵⁰³

Eve considers herself as the cause of sin and her husband's distress. The description of her flesh as foul suggests her body has been physically polluted by sin. Her flesh is linked to her moral status, which recalls the Sultan's transformation from black to white when he is christened in *The King of Tars*.⁵⁰⁴ Eve's description of her body as polluted and unclean uses the terms conventionally applied to the bodies of women who have committed sexual sin. Although her sin was not sexual, her disobedience is similar because it breaks the rules that have been set down by the men around her. In this text, Adam, as the only man on

⁵⁰² Caxton, *The Book*, p. 62.

⁵⁰³ *The Life of Adam and Eve*, MS 218, fol. 2v, l. 330-337.

⁵⁰⁴ The link between purity and beauty is particularly common in discussions of female saints, and will be discussed in greater detail in chapter four.

Chapter Three – Good Wives and Dangerous Distractions

earth, represents patriarchal control. Eve's disobedience is treated identically to the sexual sins of previous women of the Auchinleck manuscript. This suggests that, as is shown above, the actual sexual liaison is of little concern to society; it is the breaking of patriarchal order that makes such acts problematic.

That the punishment for Eve's sin is inflicted upon her body also reflects this link between sin and the female body.⁵⁰⁵ Eve takes penance in the desert, making no decision as to how long the penance will last. It is only ended by her going into labour:

Gret wiþ child, sche duelled þare,
 In miche sorwe & Michel care.
 Þe time neized ate last
 Pat Eue bigan to gret fast,
 & hye bigan to gron sore
 & seyd 'Louerd, merci, þine ore.'⁵⁰⁶

There are not many explicit details about Eve's experience of labour in the Trinity College manuscript, and the scene of birth is missing in Auchinleck. It is safe to assume, however, that the painful details of childbirth would not have been included in the missing text; the gross nature of women that embodied their perceived nature as sensual and unclean was evidenced by childbirth and menstruation. The gruesome details of childbirth were used by texts such as *Hali Meidhad* in order to deter women from having physical children and to encourage them to redirect their maternal desires to having "children of the virtues".⁵⁰⁷ As will be discussed in chapter four, however, the Auchinleck manuscript values mothers and their role in society. Thus, it would be surprising to find details which were normally used to dissuade women from pregnancy within this manuscript. The experience of labour, however, is a transformational moment that acts simultaneously as Eve's punishment and salvation. This is the point when she changes from sinner to forgiven, from bad wife to good wife. It is at this moment the audience finally hears her beg for forgiveness in her own voice. All notion of comfort is forgotten, and there is no avarice in her desires. Her only concern is 'Who may telle Adam mi þouzt.'⁵⁰⁸ When she could express desire for the safe delivery of her child, or for release from the pain of labour, basic sustenance, or shelter, Eve's concern is focused on Adam and his right to know about the birth of his child. Her single-minded concern illustrates that her desires have become subordinate to

⁵⁰⁵ In this particular redaction of the biblical story, God does not tell Adam that cultivation will be his toil, or Eve that childbirth shall be hers, as they exit the Garden. Rather, they appear to be left to discover these things as the narrative progresses.

⁵⁰⁶ *The Life of Adam and Eve*, MS 218, fol. 2v, l. 343-348.

⁵⁰⁷ Fellows, 'Mothers', p. 42-3. Robertson, 'Early English Devotional Prose', p.79.

⁵⁰⁸ *The Life of Adam and Eve*, MS 218, fol. 2v, l. 349.

Chapter Three – Good Wives and Dangerous Distractions

her duty as a good, obedient wife. Childbirth in *The Life of Adam and Eve*, as with *The King of Tars*, becomes a catalyst through which God brings about a change.

After this moment of change, Eve never again separates from her male kin. Her third and final encounter with the devil illustrates in particular how she has transitioned from disobedient wife with a disregard for patriarchal control, to a good, subordinate, wife. The devil takes on her son's appearance to try and prevent her from seeking a cure for Adam. As soon as she sees him, she responds:

‘Allas, allas’ quap Eue þo,
‘What icham cursed, & oþer mo,
þat breken Godes commandment.
Now is mi sones visage schent.⁵⁰⁹

Although Eve laments that she is once more accosted by the devil, there is a marked difference in this interaction than in those previously discussed. She immediately recognises him for what he is. This time she shows no willingness to disobey patriarchal orders; her desire is to go to Eden as Adam has commanded. Once she has accepted her place as subordinate to the patriarchal control of Adam and God, she is able to recognise the devil. She does not, however, have the power to banish him. That falls to Seth, who commands:

‘Fro mi moder þat here geþ
& fro me, þurth Godes miȝt,
Passe oway out of our siȝt.⁵¹⁰

Although Eve can now recognise the devil upon seeing him, she is dependent on Seth to protect her. That women need men to protect them not only echoes the text's earlier suggestions about the weakness of the female gender as a whole, but also the warning of *Sir Degaré* that women should not wander alone for fear of the dangers they could meet. By walking with her son upon the orders of her husband, Eve remains within patriarchal protection and control.

There is nothing unsurprising or unexpected in the depiction of Eve as a sinner; her blame in the fall of man has never been forgotten. The Auchinleck redaction of *The Life of Adam and Eve*, however, contrasts her with the Princess in *The King of Tars*. Where the Princess rejects earthly pleasures, Eve is willing to forgo penance for her own comfort. Where the princess undergoes a quick, pain free labour, Eve's suffers alone in hers. When

⁵⁰⁹ *The Life of Adam and Eve*, Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, MS Advocates 19.2.1, fol. 14r, l. 411-414.

⁵¹⁰ *The Life of Adam and Eve*, MS Advocates 19.2.1, fol. 14r, l. 438-440.

Chapter Three – Good Wives and Dangerous Distractions

read together, they become the good wife and the disobedient wife. The Auchinleck redaction of *The Life of Adam and Eve* is, consequently, subordinating concern for original sin to an emphasis on female behaviour. It provides the paradigmatic model of a disobedient wife, suggesting that the failings of women as a whole mean that such behaviour in a wife is inevitable. At the same time, however, the text also suggests that women, by choosing obedience to their husband, can avoid becoming these wives. Eve is portrayed as a sinner, but a sinner who can learn from her mistakes and that ultimately is transformed into the good wife through obedience to her husband and faithfulness to God.

The Seven Sages of Rome

The Seven Sages of Rome is the second to last piece in booklet three and, at just under three thousand lines, it is the longest text that this thesis is examining. It has a complex narrative structure which frames shorter stories within its wider narrative. Consequently, it has been considered a contemporary analogue of *The Canterbury Tales*, and indeed may have influenced Chaucer's work.⁵¹¹ It includes a narrator who tells the overall story, and eight different characters who tell sixteen different stories within the narrator's framework. The poem is incomplete in the Auchinleck manuscript, with approximately 120 lines missing from the beginning and 650-1850 lines missing from the end. The missing gaps have been filled in from Karl Brunner's 1933 Early English Text Society monograph, which is collated from all available manuscripts.⁵¹²

These stories mainly discuss the nature of women, effectively turning this long narrative into an extended debate poem about the nature of women versus the nature of sons.⁵¹³ Women feature heavily in the narratives told by the sages, and are only once presented in a favourable light. One wife clearly falls into the category of dishonest wife, whilst the rest appear to be maliciously evil. Together, the stories illustrate the two models of wifhood we have seen in *The King of Tars* and *The Life of Adam and Eve*, and adds a new category of maliciously evil wife.

⁵¹¹ Larry Benson, *The Riverside Chaucer* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) p. 3.

⁵¹² A full summary of the complex plot of *The Seven Sages of Rome* can be found in appendix eight.

⁵¹³ There are two standard debate poems within the Auchinleck manuscript: the aforementioned *Thrush and the Nightingale* and *The Alphabetical Praise of Women*. Both of these texts are debate poems which also focus on the nature of women, effectively making *The Seven Sages of Rome* part of a trio of texts in the manuscript which discuss women. Unfortunately, both of the clear-cut debate poems are present in later booklets towards the end of the manuscript, and the constraints of this thesis does not allow for a detailed analysis of these. They are, however, briefly discussed in chapter five.

Chapter Three – Good Wives and Dangerous Distractions

The Empress presents one example of a good wife in *The Seven Sages of Rome* who is used to demonstrate extreme obedience to the husband. When the steward initially suggests to his wife that she should have intercourse with the King, she objects quite strongly. He responds with a reminder of her place:

“A, sire,” sche saide, “fi! fi!
 Hit is foul man to liggen bi,
 And þat wot eurich woman wel.”
 “Þou schalt, bi seint Michel.
 Who þat seluer winne nelle,
 Lese he mot wiȝ riȝt skille.
 Pou sschalt ous þe penies winne,
 Oþer I þe sschal driue out of min inne.
 O nedes he sschal, þat nedes mot;
 His nis nowt mi wille, God hit wot.
 But hit is skil, riȝt and lawe,
 To do bi me as bi þin awe.”⁵¹⁴

The wife makes it very clear that she does not want to be involved with the King; his reputation has proceeded him and her claim that all women know of his foul nature suggests that no good women would lay with him. The husband’s response, however, illustrates his control over his wife. Firstly, he threatens to throw her out of his house should she refuse, thus reducing her to a state of homelessness and poverty. Then, he reminds her that she is bound, as his wife, to obey his will regardless of her desire. Despite her distaste and the complicated moral issues that surround a husband ordering his wife to commit adultery, she is forced to obey his order in order to remain a good wife. As is shown by Augustine, and by *The King of Tars* above, to be a good wife is to be an obedient wife. Additional conduct books, such as *Le Lire du Chevalier de la Tour-Landry pour l’enseignement de ses filles* also echo the necessity of obedience:

And thus this good lady amended euer his [her husband’s] folye/ wherof she
 may be wel preysed/ Therefore ye haue here good ensample/ how euery
 good woman must suffre of her lord and ought to answeere for hym ouer al/ al be
 he neuer so yrous ne cruel to her and saue and kepe hym fro all peryls.⁵¹⁵

Landry instructs his daughters that a wife should be submissive to her husband regardless of the unreasonableness of his request. The good wife is metaphorically enslaved to her husband’s commands.

⁵¹⁴ *The Seven Sages of Rome*, Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, MS Advocates 19.2.1, fol. 93rb, l. 1589-1600.

⁵¹⁵ Caxton, ‘The Book’, p.123.

Chapter Three – Good Wives and Dangerous Distractions

For the text to promote this obedient model of wifehood as the correct way for women to behave, however, it cannot leave her to be sexually abused in this manner. Just as with the Princess in *The King of Tars*, the narrative acts to reward the obedient wife by resolving the issues; in this case her marriage to an abusive and treacherous husband. When the King discovers her true identity, he tells the steward that he ‘has bitraid þi wif and me.’⁵¹⁶ Through the King’s reaction, the text explicitly states that abusing the obedient nature of a good wife in such a manner is wrong. Furthermore, the wife ultimately gets rewarded for her obedient nature when the King arranges for her future:

Sire, þous þe stiward les his wif
 And fley awi wiȝ mochel strif.
 Iwis, he was al forlore,
 He com aȝein neuere more.
 Þe king aros whan him list
 And kep þe leuedi wiȝ þe best,
 And held hire two ȝer oþer þre,
 And siþen ȝaf hire, wiȝ riche fe,
 To a riche erl of þat lond;⁵¹⁷

Where the steward is banished, the wife is taken in by the King, who appears to take ‘ownership’ of her. This gives him the right to give her to a rich Earl. The one example of a good wife within the stories of *The Seven Sages of Rome*, then, really presents the good wife as synonymous with the obedient wife. Even though she explicitly objects, in the one moment where her voice is directly reported, she is reminded that as his wife her duty is to be obedient regardless of moral issues. Her husband is, however, punished for taking advantage of both her obedience and the King’s lustful desperation, and loses both his position and his wife. She, on the other hand, continuing to be obedient and submissive to patriarchal authority, which has now transferred to the King, is given a rich Earl as a new husband. The similarities between the obedient nature of the Princess of *The King of Tars* and the wife in this tale establishes that the model for good wifehood is specifically about obedience to the husband. This one example of the good wife in *The Seven Sages of Rome* echoes this model of utter obedience.

The Seven Sages of Rome reflects the imbalance between obedient wives and bad wives that pervades medieval literature. The Empress presents seven stories defending her position as a wife, but only one contains an example of a good/obedient wife. The belief that women were inherently disobedient (as is demonstrated by Eve’s actions in *The Life of*

⁵¹⁶ *The Seven Sages of Rome*, MS Advocates 19.2.1, fol. 93va, l. 1633.

⁵¹⁷ *The Seven Sages of Rome*, MS Advocates 19.2.1, fol. 93va, l. 1641-1649.

Chapter Three – Good Wives and Dangerous Distractions

Adam and Eve) is so universally accepted that the Empress cannot argue against this perception; her stories are inherently self-degrading. Even with the one positive example the Empress is not arguing on behalf of wives. The obedient wife appears only coincidentally. Instead, the Empress's focus is on proving that servants are deceitful. Within the story of the good wife, the Empress states: 'Panne þout þat steward coueitous,/þat siluer schal bileue wiȝ ous.'⁵¹⁸ Rather than trying to defend her sex from the repeated claims of their disobedience and evil tendencies, she tries to prove that servants, and thus the sages, are untrustworthy. The Empress's decision not to defend her gender illustrates how entrenched the disobedient and potentially evil nature of women was in late medieval thinking. The Empress cannot win the argument by defending women. She must instead try to defend herself by discrediting the words of her attackers.

As suggested above, the Sages are focused upon discrediting the Empress through tales of disobedient and evil wives, a subject of which there is no shortage of examples. Bancillas, for example, provides a model of the disobedient wife through his story of the greyhound and the adder. As we have come to expect, the lady is initially described in simple terms as the property of her husband: 'Þe kniȝt hadde a fair leuedi.'⁵¹⁹ Though the past tense of 'to have' is commonly used in this manner, it still denotes a sense of ownership and possession. Bancillas views her as something the lord 'has', not someone that he has married. Next, he turns his attention to the actions of the nurses, who he denounces as representative of all women. When they find the upturned and bloodied cradle, he says that:

Þe norice was sori in hert,
 & ech of hem vnderstode
 Pat þe greihond was wod
 And hadde þat faire child islawe;
 Awai þai gonne fle and drawe,
 Als hit were wode wimmen.⁵²⁰

The women are frightened of their mistake, and so decide to withdraw and run rather than to investigate circumstances properly. This cowardly behaviour is then something that Bancillas ascribes to all women, a generalisation the Lady promptly reinforces. Upon hearing the news, she asks no questions; instead 'aswone sche fil adoun, iwis.'⁵²¹ However understandable this inconsolable attitude may be, it recalls the unstable emotions that were

⁵¹⁸ *The Seven Sages of Rome*, MS Advocates 19.2.1, fol. 92ra, l. 1581-1582.

⁵¹⁹ *The Seven Sages of Rome*, MS Advocates 19.2.1, fol. 88rb, l. 711.

⁵²⁰ *The Seven Sages of Rome*, MS Advocates 19.2.1, fol. 88va-88.vb. l. 776-781.

⁵²¹ *The Seven Sages of Rome*, MS Advocates 19.2.1, fol. 88vb. l. 788.

Chapter Three – Good Wives and Dangerous Distractions

associated with medieval women, as discussed by *The Legend of Pope Gregory*. Bernau summarises the theological medieval theory behind women's susceptibility to their senses and emotions when she states:

Man was perceived to be more closely aligned with the spiritual, since he was made in God's image. Woman, who was made from Adam's rib, was more fully associated with the material world, and hence with carnality. Because of this, women were thought to be more in thrall to their senses and, through them, to sexual desire.⁵²²

It is the general failing of women to be more susceptible to their feelings and emotions. The Lady's initial distress and her secondary outburst, motivated by revenge, illustrates her hysterical madness. She cries ' & but ze willen him [the greyhound] slen anon,/Ri3t now ich wille mi lif forgon,' demonstrating that she is giving into despair rather than praying or seeking solace in the lord.⁵²³ Controlled by her emotions, she forces her husband's hand rather than waiting for his decision. In this act of disobedience, where she presumes to make orders of the man under whose authority she should be acting, she becomes a disobedient wife which results in her husband losing his faithful greyhound. Whilst she had no deliberate intention to disobey, her lapse in control ultimately causes her husband distress. Thus, she becomes, like Eve, an example of the disobedient wife, accidentally causing her husband harm through actions which undermine the control of patriarchal authority. Her actions consequently tar the whole gender, as seen when the Knight cries:

Ne be þat man neuere iborwew,
But in euel water adreint
Pat euer leue wimmannes plaint.⁵²⁴

This lesson is then repeated a few lines later:

I schal mi selue abigge þat wrong,
And tache oþer kni3tes saun fail,
To leue here leuedis conseil.⁵²⁵

Between Bancillas's didactic guidance and the knight's repeated proclamation, the lesson is clear; all women are incapable of speaking and acting wisely.

⁵²² Anke Bernau, 'Medieval Antifeminism', in *The History of Women's Writing, 700-1500*, ed. by Liz Herbert McAvoy & Diane Watt (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), pp. 72-82, p. 74.

⁵²³ *The Seven Sages of Rome*, MS Advocates 19.2.1, fol. 88vb, l. 795-796. As with *The Legend of Pope Gregory* above, it is the woman who threatens to fall into despair, giving up on the power of God to right the wrongs that have incurred. Where the man takes action, she is passively waiting to be saved.

⁵²⁴ *The Seven Sages of Rome*, MS Advocates 19.2.1, fol. 88vb, l. 812-814.

⁵²⁵ *The Seven Sages of Rome*, MS Advocates 19.2.1, fol. 89ra, l. 824-826.

Chapter Three – Good Wives and Dangerous Distractions

The final model of wifhood, which we have not yet encountered in the Auchinleck, is that of the evil wife who deliberately and maliciously deceives her husband. Six of the seven sages tell of women who fall into this group, hardly surprising when their goal is to bring down the Empress through tarnishing her gender. Five of the six stories feature adultery as the main failure of the wife, and are discussed below. Gesse's story, on the other hand, presents the fickle nature of women without the adulterous step.

The fickle nature of women is established by Gesse's emphasis of the loyalty of the dead Sheriff's wife. She swears to die at the grave of her husband and be buried beside him, despite her friends' attempts to console her:

Dame, gent and fre,
 Of þi selue haue pite,
 For þou art fair and ʒong, saunʒ fail,
 And maist þe werld mochel auail.
 Some kniʒt þe wedde of noblai
 And haue wiʒ him moche to plai,
 Gode children biʒeten and faire.
 Gentil dame, debonaire,
 Lete awai þi mourning,
 & tak þe to som confortig.”
 “Þat wil I do for no wele,
 Ac die ich wille on his beriele.”
 ʒhe saide “allas and wailawo!
 Ne lich hennes neuere go.
 Ne confor[t] take neuer mo.⁵²⁶

It appears that this wife is devoted to her husband even in death, depicting an obedience to her husband that goes beyond what is legally, culturally, and spiritually required. This extended passage reveals the strength of her convictions. The directly reported speech details the persuasive attempt of her friends to remind her she could have more. These messages are further emphasised by the Knight as he repeats them when he sits by her fire. She refuses to oblige him. Her sudden change of heart when he requires help, is therefore very abrupt: ‘she saide “sire, ich wille helpen þe,/So þat þou wille spouse me.”⁵²⁷ There is no indication prior to this statement that she has any desire to marry the Knight. The text also suggests that she would not have to go to the extreme of blackmailing him into doing so; both her friends and the Knight himself point out that she could easily win a nobleman's heart as she is young, pretty, and amiable. Her sudden change consequently

⁵²⁶ *The Seven Sages of Rome*, MS Advocates 19.2.1, fol. 98vb, l. 2577-2591.

⁵²⁷ *The Seven Sages of Rome*, MS Advocates 19.2.1, fol. 99rb, l. 2653-2654.

Chapter Three – Good Wives and Dangerous Distractions

comes across as a moment of deus-ex-machina, where she inexplicably changes in order to fit the required anti-feminist moral of this story.⁵²⁸

This sudden change, however poorly conceived by the anonymous author of this redaction, demonstrates the changeable nature of women. Her actions reveal ‘Pat fals and fikel was hire blod.’⁵²⁹ The association of the wife’s fickleness with her blood suggests that there is something natural and inherent about this behaviour. This echoes what Capellanus said in *De Amore* c.1185. The entire passage on the fickle hearts of women reads:

Women is also found fickle as a general rule. There is no woman so firmly determined on anything that her reliability cannot be soon dispelled by slight persuasion from someone. For woman is like melting wax, always ready to assume fresh shape and to be moulded to the imprint of anyone’s seal. No woman could make you so certain of her promise that her intention and purpose with regard to that promise are not found to be changed in next to no time. No woman’s mind remains unchanged for an hour, so that Martainus reasonably says: ‘No more delays, for woman’s always fickle in her ways’. You must therefore not expect to enjoy fulfilment of any promise from a woman unless you have first safely obtained the thing promised. It is useless to regard a woman’s pledge by the light of the civil laws; you must always hold your bag ready when confronting her promises. The old proverb appears to brook no exception in the case of women when it says ‘Once you’re ready, no delays; procrastination never pays’. We know that everything every woman says is spoken with inner deceit, for they always have thoughts different from the words they say. No man could so rejoice in a woman’s intimacy or affection as to be able to know the secrets of her heart or the degree of sincerity with which she addresses him, for a woman trusts no man as friend, believing all are utter deceivers. So she continues always in her deceitful purpose, and all she says is spoken with a false heart and ambivalent mind.⁵³⁰

The sudden and poorly constructed change in characterisation illustrates how heavy handed the moral messages against evil wives are within *The Seven Sages of Rome*. This story applies the culturally accepted notion of women as fickle and treacherous to a short tale. Whilst the actions of the evil wife may initially shock the reader, the numerous texts discussing the fickle nature of women which predate the Auchinleck manuscript, such as *De Amore*, demonstrate that an understanding of women as fickle would be so engrained in an audience that it explains the seemingly implausible action of this character.

The message that women are fickle within Gesse’s story cannot be missed, and it is equally portrayed in the five adultery stories which surround his short narrative. For

⁵²⁸ A similarly ‘tacked on’ antifeminist statement can be found in Anxulles’s story, discussed below.

⁵²⁹ *The Seven Sages of Rome*, MS Advocates 19.2.1, fol. 99va, l. 2698.

⁵³⁰ Capellanus, ‘On Love’, p.313.

Chapter Three – Good Wives and Dangerous Distractions

example, the wife in Catonne's story is immediately introduced as a fickle and deceitful woman:

Bote sche was fikel under hir lok,
 And hadde a parti of Eue smok.
 And manie ben ʒit of hire kinne,
 Pat ben al bilapped þerinne.⁵³¹

Catonne's example of an evil wife recalls the inevitability of women to fall because of their association with Eve that is established earlier in the manuscript in *The Life of Adam and Eve*. The choice of the word 'fikel' is also particularly notable, given the association of the other evil wives with fickleness. There can be no doubt for the reader that this is not a woman on which to model their behaviour. In Maxious's story, we read of a woman who betrays her husband and runs away with another man. Early on in the tale we are told of the Earl's fear that she will betray him:

And for gelous he letter hyr be sett
 In a toure welle faste jshytte;
 She come not owt day ne nyght
 To play hyr with swayne ne knyght.⁵³²

The Earl's concern with keeping his wife away from other men immediately warns against women's fickle nature and the likelihood that they will commit adultery given a chance. His wife takes:

...a letter jwretyn fulle right,
 And caste hit downe before the knyght.
 The knyght toke the letter anone
 And vndyde hit and lokyd there on.
 He hadde wounder whoo hit threwe,
 But there by the lady he knewe,
 And that he schulde with hyr play
 For any thing that any man couthe say.⁵³³

The text makes it explicit that the lady approaches the knight first. In doing so, she displays her fickle heart and her lack of loyalty to her husband. She is the instigator of the adultery and thus she is the evil wife who maliciously betrays her husband. She becomes a model of behaviour which the female reader should avoid.

⁵³¹ *The Seven Sages of Rome*, MS Advocates 19.2.1, fol. 96va-f.96vb, l. 2197-2200.

⁵³² 'The Seven Sages of Rome', in *The Seven Sages of Rome: Southern Version*, ed. by Karl Brunner (London: Early English Text Society, 1933) pp. 1-192, p. 142.

⁵³³ 'The Seven Sages of Rome', p. 146.

Chapter Three – Good Wives and Dangerous Distractions

The context of Maxious's story within the larger text is exceptionally important, and thus his tale becomes a small example of the importance of contextualised reading to an understanding of the Auchinleck the manuscript. When read apart from the other stories, this tale feels like a short romance: the lady in the tower, the characterisation of a Knight who demonstrates prowess in battle, the use of the dream which celebrates the love between the Lady and the Knight as fin 'Amor, are all tropes of the genre. As a stand-alone piece, then, the Lady's role as the villain is diluted because of the romance motifs which encourage fin 'Amor. She can almost be seen as victim of a possessive husband who needs to be rescued by the Knight. Read in the context of the full text of *The Seven Sages of Rome*, however, the wife's actions reflect those of the evil wives who are her literary companions. Her role as the adulterous wife is emphasised by its proximity to the rest of the Sage's tales. When read together the other stories encourage the audience to view this adulterous woman as a model for an evil wife, despite the romance elements. Thus, Maxious's story provides not just a model of behaviour for women to avoid, but also an important example of the type of contextual reading the Auchinleck manuscript, with its consistent linked themes, encourages.

The other evil wives in *The Seven Sages of Rome* are a more explicitly negative example for the reader; they are fabliaux without such a strong romance influence. Malquydras, for example, makes the malicious intent of the wife in his story very evident. His story discusses the young wife who marries the old man and is unsatisfied with him. The parallels between Malquydras story and Chaucer's *Merchant's Tale* are quite evident, but, unlike in Chaucer's tale, the reader is not encouraged to feel sympathy for the young wife. There is no suggestion that the wife is unwilling to engage in coitus with her older husband. He, rather, is unable to pay the marriage debt. Where May turns to Damyan after falling in love with him, the wife in Malquydras' tale turns to the gardener on the advice of her mother, in order to sate her lust. She says:

...“moder, I þolie a cas:
Mi loured doþ me no solas.
Ich moste haue som oþer loue.”⁵³⁴

The wife complains to her mother that she has not been satisfied with her old husband, and that she desires another lover. Her need for sexual attention is bluntly indicated through the use of the determiner 'must'. This sexual appetite would not have been considered unusual by an educated medieval audience; women were considered weaker in maintaining sexual

⁵³⁴ *The Seven Sages of Rome*, MS Advocates 19.2.1, fol. 94ra, l. 1741-1743.

Chapter Three – Good Wives and Dangerous Distractions

abstinence and were thought to have a more powerful libido. Numerous medieval sources demonstrate that ‘women were held to be more lustful creatures by nature.’⁵³⁵ For example, Isidore of Seville, in his *Etymologies* c.570-636, states:

For females are more lustful than males, among women as much among animals. Hence the word ‘effeminate’ was applied to an excess of love in antiquity.⁵³⁶

The voracious sexual appetite the wife displays is once more symptomatic of generalised medieval opinions on the nature of women. As such, it does not need to be grounded in characterisation. The reader is able to believe the wife would be licentious because that is what she has been taught all women are.

The evidence that the wife has an untempered sexual appetite is emphasised further by her licentious actions after she has committed adultery. This allows her role as a model of negative behaviour to come to the fore. After she has had her ‘play’ with the gardener, and tricked her husband into thinking she was just warming him, she returns to her mother, still unsatisfied that her husband will not have intercourse with her. She kills his greyhound in a bid to seek his attention, which does not work. Finally, she reveals to her mother that she actually desires the priest, not her husband nor gardener. Her reasoning for this is particularly malicious:⁵³⁷

Ac, tel me doughter, for God aboue,
What man hastou meant to loue?”
“Dame” 3he saide, “þe prest, bi skil.”
“Nai, doughter, 3if God wil,
While þou mi3t haue squire or kni3t.”
“Nai, moder, mi trewþe I plizt,
I nelle come in no kni3tes bedde,
He hit wile make wide ikedde,
And I þe saie, sikerliche,
Þe prest I mai loue priueliche.”⁵³⁸

In her desire for the priest, the daughter displays many of the flaws of women. She shows a fickle heart that cannot decide what she wants, a desire for more that only encourages her changeable behaviour, and an inability to control her sexual urges. Beyond this, she displays cunning and a meticulously planned determination to betray her husband. She chooses the priest, rather than another knight (or any other man), because she believes that

⁵³⁵ Blamires, *Woman Defamed*, p. 5.

⁵³⁶ Blamires, *Woman Defamed*, p. 43.

⁵³⁷ Again, this sudden change is poorly conceived by the writer/scribe and relies on the reader’s acceptance that women are extremely fickle.

⁵³⁸ *The Seven Sages of Rome*, MS Advocates 19.2.1, fol. 94va, l. 1819-1828.

Chapter Three – Good Wives and Dangerous Distractions

she will be able to guarantee his silence; unlike any other man, the priest has equally a lot to lose if the relationship is discovered. She continuously provides evidence of a variety of pre-meditated ways to betray maliciously her husband, thus presenting a model of behaviour for the female reader, readers, or listeners, to avoid.

Malquydras emphasises that women are inevitably disobedient and potentially evil wives, first seen in *The Live of Adam and Eve* above, when he makes use of the antifeminist tradition of ‘the old, ugly cunning instructress [who] is often the butt of virulent mockery, and perhaps projects a certain male fear.’⁵³⁹ Malquydras’s story places the older woman in the role of tutor to the younger. This model is found in earlier works, such as Ovid’s *Amores*, written between 43BC and 18AD, and in the figure of La Vieille in *The Romance of the Rose*. Ovid discusses the role of Dipsas the procuress, and the advice she gives to young women:

She’s a witch, mutters magical cantrips, can make rives
Run uphill, knows the best aphrodisiacs -
... Well: this old hag undertook to suborn *our* relationship,
And a glibly poisonous tongue she had for the job...
“While you’re spreading your net, go easy. Don’t show too rapacious
Or your bird may fly off. Once you’ve caught him, anything goes.”⁵⁴⁰

As the reader might expect from the roots of medieval antifeminist literature, the older woman in Malquydras’s story advises the younger in illicit behaviour and witchcraft, acting as a Dispas figure. Additionally, the text states: ‘For iuel blod was hire wizinne,’ blaming the wife’s inherently evil nature on her blood.⁵⁴¹ Malquydras’s text does not just warn about women’s tendency to commit adultery; it also blames this tendency on the nature of her mother, a chain that can be followed back to Eve. Thus, Malquydras generalises and condemns all women because of the actions of one (or two).

As well as portraying wives as fickle and licentious, *The Seven Sages of Rome* also routinely others women in order to represent them as dangerous. The merchant in Lentyllous’s tale, for example:

Wolde spouse no neyhebour schild,
But went fram home as a moppe wild
He let his negheboures child for o vice,
And wente fram hem als moppe and nice,
And browzte home a dammaisele,

⁵³⁹ Blamires, *Woman defamed*, p. 21.

⁵⁴⁰ Ovid, ‘The Amores’, in *Ovid: The Erotic Poems*, ed. by Peter Green (London: Penguin Books, 1982), pp. 85-165, p. 97-99.

⁵⁴¹ *The Seven Sages of Rome*, MS Advocates 19.2.1, fol. 94vb, l. 1868.

Chapter Three – Good Wives and Dangerous Distractions

Was ful of vices swathe fele.⁵⁴²

The introduction to the female character of this particular narrative immediately instructs the audience not to trust the woman because of her foreign blood, and warns us that her nature as an alien means that she is full of vices.⁵⁴³ Line 1290 also suggests that she is not a virgin:

Hire forme lemme hire after com,
 Pat hire serued mani a stounde,
 When on slepe was þe [hus]bounde.⁵⁴⁴

Within nine lines, the audience is convinced that this woman is evil and expects her to fulfil the prescribed role of creating problems for the merchant. The use of the word ‘served’ is an interesting euphemism for sexual intercourse, as it carries the notion of servitude with it. Though not strictly a possessive word, it does suggest the lady ranked below her lover, and emphasises the hierarchical nature of patriarchal society which places women below men.

The use of possessive language, as seen in previous texts, is particularly noticeable when the merchant finds out about his wife’s adultery. He states ‘Of þe ne kep I neuere mo,’ illustrating that he likewise viewed her in a possessive manner. She was his to ‘keep,’ until he no longer wanted her. It is he and he alone who makes the decision to relinquish this ownership; she gets no say in the matter. Interestingly, in a manner that echoes the concerns of the sister in *The Legend of Pope Gregory*, he threatens her with public humiliation. He tells her that ‘Al þi kin schal witen and sen,/What mester woman þou hauest iben.’⁵⁴⁵ Her response is to threaten suicide by drowning in a well. This threat, and the response she gives, equates her reputation with her life. It is not the thought of being put aside by her husband that inspires a reaction from the wife; it is the fear of the destruction of her reputation. As with the sister in *The Legend of Pope Gregory*, for this woman, her reputation is of the utmost importance to her.

In order for this text to serve the purpose of educating Diocletian about the dangerous nature of wives, it is the woman who manages to win the battle between the genders. She tricks her husband into being caught outside after curfew, and he is subject to the public humiliation that he threatened her with. The narrative’s desire to create models

⁵⁴² *The Seven Sages of Rome*, MS Advocates 19.2.1, fol. 92ra-f.92rb, l. 1403-1408.

⁵⁴³ This is an interesting mirror to Diocletian’s wife, who is also an alien from a foreign land and appears to have the same vices.

⁵⁴⁴ *The Seven Sages of Rome*, MS Advocates 19.2.1, fol. 92rb, l. 1414-1416.

⁵⁴⁵ *The Seven Sages of Rome*, MS Advocates 19.2.1, fol. 92rb, l. 449-1459.

Chapter Three – Good Wives and Dangerous Distractions

of negative wifely behaviour, however, can be seen when Lentyllous spins the wife's victory into a warning against the trickery of women and the potential trickery of Diocletian's wife. He states:

Sire, mo swiche þer beȝ ifound,
 And þi self had on swich.
 Ȝe wil be traie sikerlich,
 Ȝif þou dost after her red,
 Pat þou dost þi sone to ded.⁵⁴⁶

Once again, the actions of one woman are used to tar the entire gender. Lentyllous makes the message more specific than Bancillas did, directly translating it for Diocletian into a warning about his own wife. This seems appropriate, as there is much similarity in origin and exotic nature between the merchant's wife and Diocletian's wife. Once again, the Sage's stories silence women's voices, this time because they are so full of 'guile' they cannot be trusted. They are very willing to betray and deceive their husbands, representing a model of wifhood that should not be followed.

The determination to include a strong anti-feminist statement within *The Seven Sages of Rome* is most evident in Anxulles' tale, which talks of an adulterous Queen. When Ypocras's nephew pries the truth about the Prince's father out of the Queen, it is a back and forth dialogue of twenty-five lines before she reveals the truth to him. The conversation ends:

“Dame” he saide, “pai ȝhe wille me slen,
 I ne mai do þi sone no bot,
 But ȝif I wite þe sothe rot,
 Of what man hit was bizete.”
 “Maister?” ȝhe saide, “pat mai no man wite.
 Ȝif mi conseil were vnhele,
 Ich were islawe bi riȝte skele.”
 “Dame” he seide “so mot ich þe,
 I nelle neuere biwraie þe.”
 “O meister” ȝhe seide “so hit bifel,
 Þis endedai in on Aueril,
 Perl of Nauerne com to þis þede,
 Wel atired in riche wede,
 Wiȝ mi loured for to plai,
 And so he dede mani a dai,
 Pat ich erl I gan to loue
 Al erthliche þing aboue,
 And so, par gret druri,
 I let pat erl ligge me bi,

⁵⁴⁶ *The Seven Sages of Rome*, MS Advocates 19.2.1, fol. 92vb, l. 1514-1518.

Chapter Three – Good Wives and Dangerous Distractions

And þous hit was on me biȝete.⁵⁴⁷

This story repeats the idea that the weak nature of women makes them likely to give into lust. Though the narrative does not explicitly condemn the woman's actions, phrases such as 'gret druri' convey a tone of regret. The Queen's desire to keep her son's heritage a secret suggests that she feels remorse for her actions, though this can also be read as protecting her reputation in a similar manner to the sister's actions in *The Legend of Pope Gregory*. The Earl of Navarre, however, is not at all condemned for his actions. There is an evident imbalance in the apportioning of blame in this adultery case. It also leaves the problem of an illegitimate heir to the throne of the country, showing the potential consequences of the deceitful evil wife's actions on patrilinear inheritance.

The contrived inclusion of a negative model of behaviour for the female reader is evident in Anxulles's tale through the complete irrelevance of the adulterous Queen to the rest of the narrative. She exists to illustrate that Ypocras has trained his nephew well in the medical arts, which emphasises the irony when Ypocras discovers it is only his murdered nephew who could have cured him. The irrelevance to the rest of the story is most noticeable in Anxulles's summary to the King, which reads:

“Lo!” saide þe maister ‘hou Ypocras
 Destrued his lif and solas.
 Sire emperor, tak hede and loke,
 He slow his neuue and brent his boke,
 Miȝt hit him ani þing profite?’⁵⁴⁸

Unlike the other six sages, the danger of the woman is not mentioned in Anxulles's summary to the King, which emphasises the need to protect the young. This lesson could have been taught without referring to the Queen's infidelity; the moral about the evil nature of women is superfluous to the story. This thus reveals the underlying motive behind *The Seven Sages of Rome* to demonstrate repeatedly models of inappropriate female conduct, an emphasis of particular relevance to female audiences.

The final woman who provides a model which teaches women how not to behave in marriage, is the Empress herself, who demonstrates disregard for patriarchal norms by taking control of her own sexuality. She isolates Florentine alone in her bedroom, an act which immediately troubles social norms. As discussed earlier in *The Legend of Pope Gregory*, bedrooms provide the scene for many transgressive sexual moments. Within the Auchinleck texts, the bedroom is a space where the boundaries of social decency

⁵⁴⁷ *The Seven Sages of Rome*, MS Advocates 19.2.1, fol. 90rb, l. 1060-1070.

⁵⁴⁸ *The Seven Sages of Rome*, MS Advocates 19.2.1, fol. 90vb, l. 1157-1161.

Chapter Three – Good Wives and Dangerous Distractions

disappear. By taking her step-son into the room, the Empress is threatening social order by inviting him into what should be the domain of her husband. She thus troubles social orders by taking control of her sexuality rather than relinquishing that control obediently to her husband.

The Empress's attempts to use her sexuality to affect and alter her position within patriarchal society reveal two concerns within medieval society about the potential power of female sexuality. Firstly, she attempts to seduce the young Florentine:

Bi loued þe emperour is old,
 Of kinde, of bodi he is cold.
 I swere, bi sonne and bi mone,
 But for ich herde telle of þi pris,
 Pat þou were hende, gentil, and wis.
 For to haue wiȝ þe accord,
 Ich am iwedded to þi lord.
 Kes me, lemman, and loue me,
 & I þi soget wil ibe.
 So God me helpe, for he hit wot,
 To þe ich haue ikept mi maidenhod.⁵⁴⁹

She offers herself to Florentine as a lover. Exactly what she planned to achieve from this act is never clearly explained, but the terms in which she offers herself highlight the submissiveness of female sexuality in fourteenth-century England. To begin with, she assures him of her virginity in terms that highlight its value. She has kept it for him, as one keeps an object of worth; it is a gift for him. She also offers herself as his subject, putting herself in a subordinate position to his male desire. She is playing the role of an ideal medieval woman; virginal and submissive. Her false declaration of virginity recalls the problematic issue of a socially valued item that cannot be proven to exist, as is demonstrated in *Floris and Blancheflour*.

The Queen's use of her sexuality also highlights the problems of the untrustworthy nature of women's voices as she fabricates a false rape accusation:

Sche tar hire her and ek here cloþ
 Here kirtel, here pilche of ermine,
 Here keuerchefs of silk, here smok o line,
 Al togidere, wiȝ boþe fest,
 Sche torent bineþen here brest.
 Wiȝ boþe honden here ȝaulew here
 Out of þe tresses sche hit tere,
 And ssche tocraged hire visage,

⁵⁴⁹ *The Seven Sages of Rome*, MS Advocates 19.2.1, fol. 86vb, l. 435-446.

Chapter Three – Good Wives and Dangerous Distractions

And grade ‘harow!’ wiȝ gret rage.⁵⁵⁰

In this scene, the poet is very specific about the image of the rape victim the Empress constructs. She tears at her clothes and skin, creating visual evidence of the attack. She also cries out, and immediately reports the crime to Diocletian, creating the ‘hue and cry’; medieval legal practise expected the rape victim to quickly publicise her rape by reporting her attack as soon as possible to document ‘the event by showing any wounds and her torn and bloodstained clothes to the local bailiff, sergeant or coroner.’⁵⁵¹ This care to create a legally recognised condition thus demonstrates her knowledge (or the scribe who depicts her) of rape law and her cunning in trying to evoke it. Through her attempts to seduce Florentine and her carefully crafted rape accusation, she embodies the act that men fear; that women could lie about their sexual experience, with only their untrustworthy voices as evidence for their claims. In accusations regarding female sexuality, the female voice gains an autonomy that is at odds with medieval society’s desire to silence women. For all the law favoured male kin, it was still necessary to allow women to bring accusations for themselves; to force their voice to be heard, as is seen in legal appeals. Despite the many rape scenes in *Auchinleck*, however, the only woman who brings forth an accusation of rape to the legal courts is the one who is depicted as an evil and deceptive wife. Where the other victims of rape dealt with the consequential pregnancies, and thus accepted the blame put on them, the Empress comes forward to claim her right to retribution for the (fictional) attack. As she is a liar, however, her statements come across as malicious and deceitful. The manuscript consequently depicts rape accusations in court to be suspect. By having the evil wife use her voice in this false manner, *The Seven Sages of Rome* depicts female voices as untrustworthy, and feeds into the myth that women falsely accuse men of rape out of vengeful malice, a myth that is still prevalent in modern society.⁵⁵²

As well as embodying the malicious tendencies of evil wives, the Empress also demonstrates the ignorant tendencies of disobedient wives by failing to heed her own advice. Her desire to see Florentine dead stems from a conversation with a servant:

Som squieror som seriant nice
Had itold the þemperice

⁵⁵⁰ *The Seven Sages of Rome*, MS Advocates 19.2.1, fol. 86vb, l. 458-466.

⁵⁵¹ Dunn, *Stolen Women*, p. 68.

⁵⁵² Although the rate of false accusations of rape (2%) is on a par with false accusations of other crimes, there are still wide spread beliefs that this rate is much higher. If we take into account that an estimated 60% of rapes are not reported, it becomes likely that the number of false accusations of rape are actually below those of other crimes. Stanford University, ‘Rape Statistics’, <http://web.stanford.edu/group/maan/cgi-bin/?page_id=297>, [Accessed 16th April 2015].

Chapter Three – Good Wives and Dangerous Distractions

Al of þemperoures sone,
 Hou he wi3 þe maistres wone.
 And hire schildre scholde be bastards
 And he schal haue al þe wardes
 Vnder hest and vnder hond
 Of þempire and al þe lond.
 Pan couþe sche boþe qued and god
 And sone sche gan to pekke mod[.]⁵⁵³

As was discussed in the story of the good wife above, and can be seen in the summary of the Empress's tales, her seven stories carry warnings about the untrustworthy and deceitful nature of servants. It is ironic, then, that it is a discussion with a servant that causes her to lose faith in her husband and become fearful for her children's future. She listens to gossip, and is inevitably punished for doing so. As such, even though her stories do not necessarily depict a model of wifehood, they all add to the representation of her as a foolish woman as, through them, she is directly criticising her own mistake whilst in the act of making it. Her ignorance is reminiscent of the foolish behaviour of Eve and the mother of the child saved by the greyhound, and links the Empress to these bad wives. She provides, in effect, the two models of wifely behaviour that illustrate what not to do. In her ignorance, she represents a disobedient wife, and in her wilful deception and rise against patriarchal control over her body, she represents an evil wife.

The Seven Sages of Rome is a long text that, in effect, is a microcosm of the entire manuscript. It combines many stories about women in order to deliver a didactic lesson about wives to the reader. Following the patterns illustrated in both chapter two and this chapter, the number of stories that demonstrate how a woman should not behave sorely outnumber the stories that demonstrate a model of how a woman should behave. The various stories, through the models of female behaviour they provide, create a powerful message for the female reader; women (through their inheritance from Eve) are inevitably dishonest, and the only way for them to combat this natural flaw is complete obedience to patriarchal norms. The narrative framework encourages the reader to consider all of the stories linked, and to see them as one long exemplum on wifely conduct. This text, which links many stories of different genres (including epic, romance, and fabliau) through the theme of wifely behaviour and the dishonest woman, requires the reader to link together the texts to find the moral lesson. If a contextual method of reading is required by *The Seven Sages of Rome*, then it reveals a type of reading that our hypothetical reader, or readers, could apply to the whole manuscript. The audience of the *Seven Sages of Rome*

⁵⁵³ *The Seven Sages of Rome*, MS Advocates 19.2.1, fol. 85va, l. 239-248.

Chapter Three – Good Wives and Dangerous Distractions

could link together texts by their repeated representation of models of female behaviour, and thus could read the whole Auchinleck manuscript as an exemplum on how a fourteenth-century English woman should and should not behave as well as a piece of entertainment.

Conclusion

Examining these three texts in context with each other illustrates how they work together to depict three models of wifhood; the good, the disobedient, and the evil. There is an evident progression from the good to the evil as the reader moves through these three texts. Although the wives act differently, and the texts span a variety of settings and genre, the models of female behaviour depicted remain the same.

In *The King of Tars*, we find a text that engages with issues of female voice and its power to give consent. The Princess is given the right to speak her opinion, and the narrative condemns the man who silences her. The woman's voice, however, is only heard when it complies with the societal controls determined by sources such as Augustine, which allow her to disobey her husband under her particular circumstances. Her agency is still controlled by patriarchal Christian society, and her obedience to Jesus forces her to relinquish her body to be used as a tool to bring about conversion. Her role is not to act, but to be acted through, and her extraordinary obedience to this role makes her a model for how to be a good wife.

For Eve in *The Life of Adam and Eve*, perfect obedience is more difficult to achieve. She repeatedly illustrates a tendency to shy away from the control of patriarchal rules: more than once she directly disobeys commands from the patriarchy. When her voice is depicted, it is shown to make the wrong decision and give into temptation. This Eve is not a sexualised figure; there is no suggestion that she seduces Adam into sinning. Rather, this is an Eve who challenges her role as the paradigmatic wife by forgetting her place as subordinate to her husband. She is punished for her disobedience and suffers greatly; it is only when she surrenders her voice and agency to men (primarily Adam and latterly Seth) that she is able to achieve peace and some happiness in her life. She provides the model of the bad wife, who is ignorant and who disobeys her husband, but does not do so with malicious intent.

The third text, *The Seven Sages of Rome* fully develops the caricature of the dangerous woman, compelling the audience to distrust all women by presenting various

Chapter Three – Good Wives and Dangerous Distractions

stories about their fickle nature, their easily corrupted tendencies, and their natural licentiousness. The text builds upon the implicit condemnations of female agency found in earlier texts to explicitly accuse women of being manipulative and deceitful. All women, with one exception, are shown to be untrustworthy. The one exceptional woman is obedient to her husband despite his repugnant demands. As well as emphasising the already established models of good and bad wife, the text discusses the problem of evil wives, who are maliciously disobedient and who challenge to patriarchal controls over their sexuality.

Examining the treatment of the wife in these three narratives shows that there is consistency in the models of wifhood depicted. They all encourage wives to be beautiful and charming, yet silent. Their voices are not to be heard. They are only allowed to act within the permissible confines of patriarchal rule. Their sexual bodies are powerful and must (for their own good) be tempered through submission to masculine desires. This is the message that is consistently passed to the hypothetical female audience.

The desire for wifely submission neatly ties in with the representations of female sexuality discovered in the narratives in chapter two. Like these early texts, these narratives also acknowledge the power of female consent by dedicating some small number of lines to its direct expression. The power these narratives explore, however, is focused on the dangerous threat of female sexual autonomy to the societies they are living in. Female consent thus becomes an issue that threatens both the private home, the marriage transactions between families, and the running of patriarchal society itself.

For our female reader or female listeners, these texts work together in a similar way to those in the second chapter. As texts about female sexuality, they become examples of Foucault's 'power from below.' They work together as entertainment that sends a consistent message to women about the need to accept patriarchal control over their sexuality, and their need to remain obedient to their husbands and fathers. Through compilations like these, the medieval woman is taught to repress her own sexuality, to accept the control of men, and to do so willingly.

Chapter Four – Secularised Saints and Stripping Virgins

Introduction

The history of female reading, as discussed in the introduction, shows that women had sustained interest in female Saints' lives in fourteenth century England. Having discussed the models of female behaviour demonstrated through the portrayal of maidens and wives, this final chapter turns its attentions to some of the religious women in the Auchinleck manuscript; Saint Margaret, Saint Katherine, and the Virgin Mary. It will discuss the two saints' tales *Seynt Mergrete* and *Seynt Katerine*, followed by a miracle of the virgin entitled *The Clerk Who Would See the Virgin*, and finally *The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin*. As well as extolling the virtues of chaste virginity to provide an alternative model for women who wished to avoid marriage, these texts also discuss the roles of women as mothers and teachers.

The use of hagiography as exemplum for women has been well studied. The AB collection was written for women and contains only religious texts: *Ancrene Wisse*, *Swales Warde*, *Hali Meidenhad*, *Saint Juliana*, and (as featured in the Auchinleck manuscript) *Saint Katherine* and *Saint Margaret*. These religious texts would have been considered exceptionally suitable for the anchoress, who had devoted herself to religious seclusion and whose particular lifestyle choice demanded devotion to contemplation and reading.⁵⁵⁴

This collection is symptomatic of literary trends in the thirteenth century, when the Church began a new commitment to teaching the laity and the laity themselves began to seek a more active religious life.⁵⁵⁵ As Winstead tells, 'one of the results of these movements was that more religious literature, including hagiography... was translated into the native languages of these new lay audiences.'⁵⁵⁶ For example, Robertson illustrates the influence of this movement within the AB texts. She explains, in her discussion of this early redaction of *Saint Margaret*, that the text addresses all women by specifically addressing widows, wives and maidens in its opening prayer, and calling upon all these women who read or handled *Saint Margaret* to be saved by Christ.⁵⁵⁷ Whilst the intended audience for the AB texts was initially anchoresses, the author of *Saint Margaret* was aware that other women were likely to read his text.

⁵⁵⁴ Robertson, *Early English Devotional Prose*, p. 8. Also see Millett, 'Women in No Man's Land', p. 91.

⁵⁵⁵ Joseph H. Lynch & Phillip C. Adamo, *The Medieval Church: A Brief History* (London: Routledge, 1992) p. 208-209.

⁵⁵⁶ Karen A. Winstead, *Chaste Passions: Medieval English Virgin Martyr Legends* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2000), p. 4.

⁵⁵⁷ Robertson, *Early English Devotional Prose*, p. 94.

Chapter Four – Secularised Saints and Stripping Virgins

The AB texts provide an unusually specific example of a sustained interest in religious texts that Wogan-Browne has shown to be common to both lay and religious female readers across twelfth and thirteenth century England.⁵⁵⁸ She states that:

Much British vernacular hagiography of the high Middle Ages is produced specifically for women, especially (though by no means exclusively) women religious, whose disenfranchisement from full Latinity made them an important market for hagiographic translators. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, at first predominantly in Anglo-Norman and then increasingly in English, manuscript collections of vernacular saints' lives were made for female communities.⁵⁵⁹

Jenkins agrees with Wogan-Browne's findings, stating that 'vernacular devotional literature was by far the favourite reading choice for women in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries,' whilst Lewis also comments that 'the virgin martyrs in general, and St Katherine in particular, were often considered to be of particular relevance and value to religious and lay women in later medieval England.'⁵⁶⁰ Thus, as previously discussed, the history of medieval women's reading strongly suggests that religious texts such as the tales of the female saints were popular with female audiences. The common association between women and religious texts consequently reinforces the appeal of miscellanies that contain saints' lives, such as Auchinleck, to female readers. Sarah Salih, in her discussion of the Auchinleck manuscript, suggests that female readers may have requested such texts: 'saint's lives that appear in miscellanies...are likely to have been specially requested by their readers: we might assume they represent favourite narratives or saints.'⁵⁶¹

One particular saint's life that is found in Auchinleck, *Seynt Katerine*, is known to be one of the most commonly read saints' tales in late medieval England. Katherine J. Lewis undertook a detailed study of the manuscripts in which the saint's life is found, revealing its inclusion in numerous manuscripts intended for a female reader. Harley 4012, for example, is a fifteenth-century penitential miscellany which contains *Sent Katerine* and *Seynt Mergrete* alongside *Saint Patrick's Purgatory*, extracts from the *Book of Ghostly Grace*, *The Clensyng of Mans Sowle*, *Pore Catif* and *The Mirroure of Sinnes*. The manuscript contains an inscription 'Thys ys the boke of dame anne wingfield of ha[r]lyng',

⁵⁵⁸ Wogan-Browne, *Saints' Lives and Women's*, p. 3.

⁵⁵⁹ Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, 'Saints' Lives and the Female Reader', *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 27 no. 4 (1991), pp. 31-332, p. 314.

⁵⁶⁰ Jacqueline Jenkins, 'Reading Women Reading: Feminism, Culture, and Memory', in *Maistrese of My Wit: Medieval Women, Modern Scholars*, ed. by Louise D'Arcens and Juanita Feros Ruys (Belgium: Brepols, 2004) pp. 317-334, p. 322. Katherine J. Lewis, *The Cult of St. Katherine of Alexandria in Late Medieval England* (Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2000) p. 227. See also Wogan-Browne, 'The Virgin's Tale', p. 173.

⁵⁶¹ Mary Beth Long, 'Corpora and Manuscripts: Authors and Audiences', in *A Companion to Middle English Hagiography*, ed. by Sarah Salih (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2006) pp. 47-79, p. 53.

Chapter Four – Secularised Saints and Stripping Virgins

that shows that the book was initially compiled for a woman. Although we cannot tell if Anne chose these texts herself, they reflect the devotional themes of her other books, as is indicated in her will.⁵⁶² Another manuscript, the late fifteenth century Advocates manuscript 19.3.1, contains the inscription ‘elsabet Bradshaw’ at the top of a folio of *Seynt Katerine*. Although this manuscript includes a mixture of religious, devotional, secular and practical texts, (including *Sir Gowther*, *Sir Isumbras*, *Sir Amadace*, *The Lay Folk’s Mass Book*, *Ave Regina Coelorum*, courtesy texts, medical recipes and carols), it is evident that the saint’s tale at least was intended specifically for a female reader.⁵⁶³ A final example can be found in another fifteenth century manuscript, Cambridge Corpus Christi College 142, which belonged to ‘Wyllim bodleys & Elizabethe hys wyffe.’ It contains *Saint Katherine* and *Saint Margaret* alongside *Love’s Mirror*, a treatise on the sacrament, *Saint Nicholas*, a confessional treatise on spiritual battle and a sentence of excommunication. Once again, the inscription shows that the lives of both Saint Katherine and Saint Margaret were included in a manuscript for a specific named female reader.⁵⁶⁴

Although these manuscripts were all produced later than the fourteenth century Auchinleck, the evidence that Lewis has produced reveals that female readers had a keen interest in religious texts, particularly *Seynt Mergrete* and *Seynt Katerine*. This interest strengthens the likelihood that Auchinleck was intended for a female readership. If religion is, as Meale suggests, ‘the dominant reading interest of medieval women,’ then it is to be expected that we would find a large number of religious texts within the Auchinleck manuscript.⁵⁶⁵ As discussed earlier, this is very much the case with the contents of the Auchinleck miscellany, of which forty-two percent are religious texts. The sustained interest of women in religious texts, combined with the selection of specifically female saints, suggests this manuscript could have been intended for a female reader or listener.⁵⁶⁶

Previous chapters have built a case for viewing the Auchinleck manuscript as a conduct book due to the consistency of the depicted models of behaviour for women in each text. Even though at first glance one might think that saints’ lives would not provide models of behaviour for secular maidens and wives, the genre of hagiography is by no means exempt from this pedagogical function. Sarah Salih describes the saints as both ‘models for personal conduct and patrons with access to heavenly power,’ and observes the

⁵⁶² Lewis, *The Cult*, p. 180.

⁵⁶³ Lewis, *The Cult*, p. 181.

⁵⁶⁴ Lewis, *The Cult*, p. 183.

⁵⁶⁵ Meale, “...alle the bokes’, p. 137.

⁵⁶⁶ It is important to note that the inclusion of religious materials and female saints does not preclude a male reader.

Chapter Four – Secularised Saints and Stripping Virgins

common use of ‘the virgin saints as examples for girls, who were thought likely to identify with the narratives of other girls like themselves.’⁵⁶⁷ Lewis also identifies specific saints used within conduct literature. She states that

Within this discourse [of courtesy literature] St Katherine and the other virgin martyrs were put to a variety of paradigmatic uses. Their words and conduct within the legends are also presented as the epitome of young womanhood.⁵⁶⁸

An example of both Katherine and Margaret as conduct role models can be found in *The Book of the Knight of the Tower*, dated to c.1372 one of the most popular conduct books for young women in medieval England. It reads:

Saynt Katheryn/ saynt margaryte/ of saynte Crystyn/ the enleuen thowsand vyrgyns and of many other/ of whiche the grete constaunce and feruente courage of them/ were to longe to be recounted/For they surmounted many grete temptacions and vanquysshed any tyraunts/ whereby they gate & conquered the grete reame of blysse and glorye where as they shalle euer be in perdurable mioye.⁵⁶⁹

Landry also looks to the Virgin Mary for a further role model for young women when he entitles a chapter: ‘How euery woman ought to meke and humble at themplary of the blessed vyrgne Mary.’⁵⁷⁰ Whilst these religious women provided obvious role models for young women, there is evidence that older women would return to the narratives of the virgin saints’ repeatedly, despite having chosen a secular life very different from those found in the vita.⁵⁷¹ Christine de Pisan, for example, in book three of her 1405 *Book of the City of Ladies* turned to virgin-martyr narratives to advise women suffering under abusive husbands to ‘attempt reform by example, but to bear all with patience.’ Also, in the *Book of Margery Kempe* (c.1430), Kempe draws upon the examples of the virgin saints in order to confront the male authorities challenging her writing.⁵⁷² Thus, there is evidence that the virgin martyrs were used as examples of acceptable female conduct in texts written for and written by women. Thus, it is not a stretch to see these four texts playing a paradigmatic role for the female reader of Auchinleck.

⁵⁶⁷ Wogan-Browne, *Saint’s Lives and Women’s*, p. 3. Sarah Salih, ‘Introduction’, in *A Companion to Middle English Hagiography*, ed. by Sarah Salih (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2006) pp. 1-25, p. 6 & 18.

⁵⁶⁸ Lewis, *The Cult*, p. 231.

⁵⁶⁹ Lewis, *The Cult*, p. 233.

⁵⁷⁰ Caxton, *The Book*, p. 145.

⁵⁷¹ Salih, ‘Introduction’, p. 19.

⁵⁷² Katherine J. Lewis, ‘“Lete me suffre”: Reading the Torture of St Margaret of Antioch in Late Medieval England’, in *Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts in Late Medieval Britain: Essays for Felicity Riddy*, ed. by Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, Rosalynn Voaden, Arlyn Diamond, Ann Hutchison, Carol M. Meale & Lesley Johnson (Belgium: Brepols, 2000) pp. 69-82, p. 82.

Chapter Four – Secularised Saints and Stripping Virgins

The frequency with which the lives of female saints were used as exempla for female readers, and the sustained interest in these narratives that existed in England from the twelfth century onwards, created a demand for these texts which has left a significantly higher number of redactions available to the modern scholar than is found with the Auchinleck texts discussed earlier. Hagiographical texts were frequently altered and reimagined to suit a specific purpose. Ashton comments that ‘hagiography is a received tradition whose continually evolving focus is the changing needs of the community it serves,’ and Postlewate states ‘the central plot remains relatively fixed, yet the possibilities for variation in the way it is told, and even in the details of the narrative, are endless.’⁵⁷³ Within the genre of hagiography, we expect to find alterations to the text to suit a particular reader or group of readers. It is thus likely that the Auchinleck redactions of these particular texts were edited by the author or scribe, with the particular intended female reader or female listeners in mind. This is evident in *Seynt Mergrete* which, as is shown below, undergoes significant changes at certain points which alters the emphasis of the text. The individual messages and slants elucidated by my readings are not broad messages to be found in every redaction of Saint Katherine’s life or Mary’s death. They are specific to the Auchinleck texts, and when read in context with the texts discussed above, these create positive role models for the female reader of the Auchinleck manuscript.

Seynt Mergrete

Seynt Mergrete is the fourth text of the first booklet of the Auchinleck manuscript, and follows directly after *The Life of Adam and Eve*. *Seynt Mergrete* is almost entirely intact, except for some lines of f.16va and f.16vb, which have been lost due to the removal of a miniature on the reverse of the vellum. The rest of the text is intact and in excellent condition. As discussed above, there are significantly more redactions of Saint Margaret’s life left to us than the texts previously discussed by this thesis. Karl Reichl considers the Auchinleck redaction to be one of six versions of what he calls the Middle English stanzaic *Seynt Mergrete*. The other redactions which he considers comparable to the Auchinleck version are found in Trinity College Cambridge manuscript 323, Oxford Bodleian Library manuscript Bodley 779, Oxford Bodleian Library manuscript Rawlinson poetry 34,

⁵⁷³ Ashton, *The Generation of Identity*, p. 11. Laurie Postlewate, ‘Vernacular Hagiography and Lay Piety: Two Old French Adaptations of the Life of Saint Margaret of Antioch’, in *Saints: Studies in Hagiography*, ed. by Sandro Sticca (Binghamton: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies: 1996) pp. 115-130, p. 115.

Chapter Four – Secularised Saints and Stripping Virgins

Cambridge University Library manuscript Additional 4122, and Blackburn Public Library manuscript Petworth 3.

Seynt Mergrete has received some critical attention from those who study Middle English hagiography, and is particularly prominent in some feminist readings of the virgin saints. It has not, however, been read and analysed as an individual text from the Auchinleck manuscript and, except for general observations about the religious nature of booklet one, it has not been examined within the manuscript's context. Although the general narrative is well known, there are some significant differences to the plot of Auchinleck's *Seynt Mergrete*.⁵⁷⁴

The story of *Seynt Mergrete* offers a more explicit challenge to male ownership of female bodies than has previously been observed through a focus on the role of the mother. The Auchinleck redaction begins with a description of Margaret's birth and relationship with her mother that is not present in most other versions. The inclusion of Margaret's mother demonstrates the devotion of a mother to a child:

Sche þouȝt to saue þe childes liff
& bring hir out of wo,
Ful priueliche & stille⁵⁷⁵

The mother, for love of her child, goes against her husband's wishes and sends the child to safety. It is easy to assume that the mother is a Saracen; her husband Teodolus is specified as such and traditionally the wife maintains the religion of her husband. When Teodolus is described, however, he is full of hatred for Christ and love for the Saracen gods. The mother, on the other hand is only described as a 'careful wiif,' meaning that she is full of worry and anxiety.⁵⁷⁶ Her motherly instincts over-shadow any concern for her own safety and her husband's orders. As her religion is not specified, it is possible that she is secretly Christian. However far we wish to take our speculations about her faith and her motives, her intervention denies Teodolus his right to ownership over Margaret's body. It mirrors the action of the sister and Princess of Tars who send their children away from negative influences. It also recalls the knight's statement about the role of parents in *The Book of the Knight of the Tower*, which reads:

And by cause eury fader and moder after god and nature ought to teche &
enforme their children and to distourne them fro the euyl waye/ and to shewe

⁵⁷⁴ A full summary of the plot of the Auchinleck *Seynt Mergrete* can be found in appendix nine.

⁵⁷⁵ *Seynt Mergrete*, Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, MS Advocates 19.2.1, fol. 16vb, l. 42-44.

⁵⁷⁶ *Seynt Mergrete*, MS Advocates 19.2.1, fol. 16vb, l. 37.

Chapter Four – Secularised Saints and Stripping Virgins

tto them the right weye and true pathe as well for the sauacioun of theyre sowles/
as for thonoure of the body erthely.⁵⁷⁷

The Knight's book, originally written a few decades after Auchinleck, emphasises the role parents played in their children's education. Margaret's mother cannot fulfil the above unless she sends her child away. She demonstrates the parental attitude that Landry describes.

The mother's inclusion emphasises the necessary balance between acceptable male control of the female body and unacceptable male ownership of the woman. Teodolus is marked by his Saracen faith, a distinct feature of antagonists within the Auchinleck. His overt desire to control Margaret, is more extreme than seen in other texts such as *The Legend of Pope Gregory* and *Floris and Blancheflour*. He desires her death: 'For hir fader hadde beden/to deþ þat sche schuld go.'⁵⁷⁸ The act of murdering Margaret is the only way he can truly guarantee control over her autonomy; the violent act would silence her potentially disruptive voice. That Teodulus's desire to control Margaret is thwarted by her mother emphasises the previous suggestion that a mother has a duty to protect her child from negative influences. By saving the child, despite the risk to her own life, Margaret's mother demonstrates agency which is sanctioned by the manuscript due to her husband's Saracen faith. This action sets up motherhood as a positive role for women, with significant importance; the mother saves a future saint.

The complex notion of who rightfully owns a woman's body is further discussed as Margaret grows into a young woman. Now separated from her mother, Margaret demonstrates the autonomy that her father feared. The narrative demonstrates her understanding of both her body's potential as a marriageable object and her mind's ability to make decisions freely. We are told:

Hir felawes þat hir lyen bi,
At ich time þat þei woke,
Hou Mergrete was in hir bedes
Gode hede þai toke.
Þe norice þat hir ʒemed,
Sche ʒemed hir wiþ winne;
Alle þai loued hir ful wele,
Þe hous þer sche wond inne.
Anon as sche couþe witt,
Michel sche hated sinne;
She toke hir to Ihesu Crist,

⁵⁷⁷ Caxton, *The Book*, p. 13.

⁵⁷⁸ *Seynt Mergrete*, MS Advocates 19.2.1., fol. 16vb, l. 27-28.

Chapter Four – Secularised Saints and Stripping Virgins

Hir form liif to beginne.⁵⁷⁹

This passage reveals the strength of Margaret's individual agency. She decides to pray more often than is necessary, and she decides to give her body to Jesus. The comparison with her fellow pupils particularly emphasises the difference between Margaret and other girls her age. The text states that her fellows 'gode hede þai toke', illustrating that they are learning from watching Margaret. This distinction singles her out as instinctively more pious than others; her behaviour is so exemplary that other girls are encouraged to mimic her. The effect of this statement is twofold. Firstly, it illustrates that Margaret is in control of her own body and autonomy; she does not appear to be subject to peer pressure and functions as an individual separate from those around her. Secondly, it establishes early on her role as a teacher of young girls, significant to the potentially young female reader of the manuscript. This passage highlights Margaret's function as an exemplary character for women to learn from by depicting characters who, like the reader, can learn from her example.

The notion that both characters and the audience can learn from watching (or reading/hearing) Margaret's behaviour is further emphasised through her interactions with Olibrius. Her control over herself is evident as she resists the temptations of worldly wealth, pleas from others for mercy upon herself, and the fear of pain and certain death.

Anon as þe turmentours
 To Mergrete were ybrouzt,
 Þai todrowen hir white flesche
 Wiþ iren crookedly wrouzt.
 Sum þat bi hir stoden,
 Her hertes were wel sore
 & sed sore wepeand,
 'Mergrete, þi nore.
 Do after Olibrious
 & leue opon his lore.
 Haue merci on þi fair bodi
 & þole þis paines no more.'
 Mergrete answerd
 To hem þat bi hir stode,
 'I do me out of 3our conseyl;
 3our redes be nouzt gode.
 Y take me to Jhesu Crist,
 Pat was don on þe rode.
 Al þe pine þat ich þole
 It is þe soules fode.'
 Sche loked vp to Jhesu Crist,

⁵⁷⁹ *Seynt Mergrete*, MS Advocates 19.2.1, fol. 16vb, l.50-61.

Chapter Four – Secularised Saints and Stripping Virgins

Mergrete, & sized sore
 & seyde 'swete Jhesu Crist,
 Y leue opon þi lore.
 For þis men þat pin me þus,
 Y crie, lord, þi nore.
 Forzif hem & lete me suffre;
 For me þou suffredest more.'⁵⁸⁰

When Margaret appears to be completely under the control of Olibrious, who systematically destroys her body in order to try and control her rebellious mind, Margaret is in control of how she is perceived by others. The detailed destruction of her 'white flesh' places the reader in a voyeuristic position; she, like the fictional narrative audience, is engaged in viewing the naked body of the saint. Gravdal considers this licit voyeurism symptomatic of the eroticism contained within tales of the female saints.⁵⁸¹ The fictional audience, however, do not seem to take pleasure from what they are viewing. Their cries indicate that they interpret the destruction of Margaret's body as a horrific act. The Auchinleck Margaret plays to this horror, repurposing her torture as something she desires when she cries 'lete me suffre;' a cry that contrasts with the AB Margaret, who Robertson observes prays for her suffering to be hidden from others.⁵⁸² The gaze of the fictional audience (and the reader) upon her body is essential to the Auchinleck Margaret's role as a saint; by seeking suffering she circumvents the desire of Olibrious. Rather than submitting to his attempts to control her body, she turns her torture into a visual demonstration of the power of her faith.⁵⁸³ Female agency, empowered by faith, thus allows her to control both her body's sexuality through the denial of Olibrious's offer of marriage and her body's destruction through commandeering her torture as an act of faith. That female agency emerges from Christian faith is something seen in *The King of Tars*, where the Princess used her faith initially to refuse an unwanted marriage, and eventually to save the soul of her husband. *Seynt Mergrete* portrays a similar link; it is her religious convictions that allow her to defy Olibrious's attempts to take ownership of her body. Both *The King of Tars* and *Seynt Mergrete* appear to demonstrate the need for women not to deny or attempt to escape their sexuality, but to 'redirect her sensual and sexual self to an appropriate object, Christ.'⁵⁸⁴ Thus, by controlling rather than dismissing her sexuality, Margaret is

⁵⁸⁰ *Saint Margaret*, MS Advocates 19.2.1, fol. 18r a & b, l. 141-1558.

⁵⁸¹ Gravdal, *Ravishing Maidens*, p. 34.

⁵⁸² Robertson, 'The Corporeality of Female Sanctity', p. 281.

⁵⁸³ Kathrine J. Lewis, 'The life of St Margaret of Antioch in late medieval England: a gendered reading', *Studies in Church History*, 34 (1998), pp. 129-142, p. 137.

⁵⁸⁴ Robertson, *Early English Devotional Prose*, p. 9.

Chapter Four – Secularised Saints and Stripping Virgins

able to modify the behaviour of the fictional audience and thereby to guide the reader of the text.

The rejection of wealth is a trait of positive role models throughout the Auchinleck manuscript, whether explicit as in the case of the Princess in *The King of Tars* or implicitly achieved through the rejection of sin and the absolution from former offenses, as is seen with the sister and Eve in *The Legend of Pope Gregory* and *The Life of Adam and Eve* respectively. *Seynt Mergrete* repeats the explicit attitude to wealth laid out by the Princess in *The King of Tars*. Olibrious says:

& for hir Michel feirhed,
 ʒif sche be born of þral,
 Hir marriage
 No tineþ sche nouȝt al:
 In sikelatoun & pal;
 Sche schal be mi leman
 & haue gold to wal,⁵⁸⁵

Olibrious, like the Sultan in *The King of Tars*, desires Margaret because he views her as pure and chaste, attributes he associates with women who are equal in high status to himself. Where the Sultan was able to approach the Princess's father to open trade negotiations, Olibrious is forced to engage directly with Margaret because she has no male kin whom he can approach. The offer he makes highlights his understanding of marriage as a process of trade; he states:

Ichold þe for mi wiif,
 ʒif þou be of kin fre;
 ʒif þow be of þraldam born,
 Y ʒiue þe gold & fe.
 Pou schalt be mi leman,
 So long so it be.⁵⁸⁶

This passage demonstrates his need to ascertain the 'quality' of the goods he is trading for. He also offers the riches he views as suitable payment for a beautiful chaste woman of good breeding. In the Saracen's view of marriage, female consent is not relevant. His understanding of marriage as a trade agreement also explains his refusal to accept Margaret's rejection of his offer. In his eyes, he has made a fair offer and thus he cannot understand the refusal. Like the Sultan in *The King of Tars*, Olibrious refuses to

⁵⁸⁵ *Seynt Mergrete*, MS Advocates 19.2.1, fol. 17ra, l. 94-101.

⁵⁸⁶ *Seynt Mergrete*, MS Advocates 19.2.1, fol. 17va, l. 90-95.

Chapter Four – Secularised Saints and Stripping Virgins

acknowledge that a ‘fair bargain’ does not guarantee the agreement of the woman he seeks to marry.

Where Olibrious makes his offer of marriage or concubinage to Margaret as he would make an offer of trade to another man, Margaret’s refusal expresses not a rejection of an offer which she deems unequal to her worth, but rather a statement of her personal belief that her body is unavailable to give to Olibrious. She views herself as belonging to a different man:

‘Cristen woman icham
& houen in funston.
Blisced be mi lord,
To wham ichaue me tan.
No wil y nouzt leue [h]is loue
For non oþer man.’⁵⁸⁷

This is the first of Margaret’s many refusals, and through it she illustrates that she does not consider her body to belong to herself. She explicitly states that she has relinquished control over her body to God. She, as Wogan-Browne states, ‘articulates her loyalty to [God and Jesus] rather than directly arguing her own autonomy.’⁵⁸⁸ Margaret may act as her own spokeswoman on earth when she refuses Olibrious’s offer and controls the interpretation of her body’s actions in order to influence and teach others, but this is achieved through her devotion to God. Her ability to say no to Olibrious’s offer arises from her faith, and this faith (in a similar manner to that which is seen in *The King of Tars*) is portrayed as something which the woman can use to control the actions of the men who are trying to seize control of her body.

The power which faith offers the female characters of the Auchinleck, however, is not unrestricted; as demonstrated in *The King of Tars*, the power to speak directly and to reject men’s commands is intrinsically linked to female virginity. Gaunt states that sexuality is ‘a crucial element in the construction of female sainthood and medieval depictions of female saints indicate that medieval culture was obsessed with virginity’ and notes that the replacement of Margaret’s name with ‘the virgin’ in Wave’s version of the life is proof that martyr’s virginity is her most important quality.⁵⁸⁹ *Seynt Mergrete* is no exception to this statement: the narrative emphasises Margaret’s sexuality through the frequent addition of ‘virgin’ to Margaret’s name, i.e. ‘Þai seyȝe maiden Mergrete’ or as a

⁵⁸⁷ *Seynt Mergrete*, MS Advocates 19.2.1, fol. 17va, l. 176-181.

⁵⁸⁸ Wogan-Browne, ‘The Virgin’s Tale’, p. 174.

⁵⁸⁹ Gaunt, *Gender and Genre*, p. 185 & 190.

Chapter Four – Secularised Saints and Stripping Virgins

complete replacement for her name, i.e. ‘Anon as þe mayden was.’⁵⁹⁰ In the latter example in particular, the sexual status eclipses Margaret’s individuality. It is almost completely irrelevant which particular female saint is being discussed, as long as she is a virgin she has the power to be an example for female readers. Like the Princess of Tars, the virgin is wise; she can educate, make decisions, and enact extraordinary Christian deeds that push others towards conversion. Her virginity allows her an autonomy that is not granted to a sexually experienced woman, even one who has become experienced through a legitimate and legal process (like the Princess of Tars, whose wisdom and agency disappears after her husband’s conversion). The power she gains through her Christian faith is closely linked with her role as a virgin.

The result of the de-individualising title bestowed upon Margaret and her willingness to give herself to God, although she has more autonomy than most women in the Auchinleck, is that she never gains full control over her body. As discussed, she willingly gives her body and virginity to Jesus, relinquishing her ownership of herself. Her relationship with Jesus is described in terms of love:

‘Cristen woman icham
& houen in funston.
Blisced be mi lord,
To wham ichaue me tan,
No wil y nouȝt leue [h]is loue
For non oþer man.’⁵⁹¹

Margaret already views Jesus as her husband, bestowing her body on him as a woman would her spouse. The treatment of Jesus as a spiritual husband in Middle English saint’s tales is a significant addition when compared to the Anglo-Saxon and Latin predecessors. Both Hurley and Clark notice that additional alliterative and lyrical phrases describing this spiritual marriage are additions not found in the earlier vita. As Robertson states, however, these lines reflect a ‘large conception of a specifically female experience of Christianity,’ one where the relationship between Christ and the virgin serves to ‘both identify with Christ and to replace her perceived necessary attachment and dependence on men with a more appropriate paternal figure.’⁵⁹² As such, Margaret is as defined and controlled by men as the other women. The sins of the sister in *The Legend of Pope Gregory* can be seen as a result of a failure of men to control the female body, whilst the body of the Princess of Tars passes through control by the father and Jesus in order to land on her converted

⁵⁹⁰ *Seynt Mergrete*, MS Advocates 19.2.1, fol. 17ra, l. 49 & fol. 16vb, l. 39.

⁵⁹¹ *Seynt Mergrete*, MS Advocates 19.2.1, fol. 17v, l. 176-181.

⁵⁹² Robertson, *Early English Devotional Prose*, p. 95-96.

Chapter Four – Secularised Saints and Stripping Virgins

husband. For Margaret, Jesus controls her body. Although the non-physical male authority grants her more agency than physical men grant women, the agency granted by Christian ideology is just as coded and controlled as non-religious agency. Her religious experience is unique to women as, unlike with her male saint counterparts, her relationship with God is constructed around her gender and the fleshly weakness associated with the female sex. As Robertson writes, ‘Sexual temptation is transformed into a commitment to Christ,’ and the preservation of virginity becomes an example of wifely chastity.⁵⁹³ Thus, even the saint who dies a virgin martyr is able to teach our hypothetical secular female reader by providing a model of chastity in marriage.

Margaret’s final act of martyrdom emphasises the doubleness of her position as both a woman with agency and a woman controlled by a patriarchally structured faith. When Olibrius orders her to convert, she replies that she is Christian and comments:

Jhesu Crist, mi lord,
 Y toke me to þe.
 Bleþeliche wald y for þi loue
 Martired to be.⁵⁹⁴

Martyrdom has never been Margaret’s life goal. Rather, she seeks martyrdom as a last resort. This concluding scene once more finds Margaret enacting a double role. Mills states that ‘we find...[the virgin saint]...trapped between positions of victimhood (‘she was forced to die’) and positions of empowerment (‘she chose to die’).⁵⁹⁵ Thus, Mill’s concludes that we cannot depict the martyr solely as a victim or an empowered woman. Margaret’s controlled agency exemplifies her liminal role as an empowered victim; she is both forced towards martyrdom as her only escape from forced conversion and marriage, and empowered through faith which allows her to choose martyrdom over conversion and marriage.⁵⁹⁶ Although empowered by faith which allows her to escape Olibrius, said power is controlled by God who requires her to be subservient to his needs and desires. As Mill’s states, she is not a victim nor is she empowered: she must be seen as occupying a middle ground.

⁵⁹³ Robertson, *Early English Devotional Prose*, p. 95-96. See also Lewis, *The Cult*, p. 234.

⁵⁹⁴ *Seynt Mergrete*, MS Advocates 19.2.1, fol. 17rb, l. 136-139.

⁵⁹⁵ R. Mills, ‘Can the Virgin Martyr Speak?’, in *Medieval Virginites*, ed. by A. Bernau, S. Salih & R. Evans (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003) pp. 187-213, p. 196.

⁵⁹⁶ In contrast, the Princess of Tars, whose faith was strong but not exceptional, never had the option of martyrdom to escape marriage.

Chapter Four – Secularised Saints and Stripping Virgins

The need to categorise women as either victims or empowered women is, however, a modern view that would not necessarily be of concern to our hypothetical female audience. Nevanlinna and Taavitsainen state concerning saints' lives

these stories exemplified the strength of the Christian faith and provided entertainment by their fanciful accounts of torments, miracles and exaggerated sentiments.⁵⁹⁷

By depicting Margaret as both able to resist her pagan tormenter and to be subservient to God, the Auchinleck redaction uses Margaret's characterisation to create a specific role model for the female reader. *Seynt Mergrete* emphasises both active Christian virtues (resistance against sin) and passive Christian values (obedience to God's wishes). Rather than debating whether or not Margaret is empowered or made a victim we must view Margaret's life as an exemplary fiction which guides the female audience to straddle the complex need to be both an active Christian and a passive woman.

In addition to the exemplary role that Margaret plays to guide the female reader in her subservience to God through faith, this Auchinleck redaction also brings to the fore the important role of motherhood within the Saint's life. The battle between the demon and Margaret, for example, turns to the issue of motherhood when Margaret emerges unharmed from the belly of the dragon:

He [the dragon] toke hir [Margaret] in his foule mouþe
& swaled hir flesche & bon.
Anon he tobrast
- damage no hadde sche non.⁵⁹⁸

That fact that Margaret emerges unharmed from the belly of the dragon, figuratively born again, allows her to become a symbol of safe birth.⁵⁹⁹ In addition to this is Margaret's response to the demon's assertion that 'oþer þe wiif hirseluē/of childebed be forfarn.'⁶⁰⁰

'3if ani woman trauayl
& hard clepeþ to me,
Deliuer hir, lord, wiþ ioie
Purth vertu of þe tree

⁵⁹⁷ Sara Nevanlinna & Irma Taavitsainen, *St Katherine of Alexandria: The Late Middle English Prose Legend in Southwell Minister MS 7* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1993) p. 3.

⁵⁹⁸ *Seynt Mergrete*, MS Advocates 19.2.1., fol. 18vb, l. 209-232. Where the dragon is of significant importance to other redactions, it barely makes an impact upon the Auchinleck version. It is not, as Robertson finds the dragon in the AB *Saint Margaret*, a 'central confrontation'. Robertson, 'The Corporeality of Female Sanctity', p. 279.

⁵⁹⁹ Bonnie Way, 'St. Margaret of Antioch, Patron Saint of Childbirth', <<http://thekoalamom.com/2016/07/st-margaret-of-antioch/>> [Accessed 30th May 2017].

⁶⁰⁰ *Seynt Mergrete*, MS Advocates 19.2.1., fol. 19rb, l. 243-244.

Chapter Four – Secularised Saints and Stripping Virgins

Pat þou dest þi body on
To make ous al fre.⁶⁰¹

Before her death, aware of her impending sainthood, Margaret acts to make herself the saint for childbirth. Margaret's role as the saint of childbirth is not unique to Auchinleck; it is considered one of the reasons her cult lived on despite being declared apocryphal as early as 494.⁶⁰² There is evidence that it was 'widely believed that a reading of her passion would expedite safe childbirth,' a belief so strong that copies of her legend were 'given to pregnant women in the form of amulets.'⁶⁰³ Additionally, 'the life of Margaret of Antioch often appears in medical texts...[and] prayers to her were even carved into apples for pregnant women to eat.'⁶⁰⁴ This strong association with the experience of childbirth means that the inclusion of *Seynt Mergrete* in the Auchinleck manuscript, in addition to the model of behaviour discussed above, teaches the female reader who she is to turn to during one of the most dangerous moments in her life. This narrative prepares the female reader for the trials of childbirth she is likely to face in the future.

The Auchinleck redaction is unique, however, in the additional emphasis on responsible motherhood that is present through the role of Margaret's mother, discussed above. In the AB version of Saint Margaret's life, Margaret's mother is barely mentioned: 'hire moder was iwend þe wei þet worldlihe men alle schulen wenden.'⁶⁰⁵ In a redaction that was written for anchoresses who would avoid childbirth, paired with a text that denounces the horror of childbirth, a lack of any interest in Margaret's mother is unsurprising. As Reichl shows in his parallel text edition of Margaret's life, found in his *Religiöse dichtung im Englischen Hochmittelalter*, this one sentence has been rewritten and expanded by various different redactions, including the Auchinleck Manuscript:

[Trinity College Dublin, MS 323]
Þe moder was an heþen wif
Pat hire to wynman bere,
Ðo þat child ibore was,
Nolde ho hit furfare:
Ho sende hit into Asye
wid messagers ful yare
To a norice þat hire wiste

⁶⁰¹ *Seynt Mergrete*, MS Advocates 19.2.1, fol. 20va, l. 720-725.

⁶⁰² David Farmer, *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) p. 289.

⁶⁰³ Millett and Wogan-Browne, 'Introduction', in *Medieval English Prose for Women: Selections from the Katherine Group*, ed. by Millett and Wogan-Browne (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp.xi-xl p. xxii.

⁶⁰⁴ Long, 'Corpora and Manuscripts', p. 52

⁶⁰⁵ 'Seinte Margarete', in *Medieval English Prose for Women: Selections from the Katherine Group*, ed. by Millett & Wogan-Browne (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 4-85, p. 46.

Chapter Four – Secularised Saints and Stripping Virgins

ant sette hire to lore.

[Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 788]

Here modi[r] was an heþen wif
 þat here to woman bare:
 And þo þat mayde Ibore was
 3he woden here forfare;
 Þey sentin here fer into A3ye
 wit messengerus wel 3are
 To a norise þat her fedde
 and sente here to lore þare.

[Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson Poetry 34]

The modere was a sarseyne
 that this maydene bare;
 And whene the childe was borne
 she wolde yt nought forfare:
 Sche sent yt into Antyocheythe
 messangers fulle yare
 The chylde for to norysche and fede
 and sette yt to lare

[Cambridge University Library, MS Additional 4122]

Her moder was an heþen wyfe
 þat her to þis world bare,
 As sone as þe chylde was borne,
 sche wolde it schulde not forfare:
 Sche it sente into Asye
 with massyngers fulle 3are
 Toa noryse þat her fedde
 and sette her to lare.

[Blackburn Public Library, MS Petworth 3]

Here modyr was a hethyn wyfe
 the whiche Margaret bare,
 Tho the childe ybore was,
 she wolde hit nou3t forfare:
 She sende hit into Assya
 with messyngeris ful yare
 To a norise to kepe and gye
 and to set her vnto lare.

[Auchinleck Manuscript]

As þai liued togider,
 þe king and þe queen,
 Maiden Mergrete was
 goten hem bitvene,
 Pat seþþen leued on Jhesu Crist
 and hadde Michel tene,
 And miche pine þoled seþþe

Chapter Four – Secularised Saints and Stripping Virgins

hir bodi þat was so schene,
 While þe quen ʒede wiþ child,
[11 missing lines]
 þat it were to deþ brouʒt
 wiþouten more striif.
 Þo hye herd þat tiding,
 sche wex a careful wiif,
 Anon so Mergrete was yborn
 hir moder was wel wo,
 For hird ager hadde beden
 to deþ þat sche schuld go.
 Sche þouʒt to saue the childes liif
 and bring her out of wo:
 Ful proueliche and stille
 to Azie sche sent her þo.⁶⁰⁶

The Auchinleck redaction of this particular passage, as shown above, is over twice the length of the other extant Middle English versions of the stanzaic life of Margaret. The writer/scribe expands the discussion of Margaret's conception, Teodulus's decision to kill the child, and the mother's decision to send the child to a nun to be saved and raised as a Christian. It is unlucky, however, that this is where the damage has removed lines of the text. The unique nature of this redaction means that we have no way of reconstructing these missing lines. Perhaps they answered some of our questions, explaining in detail Teodulus's decision to kill his child, how the mother knows a nun in Asia, or how she smuggled her daughter out in secret. What can be seen from the above side by side comparison, however, is that the Auchinleck redaction emphasises the mother's sorrow at losing her child far more than any other version. She 'wex a careful wiif' and is 'wel wo' at the news, details which are missing from all other redactions. In Auchinleck, more than any other version, Margaret's mother acts out of love and duty to save her daughter's life, despite the risk that it must have been to her own life. Motherhood thus takes centre stage in this particular redaction, presenting a model of behaviour for women to follow once they have entered into this particular role.

With this emphasis, therefore, there is a circularity to the *Seynt Mergrete* narrative. The mother's explored and detailed actions combined with Margaret's successful slaying of the dragon and established role as the saint of childbirth, combine to create a text that is as much about motherhood as it is about the benefits of virginity. That these details are unique to the Auchinleck manuscript suggests a deliberate modification of the text in order to create a learning aid for future mothers. It is not simply text which praises chaste

⁶⁰⁶ Karl Reichl, *Religiöse Dichtung im Englischen Hochmittelalter: Untersuchung und Edition der Handschrift B.14.39 des Trinity College in Cambridge* (Munich: Wilhem Fink Verlag, 1973) p. 170-171.

Chapter Four – Secularised Saints and Stripping Virgins

virginity; it is an exemplum that promotes virtuous maidenhood, the giving over of the virginal body to an approved male authority, the need for balance between active Christianity and passive womanhood, and the importance of the dutiful loving mother.

Seynt Katerine

The second virgin saint's tale in the Auchinleck manuscript follows directly after *Seynt Mergrete*, making it the fifth text in booklet one. The two texts have often been taken as a pair, and their positioning together seems exceptionally coordinated. *Seynt Katerine* is in fairly good condition. As with *Seynt Mergrete*, its corresponding miniature has been removed, which has led to the loss of eleven lines on the opposite side of the page. Unfortunately, the end has been lost due to the deliberate removal of two pages, containing the end of *Seynt Katerine* and the beginning of the following text.⁶⁰⁷ As with *Seynt Mergrete*, there is a significantly larger number of surviving redactions of *Seynt Katherine* in comparison to the romances of previous chapters. Nevanlinna and Taavitsainen consider the Auchinleck redaction to be one of six extant copies of the A text. As an early fourteenth century text, Auchinleck is the earliest surviving Middle English version of the A text. The general story of *Seynt Katerine* is quite well known, but the A text is different and less detailed than the commonly known prose versions of her life, such as the AB version mentioned above.⁶⁰⁸

The popularity of Saint Katherine in England is considered to be on par with, or perhaps more than, Saint Margaret. Physically there are at least fourteen extant Middle English versions of Katherine's life. For comparison, Margaret has eleven, and the general average per saint is eight. Additionally, Katherine is mentioned more regularly in wills than any other saint. Lewis concludes that only Saint John the Baptist is more popular in medieval England.⁶⁰⁹ It is now believed that Katherine never actually existed though, as Lewis points out, whether or not she existed makes no difference to the study of her influence on medieval audiences.⁶¹⁰

Seynt Katerine explores many of the motifs previously seen in the examined texts, for example, the rich Saracen villain is similar to the rulers in both *The King of Tars* and *Seynt Mergrete*. The text informs the reader that:

⁶⁰⁷ The leftover stub of both leaves is straight and clean, strongly suggesting the removal of these pages was deliberately undertaken with a sharp blade. Why they were removed, however, is a mystery.

⁶⁰⁸ A full synopsis of the Auchinleck *Seynt Katerine* can be found in appendix ten.

⁶⁰⁹ Lewis, *The Cult*, p. 2-3.

⁶¹⁰ Lewis. *The Cult*, p. 3.

Chapter Four – Secularised Saints and Stripping Virgins

In Grece jt was an emperour;
 He was king of mani palays,
 Castels gret & mani a tour.⁶¹¹

In the same manner as the other villainous men in Auchinleck texts, the Emperor offers wealth to Katherine in order to secure his control over her and her conversion to the Saracen faith:

Haue merci on þi feirhed.
 Y schal þe worþschip ich day.
 Pou schalt be worþschiped as þe quen,
 Boþe in bour & halle
 & in þi name schal be wrouzt
 An ymage fair wipalle,
 & in þis borwe it schal be sett,
 heiþe & lowe to louten alle.
 Of alle þe nedes of þis lond
 To þe we schal conseyl calle.
 Heiþe & lowe worþshipe þe.⁶¹²

The Emperor offers to make Katherine a goddess, promising devotion from both himself and his people. This promised devotion is different, however, to the offer made to the Princess of Tars and Margaret. When the previous virgins are offered wealth, it is tied to an offer of marriage; in a depiction of marital gift exchange. *Seynt Katerine*, however, is forced to alter this arrangement as the Emperor is already married. He is thus unable to broker a deal between Katherine (or her father) to gain access to her body.

It is not, however, Katherine's body that he desires access to. Unlike with the Princess of Tars and Margaret, neither the narrator nor the Emperor make much of Katherine's appearance. This is despite the fact that she is a virgin; the text frequently uses Maiden as an additional title or a replacement for Katherine's name, for example in the lines 'Maiden' he seyde 'þou art vnwise' and 'þe maiden was in prisoun don.'⁶¹³ Both the narrator and the Emperor frequently employ Katherine's sexual status as a noun. The name Katherine only appears thirteen times in the narrative, almost half the frequency of maiden, which appears twenty-one times. This illustrates that her personal identity is tied to her sexual status. This sexual status, however, does not make her body overtly desirable as in the case of Margaret. Instead, *Seynt Katerine* avoids physical attraction and depicts the desire for the virgin's wisdom that is implicitly found in both *The King of Tars* and *Seynt*

⁶¹¹ *Seynt Katerine*, Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, MS Advocates 19.2.1, fol. 21rb, l. 6-8.

⁶¹² *Seynt Katerine*, MS Advocates 19.2.1, fol. 22va, l. 120-125.

⁶¹³ *Seynt Katerine*, MS Advocates 19.2.1, fol. 22ra, l. 55 & 79.

Chapter Four – Secularised Saints and Stripping Virgins

Mergrete. As the Sultan emphasises in the last two lines of the extract above, he offers riches in return for her counsel. He desires to trade for access to her mind rather than her body.

The intellect of Saint Katherine is traditionally considered to be the source of her power. In a similar way to Margaret, she can rely on her faith to give her the power to subvert the wishes of the Saracen who is threatening her. Where Margaret used her faith to subvert the result of her torture, Katherine uses her knowledge of faith to conquer male intellects who challenge her.⁶¹⁴ In the Auchinleck redaction of *Seynt Katherine*, however, the idea that Katherine's wisdom is empowering is subverted by the text itself. Whilst the narrator comments upon her intelligence as is required by the plotline, he avoids all directly reported speech. Her argument with the scholars, so powerful that they convert upon hearing them, are described as follows:

Whan þai hadde her ressouns seyde,
 Euerichon more & lesse,
 Sche answerd hem at eueri point
 Wiþ ful michel mildenis,
 & seþþen seyde hir aviis
 Of God þat loued was & euer isse,
 Pat euer was & ay schal be;
 Þe godspelle sche tok to witnisse.
 She schewed hem wiþ holy writ
 Of Jhesus incarnacioun,
 Hou he was of a maiden born,
 & hou we suffred passioun,
 & hou he sent his apostles wide
 For our alder sauacioun.
 & all þe belieue of Cristen man
 Sche schewed hem wiþ gode resoun.⁶¹⁵

Katherine's intellect, the one thing that distinguishes her from Margaret and the Princess of Tars, is summed up in sixteen lines which do not report any of her arguments. The reader does not discover what was said and has to settle for a brief synopsis consisting of the commonplace facts of the Jesus's life. This pivotal scene thus lacks the theatrical discussion between the virgin and her challenger, which Mills considers to be the climactic scene of this tale.⁶¹⁶ That we do not hear the full extent of her powerful arguments, nor even her voice, belittles the impact of Katherine's intellect. She becomes a metaphorical parrot, repeating points that would have been well known to our reader. At the same time,

⁶¹⁴ Robertson, *Early English Devotional Prose*, p. 98.

⁶¹⁵ *Seynt Katerine*, MS Advocates 19.2.1, fol. 22rb, 1.91-101.

⁶¹⁶ Mills, 'Can the virgin', p. 192.

Chapter Four – Secularised Saints and Stripping Virgins

her voice is offered some positive aspects as she speaks with ‘gode resoun’ and has knowledge of ‘holy will’. Many positive aspects of her intellect are reflected, even if the argument is not specifically stated. Her role as a teacher is thus somewhat diluted, but not completely obliterated. More important than her voice is her passive Christian behaviour, displayed by her refusal to convert and acceptance of her martyrdom; that is the model of behaviour for the female audience.

Where Katherine normally takes an active role in teaching others, the Auchinleck redaction focuses more on her role as the passive catalyst of conversion. This is particularly evident during the scene where the Queen converts. The Queen and Porfir go to Kathrine’s cell where they see:

...þerin so michel liȝt,
 & God his angels þider sent,
 Þat sete about þat swete wiȝt
 & anoint hir wiþ oinement.
 Þai seiȝen angels anoin[t]en hir cors,
 Ich wen & ich a wounde,
 & þurth the miȝt of Jhesu Crist
 Þan þai were boȝe hole & sounde.⁶¹⁷

It is not Katherine’s reported intellect that converts the Queen and Porfir. She is not given the opportunity to converse, educate and persuade the two Saracens. Conversion is caused, not by the actions of Katherine, but by the sight of the angels gathered around healing her; she is upheld by the ‘might of Jesus Christ’. Thus, it is not the reported intellect of Katherine that starts the conversion of the Saracens, but the sight of her body which, as a holy virgin, is controlled by God. As is seen with the Princess of Tars, Katherine’s body becomes a physical catalyst of the religious change of a prominent political figure. Katherine passively accepts this role of catalyst; for example, she is told by an angel ‘for his [Jesus] loue þai schal marterd be.’⁶¹⁸ She does not actively seek martyrdom, but also does not argue with the angel about her fate. She obediently accepts the path she has been set upon by God. Despite her reported intellect, the Auchinleck Katherine has a less active role in her narrative than Margaret. Where Margaret’s control over her body created a working interplay between active religious voice and passive female body, the erasure of Katherine’s voice by the Auchinleck narrative reduces her to a passive object which is used by the patriarchal authority of God to bring about the conversion of Saracens. The reader is not to focus upon Katherine herself, but the actions of God and those around her.

⁶¹⁷ *Seynt Katerine*, MS Advocates 19.2.1, fol. 23ra, l. 155-157.

⁶¹⁸ *Seynt Katerine*, MS Advocates 19.2.1, fol. 22ra, l. 84.

Chapter Four – Secularised Saints and Stripping Virgins

The relationship between the Emperor and Queen additionally discusses the control of the female body by patriarchal structures as it presents a different version Katherine and God's arrangement. When the Queen does convert, she refuses to obey her husband any longer. She tells him 'Y forsake þe today.'⁶¹⁹ His reaction to this betrayal goes as follows:

'Y þe swere bi min godes
 & bi al þat y swere can,
 Bot þou raþer wende þi mode,
 To wicked ded þou schalt be don.
 Bot þou forsake Jhesu Crist,
 Þis schal be þi iugement:
 First þine pappes of þi brest
 Wiþ iren hokes schal be rent;
 Biheueded schaltow þan be,
 Þi bodi on þefeld ysent,
 Wiþ houndes & wiþ foules todrawe.
 & þis schal be mi comandment.'⁶²⁰

Although the Queen is transformed from an obedient wife to a disobedient one by her conversion, her disobedience is permissible. Sources previously discussed, such as Augustine, encourage Christian women to be disobedient when faced with the demands of a non-Christian husband. A disobedient Christian wife is common within the lives of female Saints and is universally forgiven. As Bernau states:

While in the lives of female saints, Christianity is shown to facilitate their change from obedient daughters and wives to outspoken heroines of the faith, this is understood to be justifiable within a very specific context, because their obedience is now owed to the supreme patriarch: God the father. In the case of rebellious wives the husbands in question are usually pagan and at times the implication is that women are therefore not required to be obedient to them.⁶²¹

Although the Queen appears to become the disobedient wife so discredited in the previous chapter, the religious difference between husband and wife creates a fourth model of wifely behaviour that is not fully explored by the texts of the previous chapter; the justifiably disobedient wife. The Queen's new role as a Christian woman pardons, and even encourages, this disobedience as necessary part of being a Christian. The queen is not acting against the model of good wifely behaviour; rather she is actively following in the path of the Princess of Tars in trying to convert her husband. Unfortunately, unlike in *The King of Tars*, the Queen is unable to become a catalyst for her husband's conversion.

⁶¹⁹ *Seynt Katerine*, MS Advocates 19.2.1, fol. 24ra, l. 257.

⁶²⁰ *Seynt Katerine*, MS Advocates 19.2.1, fol. 24rb, l. 261-267.

⁶²¹ Bernau, 'Gender and Sexuality', p. 110.

Chapter Four – Secularised Saints and Stripping Virgins

When she betrays the Emperor, his reaction is to try and convince her to change her mind by threatening the body, which he is used to controlling. By inflicting pain upon her body, he believes he can control her mind. Her Christian faith, however, gives her the strength to ignore his attempts at control in obedience to a higher cause. This is particularly evident when the Queen looks to Katherine, the source of her conversion, for strength as she is taken to her death:

Sche loked opon Katerine,
 & mildeliche sche hir bisouȝt
 Pat sche schuld hir erande bere
 To Jhesu Crist þat ous haȝ bouȝt.⁶²²

The sight of Katherine's face, and the words of her blessing, are enough to strengthen the Queen's resolve. As is shown in *Seynt Mergrete*, strength of faith gives women the opportunity to resist actively the Saracen patriarchy's attempt to control them.

The torture scenes within *Seynt Mergrete* allow Margaret to take control of the situation by inviting the pain of torture. Her ability to withstand fear and pain becomes the inspiration for the conversion of those around her. There is, however, a stark difference in the descriptions of the tortures of the Queen and Margaret undergo and the torture which Katherine suffers. Margaret, desired for her appearance, undergoes many tortures which mutilate her body, all of which are detailed in an eroticised manner. The Queen, as a wife, is assumed to be a sexually active woman, and undergoes an eroticised torture which focuses on her breasts. The detail of the mutilation of a part of the female body focussed with sexuality and maternity is repeated twice:

First þine pappes of þi brest
 Wiȝ iren hokes chal be rent;...
 ...Men drouȝ hir tates of hir brest
 & heueded hir as y ȝou told.⁶²³

These mutilations of a sexualised body part encourage the reader to think about the physical form of the woman. As mentioned above, Gravdal asserts that 'hagiography affords a sanctioned space in which eroticism can flourish and in which male voyeurism becomes licit, if not advocated.'⁶²⁴ Lewis, however, disagrees with this interpretation of the explicit details of female torture within female saints tales as eroticism, believing that to

⁶²² *Seynt Katerine*, MS Advocates 19.2.1, f. 24rb, l. 272-276.

⁶²³ *Seynt Katerine*, MS Advocates 19.2.1, fol. 24rb, l. 267-280.

⁶²⁴ Gravdal, *Ravishing Maidens*, p. 34. See also Gaunt, *Gender and Genre*, p. 196. Karen Winstead, *Virgin Martyrs: Legends of Sainthood in Late Medieval England* (London: Cornell University Press, 1997), p. 12.

Chapter Four – Secularised Saints and Stripping Virgins

conclude these scenes are reductive is itself reductive, as such a conclusion is dependent upon ‘the way the audience ‘must’ have read and understood’ the texts, and ignorant of the evidence that there was a large female audience for these texts.⁶²⁵ She also points out that *St Katherine*, one of the ‘least gory’ of the virgin tales, was the most popular martyr in England, whilst *St Agatha*, whose torture is more detailed, was one of the least. Lewis suggests that the lack of a correlation between gore and popularity means that ‘the medieval audience was not as interested in the graphic torture of young women’ as often hypothesised.⁶²⁶

I argue that the detailed nature of the torture scenes in *Seynt Katerine* occupies a middle ground between both stances. The scenes do not provide a licit voyeuristic spectacle that had a pornographic purpose, but they do remind the reader of the sexual potential of the female body and encourage a voyeuristic view of the body, not for pornographic titillation, but as a conduit for faith. In *Seynt Katerine* in particular, the difference between Katherine and the Queen’s tortures reveals the perceived sexuality of the two women. As Gaunt explains, ‘medieval narratives of virgin saints do not deny the female saint’s sexuality; on the contrary, they define her exclusively in relation to it.’⁶²⁷ Katherine’s torture lacks specific detail: ‘Þai made hir body blo & blac/Pat er was white so alpes bon.’⁶²⁸ Whilst the audience hears the specific orders of the Emperor through his related speech, the reader does not ‘witness’ the torture in detail; there are no specific body parts mentioned and Katherine is not stabbed with phallic weapons, which Gravdal reads as an implicitly pornographic image.⁶²⁹ In contrast, the sexual Queen suffers a torture which is far more explicit and voyeuristic in nature. The torture of the two women, and the voyeurism of the audience’s position, is thus linked to the women’s sexual status.

Where Margaret, who was desired for her body, seized control of her torture by claiming her suffering as a demonstration of her faith, Katherine, desired for her mind, does not have the same influence over the gaze of her audience. Instead, her virginity acts as a barrier between the body of the saint and the audience, preventing them from ‘viewing’ her body in a voyeuristic and licentious manner. This is not unlike the example discussed by *The Book of the Knight of the Tower*, where Landry tells of the sinful and devout sisters. When their lovers approached, the devout sister’s:

⁶²⁵ Lewis, ‘‘Lete me suffre’’, p. 71.

⁶²⁶ Lewis, ‘‘Lete me suffre’’ p. 71-72.

⁶²⁷ Gaunt, *Gender and Genre*, p. 186.

⁶²⁸ *Seynt Katerine*, MS Advocates 19.2.1, fol. 22vb, l. 142-143.

⁶²⁹ Gravdal, *Ravishing Maidens*, p. 24-25.

Chapter Four – Secularised Saints and Stripping Virgins

seemed he sawe moo than a thousand men in sudaryes lyke dede men/which
were about the damoyzell he hadde so grete fere and hydoure that he was
al affrayed/ Whereof he took the feures and was seke in his bed.⁶³⁰

One sister is protected by her faith, which creates a barrier to protect her body from men. The sinful sister, however, has no such protection, and thus falls pregnant and is executed for her licentiousness. In a similar way, the Auchinleck redaction protects the saint's body from the view of the reader by avoiding explicit details of her torture. As well as the vague descriptions of her bruised body, God sends angels to destroy the wheels of torture before they expose her body to the fictional audience:

Godes help þer com ful sone.
þe wheles for to brese & breke
Our louerd bad an angel gon.⁶³¹

The protection which hides the virgin's body from the gaze of the fictional audience and the reader contrasts greatly to the specifically ripped breasts of the Queen. What is often taken as a voyeuristic scene acts as a commentary upon the purity of the virgin's body as it removes the virgin from the male gaze. In turn, this action warns about the danger of the male gaze, something that is further explored in *The Clerk Who Would see the Virgin* below.

For our female audience then, Katherine presents a complex literary figure. Unlike the previous heroines the reader has encountered, Katherine is traditionally granted an educated intelligence. The Auchinleck redaction, nonetheless, does not encourage the reader to think of Katherine in this light. The use of indirect speech to summarise Katherine's arguments quickly draws focus away from her barely reported intelligence. The familiar nature of the words encourages the reader to move onto the core action of the narrative; the conversion of the Queen through the presence of angels. Even the suffering of the Queen is more detailed than the suffering of Katherine. The text thus encourages the reader to focus more on the transformation of the Queen than Katherine. Our heroine is represented passively, despite her seemingly active role in the plot.

This representation of passivity, then, becomes a model of behaviour for the female reader in line with those that we have previously seen. Even more so than seen above in *Seynt Mergrete*, this version of the saint's life does not advocate the holy life to female readers. Katherine goes from her father's home to the Emperor's palace, where she speaks out against heresy. She is imprisoned for this action and told she shall become a martyr,

⁶³⁰ Caxton, *The Book*, p. 15.

⁶³¹ *Seynt Katerine*, MS Advocates 19.2.1, fol. 24ra, 1.244-246.

Chapter Four – Secularised Saints and Stripping Virgins

which she obediently accepts. Katherine depicts the obedient Christian woman who speaks out against sin and obeys her ultimate patriarch, God. The reduction of her arguments to a short passage, using lines so familiar to the medieval reader that they would encourage line-skip, illustrates that the purpose of *Seynt Katerine* is not to educate women in holy matters. Rather, the purpose is to demonstrate the power of belief and the importance of obedience. As our female audiences were unlikely to find themselves in a situation where she would be faced with martyrdom, the lesson to be taken from Katherine is to be found in her behaviour; her extant and praised chastity, her rejection of worldly wealth, and her accepting obedience of patriarchal decisions.

The Clerk Who Would See the Virgin

The Clerk Who Would See the Virgin is a short text that appears directly after *Seynt Katerine*. It is the first of two texts in the manuscript that include the Virgin Mary as a character, and has been frequently dismissed as a filler text due to its short length. As it stands, it is impossible to know for certain that any text in the manuscript was an unplanned filler text inserted to take up space. The only evidence that *The Clerk Who Would See the Virgin* was inserted without adherence to a scribal or commissioner's plan is that it is short and is the final extant text in booklet one. This position has led to claims that the text was only inserted to fill empty pages at the end of a booklet. Such a claim ignores the text's engagement with the themes we have previously seen, and is further problematised by the presence of two additional short texts at the beginning of booklet three: *The Seven Deadly Sins* and *The Paternoster*.

The beginning of the text is missing, and further damage has occurred to the inner edge of the first page. This has made the first few words of lines one to forty-five difficult to decipher. Once past this damage, the remaining one hundred and fifty-six lines are undamaged and clearly legible. Despite being fairly intact, to the best of my knowledge, there has been no critical work done on the text of *The Clerk Who Would See the Virgin*; scholars have focused on the filler debate rather than examining the contents of the poem. Critics have noticed, however, that there was a growth in interest in Mary that might account for the presence of this text in the manuscript. Caroline Walker Bynum, for example, has commented upon the general growth of interest in the Virgin Mary in England from the twelfth century onwards, and also 'traces the use of maternal imagery' in

Chapter Four – Secularised Saints and Stripping Virgins

spiritual works from this period onwards.⁶³² Additionally, Riddy has observed that illustrated miracles of the Virgin in English make up a significant section of the Vernon manuscript, which, as discussed in chapter one, has been convincingly argued to have been written at the very end of the fourteenth century for ‘a community of nuns or a household of devout gentlewomen.’⁶³³ Thus, there is evidence that the subject matter of this text was popular with female readers.⁶³⁴

The Virgin Mary presents a model of behaviour to the female reader that is idealised as perfect, yet impossible to imitate; she brings a son into the world whilst maintaining her virgin status. This unique sexual status, non-existent in any other female character of the Auchinleck manuscript, is explicitly valued by the text. When pleading for Mary’s second visit, the Clerk states:

A, leuedi, for þi maidenhed
Forziue me mi sinnes vile,
& help me in þis muchel nede.⁶³⁵

Further down, he adds: ‘Graunt me þat y þe craue,/For his loue þat of þe was born.’⁶³⁶ The Clerk refers to both her intact virginity and her role as mother of (and thus intercessor with) her son. He completely defers to her wisdom and power in a way that no man in the text has before. Although the education and wisdom of Blanche flour, the Princess of Tars and Katherine is recognised by their texts, the men they interact with question them. This is not the case for Mary. Her sexual status as a virgin enables her to speak as Katherine did, but the respect she is afforded by the Clerk comes from the power bestowed upon her as a mother. The text thus emphasises Mary’s paradoxical dual roles as mother and virgin, and it is from her embodiment of both these roles that her respected agency and power is derived. She stands as in contrast to the Princess of Tars, whose agency and power is lost when she becomes a wife (and subsequently a mother) due to her lack of virginity and her required submission to her husband. Mary, embodying both the state of virgin and mother, is able to demonstrate autonomy without the need for a controlling male figurehead.

Although Mary is implicitly faithful to God, her actions are not mediated by his will as is seen with the Princess of Tars and Katherine. Mary is the only female figure

⁶³² Fellows, ‘Mothers’, p. 42.

⁶³³ Felicity Riddy, ‘“Women Talking About Things of God”: A Late Medieval Subculture’, in *Women and Literature in Britain, 1150-1500*, ed. by Carol M. Meale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp.104-129, p. 107.

⁶³⁴ A synopsis of the text can be found in appendix eleven.

⁶³⁵ *The Clerk Who Would See the Virgin*, Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, MS Advocates 19.2.1, fol. 38rb, l. 110-112.

⁶³⁶ *The Clerk Who Would See the Virgin*, MS Advocates 19.2.1, fol. 38rb, l. 115-116.

Chapter Four – Secularised Saints and Stripping Virgins

within the manuscript who is able to make correct decisions without influence from any male authority:

[Tidan]des now y þe bring
 [Fram M]arie, our heuen-quen;
 [I þe] telle certain tiding:
 [If þou] wilt hir bodi sen,
 [If sen] þou wilt þat leuedi briȝt,
 [Þis p]enaunce þou most chesen:
 [Þou m]iȝt be siker, þine eiȝesiȝt
 [Oþer þ]i liif þou schalt forlesen.⁶³⁷

Mary choses to allow herself to be seen by the Clerk; her opinion of his worth, and the subsequent decision to demand penance for his desires, is not guided by any male authority. Her ability to order men to do penance is also unique and contrasts with the passive Christianity of the other Auchinleck women, such as the sister in *The Legend of Pope Gregory* who could not even formulate her own penance. Mary and the sister thus are at two different ends of a spectrum: at one end, the sinful sister who cannot undertake active penance because of her need for a male authority figure to command it, and Mary at the other, who is able to command penance from men because she is free from the need to submit to any male authority except God.

The paradoxical nature of Mary's existence is also represented through her body, which is both beautiful and dangerous to see. In the Clerk's tale, there is a suggestion that the sight of the virgin's body does sexualise Mary. When Mary reveals her naked body to the Clerk, she states:

Apertliche þou me beheld,
 Bodi & face, brest & swire.⁶³⁸
 Swire & al hir bodi he seiȝe,⁶³⁸

The description of Mary's naked body is directed to her breast and the neck, parts of the female body which romance descriptions of beautiful women commonly focus on. The image of the naked Virgin makes her potential sexuality explicit. It remains, however, an illicit spectacle. The blinding of the Clerk echoes the life of Saint Agnes, whose naked body is hidden from the view of men by a bright light that blinds all who look upon her. Horner considers that, in this moment, 'Agnes' body is simultaneously sexualised and desexualised, at once the public spectacle of the male gaze and the spiritual mystery that is

⁶³⁷ *The Clerk Who Would See the Virgin*, MS Advocates 19.2.1, fol. 37vb, l. 13-20.

⁶³⁸ *The Clerk Who Would See the Virgin*, MS Advocates 19.2.1, fol. 38ra, l. 75-77.

Chapter Four – Secularised Saints and Stripping Virgins

hidden from view.’⁶³⁹ The blinding of the Clerk echoes this simultaneous sexualisation and desexualisation; the clerk must be punished for his desire to see the sexuality of Mary, rather than her desexualised mystery. Thus, Mary’s body, which the reader voyeuristically views through the eyes of the Clerk, epitomises the doubleness of her existence. Her naked sexuality is a dominant image, but the reading of her flesh is considered illicit and inappropriate. The penance demands that those who see her be punished, as her flesh should remain hidden in order to maintain the sacredness of her virgin state. In the same way that Horner considers Ælfric’s Saint Agnes as demonstrating ‘the need to conceal the saint’s naked body from a pagan gaze, by clothing it with spiritual adornment,’ we can understand Mary’s blinding light as the need to conceal the sexual potential of her body in deference to spirituality; even the Virgin’s body is threatening to spirituality because of its ability to awaken sexual desire in men.

Mary’s unique position as an active reformer of men mitigates any concern over the potential sexuality of her naked body and the temptation it poses for men. The devotion which the Clerk shows Mary echoes some of the lines in *Seynt Mergrete*:

Wroþ sche is, & wele sche may,
 Wip me, þat am sinful chaitif,
 Pat y schuld hir so bitraye,
 Pat ichaue loued in al mi liif.⁶⁴⁰

These lines reverse the devotions seen in both *Seynt Mergrete* and *Saint Katerine*; it is the man who adores the woman rather than the woman who views herself as belonging (in the context of a loving relationship) to the man. This devotion highlights the potential threat of female sexuality to men. Due to her perfect sexual status, Mary is able to inspire a level of devotion and subservience in men that is extreme and dangerous to them. However pure Mary is, her body tempts the Clerk. Like many male characters, he sins through exposure to the female form. Unlike the other women in the manuscript who are sexually desired, Mary’s uniquely perfect nature allows her to reform his actions and actively intervene in the arousal that her body is causing. Rather than becoming trapped within the confines of the sexualised male gaze, she controls the situation, transforming physical desire for her body to spiritual desire for her blessing.

⁶³⁹ Shari Horner, ‘The Violence of Exegesis: Reading the Bodies of Ælfric’s Female Saints’, in *Violence Against Women in Medieval Texts*, ed. by Anna Roberts (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1998) pp. 22-44, p. 36.

⁶⁴⁰ *The Clerk Who Would See the Virgin*, MS Advocates 19.2.1, fol. 38rb, l. 101-104.

Chapter Four – Secularised Saints and Stripping Virgins

Mary's special status as sexual mother and innocent virgin allows her to control even her male admirers, and gives her the ability to correct his misguided desire for her body into a desire for mercy and grace. She becomes a woman with the power to educate men. As a role model for our hypothetical reader, she provides an exemplary model which meets the sexual desires of men, and the sins they commit when confronted with female sexualisation, with understanding and forgiveness. She demonstrates the potential of the female body to be sexualised, and how the woman must act to protect herself from the desiring threat of the male gaze. She also demonstrates how a woman can use grace and mercy, two personality traits demonstrated by our previous passive religious women, in order to affect a change for the better in men's behaviour. The text serves as a warning to women about the licentious nature of men's gaze, but also provides an answer to the problem by demonstrating grace and mercy; the traits of the passive religious woman. Although short, the text is linked with the themes present within other texts of the Auchinleck manuscript.

The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin

The Virgin Mary is also the main character of *The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin*, which takes a similar interest in the body of Mary as *The Clerk Who Would See the Virgin*. It is the second text in the third booklet of the manuscript and tells the apocryphal story of the death of Mary. There are some missing lines due to damage on the first page, but otherwise the text is in good condition. As far as I am aware it has received little critical attention; its short length and religious nature has left it overlooked.⁶⁴¹

As is seen in *The Clerk Who Would See the Virgin*, Mary's dual role as both virgin and mother is of significant importance throughout the story of her assumption. There are frequent references to both of these roles, as well as an extended passage:

Pat oure leuedi was clene of lif,
 Clene maiden and clene wif,
 Bitokeneȝ verraiment.
 And clene virgine ȝhe was also,
 Pat is heiere þan þe two:
 Wif oþer maidenhede.
 For woman mai lese virginite
 Wiȝ wille and þout, so mot ic þe,
 Wiȝouten flesschlich dede.

⁶⁴¹ A full synopsis of the text can be found in appendix twelve.

Chapter Four – Secularised Saints and Stripping Virgins

But maidenhood mai non bi lorn
 Of no womman þat is iborn,
 Wiȝouten mannes mone,
 Ne no maiden wiȝ childe gon,
 Ne neuer ȝite ne dede non,
 Saue oure leuedi al one.⁶⁴²

The word choice throughout this passage echoes the diction that has surrounded all the virgins seen in Auchinleck. Of particular importance is the emphasis on the word ‘clene’, which is repeated four times throughout this passage and is frequently used to describe Mary throughout the text. This emphasises the association between sexual activity and bodily pollution. Mary’s cleanliness is more than that of the other virgins. Additionally, her unique state of virginal mother is recognised by the text, which states that no other woman can hope to attain the same status. The text states that the apostles thank God for his decision ‘To crownen a womman of oure kinde/Qwene in heuen.’⁶⁴³ The text thus appears to recognise that Mary poses an unattainable sexual role model whilst also being a human of ‘our kind’; someone who was once a woman like our hypothetical female audience members.

Although Mary’s sexual status is impossible for our female reader to achieve, she does illustrate models of behaviour throughout the story of her death through her passive and obliging behaviour. For example, her friends and family state:

Iblessed be þou, swete leuedi,
 To vs þou hauest be ful redi
 To seruen vs day and niȝt.⁶⁴⁴

Prior to this, Mary begs their forgiveness for having called them together in the first place. Mary is described as serving others, and is extremely apologetic upon gathering people to her. Her characterisation is mild mannered, passive, and obedient. She places herself underneath those around her.

Additionally, Mary is equally subservient to God:

Oure swete leuedi milde and fre –
 Ihered and heghed mote ȝhe be –
 ȝhe makeȝ oure blisses newe;
 ȝhe tok þe palm þat God here sente,
 And into here chaumbre anon ȝhe wente

⁶⁴² *The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin*, Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, MS Advocates 19.2.1, fol. 73rb, l. 46-60.

⁶⁴³ *The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin*, MS Advocates 19.2.1, fol. 78ra, l.730-731.

⁶⁴⁴ *The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin*, MS Advocates 19.2.1, fol. 73vb, l.118-120.

Chapter Four – Secularised Saints and Stripping Virgins

And dede on clopes newe.
 Our swete leuedi, maiden briȝt,
 Knelede adoun anonriȝt
 And seide here bileue,
 And bad a bone to God in heuene,
 For his dereworhte names seune
 Pat no fend sscholde hire greue.⁶⁴⁵

At the beginning of the text we find Mary on her knees, praying. Though this is by no means an uncommon position for prayers in late Medieval England, the description of her kneeling is unusual. In the previous Auchinleck texts, when women have gone to pray, they are described actively as ‘praying’. The specification of Mary’s position emphasises her subservient nature and her relationship with God. Again, this makes her better than the virgins before her; they prayed, but she prays more submissively. She visually demonstrates her deference to her male authority; God.

The concern for the safety of the female body outside of the home that has been touched upon by previous texts is fully explored in *The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin*. Mary demonstrates an awareness that her body, upon leaving the safety of her home in a funeral procession, is a target for ill will:

And ich biseche ȝhou for his loue,
 Mi sone þat sit vs alle aboue
 Pat hider ȝou had isent,
 Ne leteȝ no Iwes ful of enuye
 Do mi bodi no vilainye,
 Whan þe soule is went.⁶⁴⁶

Mary asks the men gathered around to protect her body from unholy men, even when she has died. Though the actions of the Jews later reveal that she is a hated figure and thus target for them, Mary’s concern with her body elaborates on implied lessons found earlier in the manuscript. She understands, where the Princess in *Sir Degaré* did not, that leaving her home places her body at risk from men. Her concern also recalls the biblical story of Jacob’s daughter who, as Landry states in *The Book of the Knight of the Tower*:

Lefte the hous of her fader and of her bretheren for to goo and see the atoure
 or aray of the wimmen of another lande/ Wherfor hit happed that Sychem the
 sone of amor which was a grete lord in that londe sawe her so faire that he
 coueyted her/ and prayd her of loue// in so moche he took fro her
 her maydenhode.⁶⁴⁷

⁶⁴⁵ *The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin*, MS Advocates 19.2.1, fol. 73va, l.79-84.

⁶⁴⁶ *The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin*, MS Advocates 19.2.1, fol. 74vb, l. 21-246.

⁶⁴⁷ Caxton, *The Book*, p. 82.

Chapter Four – Secularised Saints and Stripping Virgins

The Mary in *The Clerk Who Would See the Virgin* evidently understood the dangers of the male gaze upon the female body. This Mary also understands the dangers of entering public spaces outside her home that texts such as *The Book of the Knight of the Tower* discuss. Her concern implicitly praises her desire to stay at home, promoting the idea that young women must also do the same, a moral message that Ashley observes in her discussion of the influence of conduct books on the religious cycle drama. She notes that, where the Mary of the cycle drama once lamented over her son's capture, the necessity for women to stay home found in conduct books changes her emotional reaction into a message about the safety of the female form.⁶⁴⁸ The same message is reinforced by *The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin* by Mary's decision to employ trusted male protectors to protect her when she must leave the home, despite the fact she will be dead. Even in death, she provides a model of good behaviour for our female reader by warning against entering the public sphere without appropriate (male) protection.

In addition to Mary's literal fear over the risk to her body within public spaces, we can also view her fear as a product of the symbolic nature of the female virgin's body as a whole. Wogan-Browne remarks that

Just as the power and integrity of secular kings is mapped onto the body of the queen, so the boundaries of Christian polity are policed on the bodies of virgins: represented bodily integrity serves an exclusionary definition of Christian community asserted against the 'pagan'.⁶⁴⁹

In her reading of the bodies of the virgin saints of the Katherine Group, Wogan-Browne sees their bodies as 'unsacked citadels' that mark the territories of Christian faith. Though they are externally damaged, the pagan's failure to breach the defences of virginity becomes a symbolic image of the strength of Christianity. As the epitome of virginity and chastity, then, the body of the Virgin Mary is symbolically the ultimate stronghold of the Christian faith. Mary's call to the apostles to defend her body from the Jews is not just a literal defence of her body against the public realm, it is a symbolic defence of Christianity against the monstrous pagan. She 'understands a wider range of meanings than the tyrant.'⁶⁵⁰ Mary calls upon the men around her to become active defenders of the faith as she will no longer be able to achieve this herself.

⁶⁴⁸ Ashley, 'Medieval Courtesy Literature', p. 35-36.

⁶⁴⁹ Wogan-Browne, 'The Virgin's Tale', p. 177.

⁶⁵⁰ Wogan-Browne, 'The Virgin's Tale', p. 179.

Chapter Four – Secularised Saints and Stripping Virgins

The final model of behaviour for the female reader in *The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin* is one that is not touched upon by previous texts; how to die. In her behaviour, and her counsel to the apostles, she demonstrates sorrow which is restrained and controlled:

Panne saide oure swete leuedi
 To alle þo þat stolen hire bi,
 Pat wopen and wrongen
 ‘Ne wepe3 nowt. Holde 3ou stille.
 Ich mot do mi sones wille.
 I ne mai hit nowt wizstonde.’
 Hire herte armede oure leuedi bri3t
 And gan to wepe anonri3t
 For pite þat 3he segh3.⁶⁵¹

Mary tells her sad household not to cry, for she will willingly do her son’s bidding. She is not unemotional about her imminent departure; as is to be expected she is tearful and sad to be leaving her friends. At the same time, however, she does not question her fate or beg Jesus to change his mind. She, as a faithful women and mirroring Margaret and Katherine, is completely accepting of her fate. Surrounded by friends rather than enemies, her sorrow is understandable and, when placed alongside images of her beauty and grace like ‘lady bright’, it gives a melancholy prettiness to this particular narrative. Mary’s behaviour is in direct contrast to the depression experienced by the sister in *The Legend of Pope Gregory*. Her sadness is never paired with images of her beauty, and she is warned continually by the narrator and the Knight against falling into ‘wanhope’. The sister’s despair is far more intense, and it leads her to question God. Mary here, however, demonstrates a restrained level of sadness that is acceptable conduct. She, unlike the sister, demonstrates how a Christian woman should approach grief.

Whilst Mary demonstrates submission to her fate, she does discuss her fear of death, revealing a weakness that helps to humanise her characterisation:

Panne seide oure leuedi Marie
 ‘Leue sone, let me nowt die,
 Ich beseche þe.
 Leue sone, for mi loue
 Let mi de3 be for3oue.
 3if hit mai so be.’
 ‘Leue moder’ quad swete Ihesus,
 ‘For sothe, hit mot nede be þous,
 Þi de3 maist þou nowt fle,

⁶⁵¹ *The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin*, MS Advocates 19.2.1, fol. 73vb, l. 127-135.

Chapter Four – Secularised Saints and Stripping Virgins

For al þat liueþ, all sschal die,
 Oþer ells, moder, ich moste lie,
 And þat ne mai nowt be.
 ‘Sone’ quad oure leuedi þo,
 ‘Ase þou wult, iche wille also;’⁶⁵²

The text discusses Mary’s fear of death alongside the earlier reminder that Jesus was also afraid: ‘Of deþ þhe moste ben adrad;/God þat on þe rode was sprad.’⁶⁵³ It thus normalises fear of death rather than condemning it. As such, it addresses the experience of death in a more realistic light than is seen in *Seynt Mergrete* and *Seynt Katerine*. It is unlikely that our potential reader/s would experience a martyr’s death by execution. The model of death written here, occurring from old age, is more likely to be experienced by our reader/s, either in her own death or in witnessing the deaths of her own family members. There are also aspects of this model which could be applied to death from childbirth or disease. When Jesus reveals that it must be, Mary submits to his desires and once again expresses her continued submission to God’s will. Bahr observes that ‘Mary’s prayer [to be spared from death above] is unique to Auchinleck’s version of the poem.’⁶⁵⁴ By expressing fear, Mary provides a surprisingly realistic model of conduct in dying for the reader, one that takes comfort from faith and approaches death in a passive, accepting, but not emotionless or fearless, manner. Unlike the martyred saints whose tortured deaths are not realistic to the lives of the average female women of fourteenth-century England, Mary dies (presumably) of old age. Thus, when she manages through faith to conquer the sadness and fear that threaten her, she provides an example that the reader herself can follow. The need to provide guidance in the correct way to die is also expressed in the treatise *The Book of the Craft of Dying*, ‘a practical guide on how to assist someone on their death-bed’ which ‘contains general advice on the spiritual dangers of the last hours of life.’⁶⁵⁵ The existence of such a treatise reveals that there was a societal concern with the correct way to die, which emphasises Mary’s role in her assumption as exemplary for the audience.

For all that *The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin* is surprisingly real in its handling of the emotions surrounding death, it still contains the religious miracles expected of hagiographical and religious texts of this time. Of particular interest is the gift that is bestowed upon Thomas as proof of Mary’s resurrection:

Oure leuedi – blessed mote þhe be.

⁶⁵² *The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin*, MS Advocates 19.2.1, fol. 75rb, l. 331-344.

⁶⁵³ *The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin*, MS Advocates 19.2.1, fol. 74vb, l. 259-260.

⁶⁵⁴ Bahr, *Fragments and Assemblages*, p. 121-122.

⁶⁵⁵ Taylor, ‘Into his Secret Chamber’, p.57.

Chapter Four – Secularised Saints and Stripping Virgins

Of Thomas hade gret pite,
 In kare þat was ibounde;
 Þe gerdel of hire middle small,
 Nowt a gobet þerof but all,
 3he let falle to grounde.⁶⁵⁶

Mary provides her girdle so that Thomas can convince the others of what he saw. The choice of the girdle is pragmatic; as a commonly worn adornment by late medieval women the audience will know what it is and would have accepted readily that Mary would wear one. It is also, however, an object that has additional connotations due to its use in romance narratives, for example, the girdle is an important symbol in the late fourteenth-century *Gawain and the Green Knight*.⁶⁵⁷ The use of the girdle as a magical talisman which protects the wearer/owner is common is also found in the 1380 romance *Firumbras* and the late fourteenth century *Sultan of Babylon*. Although all these romances are dated after the composition of the Auchinleck's *Assumption of the Blessed Virgin*, they illustrate that the symbolic value of the girdle as a protective item was commonly found only forty years after the compilation of Auchinleck. Thus, it is feasible that such a common image would have been known to the composer of the Auchinleck redaction. Thus, when Mary gives over her girdle to Thomas, it carries connotations of protection. The timing of this gift is important. It is not given to Thomas as a memorial gift upon the passing of Mary's soul. It is only given once her physical body has been resurrected. The need for the female body to be protected is thus emphasised through this gift. Only once her body has safely risen and can no longer be damaged by others is Mary able to bestow the girdle upon Thomas. She no longer requires its protection, and thus bestows the gift upon him in order for it to protect the faith; it is the girdle that convinces the other apostles to believe Thomas's report of the resurrection of Mary.

The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin builds upon the various threads explored in other texts. It characterises Mary as a role model for women, and demonstrates both an awareness of her unique sexual status and her existence as a normal human woman. In her humility and subservience, both to God and to the men around her, she demonstrates an acceptable conduct for women. In particular, her awareness of the danger of public spaces to her body repeats a key theme seen throughout the manuscript. Her acceptance of death, despite the fear and sadness she feels, is in contrast to the behaviour of previous women within the manuscript. Where, at the beginning of the first booklet, we have an example of

⁶⁵⁶ *The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin*, MS Advocates 19.2.1, fol. 77rb, l. 595-600.

⁶⁵⁷ Ross G. Arthur, *Medieval Sign Theory and Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (University of Toronto Press: Toronto, 1987) p. 107.

Chapter Four – Secularised Saints and Stripping Virgins

how not to conduct oneself when engaging with the concept of death, Mary provides an example of how to deal with fear and sadness in a faithful, obedient manner. She provides a model of female conduct that is both attainable and obedient. Finally, the text then, through use of a girdle, reminds the reader of Mary's position as an intercessor with her son, and thus a protector against sin and the devil. When read in context with the other texts of the manuscript, *The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin* transforms from a simple apocryphal tale that is underdeveloped in style to one which provides another viewpoint on death and the female body. Context and association with other texts strengthens subtle themes in *The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin*, and turns this short text into a powerful demonstration of correct conduct for the female reader.

Conclusion

The female virgin saints' tale is one of few genres we know were certainly read by female readers alongside male readers.⁶⁵⁸ This popularity would have been known to the compiler of the Auchinleck manuscript, and the inclusion of these texts indicates consideration of female interests. As women were known to have been avid consumers of female saints' lives, these texts would have been particularly appropriate for female audiences.

It is easy, however, to fall into the trap of reading these texts as wholly empowering to women and as works that refute misogyny. cursory readings of these texts, especially out of manuscript context, can allow for readings of the saints as tackling the patriarchy head on; we see women arguing with patriarchs, asserting their rights, and controlling their own destiny. A close reading of the Auchinleck versions in context reveals the interest in female behaviour demonstrated by the entire manuscript and further illustrates that these texts are less empowering and more regulatory than other redactions. Small changes in each redaction allow for more nuanced readings of these common devotional texts, and reading with an awareness of Auchinleck's continued interest in the regulation of female behaviour alters our interpretations.

Seynt Mergrete is a text which comments upon many of the themes elucidated in previous chapters. It presents the reader with a heroine with a double role. Margaret fights against the ownership of her body by one man and passively gives herself to another. She is both victim of murder and willing martyr. In addition to this, the text builds upon motifs of rejecting wealth and empowerment through faith. Her clean body praises chastity, but at

⁶⁵⁸ Lewis, *The Cult*, p. 229

Chapter Four – Secularised Saints and Stripping Virgins

the same time does not censure the woman who becomes a wife or claim religious orders as better than marriage. Rather, through specific edits to this redaction, the text actually speaks to wives by adding details about Margaret's mother that build upon Margaret's role as patron saint of childbirth established from her interaction with the dragon.

The Auchinleck's redaction of *Seynt Katerine* also reiterates many of the above topics. She refuses wealth and represents praised virginity. Silenced frequently by the narrator, she does not express her individual intellect; instead she allows her body to be used as a conduit through which miracles are performed. With the introduction of voyeuristic torture scenes, the text introduces explicit concerns about the dangers of the voyeuristic male gaze.

The Virgin Mary continues this commentary on the male gaze within *The Clerk Who Would See the Virgin*. Here she uses her body to teach the reader about the risk female bodies pose to men, who will be lured into lustful desire to see them. She also shows how these men can be reformed through Christian virtues, advocating women to both protect their bodies from men, and to react to violations of the body with grace and mercy, thereby exemplifying the traits of the passive Christian woman.

Finally, the story of Mary's death in *The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin* continues the manuscript's concern with the risk posed to the female body from the public domain. Mary's allocation of male protectors for when she travels in public emphasises her need for protection. In addition, the text addresses a theme encountered at the beginning of this thesis, providing a contrast to the despairing behaviour of the sister in *The Legend of Pope Gregory* and demonstrating how death should be dealt with in the passive and accepting manner that has been praised throughout the manuscript.

What is different about these four texts in comparison with those encountered in the previous chapters is that the depictions of Margaret, Katherine and Mary are wholly positive. Until this point, there has been a lack of positive female role models in the Auchinleck texts. Both the maidens and wives presented in the manuscript have been represented almost universally negatively. The inclusion of devotional literature not only provides, as Wogan-Browne states about devotional literature in general, 'a particularly relevant model for female audiences,' but one that provides models of behaviour that can be considered exemplary for the female reader.⁶⁵⁹ These texts provide the female audience with role models who maintain the balance between the power that faith can provide women and the socially expected subservience to patriarchal authorities. In particular, if

⁶⁵⁹ Wogan-Browne, *Saints' Lives and Women's*, p. 314.

Chapter Four – Secularised Saints and Stripping Virgins

read silently by a singular female reader, Taylor considers medieval meditative devotional reading to ‘cultivate the habit of extensive fantasizing on short passages, and [to] encourage readers to visualize the events in vivid and intimate terms even to the extent of inserting themselves into the picture.’⁶⁶⁰ With wholly positive role models to fantasise about, and even insert themselves alongside, these religious texts comment upon, repeat and even contrast with the behavioural models of previous texts in order to reinforce positive models of behaviour and to counter the incorrect conduct found in the other texts of the Auchinleck manuscript.

⁶⁶⁰ Taylor, ‘Into His Secret Chamber’, p.44.

Conclusion

The close examination of the texts of booklets one and three above has revealed a consistent interest in the behaviour of women throughout the narrative texts of the Auchinleck manuscript. I have shown how these texts address the concerns of women in all stages of adult life: pre-marriage with awakening sexuality, approaching marriage and the experience of potentially disruptive independent desire, and post-marriage with new responsibilities in personal submission to both husband and God, the need to educate and raise children well, and to contend with the process of dying.

Booklets one and three include some texts which have not been discussed in detail in this thesis. These are largely didactic texts, that lack female characters but convey a clear educational message that could appeal equally to male and female readers. The didactic texts found in booklets one and three of the Auchinleck manuscript include *St Patrick's Purgatory*, which, through the journey of Saint Patrick provides a detailed portrait of hell, and *Pe Desputisoun Bitven þe Bodi and þe Soule*, which discusses the importance of the spiritual soul over the physical body. Although this text is not specifically gendered, given its focus on the body, an attribute associated specifically with the female, it could have more importance to women readers. Booklet one also contains *The Harrowing of Hell*, a short discussion of how Christ will carry souls out of hell into the bliss of heaven, providing religious education without any gendered implications. Booklet three begins with two didactic texts: *On the Seven Deadly Sins* and *The Paternoster*, both of which teach basics of the Catholic faith.

The presence of these didactic texts, despite the lack of female specific characters on them, serves to provide further evidence that the Auchinleck was compiled with a female reader in mind. The presence of these texts is particularly relevant to a female reader of Auchinleck when considered in light of Meale's statement mentioned in the introduction:

religion was by far the dominant reading interest of medieval women; they owned a variety of texts in addition to their service books, ranging from the lives of the saints, to didactic works such as *The Prick of Conscience* and *Pore Caitif*, to various of the treatises of the fourteenth-century mystics, Walter Hilton and Richard Rolle.⁶⁶¹

Although the fact that women read religious texts does not guarantee a female audience for this particular book, the inclusion of didactic texts does strengthen the educational value of the Auchinleck manuscript. The fact that these texts are written in Middle English,

⁶⁶¹ Meale, "'...alle the bokes', p. 137.

Conclusion

something emphasised by the title of *The Paternoster*, points towards a lay, and potentially a female audience. As discussed in detail in the introduction, there was a demand for texts that would both entertain and educate women, as is seen in texts like the 1372 *Le Livre du Chevalier de la Tour Landry*.⁶⁶² Thus, the presence of short didactic texts within booklets one and two is unsurprising as such text would serve the female reader particularly well.

As well as being educational for the female audience, texts like *The Paternoster* would have been valuable in aiding the development of the female reader's potential role as mother. Turville-Petre observes that this particular text would have been useful in teaching the child religious observance.⁶⁶³ *On the Seven Deadly Sins* immediately follows *The Paternoster*, and Bahr remarks that the two texts portray a model and an antimodel of specifically religious conduct.⁶⁶⁴ The idea that both these texts had an educational function within the manuscript reinforces the suitability of this manuscript as a book aimed at women. The same function can be seen in the short text *The Saying of the Four Philosophers*, which again provides simple didactic advice on the sins which damage the structure of society, and encourages that these sayings be spread throughout the populace to help defend England.

Alongside the didactic texts, there is one further text which this thesis has not discussed. The last text in booklet three is the odd, and still mystifying, *Battle Abbey Roll*, also known as the *List of the Names of the Norman Barons*. I, like the critics before me, can offer no real explanation for the presence of what seems to be an anomalous text. Perhaps it serves to teach and speak about the specific history of the manuscript readers, or more broadly provides some sort of history lesson as to the development of English nobility (and in that sense, perhaps a sort of medieval 'most eligible' list). Its purpose is, however, very elusive and it remains the most mysterious of all of Auchinleck's texts.

The discussion of the didactic texts of Auchinleck has lead Emily Runde to make observations about *On the Seven Deadly Sins* where she proposes that the text not only provides religious instruction, but also discusses the particular kind of reading practise that such didactic texts evoke. She states that the:

Seuen Dedly Sinnes comprises a collection of lists, prayers, and meditations that point to its probable use for lay religious instruction and also necessitate different kinds of reading. The poem's textual framework takes up the mantle of a clerical instructor, sustained throughout the poem, expounding basic elements of the faith as well as the reasons and ways

⁶⁶² Meale, 'Introduction', p. 2.

⁶⁶³ Turville-Petre, *England the Nation*, p. 135-136.

⁶⁶⁴ Bahr, *Fragments and Assemblages*, p. 119.

Conclusion

laypeople ought to learn them. The prefatory overview of its first section imagines a nearly universal audience for its penitentially needful contents – lists of the Seven Deadly Sins and Ten Commandments – asserting that ‘children and wimmen and men/Of twelue winter elde and more, /.../ Euerichone þai sscholden knowe’ (lines 12-13,15). At the same time, these lines suggest that the lists’ contents may already be widely known, and, in so doing, they can the preface’s stated project into question. Though some readers may have learned the sins and commandments by reading this poem, its textual frame also offers guidance in reading itself. In addition to directing readers in what to read, *Seuen Dedly Sinnes* teaches an audience to read strategically and self-consciously.⁶⁶⁵

Runde recognises that these two didactic texts discuss widely known concepts that the reader was likely to have encountered prior to engagement with Auchinleck. She proposes that these texts teach Auchinleck’s readers to read carefully and critically, and with their selves in mind. If the Auchinleck was read by an individual, Saenger considers that the private reading that developed in late medieval England encouraged an emboldened reader ‘because it placed the source of his curiosity completely under personal control,’ and cites examples of a concern about a link between individual reading and heresy.⁶⁶⁶ It is evident that the potential female readers of the text would have been able to read critically, particularly if reading the text in private. The evidence points towards a lay reader of Auchinleck who does not take texts at their face value, but rather interprets the text. What Runde observes thus suggests that the sort of careful reading which illuminates the women’s issues of each narrative text might have been performed by fourteenth century English lay readers. If, as Runde is suggesting, the audience for the Auchinleck manuscript was one which could read critically, drawing out meaning from these narratives and interpreting events and morality as applicable to their own lives, it is possible to see that the female lay reader could appreciate and learn from the models of behaviour presented by the Auchinleck’s interconnecting narratives.

This thesis has provided detailed close readings of two booklets of the Auchinleck manuscript in order to demonstrate a consistent interest in female conduct throughout these separate sections. These sections of manuscript provide models of both good and bad women, in all stages of life, in order to educate the female reader. It is probable that this targeted focus continues across the manuscript. The codicological evidence that the manuscript was carefully produced and compiled with care implies that the commissioner and/or compiler had a specific audience in mind for this manuscript. The specific and

⁶⁶⁵ Runde, ‘Scribe 3’s Literary Project’, p. 82.

⁶⁶⁶ Saenger, ‘Reading’, p.137.

Conclusion

consistent thematic interest in women's conduct suggests that the reader or listeners for whom the compiler carefully constructed the manuscript may well have been female.

It remains now to examine the rest of the manuscript from the same critical feminist perspective in order to reveal that this cohesive interest in female behaviour is found throughout the entire manuscript. Bahr states that the size of the Auchinleck 'denies us the possibility of the ultimate proof for our theories [but] its fragmentariness likewise prevents their being conclusively disproved either.'⁶⁶⁷ Whilst it is true that the damage to the Auchinleck manuscript is so extensive that I cannot be certain a missing text would disprove my hypothesis, a cursory glance over the contents of the rest of the manuscript immediately highlights some narratives which are likely to continue the interest of the manuscript in women's conduct. *The Alphabetical Praise of Women* offers some respite against the tirade of antifeminist writing commonly encountered by the late medieval female reader, as do the proto-feminist arguments in the debate text *The Thrush and the Nightingale*. Both, like the narratives of Margaret, Katherine, and Mary, provide examples of women who are positive role models for women. The romance *Sir Beues of Hamtoun* features the Saracen heroine Josian, who not only converts willingly to Christianity at the request of her future husband, but fights with every power available to her to maintain her virginity despite numerous forced marriages. She is thus another example of a good wife as well as a maiden who understands the value of virginity. Finally, Felice in *Guy of Warwick* provides an example of a woman's potentially dangerous influence over a man as it is through her encouragement that Guy initially focuses his knightly career on material concerns. Her role in his initially sinful life is particularly emphasised by the *Speculum Gy de Warewyke*, which explicitly blames Felice for Guy's faults. These texts seem, even with the most cursory glance, to epitomise both the Auchinleck's interest in providing both positive and negative models of female behaviour, and the importance of reading texts in manuscript context.

The need to read the individual texts of the Auchinleck manuscript in context with one and other has been significant to the illustration of a thematic interest in female behaviour which exists throughout both booklets one and three, regardless of the genre of individual texts. Manuscript context has brought to the fore various themes that would otherwise have remained relatively obscure. The threat of incest that can be perceived in *Floris and Blancheflour* is made more noticeable through the texts similarities with *The Legend of Pope Gregory* and *Sir Degaré*, both of which are more explicit in their portrayal

⁶⁶⁷ Bahr, *Fragments and Assemblages*, p. 106.

Conclusion

of incest. The complexity of female submission to male authority figures is also highlighted by the number of texts which present male characters who try to control women in both appropriate and inappropriate ways. Reading these individual texts in context with each other reveals that the representation of male control of women within the manuscript is constructed as a balance between too much control and too little. Interaction between the texts reveals that female submission to male authority figures is not represented as an absolute. Ultimately, interaction between the texts reveals numerous models of behaviour, both positive and negative, which provide guides for the female reader on how to act. When read as an individual text, each narrative discusses one or two conduct examples for the woman to aspire to or carefully avoid. It is only reading these narratives in context with one and other that reveals a full picture of both ideal and problematic female behaviour.

The final question left to answer is one that has been of interest to critics of the Auchinleck manuscript for decades: who originally commissioned the manuscript? The codicological evidence generally points towards a wealthy merchant family. Though the Auchinleck would not have been a cheap book to commission, there are evident cost cutting measures that make it unlikely the book was commissioned by a nobleman. The layout and structure of the manuscript suggest it was intended to be read, and Hanna agrees that the audience for Auchinleck must have been educated when he states that the audience was ‘situated in relatively educated and literarily knowing contexts, ones prepared to read romance in the manner conventional in its great tradition, as exemplarising narrative addressing social responsibility.’⁶⁶⁸ This recalls his argument, discussed earlier, that the Auchinleck manuscript was commissioned in the West End of London, an area populated by merchants, elites and government workers from city and country. The conclusion of the codicological evidence, along with Hanna’s assessment of the original locale of the bookshop, makes it likely that it was a merchant who commissioned this book: someone with the wealth to afford a book such as Auchinleck, but without a noble title.

I would further suggest, however, that this merchant did not commission the book for himself, but for a woman within his household. The exemplary aspects of Auchinleck become consistent and universal when considered in the light of a female reader. The book appears to have value as an educational item for women, thus it makes logical sense for the book to have been commissioned by a father for his daughter/s, a husband for his wife, or

⁶⁶⁸ Hanna, *London Literature, 1300*, p. 116.

Conclusion

for a household of women. The London provenance only adds to this; as the social historian Hanawalt explains:

Because London's population was continually being replenished with recruits from the countryside and because its urban elite turned over rather quickly, the market for books on deportment and on rearing children for success in an urban environment was very good. London had few established elite households where the young could learn manners [as was the norm in the countryside]. Young people who aspired to success in London, either as merchants and craftsmen or as servants, needed to know the polite behaviour that would make them acceptable in wealthy households. Parents with ambitions for their children also needed to know how to instruct. Thus the socialization of children and young people into polite society occupied an important segment of medieval London culture.⁶⁶⁹

As has been shown above, a book such as *Auchinleck* would have provided education in social norms, moral behaviour and acceptable conduct to any young woman who had access to it. The use of Middle English and the dominance of religious and romance texts tells us that this book was intended for the lay reader and that it would be well suited for a female reader. The manuscript would especially suit the wife or daughter or a merchant, or a household of women. It could well have been that the *Auchinleck* manuscript was a book intended to be given to a young woman to aid her throughout her life; in the role of virtuous maiden, obedient wife, and devoted mother.

⁶⁶⁹ Hanawalt, *Growing Up*, p. 69. See also Ashley, 'Medieval Courtesy Literature', p. 25.

Appendix One

Texts within the Auchinleck manuscript, presented in their current order, with reference to their original numeration where available and booklet number.

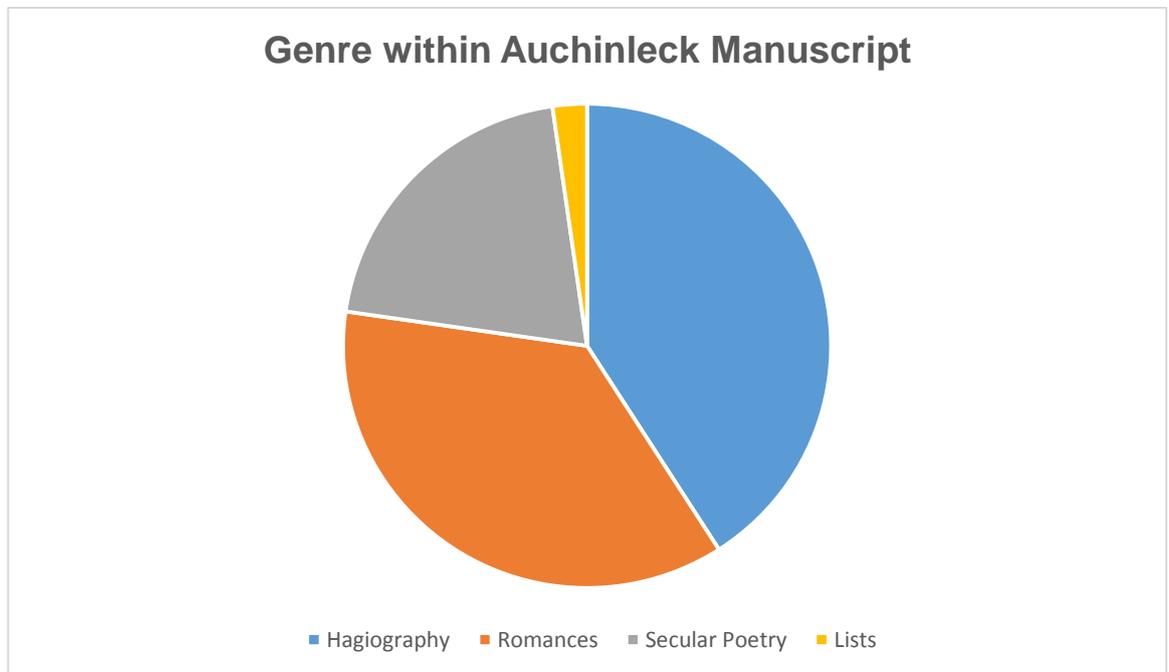
Current No.	Original No.	Title	Booklet
One	Six	<i>The Legend of Pope Gregory</i>	One
Two	Seven	<i>The King of Tars</i>	One
Three	Eight	<i>The Life of Adam and Eve</i>	One
Four	Nine	<i>Seynt Mergrete</i>	One
Five	Ten	<i>Seynt Katerine</i>	One
Six	Eleven	<i>Saint Patrick's Purgatory</i>	One
Seven	Twelve	<i>þe Desputisoun Bitven þe Bodi & þe Soule</i>	One
Eight	Thirteen	<i>The Harrowing of Hell</i>	One
Nine	Fourteen	<i>The Clerk Who Would See the Virgin</i>	One
Ten	Fifteen	<i>Speculum Gy de Warewyke</i>	Two
Eleven	Sixteen	<i>Amis and Amiloun</i>	Two
Twelve	Seventeen	<i>Life of Saint Mary Magdalene</i>	Two
Thirteen	Seventeen	<i>The Nativity and Early Life of Mary</i>	Two
Fourteen	Twenty-One	<i>On the Seven Deadly Sins</i>	Three
Fifteen	Twenty-Two	<i>The Paternoster</i>	Three
Sixteen	Twenty-Three	<i>The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin</i>	Three
Seventeen	Twenty-Four	<i>Sir Degaré</i>	Three
Eighteen		<i>The Seven Sages of Rome</i>	Three
Nineteen	Twenty-Six	<i>Floris and Blancheflour</i>	Three
Twenty	Twenty-Six	<i>The Sayings of the Four Philosophers</i>	Three
Twenty-One	Twenty-Seven	<i>The Battle Abbey Roll</i>	Three
Twenty-Two	Twenty-Eight	<i>Guy of Warwick</i>	Four
Twenty-Three	Twenty-Nine	<i>Reinbrun</i>	Four
Twenty-Four	Thirty	<i>Sir Beues of Hamtoun</i>	Five
Twenty-Five	Thirty-One	<i>Of Arthour & of Merlin</i>	Five
Twenty-Six		<i>þe Wenche þat Loued þe King</i>	Five
Twenty-Seven	Thirty-Three	<i>A Penniworp of Witt</i>	Five
Twenty-Eight	Thirty-Four	<i>How Our Lady's Sauter was First Found</i>	Five

Appendix One

Twenty-Nine	Thirty-Five	<i>Lay le Freine</i>	Six
Thirty	Thirty-Six	<i>Roland and Vernagu</i>	Six
Thirty-One	Thirty-Seven	<i>Otuel a Knight</i>	Seven
Thirty-Two	Forty-Three	<i>Kyng Alisaunder</i>	Eight
Thirty-Three		<i>The Thrush and the Nightingale</i>	Eight
Thirty-Four		<i>The Sayings of Saint Bernard</i>	Eight
Thirty-Five		<i>Dauid þe King</i>	Eight
Thirty-Six	Fifty-One	<i>Sir Tristem</i>	Nine
Thirty-Seven		<i>Sir Orfeo</i>	Nine
Thirty-Eight	Fifty-Two	<i>The Four Foes of Mankind</i>	Nine
Thirty-Nine	Fifty-Three	<i>The Anonymous Short English Metrical Chronicle</i>	Ten
Forty	Fifty-Four	<i>Horn Childe & Maiden Rinnild</i>	Ten
Forty-One	Fifty-Five	<i>Alphabetical Praise of Women</i>	Ten
Forty-Two	Fifty-Five	<i>King Richard</i>	Eleven
Forty-Three	Sixty	<i>þe Simonie</i>	Twelve

Appendix Two

Visual representation of genres of texts within the Auchinleck manuscript.



Appendix Three

The Legend of Pope Gregory

An Earl's wife dies when giving birth to the second of two twins. The elder is a boy, and the younger a girl. Before the twins are adults the Earl himself dies. Upon his deathbed, the Earl elicits a promise from his son that he will look after his sister. The new Earl does this, keeping his sister physically close. The devil exploits their relationship and possesses the brother, causing him to have sexual intercourse with his sister. Though his actions awaken her, she does not cry for help and Gregory is conceived.

Unsure what to do about the pregnancy, the twins turn to a trusted Knight who takes the sister to his own home to have her child in secret, whilst the Earl goes on crusade as penance for his sins. When the baby is born, the sister wraps her son in silk and places him in a boat with money and ivory tablets engraved with the story of his birth. She then casts him out to sea. Messengers arrive to tell her of her brother's death. She assumes the title of Lady, and is soon beset by a Duke determined to marry her. When she refuses, he lays siege to her lands.

Meanwhile, two fishermen rescue the boat and save the baby, raising him as their own by orders of the local Abbot. When near adulthood, Gregory injures one of his foster-brothers. In anger, his foster-mother reveals he is a foundling. The Abbot returns his riches to him along with the ivory tablets. Despite being offered a position in the monastery, Gregory puts on clothes fashioned from the silk his mother left him, and sets off to make his fortune as a Knight.

Upon reaching his mother's lands, Gregory rides to the rescue of the stricken Lady and defeats the Duke. When victory is achieved, the Lady meets her son, but fails to recognise him. At the advice of her counsellors, she marries him. After a period of time, a maid discovers Gregory crying over his ivory tablets and tells the Lady. She investigates and realises she has married her son. Both are horrified and Gregory sets off on pilgrimage to make amends for the sin. He encounters a fisherman who chains him to a rock and throws the key into the sea. He remains there for twenty years.

The Pope dies, and an angel informs the cardinals that they will find the new Pope chained to a rock. A group set off in search of the man and lodge with the fisherman. Upon the discovery of the key in one of the fish served for dinner, the group go to see Gregory and release him. He is made Pope. During his time as Pope, his mother appears on

Appendix Three

pilgrimage to confess her sins. He forgives her and sends her to join a nunnery, where she relinquishes all her worldly goods until the day she dies.

Appendix Four

Sir Degaré

The lay begins in a royal household that consists of a widowed King and his beloved daughter. The King is extremely protective of the Princess, which gives rise to rumours of incest between the pair. On the way to say a mass for the dead Queen, the Princess is separated from her companions and raped by a fairy knight. He leaves her pregnant, which she hides from her father. When her son is born, she calls him Degaré and leaves him with a hermit, giving him a pair of magical gloves and a broken sword, both left to her by the fairy.

The lay then follows the boy's upbringing and his quest to become a knight, which leads him to defeat his grandfather and win his mother's hand in marriage. Their relationship is discovered before the marriage is consummated through a pair of magic gloves which will only fit Degaré's mother, a gift passed from father to mother to son. After the annulment, Degaré travels on to find his father. After further adventures, he meets and fights the fairy knight, which reveals their true identities through the recognition of the broken sword. The family is reunited, Degaré becomes the rightful heir to the throne, and the fairy marries the Princess.

Appendix Five

Floris and Blancheflour

The pagan King of Spain raided the Christian country of Galicia, killing many pilgrims including a noble Knight who had been travelling with his widowed pregnant daughter. The King brought her home as a slave and she became handmaiden to the Spanish Queen, who was also pregnant. They gave birth on the same day, the Queen calling her son Floris and the Christian slave calling her daughter Blancheflour. The slave acted as nursemaid for both children, and, despite their religious differences, they were brought up together.

When the children are twelve the King decides to kill Blancheflour out of concern that his son feels affection for the girl. The Queen intercedes and Floris is sent to his Aunt to be convinced to give up Blancheflour. When he refuses, the Queen persuades the King to sell Blancheflour to travelling merchants, who take her across the sea and sell her to the Admiral of Babylon.

Floris is initially told that Blancheflour died and becomes suicidal. His parents reveal the truth and he goes in search of Blancheflour, equipped with a magic ring. Floris takes on the guise of a merchant and makes his way to Babylon. He discovers that the Admiral keeps maidens locked in a well-guarded tower, served by a well in a beautiful garden which the maidens may draw water from. The water from it has magical properties, and will turn to blood if touched by a non-virgin. The garden also contains a tree which blossoms all year round. These magical items are both used in an annual ritual through which the Admiral chooses a new wife from the maidens. It is common knowledge that the Admiral will select Blancheflour at the next ritual.

In order to access the tower, Floris befriends the steward who conceals him in a basket of flowers to be delivered to the maidens. The basket is at first delivered to the wrong maiden, who recognises Floris from Blancheflour's description. She fetches Blancheflour and the lovers are reunited. They go to bed together, which leads to an unhealthy sexual addiction. Eventually, they are discovered in the bed. Both are arrested, tried in absentia and sentenced to be burnt alive. The two are told of their fate, and proceed to have a fight over the magic ring; each desires for the other to live through the flames by wearing the ring. In the end, the ring is accidentally dropped as they are escorted to the fire. The entire conversation is witnessed, however, by one of the admiral's lords, who then convinces the Admiral to spare them. The two return to Spain and the narrator ends the story here with a very abrupt and short prayer.

Appendix Six

The King of Tars

The pagan Sultan of Damascus hears of the daughter of the Christian King of Tars and asks for her hand. The King allows her to make the decision and she refuses on account of her faith. Furious, the Sultan wages war until the Princess accepts the proposal in order to end the slaughter. She travels to Damascus where he orders her to convert or die, and gives her one night to decide. That night Jesus appears to the Princess in a dream and instructs her to pretend to convert. He will solve the rest. The Princess marries the Sultan and soon gives birth to a shapeless lump. The Sultan blames the deformity on her lack of faith and takes it to his temple. He loses his faith when his Gods do nothing and returns dejected. The Princess has the lump baptised before him and it transforms into a baby boy. This inspires the Sultan's own conversion and he joins forces with the King to force the rest of his country to convert.

At this point the extant text ends, but it seems highly likely that the King and Sultan succeeded on their mission and live on happily as Christians. An alternative might be the death of the King in battle, where he goes to heaven as a martyr and the Sultan acquires his lands. It is highly unlikely the Saracens would have triumphed, as they are always defeated in the Auchinleck manuscript.⁶⁷⁰

⁶⁷⁰ For further information on the treatment of Saracens in the Auchinleck manuscript see Bly, 'Stereotypical Saracens'.

Appendix Seven

The Life of Adam and Eve

The text begins with the fall of Lucifer to hell, explaining how his pride was damaged when he was asked to honour human beings. He goes to the Garden of Eden to persuade Eve to eat the forbidden fruit and to give some to Adam. They are subsequently banished from the Garden. They go in search of food and shelter that they cannot provide for themselves. After one week passes unsuccessfully, Adam concludes that they must do penance. He sends Eve to stand in the river Jordan for a month whilst he does the same in the sea.

Before the allotted month is up, the devil once again tricks Eve by coming to her as an angel and telling her that God has forgiven her and the penance is over. He travels with her to Adam, who recognises the devil and that Eve has once again condemned them. Horrified by her own weakness, Eve leaves Adam and travels into the desert. Out there she goes into labour and collapses. She cries out and the wind carries her cries back to Adam. When he finds her, he prays for her, and God decides to forgive them, sending angels to help Eve through labour. Cain is born, and the angels also teach Adam to cultivate the land and build shelter. The two build a home and Eve gives birth to Abel.

Eve has a dream that Cain will slay Abel through jealousy, but she and Adam are powerless to stop the murder from taking place. After it has happened, Eve has more children, including a son called Seth, in order that they multiply and populate the earth.

When Adam is older he grows sick and the entire family is called to his side. He finally relates to them the story of the banishment from the Garden of Eden. Adam send Eve and Seth to the Garden in order to obtain oil from the tree of life so that he may live on. During their journey to Eden, the devil once more appears in front of Eve to convince her of her husband's recovery. Seth sees through him and banishes him from their presence.

When they reach the gates of Eden, the angel Michael allows Seth to enter paradise and gives him kernels from the tree to take with him. Eve and Seth return to Adam who dies soon after their return. The angels teach the family how to bury the body properly.

Not long after Adam's death Eve also falls ill. When she dies, she is buried as per the angel's instructions. The narrative concludes by discussing the various sins which can be traced back to the first sin of Eve (for example, the existence of Sodom and Gomorrah), and how Jesus came to save us from these sins. It closes by discussing the happiness which Adam is now experiencing in heaven; the text makes no final mention of Eve.

Appendix Eight

The Seven Sages of Rome

The narrator tells the tale of the Roman Emperor Diocletian and his only son Florentine. When he turns seven, the boy is taken out of the city to be educated by seven sages: Bancillas, Anxulles, Lentyllous, Malquydras, Catonne of Rome, Gesse and Maxious. Whilst he is away, the Barons convince Diocletian to remarry, Florentine's mother having died in childbirth. They select a beautiful wealthy foreigner, and Diocletian marries her.

After the marriage, a servant tells the Empress of Florentine's existence. Fearing her children will suffer because they are not the heir, the Empress plots to kill Florentine. She persuades Diocletian to have the boy brought back to Rome. Prior to coming to the city, Catonne uses astronomy to predict that Florentine will be destroyed if they go to Rome. Florentine, also using astronomy, predicts that he will live if he is silent for seven days. The stars also reveal that the Empress is the instigator of the plot.

The Sages and Florentine travel to Rome. As soon as she can, the Empress drags her (now teenage) stepson into her chamber and offers him her love and virginity. When he refuses, she grows angry and tears at her clothes and skin. She then goes to Diocletian, accusing Florentine of rape and demanding his arrest. Diocletian arrests him, but shows mercy and imprisons him, waving the death penalty. The Empress then accosts Diocletian in their bedchamber, using a story to convince him to kill Florentine. The next day, Bancillas tells an opposing story to change Diocletian's mind again. So, continues back and forth between the Empress and each of the sages, until fourteen stories in total have been told. The stories go as follows:

Empress: A merchant instructs his gardener to plant a new chestnut tree beside an older one. The young tree grows quickly and the old tree starts to fail. He asks the Gardener why and is told the young tree has spread its roots wider. The merchant then cuts down the old tree in order to give more room to the handsome young tree. Moral: the younger generation will kill the older.

Bancillas: A knight had a loyal greyhound. His wife gave birth and the boy was entrusted to a group of novice nuns. One day a grand tournament was going on. Desperate to see the tournament, the novices hid the baby by the wall and snuck out to watch. An adder climbed into the cradle to kill the baby but the greyhound kills it first, knocking over

Appendix Eight

the cradle in the process. The novices return and see the silent cradle on the ground and the blood covered greyhound. Jumping to conclusions, they tell the lady that the dog has killed her child. She tells the knight and threatens to commit suicide if he does not kill the hound. The Knight kills the dog and returns to the hall. Picking up the cradle, he finds the sleeping child and the body of the dead adder. Moral: Women's words cannot be trusted.

Empress: A knight is gathering fruit in the forest when a boar finds him. Frightened, the Knight climbs into a tree. When the boar finds no fruit, he spots the Knight and tries to attack him. The Knight offers it a fruit, then attacks and kills the boar when it is distracted. Moral: friends can be deceptive.

Anxulles: Ypocras, a medical man, teaches his nephew his trade and sends him to heal the Prince of Hungary. Once there, the nephew manages to get the Queen to reveal that the boy is not the King's. Once he knows the identity of the father he is able to heal the boy. He then returns home and reports to Ypocras, keeping the Queen's secret. Ypocras then murder's the nephew whilst they are picking herbs in the garden. God punishes him by sending a sickness that only the nephew could have cured. Moral: Queens are not trustworthy and it is wrong to kill a relation.

Empress: Emperor Octavian built a tower for his riches and assigned a man to look after it. The man took his son to the tower and together they dug a hole inside and stole all the treasure they could carry. Octavian visited the next day and found he had been robbed, spotting the entrance to the hole. He revealed the theft to no one, filling the hole with pitch and leaving. With the theft apparently unnoticed, the men returned and the father jumped into the hole. Now stuck in the pitch, the father orders his son to decapitate him so his shame would be a secret. The son does so and takes the head away. Octavian returns and has the body removed and paraded through Rome. The dead man's other children recognise the body and cry out. Octavian's servants find the source of the cries, but the son convinces the servants it was shock from seeing the wound. The servant carries on, and the son is left unpunished. Moral: children cannot be trusted.

Lentylous: A rich merchant refuses to marry a local woman, and instead marries a foreigner who is full of vices. Her former lover follows her to Rome and they continue their affair whilst her husband is asleep. At this time, there was a curfew in Rome; any

Appendix Eight

person caught outside of their homes after dark would be accused of all crimes committed that night. Having noticed his wife's disappearances, the merchant follows her and discovers her lover. He leaves them be, and when she returns she finds the door locked. He shouts from the window that he will no longer keep her, and she begs him to let her in. He refuses. She then goes to the well and drops a heavy rock into it. Convinced she has committed suicide, the merchant rushes to the well. The wife then slips inside and locks the door, leaving him outside. When he returns, and asks to be let in, she refuses and accuses him of adultery. He is found and arrested. Moral: Women cannot be trusted.

Empress: The King of Poile and Calabre frequently committed sodomy with young men. For this, he suffered a swelling in his penis which made him repulsive to women. Eventually, he orders his steward to find him a woman and to pay her twenty marks. The steward keeps the money and sends his own (protesting) wife. In the morning, the King refuses to let her leave, forcing the steward to reveal her identity. The King banishes him for treason, looks after the lady and marries her off to a rich earl. Moral: servants commit treason and cannot be trusted.

Malquydras: An old man takes a young wife. He pays her no attention and does not offer her sexual gratification. She complains to her mother, who suggests she sleep with her husband's gardener. She follows her advice and the gardener is obliging. Still unsatisfied with her husband, the wife complains to her mother once again. This time she is told to kill his favourite dog. She does, but her husband still pays her no attention. She goes to her mother a third time and reveals she actually desires the priest. This time the mother instructs her to complete a magic ritual. She does this. The lord then has a great fire built and sends for a barber-surgeon. He accuses his wife of being a witch and has her blood let. The lady sends for her mother and claims that her husband has killed her through blood-letting. The mother chastises her for infidelity. Moral: women are treacherous.

Empress: Virgil was a clerk who practised necromancy. He built a fire that could not be quenched and all the local people used it. He also made many sculptures of men scattered around the city. A Lombard destroyed one by pushing it into the fire.

Another statue warned the Romans of an invasion from the King of Poile. Angry, said King offered a promotion to whoever destroyed the statues. Two men buried treasure under two of the three remaining statues. They then lied to the emperor and told him they

Appendix Eight

knew of buried treasure in his land. Under his instruction, they dig up the treasure and give it to the emperor. They then convince him to let them dig under the warning statue and, at night, push the statue into the hole. The citizens of Rome turn on the Emperor and accuse him of greed. Moral: servants are treacherous.

Catonne: A rich Roman merchant has a pretty but fickle wife, and also owns a magpie that can only speak the truth. When the merchant leaves on business, the wife sends for her illicit lover. They go into the chamber together, and the magpie sings that he has seen what she has done and will tell the master. They have intercourse, and the lady has a maid remake the bed. Meanwhile she fetches a ladder and removes the roof tiles above the magpie, placing a clear basin of water and a candle in the gap. When night fell, she lit the candle, struck the magpie's head and covered him with the water. When the merchant returned home the magpie told him of her lover, but also the rain, bright lightning and thunder. The wife interjects that the night had been dry and ordinary, and that the magpie must be suffering delusions. The neighbours confirm that the weather was fine during the night. The merchant accuses the magpie of lying and breaks its neck in anger. He then goes outside and finds the evidence of the wife's trick. Moral: women are treacherous.

Empress: Herod had seven advisors who, through his generosity, had become richer than him. One day, during a hunt, Herod became completely blind. He sent for his scholars who researched for two weeks. They looked in books and found no answers, so asked an old man who directed them to Merlin. They find him and bring him to Herod. Merlin asks to be taken to Herod's chamber and finds a potion filled cauldron under the bed. He asks to be alone with the emperor, then tells him the seven scholars put it there after making rules to allow them to rule in his place. He tells Herod to cut off their heads and put them into the cauldron. He does this and the curse is broken. Moral: counsellors can be devious.

Gesse: A Sherriff had a pretty wife and a new sharp knife. Whilst hunting he carved open his stomach, killing himself. He was laid to rest with riches. The lady, however, said she would also die and be buried alongside him. Her friends came to comfort her, and told her to pity herself for she was young and pretty, and could still marry well and beget children. The next day a knight brought three robbers to hang them at the scene. After they were hung he stayed there to make sure they were not rescued. On the first night, he noticed her fire and moved closer to be warmed. He asked the lady to let him in. Once

Appendix Eight

warm, the knight returned to the gallows to find one of the bodies missing. He is worried that he will lose his promised promotion for failing at his duty. He tells the lady of his problem and she agrees to help him if he marries her. They dig up her dead lord and use him to replace the missing body. Together they string him up in place of the missing thief. When he refuses to wound the corpse the same as the robber had been wounded, the lady takes his sword and does so herself. The Knight refuses to marry her, disgusted by what she will do in order to marry upwards. Moral: do not trust beautiful women as they play tricks.

Empress: Rome was beset by seven Sultans. There were seven wise men who the people trusted with the wealth and safety of the city. One of these men makes a rich garment and visor and sends word to the Sultans to be ready for battle the next morning. When morning comes, he climbs a tower and, wearing the robe and helmet, skirmishes with two swords against a mirror, making more noise than a whole army. Terrified, the Sultans flee and he is praised. Later, the seven wise men overthrow the monarch and force the people to serve them or die. Moral: scholars can seem wise, but can also be treacherous.

Maxious: A wounded Knight of Hungary saw a beautiful lady in a dream and fell in love with her. The lady also saw the knight in a dream and fell in love with him. The Knight searched for the lady for three months until he came to the land of Poile. He found a castle owned by an Earl, who had a beautiful wife. Out of jealousy he shut her in a tower so that she would never be seen by other men. When the Knight looked up at the tower he saw the beautiful lady and began to sing. When she heard him she immediately desired him, but did not let herself call to him in fear of what her husband might do. The Knight met with her husband and asked for permission to stay for a while. The Earl agreed as he needed the Knight to protect his lands against another Earl with whom he was at war. The Knight was made the Earl's steward.

One day, the lady drops a letter to him. He reads it and knows then that he must have sexual intercourse with her, so creates a plan. He gets the Earl's permission to build his own chamber by the tower, and employs a sly mason to make a hole into the tower so that he may have access to the lady. He goes to her and they sleep together. Before he leaves, the lady gives him her gold ring so that he may think upon her. He then returns to his chamber, fills the hole, and goes to dine with the Earl. Whilst they eat, the Earl

Appendix Eight

recognises the ring as the one he gave to the lady. He says nothing to the knight, but goes to the tower to see where the ring is. The Knight predicts his action and races ahead to return the ring before the Earl arrives. When the Earl sees the ring in place, he is overjoyed and spends the night with her.

The next morning the Knight tells him that peace has been restored in his own country, and that his lover is seeking him. He invites the Earl to join himself and his lady for a meal. The Knight goes to the lady and abducts her, taking her to his home.⁶⁷¹ She is dressed in the robes of his own country and he adorns her fingers with many rings. He then fetches the Earl and introduces him to his own wife, who is not recognised. They dine together and the Earl departs to visit his own wife. By the time he arrives, the lady is back in her room and waiting for him. He stays the night with her, whilst the Knight prepares a ship.

The next morning, the Earl leaves his wife to attend church. The Knight goes back to the tower, disguises the lady once more, and brings her to the Earl, seeking his permission to marry her. The Earl agrees and a priest is fetched; the Earl gives away his own wife to the Knight. Then, with the Earl's blessing, they board the ship and sail away. The Earl returns home to his wife and find the tower empty. He realises what has happened, but it is too late to do anything. Moral: women are deceptive.

The stories finished, Maxious tells Diocletian that he shall know in the morning who has done right and who has done wrong. The Emperor passes the night alone, and in the morning both the Empress and Florentine are brought before him. The entire court come to hear what is to be said. After the mass, Florentine finally speaks, asking for mercy and revealing that he and his masters saw all these events foretold in the stars. He then offers to tell his father one final tale to convince him of his innocence.

Florentine: A man of high position in Rome had a fifteen-year-old son. Together they sailed to Gedir. During the journey, they heard a raven cry, and the child predicts it means that he shall be a rich man. He claims his father will hold the basin in which he washes his hands, whilst his mother shall hold the towel. Jealous, the father tosses his son into the sea. The child begged God for mercy, and was rescued by a fisherman who sold him to a constable for twenty pounds. The constable raised and loved the child as his own. Years pass, and the King offers his daughter in marriage to any man who can interpret a raven's

⁶⁷¹ Her consent, either way, is not explicitly stated.

Appendix Eight

cry. None of the lords can do it, so the boy asks for a chance. The King agrees to listen and the boy explains that the ravens are in a love triangle, compounded by the fact the household has captured one. When this is resolved, the ravens are peaceful. The King gives his daughter to the boy along with half his kingdom. When the King dies, the boy is crowned, whilst his father and mother fall into poverty. They go to their son's country to live and he goes to visit them. A basin and towel are brought forward and the father takes the basin, and the mother the towel. The King then reveals his real identity to them.

Moral: children can be wise.

Florentine uses this story to persuade Diocletian that he should listen to his son. He then reveals the truth about how the Empress became dishevelled. Horrified, the Emperor orders her to be burnt for her treason and falseness. This is done, and he is delighted by the light of the fire. The narrator concludes by saying that Florentine went on to become Emperor, and was well known for his wisdom. He then calls on Jesus to bless his audience with a similar happy ending.

Appendix Nine

Seynt Mergrete

Margaret is the daughter of the Saracen patriarch Teodolus and his wife. For a reason lost to damage, Teodolus decides to kill his child as soon as it is born. Margaret's mother hides the birth and sneaks the baby girl away, sending her to Asia. There she is raised in a Convent, where she is christened and educated. Margaret proves to be beautiful, and is much admired for her appearance. She is a devoted scholar, however, and upon her fifteenth birthday she is invited to join the convent, which is her only desire.

Olibrious, who is the Saracen King of Antioch, starts to persecute all the Christians in his land. When he reaches the town where Margaret is, he sees her from the street and, struck by her beauty, orders her to be brought before him unhurt. Margaret is taken to his court where he offers to marry her if she is a noblewoman, or make her his concubine if she is not. He promises her riches and lands in return. The condition is that she must convert to his faith. She refuses and Olibrious decides to force her conversion. He orders her hands and feet bound and has her put in prison overnight. She is brought before him the next morning and refuses to convert. He then orders her to be hung upside down by the feet and whipped. She still refuses to convert. Olibrious then orders his men to use their misshaped nails to carve her flesh from her body and feed it to the dogs. She refuses to convert.

At this refusal, Olibrious has Margaret bound in chains and cast into his deepest prison. An angel comes to her, bringing a gift of a walking stick that is made from the wood of the cross. She also encounters a dragon who eats her, but spontaneously explodes to release her unharmed. She then meets his brother, a misshapen monster with his eyes on his toes, and is forced to grapple with him. When she finally uses her wimple to bind him, he tells her his name, that he is the devil's servant, and is responsible for the death of women in childbirth. She prays for her safety and he sinks into the ground.

When the morning comes, she leaves the prison, using the holy walking stick. She still refuses to convert, so Olibrious orders hot water and oil to be poured on her body. When she refuses again to convert, he then orders that she is drowned in a vat of water. When they attempt to do this an angel appears and rescues Margaret from the vat, bursting it and sending the water everywhere. Margaret is left unharmed, and the five thousand people who saw the miracle immediately convert. They are instantly killed by Olibrious,

Appendix Nine

who orders his most skilled torturer, Malcous, to take Margaret out of town and behead her. As she is taken out of town the sky grows black and the world groans in anger for her.

Once there, an angel appears to assure her of her place in heaven. Margaret thanks the angel and promises that women who invoke her name in childbirth will be safely delivered from their troubles. Jesus speaks from heaven and promises that she will be a martyr. Upon hearing and seeing these events, Malcous converts to Christianity and refuses to behead Margaret. She persuades him to do so as it is God's will.

When the deed is done, four angels appear to carry her soul to heaven. A Christian knight, who is also a novice monk, happens to ride by and rescues her body, seeing that it is buried in a Christian manner. Once he has seen this done he writes down her story, and this is how she is known to the narrator and throughout the land.

Appendix Ten

Seynt Katerine

After beginning with a short prayer, the narrative tells us of the Emperor of Greece, a rich Saracen. To celebrate his sixty fifth year as ruler, he demands that all men make an offering to the Gods.

Another King had a beautiful fifteen-year-old daughter called Katherine, who believed in God. When she heard the noise of the procession to the Emperor's palace, she asked her father the occasion. When he explains the offerings to Mahoun, she blesses herself and goes to the Emperor's palace. She approaches the Emperor and warns him that he is leading these people to eternal damnation. He argues with her and sends for scholars to argue against her. Katherine is put in jail until they arrive.

When they arrive, she is brought forth and tells them of the Christian faith. They are convinced and convert, rather than arguing with her. The Emperor burns them all for their conversion. The Emperor has Katherine brought before him and tempts her with riches, but she refuses to convert. He orders her beaten and put in jail with nothing to eat or drink.

When the Emperor retires, the Queen has a Knight called Porfir take her to see Katherine in secret. When they enter the prison, they see seven angels tending to her wounds. They convert immediately and Katherine tells them more about Christianity. They leave and tell all one hundred knights about what they witnessed, inspiring further conversions. After twelve days Katherine is visited by Jesus who assures her of her place in heaven. She is brought once more to the Emperor and again refuses to convert. Four wheels are constructed in order to crush her. When she is brought to it, God sends an angel who kills four thousand Saracens who have gathered to watch. The Queen then turns to the Emperor and tries to convert him. He accuses her of witchcraft. He orders her breasts torn off with iron hooks, and then her head cut off. Katherine looks to the Queen and gives her spiritual support. She is killed and her body is buried in a Christian manner by Porfir whilst her soul goes to God. Porfir then comes to the Emperor and reveals what he has done with the martyr's body. He then kills himself in front of the Emperor, who laments losing his best Knight to witchcraft. He then asks his knights who is christened, and kills all who are.

Katherine is once more brought before him and offered a chance to convert. She refuses.

Appendix Ten

At this point the text in Auchinleck ends. Assuming the text does not differ too much from the standard narrative, and given that the missing pages only amount to a couple of hundred lines at most, it is likely that Katherine is beheaded very quickly after this final confrontation. Her body will be buried by a Christian and her soul will go to God.

Appendix Eleven

The Clerk Who Would See the Virgin

There is a male Clerk who is desperate to see the body of the Virgin Mary whilst he is alive on earth. An angel comes to him one night and offers him the opportunity to see her, but warns that he will lose the sight in the eyes that look upon her. He sees a loophole, and decides that he will keep one eye closed. Then he will both see her and be able to see after the event. He accepts the angel's offer.

Mary comes to the Clerk, who looks upon her with one eye and is astounded by her physical beauty. As promised, when he wakes after she has left, he cannot see out of the eye which gazed upon her. His other eye remains unharmed. He feels guilty about tricking Mary, and this guilt eats at him until he is filled with remorse and begs Mary to visit him again so he can give her the sight in his other eye.

Moved with compassion, Mary visits him again. He begs her for mercy and forgiveness for his transgression, and promises to do penance. Mary chooses to forgive him and he wakes his find his sight fully restored in both eyes. He praises her for her mercy and grace.

Appendix Twelve

The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin

The text opens with a narrator's comment about the blessings of the psalms. The narrator then tells that Mary, putting on new clothes, prays to God for his protection from demons. She then goes into the public areas of her home and gathers together her friends and relations. She tells them that Jesus has sent an angel to give her a palm leaf and tell them she is to leave them. The gathered crowd are upset and ask her not to go, but she refuses to disobey her son's will. John is particularly upset, but accepts God's will. He gathers the apostles to share the news, and they in turn go to Mary to offer their services to her. She asks them to ensure that the Jews do no wrong to her body.

Mary takes to her bed to die, but is afraid of what will happen. Jesus sends an angel to reassure her that she has a place in heaven and not to be afraid. He returns to heaven and she is no longer afraid. She lays in the chamber night and day to await death, and the apostles do not leave her side.

On Good Friday, Jesus comes to her with a company of angels. She is overjoyed to see him, and he promises to protect her from the devil upon the moment of her death. He then takes her soul from her body and the angels carry it to heaven. Jesus commands Peter to take her body to the Valley of Joseph to be buried. He tells John to carry the palm leaf brought by the angel which will protect her from the envious Jews.

The apostles take up the body and begin to process to the burial place. The Jews hear the singing of the procession so go to see what is happening. When they discover it is Mary, they are angry that a traitor should be treated with such honour. They decide to pull the body into the mud. When a Jew lays a hand upon the body God cuts the hand in half. Others who have come to do dishonour are made lame and blind. The apostles praise God and continue on their way.

They pass a Jew who is tied to a tree, who calls to Peter to deliver him from his fate. Peter tells him that God will do so. The Jew coverts and Jesus delivers him from his bonds. He falls to his knees and praises God. The other Jews spit on him, but he pays them no attention. Peter tells him to go and preach the word of God. He starts to preach right there and after three days has converted more than a hundred Jews.

The apostles take Mary's body to the Valley and bury it as ordered. They then return to the city in sadness. An angel is sent to them to tell them to go out and preach, but they do so with sadness. Meanwhile, Jesus goes to the Valley with a company of angels

Appendix Twelve

and brings her soul out of heaven. He puts her soul back into the body, and she is taken back to heaven, both soul and body.

Thomas had lingered behind his fellow apostles at the burial and saw the miracle with his eyes. He begs Mary to give him proof of the miracle that he can take to his fellow apostles. She gives him her girdle then ascends to heaven. Thomas hurries after his friends and tells them what he saw. John scolds him and reminds him they covered her tomb with stone. He shows them her girdle. They decided to go to the tomb and look for the body. On discovering it is gone they kneel and praise God, thanking him for crowning her Queen in heaven.

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