



1953

## The Intention, Art, And Originality of John Gower as Shown in His "Tale of Constance"

Robert Edward Dulak  
*Loyola University Chicago*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc\\_theses](https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_theses)



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Dulak, Robert Edward, "The Intention, Art, And Originality of John Gower as Shown in His "Tale of Constance"" (1953). *Master's Theses*. 982.  
[https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc\\_theses/982](https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_theses/982)

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses and Dissertations at Loyola eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master's Theses by an authorized administrator of Loyola eCommons. For more information, please contact [ecommons@luc.edu](mailto:ecommons@luc.edu).



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 License](#).  
Copyright © 1953 Robert Edward Dulak

THE INTENTION, ART, AND ORIGINALITY  
OF JOHN GOWER AS SHOWN IN HIS  
"TALE OF CONSTANCE"

by

Robert Edward Dulak

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School  
of Loyola University in Partial Fulfillment of  
the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Arts

June

1953

## LIFE

Robert Edward Dulak was born in Chicago, Illinois, August 27, 1929.

He was graduated from Weber High School, Chicago, Illinois, June, 1946, and from De Paul University, Chicago, June, 1951, with the degree of Bachelor of Arts.

He began his graduate studies at Loyola University in October, 1951.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
<p>I. INTRODUCTION . . . . .</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">The neglect of Gower in literary history--Intention of this thesis--Scope of this thesis--Gower's life.</p>	1
<p>II. A HISTORY OF THE CONSTANCE STORY . . . . .</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">The Constance story as a folktale--The various literary versions--<u>Vita Offae Primi</u>--<u>La Belle Helene de Constantinople</u>--<u>Esare</u>--<u>Mal und Beaflor</u>--<u>La Manakine</u>--"<u>La Penta Monozozza</u>"--<u>Victorial</u>--Conclusion.</p>	6
<p>III. A STUDY OF NICHOLAS TRIVET'S TALE OF CONSTANCE . . . . .</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Occasion for the chronicle--Summary of the tale--Margaret Schlauch's view on the opening of the tale--Lillian Hornstein's view--Double time scheme of the tale--Trivet's intention--Chief value of the work.</p>	23
<p>IV. A STUDY OF JOHN GOWER'S TALE OF CONSTANCE . . . . .</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">The <u>Confessio Amantis</u>--Medieval translation--A discussion of Gower's deviations from his source--Gower's changes and improvements--Gower's exposition--Plot development--Characterization--Setting--Point of view.</p>	39
<p>V. CONCLUSION . . . . .</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Gower as a great narrative artist.</p>	66
<p>BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .</p>	69

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

John Gower is perhaps the most neglected of late fourteenth century writers of the first rank. When his work is discussed, it is usually in comparison with Chaucer's. Discussion of this kind is, of course, helpful to the student of Chaucer, but what of the reader who is interested in Gower? The comparisons have done him a real disservice in that, for the most part, they have ignored or misunderstood Gower's intentions, obscured his artistic worth, and minimized his originality. The reader may indeed conclude that the comparison of Gower with Chaucer has had an artificial basis, for although the poets were contemporaries and friends (as were the enormously different Shakespeare and Jonson), they were not seeking identical artistic ends or employing identical means to reach those ends. Critical condescension toward Gower is perhaps unmatched in English literary history; no major writer has been so continuously measured by the wrong criteria.

It is the intention of this thesis to judge Gower on his own merit. What did he intend to do? Was it worth doing? And did he do it well? Although these questions are critical commonplaces, they must be answered in any honest evaluation of a writer's accomplishment.

No great attention has been paid to Gower's works. There have been a few studies of his political thought, of his rhetoric, and of his use of

source material, but a major work on Gower, other than an edition of his works, has yet to be published.<sup>1</sup> It is clear that detailed and critical study of his works and of aspects of his thought is needed and that it will ultimately yield the data which can be employed to take his full measure as an artist.

The scope of this thesis has been purposely limited to the study of a single tale, not only because it is impossible to consider all or even a sizeable portion of Gower's work in a study such as this, but also because it is the opinion of the author that previous studies have not been sufficiently limited in scope and so have yielded general, frequently useful, but insufficiently precise results. The subject of this thesis, the "Tale of Constance," is one which Gower included in the second book of his major work, the Confessio Amantis. That the author's choice should have been this tale rather than another has been determined by two considerations. The tale is neither Gower's best nor his least achievement; therefore its detailed study is not likely to result in either overevaluation or underevaluation of Gower's

---

1 The studies made include: Leslie F. Casson, "Studies in the Diction of the Confessio Amantis," ES, LXIX, 1934-1935, 184-207; George R. Coffman, "John Gower in His Most Significant Role," Colorado Studies in Language and Literature, Series 4, II, 1945; R. Balfour Daniels, "Figures of Rhetoric in John Gower's English Works," unpublished Yale University dissertation, 1934; G. L. Hamilton, "Notes on Gower," MLN, XIX, March, 1904, 51-52; G. L. Hamilton, "Gower's Use of the Enlarged Roman de Troie," PMLA, XX, March, 1905, 179-196; Theodore H. Kaplan, "Gower's Vocabulary," JEGP, XXXI, July, 1932, 395-402; Zelma Leonhard, "Classical Mythology in the Confessio Amantis of John Gower," unpublished Northwestern University dissertation, 1924; and Marie E. Neville, "The Vulgate and Gower's Confessio Amantis," unpublished Ohio State University dissertation, 1950. Although there have been a few other studies of Gower, the ones mentioned above are the most important. They have been cited in footnote form because they will not be cited at any time in the following text.

merit. A second consideration was the rich literary history of the Constance story, which will be demonstrated because the author believes that a review of this history, involving fairly lengthy summaries of the analogues and the source of Gower's tale, will give the reader a useful frame of reference. There are at least twenty-two known literary versions of the story, almost all of which are available in either printed or manuscript form. The folktale on which the literary versions are based has a remarkably wide distribution. Gower's choice of an enduring theme may be considered as the first evidence of his artistic judgment.

The direct source of the "Tale of Constance" is Nicholas Trivet's version of the story in his Cronique Anglo Normande, a thirteenth century work, and consequently detailed comparison of Trivet's and Gower's versions will be made. Trivet's version is available in its original French form, in a Middle English translation, and in a remarkably accurate Modern English translation.<sup>2</sup>

Gower deviated from his source in various places, and it is the intention of the author to evaluate as fully as possible the soundness of Gower's judgment in making these changes. While the results of the investigation will inevitably rest on inference rather than on documentary proof, the author will, of course, deal with the material objectively and critically.

---

2 J. F. Furnivall, Edmond Brock, and W. A. Clouston, Originals and Analogues of Some of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, London, 1887.

Chaucer also used Nicholas Trivet's story as a source for the "Man of Law's Tale." Many critics<sup>3</sup> are agreed that Chaucer also used Gower's version as a source. The evidence usually given is that while in every point of any consequence where Gower differs from Trivet, Chaucer agrees with Gower, there are many other and more important places where Chaucer adds to, or otherwise differs from Trivet, but where Gower does not follow Chaucer.<sup>4</sup> Although the question of priority should be settled, it is outside of the scope of this thesis. No attempt will be made here to compare Gower's work with Chaucer's.

There is no evidence to show that Gower's "Tale of Constance" has ever been studied from the viewpoint proposed in this work, although the Constance story has been extensively studied, primarily by Alfred B. Gough and Margaret Schlauch. A study of their conclusions forms a large portion of the material contained in the following chapters. Both Furnivall and Macaulay<sup>5</sup> present a very brief list of Gower's important deviations from Trivet's version, but do not attempt to explain them.

---

3 Carleton Brown, "The Man of Law's Head-Link and the Prologue of the Canterbury Tales," SP, XXXIV, January, 1937, 14.

4 J. S. P. Tatlock, Development and Chronology of Chaucer's Works, London, 1907, 185.

5 John Gower, The Complete Works of John Gower, ed. G. C. Macaulay, Oxford, 1899-1902, 4 vols. Hereafter when this work is cited, it will be by volume, book, and line.



It will be helpful for the reader who is not well acquainted with John Gower to have presented here a brief summary of what is known of his life and to mention some of his important works. John Gower was apparently a Kentish landowner, who lived in London until his last years, when he became blind and retired as a layman to the priory of St. Mary Overey, Southwark. His major works include the Speculum Meditantis, known also as Miroir de l'Omme and written in French verse about 1376. It is a religious allegory which today is considered valuable for its picture of contemporary society. Another major work is the Vox Clamantis, an expression of the terror of the wealthy at the Peasant's Revolt. This work was written in Latin verse. Gower's masterpiece is, of course, the Confessio Amantis, written in English verse and completed about 1393. It is a collection of stories written at the suggestion of Richard II and illustrating the seven deadly sins. Among his minor works are Cinkante Balades, love poems in French, and In Praise of Peace, a poem in English which he dedicated to Henry IV. It is believed that Gower died in 1408.

## CHAPTER II

### A HISTORY OF THE CONSTANCE STORY

The Constance story in the form of a folktale<sup>1</sup> is found throughout Europe, in Africa and the Near East, and in North and South America.<sup>2</sup> It occurs as a folktale in Arabic, Catalan, English, Finnish, French, Gaelic, Gascon, German, Greek, Italian, Lithuanian, Rhaeto-Romanic, Roumanian, Russian, Serbian, and Tatar, but is most popular in France, Germany, and Italy.<sup>3</sup>

There are at least twenty-two known literary versions of the story. In both the oral and literary versions, the basic story is always the same, but there are variations in the furniture of the tale. Later on in the chapter, some of the more important literary versions will be summarized and discussed.

The Constance story is the tale of a young and innocent maiden, banished by her father, who has conceived an incestuous love for her. In

---

1 Stith Thompson, The Types of the Folk-Tale, Helsinki, FF Communications No. 74, 1928, has all of the variants of the folktale. For the African versions, see May A. Klipple, "African Folktales with Foreign Analogues," unpublished Indiana University dissertation, 1938. For borrowings by North American Indians, see Stith Thompson, European Tales Among the North American Indians, Colorado College Publications, No. 2, Colorado Springs, 1919. A French version has been recorded from Missouri by Joseph Medard Carriere, Tales from the French Folk-Lore of Missouri, Evanston, 1937.

2 Alfred B. Gough, The Constance Saga, Berlin, 1902, 6-7.

3 Ibid.

some versions, she flees from him instead of being banished. She reaches a foreign land where she meets, falls in love with, and marries the king. The king is called away, either to war or to a tournament, and during his absence she gives birth to a child. Someone, usually her mother-in-law, falsely accuses her of bearing an unnatural child, usually a monster or an animal. She is again banished, this time with her child or, in some cases, children. After further adventures, different in the various versions, she is reunited with her husband and in some cases with her repentant father also.

The literary versions show a distribution over Europe similar to, but not as extensive as, that of the folktale. The literary versions were numerous and had their greatest popularity during the Middle Ages, but they continued to be written in the Renaissance.

The thirteenth-century versions of the story include: 1200, Vita Offae Primi,<sup>4</sup> a life in Latin of King Offa I of England, usually attributed to Matthew Paris; 1257, Mai und Beaflor,<sup>5</sup> a poem in the Austrian-Bavarian dialect written by Pleier; 1270, La Manskine,<sup>6</sup> a French metrical romance by Phillipe de Beaumanoir; 1277, a story in verse in Jansen Enikel's Universal Chronicle (Weltbuch)<sup>7</sup> in the Austrian dialect; and also in 1277,

---

4 Furnivall, Brock, and Clouston, Originals, 73-84.

5 F. Pfeiffer, Dichtungen des Deutschen Mittelalters, Leipzig, 1848.

6 Oeuvres Poétiques de Phillipe de Remi, ed. Herman Suchier, Paris, 1884-1885.

7 Phillip Strauch, Deutsche Chroniken, Leipzig, 1900.

Der Kunic ze Ruizen,<sup>8</sup> a prose variant of Enikel's story by an anonymous German author. In the latter half of the century, a romance in alexandrines called La Belle Helene de Constantinople was written by an unknown French author.<sup>9</sup>

The following versions were written in the fourteenth century: Historia del Rey de Hungaria,<sup>10</sup> a Catalan prose tale by an anonymous Spanish author; Novalla della figlia del Re di Dacia,<sup>11</sup> a prose tale by an unknown Italian author; and in the latter half of the century, Emare,<sup>12</sup> an English metrical romance also by an anonymous author.

More precise dates can be given for the following versions: 1316, La Contesse d'Anjou,<sup>13</sup> a poem by the Frenchman Jehan Mallart; 1340, a story in Nicholas Trivet's Cronique Anglo Normande,<sup>14</sup> which was the direct source of both Gower's and Chaucer's versions of the story; 1370, Ystoria Regis

8 This version was printed in the introduction to Pfeiffer's work. See footnote 5 above.

9 J. Von der Cheyn, ed., L'ystoire de Helayne, Brussels, 1913.

10 P. De Bofarull, ed., Collecion de documentos ineditos del archivo general de la corona de Aragon, Vol. 13 of Documentos literarios en antigua lengua Catalana, Barcelona, 1857, 53-79.

11 Alexander N. Wesselofsky, ed., Pisa, 1886.

12 Alfred B. Gough, ed., London, 1901.

13 Mario Rogues, ed., La Roman du Conte d'Anjou, Paris, 1931.

14 Furnivall, Brock, and Clouston, Originals, 1.

Franchorum et fillie, in qua adulterium comitere voluit,<sup>15</sup> a Latin prose tale by an anonymous Italian author; and in 1378, "Novella de Diongia" in Giovanni Fiorentino's prose work, Il Pecorone.<sup>16</sup>

In the fifteenth century the following versions appeared:

Di Alixandre, roy de Hongrie, qui voluit espouser sa fille,<sup>17</sup> a French prose tale by an anonymous author; 1400, Die Konigstochter van Frankreich,<sup>18</sup> a metrical romance from Alsace by Han van Buhel; an Italian romance in ottava rima, Historia de la Regina Oliva, in 1400, by an anonymous author; 1449, a fragmentary story in Spanish prose in Gutierre Diaz de Games' chronicle, Victorial,<sup>20</sup> 1457, the Italian Bartolomeo Fazio's De Origine inter Gallos et Britannos belli historia<sup>21</sup> in Latin prose; and in 1475, a short prose legend in an anonymous Venetian author's collection, Miracule de la gloriosa versene Maria.<sup>22</sup>

---

15 Bibliotheque Nationale, Mss. Latins No. 8701, 142-147.

16 Trans. W. G. Waters, London, 1897.

17 Ernest Langlois, ed., Paris, 1908.

18 Teodor Merzdorf, ed., Oldenburg, 1867.

19 Antonio D'Ancona, ed., Due Farse del Secolo XVI, Bologna, 1882, 161-165.

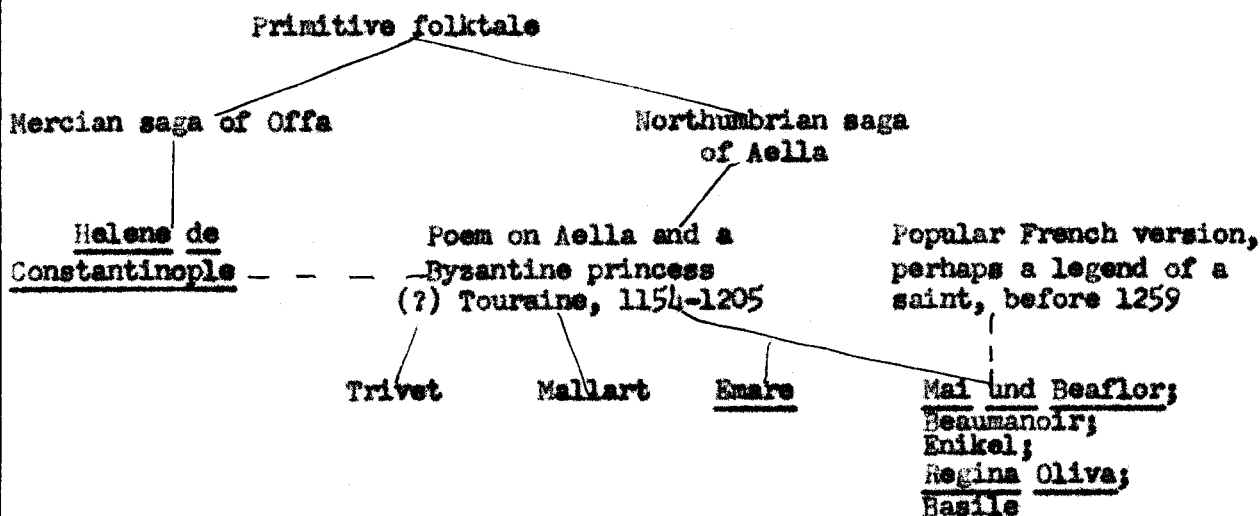
20 L. Lemcke, ed., Marburg, 1865.

21 Denis Francoise Camusat, ed., Bibliotheque Ciancani Paris, 1731.

22 Vicenza, 1475.

In the sixteenth century, the Legende von der Mutter des hl. Bartholmaus,<sup>23</sup> appeared, and a Catalan prose tale, Istoria de la filla del emperador Contasti,<sup>24</sup> by an unknown Spanish author was written during the seventeenth century. In 1637, a prose version of the story appeared as "La Penta Manomozza" in La Pentamerone<sup>25</sup> by the Neapolitan author Giambattista Basile.

Alfred B. Gough, who has made a study of the Constance story, constructed a diagram showing its history, which is here appended:<sup>26</sup>



23 George Stephens, Ett Fornsvenskt Legendarium, Stockholm, 1847, 217.

24 Bibliotheque Nationale, fonds espagnol, No. 475.

25 N. M. Penzer, ed., London, 1932.

26 Gough, Emare, viii.

It can be seen by the accompanying diagram that the story goes back to a primitive folktale. Direct descendants of this folktale are the two sagas of Offa and Aella. Helene de Constantinople is in the direct line of the Offa saga. Directly descended from the Aella saga there are a late twelfth century semi-learned version about Aella and a popular French version of the thirteenth century, which Gough believes may have been a saint's legend. These two versions, along with an indirect influence from the story of Helene, are the bases for the remaining literary versions.

The following summaries are of the more important literary versions and are herewith presented for the sake of comparison. They are important for various reasons. Either they were the more widely read versions, such as La Belle Helene de Constantinople and La Manekine, or they served as direct or collateral ancestors for other important works. They will not be presented chronologically, but in the order of their relationship to each other.

The hero of the oldest extant version of the Constance story is the half-mythical Anglian king, Offa I. His pretended history, as known in England, seems to be completely fable.<sup>27</sup>

#### VITA OFFAE I

While hunting one day in the forest, Offa becomes separated from his friends during a storm. He hears someone crying, and following the sound he comes upon a lovely and richly dressed maiden. When questioned she does

---

27 Marian Roalfe Cox, Cinderella, London, 1893, xlix.

not identify herself directly, but she tells the tale of a daughter of the prince of York. She relates that because the princess would not accept the incestuous love of her father, he ordered that she be taken to the forest and there slain and her body left to the beasts. But her executioners, having pity on her, did not kill her. Although she does not name herself, it is obvious that the maiden is the girl of the tale.

Offa takes her with him, and together they reach the hut of a hermit who shows them the way out of the forest. Upon reaching his land, Offa entrusts the maiden to the care of some of the members of his court.

Some years later, being requested by his nobles to marry, Offa decides to wed the maiden. Later they have some children.

Offa goes to the aid of the king of Northumbria, who is fighting the Scots. The Northumbrian king at the same time requests Offa to let him wed his daughter, swearing to acknowledge Offa as sovereign. Offa agrees and then defeats the Scots. He sends a letter announcing his victory. Another letter is substituted by the son-in-law, who is eager to seize Offa's throne, announcing that Offa has been defeated. The spurious letter states that Offa considers his defeat to be a judgment of God as punishment for having married the maiden. It goes on to say that the queen and her children are to be taken to some deserted place and killed. The nobles obey the letter's command, but the executioners again spare the queen, although they hack the children to pieces. A hermit finds the queen and through prayers resuscitates the children. When Offa returns he is horrified to hear what has happened, and he goes hunting to forget his grief. He finds the cave of the hermit and in it his wife and children. He is so grateful that he promises, at the



hermit's request, to build, on the very spot, a monastery.

The more usual incident of exposure in a boat appears in another story, relating to the wife of Offa II.

There lived in the land of the Franks a maiden of noble rank and of great beauty, but of evil disposition. As a punishment for some offense, she was placed in a boat, with neither rudder nor sail, and put to sea. After some time she reached England.<sup>28</sup> From this point on, the story goes off in a direction other than that followed by those of the Constance type.

In the version of the Constance story given in the life of Offa I, there is the first of many allusions to England that occur throughout the history of the Constance story. Offa is supposedly the king of the West Angles. He marries the daughter of the prince of York. The king of Northumbria plays an important part in the story. Offa and the Northumbrian king join forces to fight the pagan Scots. Although there are repeated allusions to England throughout the history of the Constance story, there is no evidence that in any instance is the story based on historical English sources.

Vita Offas Primi was the forerunner of Histoire de la Belle Helaïne de Constantinople, mere de St. Martin de Tours en Touraine et de St. Brice son frere. This version was published in quarto, at Paris, without date. Cox believes the romance to have been written in the twelfth century by Alexander of Bernai or Paris.<sup>29</sup> It would seem that she is alone in her belief.

---

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid., liii.

## LA BELLE HELENE DE CONSTANTINOPLE

Helene is the daughter of Antoine, king of Constantinople, who is married to the sister of Pope Clement IX. Helene's mother dies and Antoine decides to wed his daughter. He asks the pope for permission, and because he is under obligation to Antoine, the pope grants his request. When Helene learns of her father's intentions, she begs him to forget them and protests that she would rather cut off her hands and feet than have him love her in his unnatural fashion. Antoine will not relent, but Helene escapes to Slius, where she seeks refuge in a convent. Her father begins a vain search for her. After some years she is again in danger when the king of Slius, who desires her love, prepares to storm the convent and carry her away. She flees in a ship bound for Catalonia. The ship is wrecked and she is cast up upon the shore of England. There she meets and falls in love with Henry, king of England. They marry against the will of Henry's mother. Meanwhile, Pope Clement asks Henry's aid in the fight against the Saracens, and Henry goes, leaving the Duke of Gloucester as regent. While Henry is gone Helene gives birth to two boys. The message announcing this news to the king is intercepted by his mother, and in its place she substitutes one announcing that Helene has given birth to two dogs. Then follows a series of false letters usually connected with the Constance story. Gloucester cannot find it in his heart to burn Helene as one of the letters commands him to do, and so he cuts off one of her arms and puts her and the children to sea. Helene's

---

30 Although this refers to no particular Henry of England, it does show that the author was aware of the ascension of the Plantagenet line in England and places the story after 1154, when Henry II became the first Plantagenet king of England.

arm is put in a box which is hung around the neck of one of the boys. The boat lands in Brittany, and while Helene is asleep, a lion and a wolf make off with the children. Helene takes refuge in a deserted hut and lives on the alms of passersby. Meanwhile a hermit has saved the children and has named one, Lion, and the other, Bras.

Henry returns and learns the fate of Helene. Antoine arrives in England seeking his daughter. The two kings sympathize with each other and then discover that they grieve for the same person. Gloucester tells Henry of the letters and the truth is revealed. Henry banishes his mother, and he and Antoine join the Scottish king in a war against the heathen of Europe.

Lion and Bras, now sixteen, are sent out by the hermit to learn their parentage. They come to Tours, where the archbishop changes Lion's name to Martin and Bras' to Brice. Helene comes to Tours and receives alms from Martin, who does not recognize her. The kings come to Tours, and the boys are presented to them. When Henry sees the box which Brice carries, he recognizes his sons, and together they search for the one-armed woman. Helene, because she is afraid of meeting them, flees over the Alps to Rome and seeks the protection of the pope, who does not recognize her as his niece. Brice accompanies the kings to Palestine to fight the Saracens, but Martin remains in Tours. Later the kings come to Rome, but again Helene flees, this time to Tours, leaving a letter for the pope in which she reveals her identity. Henry learns of her action and follows her to Tours, where they are reunited and where through a miracle Helene regains her lost arm.

Again in La Belle Helene de Constantinople there is an allusion to England. Helene lands on the English coast near Newcastle upon Tyne.

She marries Henry, king of England. As in the case of the Offa version, there is no evidence that this story is based on English sources. The Helene version combines both stories of the Offa version, that is the persecuted wife motif from Offa I and the exposure in the boat from Offa II. This appears to be the first version of the story which does so. Because most of the other literary versions have the second motif, Gough is undoubtedly correct in inferring that the Helene version was an indirect source of the others.

A direct descendant of the Northumbrian saga of Aella, with an evident influence from the Helene version, is Jehan Mallart's Comtesse d'Anjou. In this story, the heroine's father falls in love with her during a game of chess, and she is forced to flee. After many adventures, she meets and marries the count of Bourges. The story follows the line taken by those of the Constance type. In this version the villain is the count's aunt rather than his mother.

Derived from the same source as the Comtesse d'Anjou is Emare, which was a widely read version of the Constance story. Alfred B. Gough reports that it is a translation or paraphrase of the lost Anglo-Norman or Northern French romance, L'Egaree.<sup>31</sup>

#### EMARE

Artyus, an emperor, loses his wife Erayne. He then desires to wed his daughter Emare. She refuses him, and he has her put to sea in a boat. She reaches Galys and there marries the king.

---

<sup>31</sup> Gough, Constance, 31.

During her husband's absence, Emare bears a son. The series of fraudulent letters follow, and she is again put to sea. She arrives at Rome and finds refuge in the home of a merchant.

Her husband returns to their home and discovers his mother's treachery. He banishes her and goes to Rome. The old emperor, Emare's father, also goes to Rome, and there the three are reunited.

This story follows the line of the majority of versions. It is interesting to note that although this is an English version of the story, no allusion is made to England. This omission, of course, supports Gough's belief that the version is a translation or paraphrase.

The final group of literary versions are descendants of the Aella saga by way of the semi-learned Touraine type and the popular French type, with the ever present influence of the Helene version. The oldest of this group is Mai und Beaflor. The author professes to be illiterate and says that he heard the story from a knight, who had read it in a prose chronicle.<sup>52</sup>

#### MAI UND BEAFLOR

Beaflor is the daughter of the Roman emperor, Teljon. Her father desires to marry her, but she asks him for fourteen days' grace. He grants it to her, and with the aid of friends, she escapes and reaches Meielant, where Count Mai receives her and gives her into his mother's care. Mai and Beaflor wed against the wish of his mother. Later on Mai goes to Spain to fight the heathen, and while he is gone Beaflor gives birth to a son. A message is sent to Mai informing him of the fact, but through treachery the

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 3.

count's mother substitutes a false letter. In one of the ensuing false letters, she orders the death of Beafior, but instead Beafior is put into a boat which in time reaches Rome. Mai in the meantime returns, learns what has happened, and kills his mother. Some time later, he comes to Rome and is there reunited with Beafior.

The Roman de la Manekine follows the same general theme as the life of Offa, but it is improbable that Beaumanoir used the work as a source.<sup>33</sup>

#### LA MENEKINE<sup>34</sup>

The king of Hungary, left a widower, is urged by his court to marry again. Having promised the late queen that he would marry only a woman who exactly resembled her, he now seeks to marry his daughter Jolie. Horrified at his proposal, Jolie cuts off her left hand, which falls into a stream. Her father is furious and demands that she be burnt alive. But friends put a dummy in Jolie's place, and she is put to sea. She lands in Scotland, where she meets, falls in love with, and marries the king.

While her husband is away attending a tournament, Jolie bears a son. The series of fraudulent letters follow through the instigation of the queen mother, and Jolie is again condemned to be burnt alive. She is again saved by friends through the substitution of another dummy. She is put to sea once more. The king returns, learns the truth, imprisons his mother, and sets out

---

33 Cox, Cinderella, xlix.

34 There are at least three known dramatizations (ca. fourteenth century) of La Manekine; Un Miracle de Nostre-Dame, La Reppresentation di Santa Uliva, and La Reppresentation di Stella. See Cox, Cinderella, lix.

in search of Joie. Seven years later he finds her in the house of a Roman senator. Her father comes to Rome to make public confession, and Joie makes herself known to him. Her hand which had been swallowed by a sturgeon is found and through a miracle becomes attached again to her arm.

In La Roman de la Manekine there is again an allusion to England. Joie lands at Berwick. She meets and marries the Scottish king. His mother lives in the city of York. Gough suggests that Beauvois may well have been unaware of the existence of a Northumbrian kingdom, because he places York, a Northumbrian city, in Scotland.<sup>35</sup>

"La Penta Manekozza" in Giovanni Basile's "frame-work" type book Il Pentamerone is an altered and abridged version of the Constance story.

#### La Penta Manekozza

The Princess Denise of France, to avoid marriage to an old German prince, flees to England and there seeks haven in a convent. The king sees her and falls in love with her. In time they are married, and later, while the king is engaged in a war with Scotland, Denise gives birth to twins. Her mother-in-law writes to the king and tells him that his wife has given birth to monsters. The king answers that they should be given loving care, but the queen mother substitutes an answer in which it is ordered that Denise and her children be killed. The person to whom the execution is entrusted allows Denise and her twins to depart. They go to Genoa, where many years later the king, on his way to a crusade, finds them.

---

35 Gough, Constance, 36.

In this version the incestuous father is replaced by an old German prince, but otherwise the story keeps close to form. Again in this version there is an allusion to England, but as before it must be noted that the story is not based on English history.

In the story by Snickel in his chronicle and in Der Kuric ze Ruizen, a prose variant of the former, the incestuous father motif returns.

The king of Russia loses his wife and he is persuaded by his nobles to marry his own daughter. When his daughter learns that the wedding preparations are for her father and herself, she tears off the wedding gown, cuts her hair off, and scratches her face until it bleeds. Her father is enraged to hear this, and he has her shut up in a barrel and thrown into the sea. She lands in Greece, where she meets and marries the king. Again there is the false letter motif. She is again put to sea and reaches Rome, where she is later reunited with her husband and her repentant father.

Games' fragmentary story in Victorial purports to give the reason for the old bitter hatred between France and England.

#### VICTORIAL

The duke of Guienne, after his wife's death, falls in love with his daughter. Rather than that her father should kiss her hands, she prevails on a servant to cut them off. She is punished by being put to sea in a boat, together with her belongings, including a silver basin containing her hands and the blood that she has lost. In a dream the Virgin appears to her, and the maiden prays for the restoration of her hands and a safe landing. The Virgin promises her a reward, and when she awakes her hands are whole again.



She arrives in England and there she marries the son of the king.

The duke of Guienne dies, and the prince goes to claim the duchy for his wife, but because the duke had never been reconciled with his daughter, he had given the duchy to the king of France; therefore the French will not give it up, and they drive the prince out of the country.

In this version there is an allusion to religion with the appearance of the Virgin. The calumniated wife motif is missing from this version, but otherwise it follows the line of the Constance story, with the minor deviation that in this version the heroine marries a prince, instead of a king.

The final version of importance is Nicholas Trivet's story, which will be summarized and discussed in the following chapter.

The pattern that the story always follows can now be easily seen. Stith Thompson sees four distinct elements in it:<sup>36</sup> one, the mutilated heroine; two, marriage to a king (or prince or duke or so on); three, the calumniated wife; and fourth, the hands restored. The first and fourth elements are not present in either Trivet's, Chaucer's or Gower's version of the story.

The story of Cinderella is related to the tale of Constance by way of the Catskin story.<sup>37</sup> This story is a variant of Cinderella, and is

---

<sup>36</sup> Thompson, Types, 111.

<sup>37</sup> Because the Catskin story has no important connection with the story of Constance, it will not be discussed. For a good summary see Henry Charles Coote, "Catskin: The English and Irish Peau D'Ane," Folk-Lore Record, III, 1880, Part I, 1-25.

characterized by the "unlawful marriage" opening, which, of course, has been utilized in the various Constance stories.<sup>38</sup>

W. A. Clouston lists some of the Asiatic versions of the "Tale of the Innocent Persecuted Wife" of which Constance is the European version.<sup>39</sup>

The Constance story is, then, an important one. Its widespread distribution both as a folktale and in its various literary versions and its ability to persist in literature give evidence to support this statement. It is an interesting and fast moving story, and John Gower's reason for selecting it as an example of the sin of detraction is evident.

---

<sup>38</sup> Cox list seventy-six versions of the Catskin story in Cinderella.

<sup>39</sup> Furnivall, Brock, and Clouston, Originals.

## CHAPTER III

### A STUDY OF NICHOLAS TRIVET'S

#### TALE OF CONSTANCE

Nicholas Trivet was the son of one of the itinerant justiciaries of the crown in the last years of the reign of Henry III. It is known that he was educated in London, that he became a Dominican friar, and that he died in 1228.<sup>1</sup> Very little else is known about him.

Thomas Hogg says that as an historian Trivet was "always judicious and never violent."<sup>2</sup> James Westfall Thompson echoes Hogg by saying that Trivet was an "accurate, precise scholar; and as an historian he showed himself judicious, moderate, and objective."<sup>3</sup> It is known that the chronicle into which Trivet introduced the story of Constance was written for Princess Marie, daughter of Edward I, after she had become a nun at Almesbury Convent.<sup>4</sup>

---

1 Thomas Hogg, ed., Nicholai Triveti Annales, London, 1845, v.

2 Ibid., ix.

3 A History of Historical Writing, I, New York, 1942, 394.

4 Margaret Schlauch, "The Man of Law's Tale," Sources and Analogues of Some of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, ed., W. F. Bryan and Germaine Dempster, Chicago, 1941, 156.

Trivet's intention was to entertain the princess with his romance, and although the rest of the chronicle is based on historical fact, there is no evidence that in the story of Constance he pretended to write of actual events. A summary of his version of the Constance story is presented herewith.

During the reign of Emperor Tiberius Constantinius, there lived a valiant knight named Maurice of Cappadocia. This knight was chosen by Constantinius to be co-emperor with him, and he gave Maurice his daughter Constance in marriage. According to Trivet, however, the ancient chronicles say that this Maurice was the son of Constance, by a king of the Saxons, Alle, the second king of Northumberland. Then it is understood that Tiberius begat on his wife, Italia, a daughter Constance. (No further explanation is given in Trivet's version.)

Constance, being Constantinius' only child, was brought up with diligence. She was taught the Christian faith and instructed in the seven sciences: astronomy, geometry, logic, morals, music, perspective and physics. She preached the Christian faith to the heathen merchants who came to the court of her father, and she converted many of them.

When these converts returned to their homeland and acknowledged their new faith before their Saracen neighbors, they were accused of heresy and brought before the sultan. They defended their new religion and spoke in praise of the maid, Constance. They told the sultan how lovely and wise she was, and hearing this, he fell in love with her. He, therefore, sent many rich gifts to Tiberius Constantinius and his daughter, asking for the hand of Constance in marriage.

After consulting with the pope, Constantinius answered that if the sultan would deny his faith and become a Christian, he would consent to the alliance. When the messengers returned to the sultan, they too praised the maiden. The sultan decided to accept the terms and he sent twelve Saracen children as hostages to Tiberius Constantinius as security for his daughter. He decreed that there would be peace between all Christians and all Saracens and free passage to all of the holy places. He relinquished the city of Jerusalem to the domination of the Christians and allowed the idol-temples to be destroyed and the clergy to enter his land.

In time the maiden was sent among the barbarians, amid great grief and tears and complaint of all in the city of Rome. A cardinal bishop, a cardinal priest, and a great number of clergy were sent with her. Also in her entourage were a Roman senator and a great number of Christians who went, some on a pilgrimage, the others to take possession of Jerusalem.

The sultan's mother, seeing her religion being destroyed by the Christians, plotted treason. She hired seven hundred Saracens, who vowed to live or die in the quarrel. She then went to her son and told him of how glad she was to be able to embrace the Christian religion, something which she had long wanted to do. She arranged with him to hold a feast to honor the coming marriage. The maiden arrived and was greeted with great honor and splendor. The feast was prepared in the palace of the sultanness and was arranged so that all of the men, Christian and Saracen, should eat in the sultan's hall, and that all of the women should eat in the sultanness' hall. The seven hundred Saracens were appointed to serve in both of the halls.

In the midst of the feast, the seven hundred armed Saracens, with another great multitude of their retainers, fell upon the guests, and by the order of the sultanness slew all of the Christians, men and women alike, including the sultan, but excepting Constance. Three young Christian men, who had heard the fighting, escaped and went to Rome, where they told the emperor of the slaughter and, as they believed, of the death of Constance.

Constance, in the meantime, remained in the hands of her enemies. No promises of riches or honor, nor threats of pain or death, could make her deny her faith. The sultanness then had a boat stored with enough bread, peas, beans, sugar, honey and wine to last three years. She also stored in it the riches and treasures which the maiden had brought with her. She then placed Constance in the boat, with neither oar nor a sail, and had the boat taken out by other boats onto the high sea where it was left to the four winds. For three years Constance was on the sea, and in that time she met neither man nor ship.

In the eighth month of the fourth year, God caused a favorable wind to drive the ship to England, where it grounded on Christmas Eve near a castle in the kingdom of Northumberland.

Elda, the warden of the castle, having been informed of the arrival by sea of a strange and beautiful maiden, went down to the shore and questioned her. She answered him in Saxon, which was his own tongue, and told him that she was a Christian of noble rank and that because of her lineage, she had been given in marriage to a great prince, but that because she displeased the great ones, she had been banished. She did not, however, tell him of her father or of the sultan or of the slaughter of the Christians.

When Elda heard her speak his language so well, he hoped that she might be the daughter of some Saxon king beyond the sea. He received her into his castle and put the treasure in safekeeping for her. After some time had passed, she regained her beauty and color.

Hermingild, the wife of Elda, seeing how virtuous Constance was, became greatly attached to her. Because Hermingild and Elda were still heathens, Constance began to try to convert them. Hermingild, after listening to Constance's teaching, desired to become a Christian.

One day, while Elda, Hermingild and Constance were walking on the beach, they met a blind Briton, who begged Hermingild to make the sign of the cross on his eyes. Hermingild, encouraged by Constance, did so, and immediately the Briton regained his sight. When Elda perceived this, he became receptive to the teaching of the two women and embraced the Christian faith. The Briton was privily sent to Wales to fetch a British bishop to baptize Elda, his wife, and their entire household. He returned with Bishop Lucius of Bangor, who baptized Elda and ninety-one members of his household.

Then Elda went to his lord the king of Northumberland, Alle, and told him of Constance. When the king had heard all that Elda had to say, he desired to meet Constance, and he therefore promised Elda that he would come to visit her.

During Elda's absence, a baptized Saxon knight, whom he had left in charge of the castle, fell in love with Constance and tempted her to sin. Being repulsed for the third time and fearing that he would be accused for his fault to his lord Elda on his return, he sought to revenge himself on Constance.

In the dawn of the day on which Elda was to return, the knight entered the chamber where Constance and Hermingild were asleep, and there he cut Hermingild's throat and hid the bloody knife under Constance's pillow. When Elda arrived and discovered the crime, the traitor blamed Constance, but Elda could not believe this of her and defended the maiden. Thereupon the knight swore on the Gospels that Constance was the murderess. Scarcely had he said this, when a closed hand, like a man's fist, appeared before Elda and smote the false knight so hard that both of his eyes flew out of his head and his teeth out of his mouth, and he fell to the earth.

After a day or two had passed, the king came and passed sentence of death upon the traitor. Then the king had himself baptized by Bishop Lucius. He then married the maiden, and she later conceived by him.

After half a year, the king heard that the Scots had invaded his lands, and so he gathered together his army and went to meet them in battle. He committed Constance to the care of Elda and Lucius and commanded them to inform him when the queen was delivered of her child.

The king's mother, Domild hated Constance because the maiden had been the cause of the king's forsaking his religion. Moreover, she envied Constance her godness, her holiness, and her marvelous beauty.

Constance gave birth to a son, and the child was named Maurice. Elda and the bishop sent the king news of the event, and the messenger went to the queen mother to bring her word. She pretended to be very happy and gave the messenger a drink which caused him to become insensible. She then substituted letters in which it was declared that Constance was an evil spirit in the form of a woman, that the wonders which she had wrought, and which



seemed to be miracles, were the deeds of the evil spirit in her body and that she had given birth to a hideous monster. The letters also said that another baby had been substituted for the monster so that the people would not know the truth and that Constance and her offspring had been imprisoned in an iron cage awaiting the king's command.

The next morning the messenger departed, promising the queen mother that he would stop at her palace on his way back from the king.

The king, upon reading the false letters, replied to them and commanded that his wife be safely kept until his return. The foolish messenger returned to Domild's castle and was again made drunk. Again the letters were opened and rewritten. Domild wrote to Elda and Lucius as if in answer to their letters and said that if Constance remained in the land, war and destruction would come, thereby commanding the two to prepare a ship and store it with enough provisions for five years. In this ship Constance and her son along with the same treasure that she had brought to the country were to be put to sea, without oar or sail.

Elda and Lucius, upon reading their letters, grieved. Constance perceived this and begged them to tell her everything. They told her of the command, and she said that if it must be, then she was ready for her banishment. Thus on the fourth day, the ship containing Constance and her son was taken out to sea and commended to God.

God guided her ship onto the sea of Spain, where it landed near the castle of a heathen admiral, to whom she was taken. The admiral's seneschal, Thelous, a renegade Christian, took pity on Constance, so that through him she was graciously received. The admiral placed her in Thelous' care, and the

geneschal confessed his sin in renouncing his faith to Constance. He begged her to allow him to go with her to some Christian land. Together with Maurice, they set out in the boat. At sea, Thelous, tempted by the devil, tried to entice Constance to sin. She used the presence of her son as an excuse for not complying with his wish and begged him to look out for land. When he was most intent in his searching, she thrust him into the sea to save her chastity.

King Alle, in the meantime, returned from Scotland and asked Elda and Lucius what had become of his wife. They told him of the letters, and at first he believed that it was through their doing that the evil deed had been performed. When the messenger was examined, he admitted his drunkenness at Domild's court. Alle went to his mother and ordered her to confess her crime. She did so and then begged for mercy, but the king cut off her head and hewed her body to pieces. Then he solemnly vowed that he would never wed until he had received some news of Constance.

In the fifth year of her exile, Constance met with a great fleet riding in a haven. The sailors brought her and her son to the palace of a Roman senator, Arsemius, whom she knew to be a friend of her father, although he did not recognize her. He questioned her, but she answered wisely and revealed nothing of her adventures. She told him that her name was Couste, for thus had the Saxons called her. He told her that the fleet was one which had been sent by the emperor against the Saracens, who had murdered his daughter.

Arsemius took Constance to Rome, and there she lived for twelve years with him and his wife, who was her cousin, but she likewise did not

recognize Constance. At this time, King Alle decided to make a pilgrimage to Rome to ask the pope for absolution for the slaughter of his mother. Elda, sent ahead to find suitable quarters for the king, chose the castle of Arsemius.

Constance, on hearing the news, swooned for secret joy, but when she was asked what ailed her, she said that it was a weakness of the brain which had come to her at sea.

The time came for the king's arrival, and so Arsemius went to meet him with all the knighthood of Rome and the rich Roman citizens. Arsemius' wife and Constance watched the proceedings from a tower, and when Constance saw Alle's face, she again swooned.

At the feast honoring the king, Maurice, now eighteen, was instructed to serve the king. Alle was struck by the boy's resemblance to his lost wife and asked whose son he was. He found out that the boy's name was Maurice, and he asked to see the boy's mother. When Constance appeared, Alle embraced her, and cried aloud, "I have found my wife!" Elda and Lucius greeted Constance, and with great joy they all thanked God.

Alle received his absolution from the pope, and after forty days he was besought by Constance to invite the emperor to a feast. Maurice was charged with the message and was told that if the emperor would not grant his petition, he should beseech him to come for the love he bore the soul of his daughter Constance. The emperor yielded and accepted the invitation. The king and his company went out to meet him, and Constance, before them all, addressed the emperor and told him who she was. Tiberius Constantinius was

overjoyed at finding his daughter, and later she told him of all her adventures.

Forth days later, Alle and Constance returned to England, and Tiberius Constantinius made Maurice co-emperor. Nine months later, Alle died and one half year after that, Constance was called to her father's death bed in Rome. Thirteen days after she arrived, the emperor died in her arms. Constance herself died one year later and was buried near her father in the Church of St. Peter in Rome. Elda, who had brought Constance to Rome, died in Tours on his way back to England.

In 1875, a mid-fifteenth century English translation of Trivet's story was discovered. The only important variation from the original French is the addition of a brief opening passage, which gives a picture of the time of Constantinius' reign. It relates the well-known incident of Gregory and the Anglian children. This and a few other variations were undoubtedly added by the translator.

Margaret Schlauch believes that Trivet's version is based directly on La Belle Helene de Constantinople,<sup>5</sup> and there is sufficient evidence to support her belief. Trivet's version follows La Belle Helene closely and in both mention is made of St. Martin.<sup>6</sup>

That Trivet really follows an ancient chronicle, as he says he does, is doubtful. The motif was added to give an air of pseudo-authenticity, and

---

<sup>5</sup> Margaret Schlauch, "Historical PreSursors of Chaucer's Constance," PQ, XXXIX, October, 1950, 402.

<sup>6</sup> Gough, Constance, 20.

those who read it were probably aware of the fact that it was merely fiction. Such a work can hardly have been older than the twelfth century or he would not have understood the language. The marriage of the maiden and the sultan points to a date after the first crusade. The burial of Elda at Tours seems to be an indication of an Anglo-French source.<sup>7</sup>

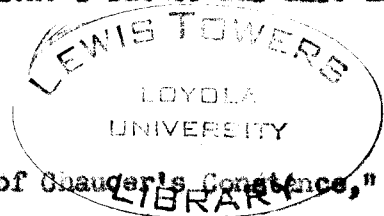
Trivet made two important changes in the traditional plot of the story. Schlauch suggests that these changes heighten the story's pathos and increase its instructional value. She proposes two historical incidents as antecedents for the changes, both of which concern persons named Constance and which deal with situations that Schlauch believes would readily come to the mind of a writer like Trivet if he were looking for ways to assimilate a popular romantic tale into a serious text written for a patroness who was both a nun and a princess. The historical material, she concludes, became for him a means of transition into a narrative which was somewhat out of keeping with the rest of the historical chronicle.<sup>8</sup>

The first innovation affected the historical envelope of the entire tale and caused its association with the names of the Byzantine emperors, Tiberius II Constantine and Maurice of Cappadocia, both of whom were actual historical personages. Tiberius Constantinius reigned in Constantinople from 578 to 582 A.D., and Maurice of Cappadocia reigned as sole ruler from 582 to 603/604 A.D. (It should be noted here that Helene's father was also an

---

7 Ibid., 21.

8 Schlauch, "Historical Precursors of Chaucer's Constance," PQ, XXXIX, 403.



emperor of Constantinople.) Trivet's choice of the Eastern Empire for the scene of the initial action was undoubtedly affected by his source, La Belle Helene de Constantinople.

The other innovation is Trivet's omission of the traditional beginning of the Constance story and his substitution of another opening. Schlauch reports that there was really an historical Constance, who found herself in a somewhat similar position not only in relation to a Saracen prince but also to an ambitious and cruel older woman, in this instance her own mother. Though the events did not actually unroll as in Trivet, Schlauch believes that the general situation was close enough to have given him the basis for his version of the tale.

The historical princess was Constance, daughter of Bohemond II of Antioch. William of Tyre relates that when Constance's mother, Alice, learned of the death of her husband, she decided to make her position more secure, and so she sent messengers to a certain powerful Turkish chief, Zengi, with whose aid she hoped to acquire Antioch for herself, despite the opposition of the people. She informed him that she would give him her daughter to wed in exchange for his assistance.<sup>9</sup>

Schlauch shows that there was, therefore, a real Constance who was the center of political intrigue affecting the status of Christian power in the Holy Land. It is easy to conceive of her as an innocent sacrifice

---

<sup>9</sup> William Archbishop of Tyre, A History of Deeds Done Beyond the Sea, II, New York, 1943, 44.

offered in a political marriage to further the Christian faith. Thus regarded, she could readily fit into the kind of story that Trivet was planning to modify for insertion into his chronicle.<sup>10</sup>

Lillian Hornstein gives another source for the opening of Trivet's tale, a medieval story called the King of Tars. She lists many details that are common to both tales: first, the report of the princess' great beauty; second, the sultan's uncontrollable desire to wed the heroine although he has never seen her; third, the girl's distaste for the proposed marriage; and fourth, the accusation of having borne a monstrous child.<sup>11</sup>

She goes on to give the following close resemblances between the two: the inducing cause for the marriage is the hope of peace and amity between the Christians and the Saracens; the sultan sends letters promising the Christians freedom of trade and worship and agreeing to relinquish the city of Jerusalem to them; he showers the bride with lavish gifts; and she is accompanied by members of the clergy, knights, and others when she leaves her home.<sup>12</sup>

When the King of Tars is considered as one of Trivet's sources, it helps to clear up an otherwise inexplicable situation in the opening pages

<sup>10</sup> Schlauch, "Historical Precursors of Chaucer's Constance," PQ, XXXIX, 407.

<sup>11</sup> Lillian Herlands Hornstein, "Trivet's Constance and the King of Tars," MLN, LV, May, 1940, 354.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

of his version. In Trivet's story the heroine leaves her father's home amidst great sorrow and lamentation, but the reason for this misery is not apparent. The sultan has already agreed to accept the Christian religion and gives every indication of being an admirable spouse. In the King of Tars, the heroine consents to the marriage only after threats of further war, and when she leaves to marry the sultan, her departure naturally evokes much pity.<sup>13</sup>

It is clear that the Schlauch and the Hornstein positions are reconcilable. It is very possible that the story of the King of Tars may have been in part influenced by the life of the real historical personage, and therefore Constance of Antioch shows up in the Trivet story by way of that tale. It is even more possible that Trivet used both sources for his opening. The actual story line is probably based on the King of Tars, and the use of real names was a result of the influence of events in the lives of the historical personages. Trivet's use of the name Alle (Aella) shows that he must have come into contact with the Aella saga or a form of it at some time or another.

Except for the omission of the first and fourth elements,<sup>14</sup> Trivet remained true to the traditional story. Because the tale is told in the form of a chronicle, the characters are necessarily lifeless. Trivet, nevertheless, gives an excellent picture of conditions in Britain at the time of

---

13 Ibid., 356.

14 The first element, as the reader will remember, is the mutilated heroine, and the fourth is the restoration of her hands. For a review of this material see Thompson, Types, 111. Also see page 21 of this study.



the story and shows that he is acquainted with the history of England. Witness the secret sending for Bishop Lucius. At the time of which Trivet wrote Northumbria was still a pagan land. Elda keeps Constance in comparative secrecy, and the king says that when he comes to see her, he will do so privately. These are both good and subtle indications that Trivet was aware of the hostility to Christianity in Northumbria in the pre-Augustinian period.

As in the other versions, there is a double time scheme in Trivet's story. The time spent by the heroine at sea is three years, two years, and three years respectively. During this time nothing happens, and the tempo of the story is not slowed. The time could just have well been three weeks, two weeks and so on. Nothing is added to the story by these prolonged exposures at sea except a demonstration that Constance is a remarkably hardy heroine. However, these passages do show the probable influence of the old voyage tales and of the romance conventions.

Constance's repeated refusal to give her name and the recurrence of this motif in the Constance saga probably reflects the influence of folk-belief. Romances, ballads and other oral literature abound in instances of the dire consequences of the inopportune revelation or use of a name.<sup>15</sup>

Trivet's primary intention in writing the narrative was to provide his patroness with interesting reading matter. Clearly his intention was not didactic, although naturally a few morals can be gleaned from the story. The substitution of a new opening is the only example of any real originality.

---

<sup>15</sup> Maria Leach, ed., Funk and Wagnall's Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology and Legend, II, New York, 1950, 782.

This, of course, is to his credit, for in it he did away with a distasteful motif and substituted in turn a far more interesting and agreeable one.

The chief value of the work, however, is that it served as a direct source for two excellent narratives, Chaucer's "The Man of Law's Tale," and Gower's "Tale of Constance."

## CHAPTER IV

### A STUDY OF JOHN GOWER'S

### TALE OF CONSTANCE

The *Confessio Amantis* consists of seven sets of stories of the seven deadly sins. Gower states that he went to the woods on a May Day, as a lover, and called upon Cupid and Venus. They showed him no kindness, even though he told them that he was dying of love. Venus answered that if he were dying, he must let her confessor come and shrive him. The confessor was Genius, the priest of nature, to whom the lover knelt and began to confess his sins. The lover asked for help in remembering his sins, and the confessor began by questioning him as to his use of the five senses, especially sight and hearing. Thus follows the sequence of tales, all of which lie close together, connected throughout by passages of dialogue between the confessor and the lover. When they had finished their discussion of the senses, they began to talk about the seven deadly sins: pride, envy, anger, sloth, avarice, gluttony, and lust each of which was divided into its chief forms and every form illustrated by an exemplum or tale.

The work ends with Venus telling the lover that his complaints are against nature and that he should remember his age. Cupid came by with a band

of gay young lovers, and Age followed with a small group of old men who had been servants to love. The old men pleaded with Venus to have pity on the lover, and so Cupid withdrew his dart from the lover's breast. Venus put some cold ointment over his heart and gave him a mirror to look into. When he had seen his aged face and hoary hair Venus laughed and asked him what love was, to which he answered that he knew not. Thereupon he was absolved by his confessor and dismissed from the Court by Venus, who advised him to go where he could find moral virtue.

The "Tale of Constance" is introduced into the work as an example of detraction, a chief form of the sin of envy. It is, of course, an excellent example, for a large portion of the tale hinges on the sin of detraction. Gower used Trivet's story in French as a source, and therefore he encountered the problems of the medieval translator. It might be well here to present a brief discussion on the subject of medieval translation, so that the reader will realize some of Gower's problems and will see how well he solved them.

All medieval English translators in general attempted to follow some such principle as that laid down in Aelfric's dictum of "word for word if possible; if not sense for sense,"<sup>1</sup> but however often the principle is stated or implied, the tendency to paraphrase is dominant. In translating from a foreign language, the medieval Englishman was forced to make a choice among obsolete English equivalents, the foreign word itself introduced silently, coinage, or words current but not widely known because of English

---

1 Flora Ross Amos, Early Theories of Translation, New York, 1920, 56.

dialectical differences. There was no definite body of opinion concerning translation, and each man made his own rules, a fact which accounts for the unevenness of translation within a single work. However, translation into medieval English, on the whole, was graceful, accurate, and sometimes, to a degree, original.

In medieval England, free translation might take any of the following forms: amplification or abbreviation; closeness to the original or collation from related sources; retention or discard of meter, if the translation was made from verse. Abbreviation was highly regarded for didactic works. Indeed, brevity combined with pith was felt to be especially appropriate for the expression of moral truths.

While the didactic spirit ran through a great deal of medieval translation, patriotism might likewise be a motive for translation, especially if it were joined to the motive of the instruction of the unlearned. This motive of patriotism was dominant with Gower. Having been commanded by Richard II to write something new, and feeling that too little was being written in English, he abandoned Latin and French, and wrote the Confessio Amantis in English.

And for that fewe man endite  
In oure english, I thence make  
A bok for Engelondes sake.<sup>2</sup>

The first thing that is noted upon reading Gower's tale is his preference for narrative over dialogue. The "Tale of Constance" is one

---

2 Gower, Works, II, 11, 620-638.

thousand and twenty-five lines long, of which only sixty-five are devoted to dialogue. In most instances Gower compensates for the loss of dramatic effect gained through the use of dialogue by the addition of dramatic action and the omission of irrelevant or repetitious material. C. S. Lewis says that although the pictorial imagination finds little to feed on in the Confessio Amantis, there is another kind of imagination, perhaps more proper to narrative, brought into play. What Gower sees is movement, not groups or scenes, but actions and events. Insofar as he approximates to the visible arts at all, Lewis continues, it is a cinematograph rather than a painting that he suggests. There is an ever present movement which is the strength of Gower as a narrative poet.<sup>3</sup>

Witness Gower's treatment of the scene of the feast given to welcome Constance to Barbary. Here is the logical place for an author to fully describe the scene that must have taken place, first, the eastern opulence, then the bloody slaughter. Trivet describes the scene thus:

Puis fu la pucele e les Cristiens resceu del souldan e de sa mere a grant homur e a grant nobleye. E le primer iour de leur venue fu la feste purveue en le palais le souldane, e estoit la mangerie ordeyne issint qe les haies le souldan mangasent tous madles, Cristiens e Sarazins, e qe en les haies e en la feste le souldane fusement soules femmes saunts les sept cents Sarazins lowes qe furent ordeines pur service del vne feste e del autre. E ces sept cents lowis, quant la fest fust plus lee, vyndrent armes oue vne autre graunde multitude de leur retenaunce sur les mangeaunts. E solen lordinaunce de la souldane, tuerent tous les Cristiens, madles e femeles, fors soule la pucele; e occirent le souldan et l'admiral e les autres comerties a la lei. E par tote la court quantqu'il trouverent del valles Cristiens, mistrent e la mort.<sup>4</sup>

3 The Allegory of Love, Oxford, 1936, 205-206.

4 Schlauch, "Man of Law," Sources and Analogues, 167.

Gower trims the scene down to its bare essentials thereby making it seem rapid, as indeed it was.

And therupon hire ordinance  
 She made so, that whan Constance  
 Was come forth with the Romeins,  
 Of clerkes and of Citezins,  
 A riche feste sche hem made;  
 And most whan that thei weren glade,  
 With fals covine which sche hadde  
 Hire clos Envie tho sche spradde,  
 And alle tho that hadden be  
 Or in apert or in prive  
 Of conseil to the mariage,  
 Sche slowen hem in a sodein rage  
 Endlong the bord as thei be set,  
 So that it myhte nocht be let;  
 Hire oghn Sone was nocht quit,  
 Bot deide upon the same plit.<sup>5</sup>

In general, then, Gower's use of narration is a device for accelerating the pace of plot movement, and it very often succeeds in producing effects both dramatic and dynamic.

Gower diverged from his source in a good many points. These deviations will be discussed in the order in which they occur in the story.

In *Trivet* Constance is very proficient in sciences and languages.

E pur ceo que nul autre enfaunt auoyt, pur ceo a grant diligence  
 la fist enseigner la fey Cristien, e endoctriner par mestres  
 sachaus en les sept sciences, que sont logiscience, naturel,  
 morale, astronomie, geometrie, musique, perspective, que sont  
 philosophies seculares apeles, e la fist endoctriner en  
 diuerses langages.<sup>6</sup>

---

5 Gower, Works, II, 11, 677-692.

6 Schlauch, "Man of Law," Sources and Analogues, 165.

Gower makes no mention of her learning in science and languages.

Instead he begins by describing her piety.

Constance, as the Cronique seith,  
 Sche hihte, and was so ful of feith,  
 That the greteste of Barbarie,  
 Of hem whiche usen marchandle,  
 Sche hath converted, as thei come  
 To hire upon a time in Rome,  
 To schewen such thing as thei brouhte;  
 Whiche worthill of hem sche boghte,  
 And over that in such a wise  
 Sche hath hem with hire wordes wise  
 Of Cristes feith so full enformed,  
 That thei therto ben al conformed,  
 So that baptesme thei receiven  
 And alle here false goddes weyven<sup>7</sup>

It is evident here that Gower desires to stress Constance's fervor and her apostolic zeal. It must be remembered that no part of the story is concerned with the heroine's vast knowledge, but her piety does play a very important part. By cutting away the superfluous attributes given Constance by Trivet, Gower better portrays the maiden as the simple, pure, and ardently religious person that she is supposed to be in both versions. One of the morals to be gleaned from the story is that piety will triumph; therefore let the heroine be pious before she is anything else.

Another point to be brought out, although it is but a minor one, is that Trivet acknowledges that Constance was trained in the seven sciences, among which he includes astronomy. But would she be quite so helpless at sea and so ignorant of where she was when she landed if she was, as Trivet himself reports, "endoctriner par mestres sachaus en...astronomie?"<sup>8</sup>

---

7 Gower, Works, II, 11, 597-610.

8 Schlauch, "Man of Law," Sources and Analogues, 165.



Therefore since Constance is portrayed as a simple, pious, chaste maiden in both versions, Gower is the more consistent in his presentation, because he does not promise anything in the way of the heroine's character that he does not demonstrate in the text. Trivet tells of her great learning, and the reader is led to expect that she will demonstrate it in some way or another. When held captive by the wicked sultanness, she could eloquently defend herself, or when the issue of the substitute letters from the king arises, she could have deduced logically that there was something false afoot. (Remember that she has been "endocriner...en logiciencie.") That Constance is a sensible and somewhat taciturn character, of course, is evidenced in both versions by her ability to answer wisely when questioned and not to give away any information that is of importance, but this is obviously no sign of education.

In the Trivet version the converted merchants "retournerent a leur terre. Et quant reconustrent la fei devant leur veizines e parens Sarazins, estoient accuses al haut soudan de leur fey."<sup>9</sup>

In the Gowerian version they are not brought before the sultan as heretics instead they are sent for.

Ther gon to Barbarie ayein,  
 And ther the Souldan for hem sente  
 And axeth hem to what entente  
 Ther have here ferste feith forsake.<sup>10</sup>

---

9 Schlauch, "Man of Law," Sources and Analogues, 165.

10 Gower, Works, II, ii, 612-615.

Because the sultan is in no way a villain, and because he is described as a person who is somewhat eager to learn, it would appear to be wiser to bring him into the story as Gower does. In Trivet's version the reader is given the idea that the merchants were accused by their neighbors before the sultan and that their lives probably depended on what he thought. In Gower's version he is presented as a more amiable and likable young man. He asks the merchants why they have given up their previous faith. The scene does not seem as sinister as it does in Trivet. By this slight deviation in the presentation, the action that follows is given a new interpretation.

In Trivet the merchants tell the sultan about Constance as a sort of defense for their actions. It is implied by what precedes that the sultan is interested. In Gower we know that he is interested. Why else would he send for them? Since he is interested, their telling him of Constance seems more natural. He is eager to know why they changed their faith. The reader is almost able to infer that the sultan himself is ripe for conversion; therefore his actual conversion seems to be more psychologically sound than in Trivet. We suspect that although the sultan actually accepted Christianity as a condition for his marrying Constance, he himself may already have had some ideas on the subject.

Trivet treats at some length of the marriage negotiations with the sultan.

Par queles paroles lue soudan, trop surpris del amour de la pucele (com il estoit homme de jeuene age), maunda de nouel meimes ceus Cristiens qil conuertit a la fei, e ouesques eus vn admiral paen oue graunt aparail et richesses e presentz a Tyberie e a sa fille, en damaundaunt la pucele en mariage oue grant promesse de pees e daliance countre les parties de Cristiens and Sarasins. E puis que Tyberie auoit counseille sur ceste

demaunde le pape Johan (de qi est auant dist en le quarantisme sisme estoire) e les autres grants de seint eglise e les Romeyns del senat, respoundy al admiral e as messagers, qe si luy soudan se voleit assenter de renser ses maumetz e sa mescreaunce, e resceuere baptisme e la lei Iesu Crist, a cest couenaunt Tyberius sassentirait a laliaunce, mes ne pas en autre fouras. E sur ceo maunda ses lettre a lui soudan, e grantment le honura les messagers. E cist, a lour retourner, sur toute reins preiserent la pucele a lui soudan, e la nobleye, a la court, e deuant tot soun counceil se vows a la fey Cristien si le soudan sassentisit.

Puis apres poy de tours le soudan maunda messes cesti admiral e solempnes messagers dez plus grants de sa terre e en lour conduyt dusse enfauntz Sarazins fits a grauntz Sarazins hostages a Tiberie, en fouras de seurte pur sa fille. E a ceo maunda son assent, haut e bass, de lordinaunce des Cristiens, e a ceo enuoya ses lettres asseles (de bone) e entre pees entre tous Cristiens e tous Sarazins, e fraunche passage de aler fraunchement e marchaunder, e pur visiter les seintz luz del sepulcre, e del mount de Caluarie, e de Bethleem e de Nazareth e del val de Josaphat e tous autres seyns deins les marches de son power. Et la cite de Ierusalem abaundona a la seigneurie des Cristiens pur enhabiter, e franchises as euesques Cristiens e a lour clergie de precher, e enseigner les gentz de sa terre la dreite foy, e de baptizer e deglises fere, a les temples de maumetz destrure.<sup>11</sup>

Gower abridges the action and thus heightens the intensity of the situation.

And when the Souldan of Constance  
 Upon the point that thei anguerde  
 The beaute and the grace herde,  
 As he which thanne was to wedde,  
 In alle haste his cause spedde  
 To sende for the marriage.  
 And furthermor with good corage  
 He seith, be so he mai hire have,  
 That Crist, which can this world to save,  
 He woll believe; and this recorded,  
 Thei ben on either side acorded,  
 And thereupon to make an ende  
 The Souldan hise hostages sende  
 To Rome, of Princes Sonnes twelue:

11 Schlauch, "Man of Law," Sources and Analogues, 165-166.

Whereof the fader in himselfe  
 Was glad, and with the Pope avised  
 Two cardinals he hath assised  
 With othre lordes many mo,  
 That with his doghter scholden go,  
 To se the Souldan be converted.<sup>12</sup>

All the irrelevant details are ruthlessly cut out, giving a much swifter pace to the narrative. Trivet's treatment tends to be repetitious. First, the merchants praise Constance, and then, when the admiral and the other messengers return from Rome, they also praise her. The details of the negotiations: the peace between the Christians and the Saracens, free passage to all holy places, the relinquishing of Jerusalem to the Christians, and the destruction of the idol-temples, would naturally come as a consequence of the sultan's conversion; therefore there is no need to list them. In Gower the sultan says, "That Crist, which can this world to save, He wold believe." What more is needed?

The sending of the hostages to Rome is given more importance by Gower when he exchanges "Princes Sones twelve" for "duzze enfaunta Sarazins." It would seem to be only proper to give in exchange persons of high birth for the daughter of an emperor.

Gower omits "a grant doel e lermes e crie e noise e plainte de toute la citee de Rome," which is so apparently inexplicable in Trivet. We can today see the possible source of this grief,<sup>13</sup> but Trivet's inclusion of

12 Gower, Works, II, ii, 620-638.

13 See page 36 of this study.

it without apparent reason is a weakness in his version. Gower obviously detected the weakness and therefore omitted it.

Where Trivet sends Constance to the sultan with "vn euesqe cardinal e vn prestre cardinal oue grant nombre de clergie," Gower cuts her clerical entourage down to just the "two cardinals." This is apparently a device to secure brevity.

Trivet states in his version that the sultan's mother plotted treason with "sept cens Sarazyns qe sabaundonerent de uiuere e morir en la querele." Later on, it is these seven hundred Saracens, "vyndrent armes oue vne autre graunde multitude de lour reteinsunce" who complete the bloody business of the slaughter of the Christians.

Gower treats the scene differently. The reader is not told how the murders are performed. All Gower says is:

Sche slooth hem in a sodein rage  
 Endlog the bord as thai be set,  
 So that it myhte nocht be let;  
 Hire oghne Sone was nocht quit,  
 But diede upon the same plit.<sup>14</sup>

The reader can infer one of two things. He can infer that the guests had been poisoned or that though it is not specifically mentioned, the sultanness was aided in these murders. If they were poisoned, it must have been with a poison that causes hemorrhage, for a few lines later Gower describes the scene:

This worthi Maiden which was there  
 Stod thame, as who seith, ded for feere,

---

<sup>14</sup> Gower, Works, II, 11, 688-692

To se the feste how that it stod,  
 Which as was torned into blod;  
 The Dissh forthwith the Coppe and al  
 Bebled thei weren overal;  
 Sche sih hem daie on every side;  
 No wonder thogh sche wepte and cride  
 Makende many a wofull mone.<sup>15</sup>

Gower's cinematic art is clearly evidenced in the passage quoted above. The action is swift, the sultanness is spotlighted, and there is a close-up of the bloody dishes and cups, the very symbols of the hospitality that the sultanness has violated. Gower's ability to highlight important details is clearly shown here. Notice also how swiftly and concisely the sultanness' character is revealed by Gower. She murdered the Christians and the friendly Saracens in "a godein rage" and even "hire oghne Bone was neight quit." These two small details are enough to give a very complete picture of the character.

In the Trivet version Constance lands in Northumbria on "la veille de la natiuite Jesu Crist."<sup>16</sup> In the Confessio Amantis she lands "upon a Somer dai."<sup>17</sup> Although her coming on Christmas Eve symbolises the arrival of something wonderful and new, Gower presents a fresher image of youth, brightness, and simplicity because of her arrival in the summer.

In Trivet Constance and Hermingild have a talk which leads to Hermingild's conversion.

---

15 Ibid., 695-708.

16 Schlauch, "Man of Law," Sources and Analogues, 168.

17 Gower, Works, II, ii, 752.

Lors, quant plusieurs foits lui auoit ceste parole afferme, un jour com Hermyngyld lui rshersa autre foits la parole, la seitne pucele lui respoundi; "Et puis que riens ne est," dist ele, "qe vous ne freez a ma volonte, count vous serrez mesme tiel come ice suy." Et Hermyngild lui respoundi: "A ceo," dist ele, "ja ne purray ice ateyndre, quar vous etez en terre sauntz peer en vertue." E Custaunce luie respount: "A ceo poez vous venir, si creere voudrez en celi dieu quest seigneur de toute vertue." (Hermyngyld e Elda e les autres Sessouns qe auoient douneque la seigneurie de la terre estoient vnquore paens.) E Hermyngild humblement e deuotement escota la doctrine de la fei par la bouche Constance, que lui aprist la puissaunce dieu en la fesaunce de tut le mound, e sa vengeance quy l prist par la grant delunie, e apres par les grants cites qil engoundri en enfer par pesche, e hommes, e bestes, e quantque leins estoit. Puis li moustra le grant amour dieu en sa nesaunce e sa bonserie e vertue en sa mort e en sa passieun, e las vertue de la deite Iesu Crist en sa resurexioun e en sa ascensioun, e tote la nature de un soul dieu e trois persones en la venue del saint esprit. E quant par plusieurs tours lauoit de la fei apris, e les sacrements, e de les comaundements, lui aprist amour e desir e la joye de ciel, e les peines de enfern douter. Dont Hermyngyld, apres ceste aprise, deuotement pria destre baptise solom la fourme de saint eglise; mes pur ceo qe son baroun estoit paen, ele ne poeit vnquore purseure soun purpos.<sup>18</sup>

Gower omits the dialogue and abridges the scene.

Dame Hermyngheld, which was the wif  
Of Elda, lich her oghne lif  
Constance loveth; and fell so,  
Spekende alday between hem two,  
Thurgh grace of goddess pourveance  
This maiden taunte the creance  
Unte this wif so parfitly.<sup>19</sup>

Here again is a place where Gower substitutes narrative action for dialogue in order to make the plot move more rapidly. The story is moving on to a high point and it is enough for the reader to know that Hermyngild desired to become a Christian. It should be noted here that while the conversion of

18 Schlauch, "Man of Law," Sources and Analogues, 169.

19 Gower, Works, II, 11, 749-755.

the Saracen merchants was characterized by a certain stateliness, the conversion of Hermingild is characterized by feminine intimacy and quiet talk. Again Gower shows his fondness for variety and at the same time demonstrates Constance's continuous success in her conversion of heathens.

Gower's religiosity shows up in the tale with the fact that the three kinds of baptism: of blood, of water, and of desire are all evident in the story. The Saracens who desired to become Christians but were slaughtered at the feast are an example of baptism of blood. The Hermingild incident is an example of baptism of desire, for she does not live to be baptized by Lucius. Though she is murdered, it is not done as a result of her acceptance of Christianity, and therefore baptism of blood is ruled out. The baptism of the Saxon household is an example of baptism of water.

It appears that Gower wished these three types to be demonstrated, for he changed Trivet's version to accomplish this. In Trivet, Elda and the other Saxons including Hermingild are baptized by Lucius before Elda goes for the king. Since in Gower she is murdered before receiving the sacrament, it appears that his intention was to call attention to the incident.

According to Trivet the blind man who received his sight through Hermingild was "vn pouere Cristien Britoun."<sup>20</sup> This Briton was later sent to bring back the bishop. Gower does not make the man a Briton. He stresses action although the characters are clearly presented through their words and actions. Gower effectively uses the dialogue to show the quality of faith

---

<sup>20</sup> Schlauch, "Man of Law," Sources and Analogues, 169.



possessed by both Hermingild and the blind man. The whole picture tends to be clearer. One of the people of the land approaches Hermingild and asks her to aid him. It is not necessary that he be a Christian, because he will not be called on later to bring the bishop from Wales.

And forto make schort tales,  
 Ther cam a Bisschop out of Wales  
 Fro Bangor, and Lucie he hihte.<sup>21</sup>

The next deviation is of more importance. In Trivet the knight who murders Hermingild is "vn cheualer Sessoun de la meyne Elda, entre les autres ia baptise, a quy Elda auoit baile ba garde del chastel taunque a sa venue del roys."<sup>22</sup>

In Gower the knight, while still a villain, plays a somewhat different role.

This Elda triste in special  
 Upon a knyht, whom fro childhode  
 He hadde updrawe into manhode;  
 To him he tolde al that he thoghte,  
 Whereof that after him forthoghte;  
 And natheles at thilke tide  
 Unto his wif he bad him ride  
 To make redi alle thing  
 Ayein the cominge of the king.<sup>23</sup>

In this case Gower gives much more depth to the characterization, and therefore he makes the knight's crime seem all the more heinous. The knight is an important secondary character and it is good form to describe him more fully than an unimportant character is described. Later the false oath

---

21 Gower, Works, II, ii, 903-905.

22 Schlauch, "Man of Law," Sources and Analogues, 170.

23 Gower, Works, II, ii, 782-800.

characterizes him further. Gower emphasizes the knight's violation of loyalty and his betrayal of his lord and lady.

In *Trivet* the knight is already at the castle, since he has been left in charge. Elda leaves, the knight quickly attempts to seduce Constance three times, he fails, plots his revenge, carries it out and so on. While this is not implausible, it is somewhat hasty. In *Gower* the knight is a messenger from Elda. He brings news to Herwingild that the king will shortly arrive. The knight, therefore, does not have much time. Gower wisely puts the attempted seduction in the past, leaving only a short time for the knight to carry out his evil plan.

In *Trivet* when the false knight is smitten by the Hand of Heaven, the voice says, "Adoerius filiam matris ecclesie ponebas scandalum; hec fecisti et tacui."<sup>24</sup>

Gower does not have the voice speak in Latin, for there is no sound reason why it should, and he makes the speech much more dramatic:

O damped man to helle,  
Lo, thus hat god the sclandre wroke  
That thou ayein Constance hast spoke;  
Beknow the sothe er that thou dye.<sup>25</sup>

After which the knight confesses his crime and dies. This whole incident is handled well by Gower. In *Trivet* the knight confesses and then is held until the king can judge him. To have him die upon completing his

---

24 Schlauch, "Man of Law," Sources and Analogues, 172.

25 Gower, Works, II, 11, 880-883.

confession is a much more dramatic scene than to have the anti-climactic wait for the king. There is a greater unity here, because the incident is not carried into the following scene as it is done in Trivet. This whole scene proves that Gower can make excellent dramatic use of dialogue when he feels that it helps plot movement, as it does in this case.

In Trivet Dowilde gives the messenger a drugged potion each time that he visits her. In Gower the first time the messenger comes:

Bot in the nyht al prively  
Sche tok the lettres whiche he hadde.<sup>26</sup>

This is a minor deviation. The second time he comes, the queen mother makes him drunk with "strong wyn." The first time she gets the letters through stealth, and therefore the messenger need not be drugged. The second time, however, she hesitates to trust her luck again and gives the messenger enough wine to make him drunk. The author believes that Gower omitted the first drugging purposely. In the first place it removes repetition, which Gower dislikes. It also makes the action seem more natural and gives the reader an added insight into the resourcefulness of Dowilde.

The communication to Constance of the king's command and her acceptance of her fate are presented thus in Trivet:

Lors ly dist luy messenger qe ly rois ly fist si dur encountre qil ne voleit fe la dame ne del enfaunt male parole oyer. Puis les seignurs ly ount les lettres le rois moustre oue grant dolour e lermes. Mes Constance, pleine deu e prest a toutes ses noluntes e a ses ordinauntes, lour dist: "Ja ne veigne ceo iour qe pur moy la terre feust destrute a que pur moy mes chers amis euses mort ou moleste. Mes puis que a dieu plect e a mon seigneur, le rois, moun

exil, a bon gree le doys prendre, en esperance qe dur comencement  
amenera dieus a bon fyn, e qil me porra en la mer sauuer qi en mer  
e en terre est de toute pussance."<sup>27</sup>

Gower relates the scene in this way:

Ther was wepinge and ther was wo,  
Bot finaly the thing is do.<sup>28</sup>

Again Gower strips away irrelevant material in order to accelerate  
the movement of the plot. Constance's acceptance of the situation is shown by  
Gower in a beautiful prayer which will be discussed below.

An interesting note is that in Trivet's text there is a glaring  
inconsistency. Constance's "son enfaunt Moris,"<sup>29</sup> the reader is told, "aprist  
marinage."<sup>30</sup> This inconsistency is of course omitted in Gower.

Besides an overall improvement to the work, Gower's major addition  
is the following section:

And thanne hire handes to the hevene  
Sche strechte, and with a milde stevene  
Knelende upon hire bare kne  
Sche seide, "O hihe mageste,  
Which sest the point of every trowthe,  
Tak of thi wofull woman rowthe  
And of this child that I schal kepe."  
And with that word sche gan to wepe,  
Swounende as ded, and ther sche lay;  
Bot he which alle thinges may  
Conforeth hire, and ate laste  
Sche loketh and hire yhen caste  
Upon hire child and seide this:

---

27 Schlauch, "Man of Law," Sources and Analogues, 174-175.

28 Gower, Works, II, ii, 1049-1050.

29 Schlauch, "Man of Law," Sources and Analogues, 174.

30 Gower, Works, II, ii, 1054-1083.

'Of me no maner charge it is  
 What sorwe I soffre, bot of thee  
 Me thenkth it is a gret pite,  
 For if I sterve thos schalt dele;  
 So not I nedes be that weie  
 For Moderhead and for tendresse  
 With al myn hole besinesse  
 Ordeigne me for thilke office,  
 As sche which schal be thi norrice,<sup>31</sup>  
 Thus was sche strengthed forte stonde;  
 And the sche tok hire child in honde  
 And yaf it sowke, and evere among  
 Sche wepte, and otherwhile song  
 To rocke with hire child aslepe;  
 And thus hire oghne child to kepe  
 Sche hath under the goddes cure.<sup>31</sup>

This beautiful passage is a fine example of the originality and the craftsmanship of Gower, the narrative poet. In the space of less than thirty lines, Gower gives the reader the first complete picture of the heroine in the entire history of the Constance story. Up to this point in the tale, the heroine has been buffeted about by fate and fortune and has seemed somehow a passive character in spite of her many successful conversions. She has always accepted her fate without question and has never struggled against it. Now she is seen as more than a puppet; she is a woman who is afraid and above all she is a mother.

None of the other authors who dealt with this story ever pictured Constance as Gower does here. She is always the silent sufferer. The reader sometimes doubts that she can be a really intelligent person, but now she is shown to be both intelligent and human. She is given life by Gower, and she becomes more than just a character; she becomes a person.

---

31 Gower, Works, II,ii, 1054-1083.

The lines quoted above contain no irrelevant material. Gower presents the scene in the briefest possible manner, and yet it is complete. There is nothing lacking. Constance's character is clearly presented.

In his version, Trivet gives much more importance to the incident in Spain than does Gower. Trivet tells how Constance lands, and how she is taken to a heathen admiral's castle by his seneschal. He tells how the seneschal reveals to Constance that he is a renegade Christian and begs her to allow him to accompany her and so on. The incident is really not an important one to the story as a whole, but Trivet stresses it.

At this point there is another inconsistency in Trivet's action. Since Thelous, the seneschal, has time to prepare for the voyage, why is it that Constance, Morris, and he depart in a boat that is still rudderless and without sail? Gower's version is somewhat different and does away with the inconsistency. He does not give the incident the unnecessary emphasis that Trivet does. He abridges it into a passage of forty-one lines. In his version Thelous sees the ship approaching.

He goth to loke in what estat  
 The Schip was come, and there he fond  
 Forth with a child upon hire hond  
 This lady, wher sche was al one.  
 He tok good hiede of the persone,  
 And sih sche was a worthi wiht,  
 And thoghte he wolde upon the nyht  
 Demene hire at his oghne wille,  
 And let hire be therinne stille,  
 That no men sih sche nocht that dai.  
 At goddes wille and thus sche lai,  
 Unknowe what hire schal betide;  
 And fell so that be nyhtes tide  
 This knyght withoute felaschipe  
 Hath take a bot and cam to Schipe,  
 And thoghte of hire his lust to take,

And swor, if sche him daunger make,  
 That certainly sche scholde deie.  
 Sche sih ther was non other weie,  
 And seide he scholde hire wel conforte,  
 That he ferst loke out ate porte,  
 That noman were nyh the stede,  
 Which myhte knowe what thei dede,  
 And thanne he mai go what he wolde.  
 He was riht glad that sche so tolde,  
 And to the porte anon he ferde:  
 Sche preide god, and he hire herde,  
 And sodeinliche he was out throwe  
 And dreynt, and tho began to blowe  
 A wynd menable fro the lond,  
 And thus the myhti goddes hond  
 Hire hath conveied and defended.<sup>32</sup>

Gower's version is more acceptable in many ways. The incident is shorter; and therefore the plot progresses at a faster rate. Constance's appearance before the admiral and so on is irrelevant to the whole tale, and the admiral is an unnecessary character. In Trivet's version although Constance maintains her chastity, she does so by a trickster's means. In Gower there is spiritual intervention which is much more acceptable, because, as the reader will remember, Constance had once before been blessed with divine assistance when she had been falsely accused of the murder of Herwingild. Finally, in Gower Constance is still in her rudderless and sail-less boat because she has had not time to prepare for her escape.

Trivet follows the action above with a description of King Alle's discovery of his mother's treachery. Gower treats the sequence in a different manner. He lets Constance finish her adventures and finally find a haven in

---

32 Ibid., 1094-1125.

Rome, thus focusing his attention on the main character, and then he returns to the king. He places the incident where it logically fits into the story: just before the reader is told that the king intends to go to Rome to seek absolution. In doing this, Gower does not stop the flow of narrative as does Trivet by inserting an incident not pertinent to the action at hand. Gower shows his mastery with dialogue when the king accuses his mother:

'O beste of helle, in what juise  
 Hast thou deserved for to deie,  
 That hast so falsly put awaie  
 The treweste at my knowlechinge  
 Of Wyves and the most honeste;  
 Bot I wol make this beheste,  
 I schal be venged er I go.<sup>33</sup>

In Trivet the queen mother's body is hacked to pieces by the king in his rage, but in Gower, Alle finds it enough that:

Sche was to dethe broght  
 And brent to fore hire Sones yhe.<sup>34</sup>

This small, but significant, deviation makes the character of the king seem less barbaric. The queen mother was burned for having committed an act of treachery. There was no need for the son to hack up her dead body. This would seem to be unnecessarily gruesome. Gower was wise to omit it.

In Trivet much space is devoted to Aella's entrance into Rome, but Gower abridges the incident:

This Senatour, whan that he com,  
 To Couste and to his wif at hom  
 Hath told how such a king Allee

---

33 Gower, Works, II, 11, 1278-1285.

34 Ibid., 1292-1293.



Of great array to the Citee  
Was come<sup>35</sup>

It should be noted that Gower is consistent in that he always calls the heroine, during her stay in Rome, by the name she had given as hers, Couste. Trivet, although he too has her give her name as Couste, calls her Constance throughout the narrative. Gower also uses the name Couste to better advantage than does Trivet. In Trivet the reader is told immediately that Couste is Saxon for Constance, but in Gower the name becomes one of the clues by which Allee is brought to suspect that Couste is his wife.

But Allee wiste wel ynogh,  
Whereof somdel symylende he lowh;  
For Couste in Saxoun is to sein  
Constance upon the word Romein.<sup>36</sup>

In Trivet the invitation of the emperor to the feast is also given much more importance. Maurice is charged with the message and given lengthy instructions on how to get the emperor to accept. The emperor notes the resemblance of Maurice to his lost daughter. "Dieux! Com cel juuencel merueilousement resamble ma fille Constance."<sup>37</sup> He finally grants the request and agrees to attend the feast. The reader could be led to expect that the emperor suspects something of what is to happen.

Gower tells the reader only that Maurice was sent to the emperor to invite him and that the emperor agreed to come, thus leading the reader to

---

35 Gower, Works, II, 11, 1341-1345.

36 Ibid., 1403-1406.

37 Schlauch, "Man of Law," Sources and Analogues, 180.

expect nothing that does not logically occur. Gower also wisely avoids repetition in this instance, because Allee had noticed the resemblance earlier. Repetition of this motif would tend to make it lose its significance.

In Trivet the entire company goes out to meet the emperor, but Gower highlights the meeting between father and daughter, and by doing so he gives the scene the importance it deserves in the story. It will be noted that Gower only expands those incidents that are of importance to the story as a whole.

Trivet's Constance returns to Rome "pur la nouele qe ele oy de la maladie son piere."<sup>38</sup> He thereby has her rush from the deathbed of her husband to that of her father. In his final deviation from his source, Gower makes her departure seem more natural;

And therepon hire herte drouh  
To leuen Engelond for evere  
And go wher that sche hadde levere,  
To Rome, whenne that sche cam<sup>39</sup>

As has been demonstrated, Gower translated Trivet's work with a great deal of freedom. He expanded some parts, but he abridged most of the story. He highlighted some scenes and passed briefly over others which were less important. In every instance he stripped away all irrelevant material in order to give the plot the rapid movement it needs.

The exposition in the tale is neither too meager nor too extended. Gower's descriptions are always thorough. His cinematic style, including his

38 Schlauch, "Man of Law," Sources and Analogues, 181.

39 Gower, Works, II, ii, 1580-1583.

ability to spotlight characters and incidents, has already been discussed and there is no need to discuss it again here.

The development of the plot is always sure and forward moving. There is no hesitation. Gower is a narrative writer and he has a story to tell. He does so in the most concise and yet complete way that is possible. Gower never falsely paints a character or incident so that the story achieves a cheap element of surprise. (Remember that in *Trivet* the reader is "misled" more than once as in the case of Constance's vast education. The reader is led to believe that at some time she will surely present a display of learning, but she never does.) If a character is meant to be evil, he is just that. Gower does not come out and say, "Dear reader, this man is treacherous," but he shows through marvelous characterization that the man is a villain. He never includes any extraneous material to put his reader off the track. The solution of the story follows from everything that has preceded it. The story remains swiftly paced, the characters remain true, and the reader remains interested.

Gower gives all of the important characters more depth than did *Trivet*, and therefore they appear to be more lifelike. At times Gower paints the character with only a few words as in the case of the sultanness. She speaks "false wordes" to her son, and at the feast she slew all of the Christians in a "sodein rage." Gower does not tell the reader that Dame Hermingild is a sweet, kind, and somewhat timid woman. He does say that

she "lich her oghne lif/ Constance loveth,"<sup>40</sup> and that when the blind man approached her and asked her aid, "Upon his word hire herte afflihte/ Thankende what was best to done."<sup>41</sup> Gower's ability to picture his characters through their actions and words rather than through direct exposition is evident throughout the tale.

Gower tends to present the settings in the briefest manner possible. For example, when Constance lands in Northumberland the reader is told that:

And happeth thanne that she dryveth  
Under a Castel with the flod,<sup>42</sup>  
Which upon Humber banke sted.

Thus does Gower strip away all unnecessary furniture to present the scene. Gower's approach might be likened to that of Thornton Wilder in his play Our Town in which the audience is asked to imagine the scenery. In that way the story becomes all important and attention can be better focused on the individual characters.

Gower's point of view is that of the omniscient third person, for it must be remembered that the tale of Constance is being related by the confessor to the author. Also, it will be noted that this type of a story would lose much of its excitement if it were told either in the first or the limited third person. The reader must of necessity know of Dowild's treachery and all of the other important elements of the tale.

---

40 Ibid., 750-751.

41 Ibid., 766-767.

42 Ibid., 718-720.

The tone of the tale is highly elevated for the theme is a serious one. Although there are definite traces of humor in Gower's work, in this particular tale the theme is not one in which humor would be well placed.

Gower shows a definite passion for rationalizing. Seldom is an incident unexplainable. Reasons are given, and they are never implausible. Although he deals with elements of the supernatural, they never appear to be artificial or to have been inserted into the story because there was nothing else to do. He proved that he could use dialogue when it suited his purpose, but his prime interest was action. He took an old story, and in the best of medieval tradition he made it new again.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

At the beginning of this thesis, three questions were proposed which although critical commonplaces must be answered in an honest evaluation of a writer's accomplishment. First, what did Gower intend to do?

His primary intention was to write a good story, one that was both interesting and instructive. In the Prologue to the Confessio Amantis, he says:

Bot for men sein, and soth it is,  
That who that al of wisdom writ  
It dulleth ofte a mannes wit  
To him that schal it aldai rede,  
For thilke cause, if that ye rede,  
It woulde go the middel weie  
And wryte a bok between the tweie,  
Somewhat of lust, somewhat of lore,  
That of the lasse or of the more  
Some men mai lyke of that I wryte.<sup>1</sup>

In the "Tale of Constance" Gower accomplished his intention for it is indeed a story of both interest and instruction. The story is an exciting one in the best tradition of the adventure tale and yet a moral can be gleaned

---

1 Gower, Works, Prologue, 12-21.

from it. Let it be noted, though, that the tale is primarily interesting; the instruction is only secondary.

How well did Gower accomplish what he set out to do? This thesis has demonstrated that he accomplished his intention very well. His excellent choice of an enduring theme and the subtle deviations from his source stand in witness to his sound artistic judgment. His originality is amply evidenced by the way in which he effected the various changes. He played up incidents which until then had been placed in the background. He relentlessly removed the unimportant and repetitious. He brought the important characters to the fore and either removed the unimportant ones or placed them in the background. Witness the way he changed the sultanness and the treacherous Saxon knight from mere instruments of the plot into life-like characters. He did this by giving them emotions. Such swift, deft characterizations are another evidence of a good narrative writer.

When judged by the medieval standard of making something old appear new to achieve originality, Gower's originality is admirable. The reader has seen that the story itself had a wide distribution in Gower's time and must have been familiar to many, and yet Gower succeeded in making it appear fresh to the readers of his day and also to the readers of today.

That what Gower accomplished was worth doing is obvious of course. The story fits perfectly into the frame-work of the Confessio Amantis and contributes its share to the general over-all excellence of the work. It meets the requirements set down by Gower in the Prologue in that it is interesting and yet presents a moral to be learned.

Thus by a review of the history of the Constance story, with attention paid to its important versions; by a close study of Gower's direct source; and by a discussion of the various successful changes effected by Gower, this thesis has demonstrated that the intention, art, and originality observed in Gower's "Tale of Constance" are those of a great narrative artist.



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### I. PRIMARY SOURCES

Gower, John, Balades and Other Poems, London, 1818.

Gower, John, The Complete Works of John Gower, edited from the manuscripts with introductions, notes and glossaries by G. C. Macaulay, 4 vols., Oxford, 1899-1902.

Gower, John, Confessio Amantis, edited by William Caxton, Westminster, 1483.

Gower, John, Confessio Amantis of John Gower, edited and collated with the best manuscripts by Reinhold Pauli, 3 vols., London, 1857.

Gower, John, John Gower de Confessione Amantis, London, 1554.

### II. SECONDARY SOURCES

#### A. BOOKS

Amos, Flora Ross, Early Theories of Translation, New York, 1920.

Child, Francis James, Observations on the Language of Gower's Confessio Amantis, Boston, 1858.

Cox, Marian Roalfe, Cinderella, London, 1893.

Dodd, William George, Courtly Love in Chaucer and Gower, Boston, 1913.

Fox, George Gillespie, The Medieval Sciences in the Works of John Gower, Princeton, 1931.

French, Robert Dudley, A Chaucer Handbook, New York, 1947.

- Furnivall, F. J., Edmond Brock and W. A. Clouston, Originals and Analogues of Some of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, London, 1887.
- Gough, Alfred B., ed., Emare, London, 1901.
- Gough, Alfred B., The Constance Saga, Berlin, 1902.
- Lewis, C. S., The Allegory of Love, Oxford, 1936.
- Tatlock, J. S. P., Development and Chronology of Chaucer's Works, London, 1907.
- Thompson, James Westphall, The History of Historical Writing, Vol. I, New York, 1942.
- Thompson, Stith, European Tales Among the North American Indians, Colorado Springs, 1919.
- Thompson, Stith, The Types of the Folk-Tale, Helsinki, 1928.
- Todd, Henry John, Illustration of the Lives and Writings of Gower and Chaucer, London, 1810.
- Whiting, Bartlett Jere, Chaucer's Use of Proverbs, Cambridge, Mass., 1934.

## B. ARTICLES

- Brown, Carleton, "The Man of Law's Headlink and the Prologue of the Canterbury Tales," Studies in Philology, XXIV, January, 1937, 8-35.
- Gallan, N., "Thyne Owne Book: a Note on Chaucer, Gower and Ovid," Review of English Studies, XXII, October, 1946, 269-281.
- Casson, Eeslie F., "Studies in the Diction of the Confessio Amantis," English Studies, LXIX, 1934-1935, 184-207.
- Coffman, George R., "John Gower in His Most Significant Role," Colorado Studies in Language and Literature, Series 4, II, 1945.
- Coote, Henry Charles, "Catskin; The English and Irish Peau D'Ane," Folk-Lore Record, III, 1880, Part I, 1-25.
- Hamilton, G. L., "Notes on Gower," Modern Language Notes, XIX, March, 1904, 51-52.
- Hornstein, Lillian Herlands, "Trivet's Constance and the King of Tars," Modern Language Notes, LV, May, 1940, 354-357.

Kaplan, T. H., "Gower's Vocabulary," Journal of English and Germanic Philology, XXI, July, 1932, 395-402.

Krappe, Alexander, "The Offa-Constance Legend," Anglia, LXI, 1937, 361-369.

Lucke, Emil, "Das Leben der Constance bei Trivet, Gower, und Chaucer," Anglia, XIV, 1891, 77-112 and 149-185.

McNeal, T. H., "Chaucer and the Decameron," Modern Language Notes, LIII, April, 1938, 357-358.

Rickert, Edith, "The Old English Offa Saga," Modern Philology, II, January, 1905, 1-56.

Schlauch, Margaret, "Historical Precursors of Chaucer's Constance," Philological Quarterly, XXXIX, October, 1950, 402-412.

Schlauch, Margaret, "The Man of Law's Tale," Sources and Analogues of Some of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, edited by W. F. Bryan and Germaine Dempster, Chicago, 1941, 155-206.

Stillwell, G., "John Gower and the Last Years of Edward III," Studies in Philology, XLV, July, 1948, 454-471.

Tupper, Frederick, "Chaucer and the Seven Deadly Sins," Publications of the Modern Language Association of America, XXIX, March, 1914, 93-128.

#### C. UNPUBLISHED MATERIALS

Leonhard, Zelma, Classical Mythology in the Confessio Amantis of John Gower, Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois, 1944.

Neville, Marie E., The Vulgate and Gower's Confessio Amantis, Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio, 1950.

APPROVAL SHEET

The thesis submitted by Robert Edward Dulak has been read and approved by three members of the Department of English.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts.

May 28, 1953  
Date

Marie Penille  
Signature of Adviser