

## CONSTANCE AS ROMANCE AND FOLK HEROINE IN CHAUCER'S *MAN OF LAW'S TALE*

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Medieval romance is, with rare exceptions, male-centered. Whether its heroes enlist the aid of women over the course of their adventures or see women as hindrances to their all-important quests,<sup>1</sup> the fact remains that medieval writers most often portray males who seek objects that will remove their societies' symbolic deficiencies or who attain a wisdom they did not originally possess. The focus of medieval romance is thus on the male's development, with the result that even the strongest female characters—for example, Enide in Chrétien de Troyes's *Erec et Enide* or Nicolette in the Old French *Aucassin et Nicolette*—are employed chiefly as means to masculine-oriented ends; Enide and Nicolette are essentially static characters, since the wisdom they already possess undergoes no appreciable change as they work to help their less enlightened spouses progress from ignorance to knowledge and from excess to restraint. Even in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, where a woman masterminds the testing of Gawain, it is nevertheless Gawain's worth that is assayed, despite feminine behind-the-scenes machinations. And in a tale such as *Decameron* 10.10, reworked by Chaucer as *The Clerk's Tale*, where the protagonist is female, there is no sense of spiritual maturation on her part; Griselda is at the end of the tale simply what she was at its outset: a long-suffering heroine, and, although *she* is tested and passes the test, the character who controls the action and who himself comes of age over the course of the tale is Griselda's husband. In *The Man of Law's Tale*,<sup>2</sup> however, Chaucer employs the same convention he has used in *The Clerk's Tale*, that of a series of misfortunes visited upon a woman,<sup>3</sup> but adds to the Griselda-like patience of his heroine, Constance, a dimension of spiritual maturation unattained by the heroine of *The Clerk's Tale*. It will be demonstrated that Chaucer's intent in presenting Constance's sufferings and development bears

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wide implications not only for the interpretation of the individual tale but also for the on-going concern with male and female status which Chaucer exhibits throughout *The Canterbury Tales*.

## I

The central theme of the quest, with its accompanying adventures, informs *The Man of Law's Tale*. Over the course of her travels—and Northrop Frye suggests that a physical journey serves as a metaphor for a spiritual quest or progression<sup>4</sup>—Constance undergoes a series of adventures and ultimately attains a status usually reserved for her male counterparts, the heroes of medieval romance. Although Chaucer's treatment of Constance's misfortunes certainly resembles the saint's legend genre,<sup>5</sup> *The Man of Law's Tale* is, first and foremost, a romance, and it satisfies the fundamental requirements of that genre even though its "hero" is a woman. This does not mean, however, that Chaucer merely grafts a female protagonist onto a male-oriented genre. Rather, he takes typical thematic and structural characteristics of medieval romance and manipulates them so that the testing and spiritual progression of Constance is couched in the pattern of female and not male initiation. The concept of initiation, that process of physical/spiritual alteration, is central to medieval romance, and Mircea Eliade has proposed the following definition of initiation, which can be readily applied to Chaucer's romance:

Initiation in the most general sense denotes a body of rites and oral teachings whose purpose is to produce a decisive alteration in the religious and social status of the person to be initiated. In philosophic terms, initiation is equivalent to a basic change in the existential condition; the novice emerges from his ordeal endowed with a totally different being from that which he possessed before his initiation; he has become *another*.<sup>6</sup>

In keeping with this pattern, the Constance who returns to Rome after her adventures is fundamentally a different person from the frightened girl who left that city for marriage in Syria with a sultan. She, who initially feared the pagans, advances to the point that she converts the heathens. The inner transformation wrought by her sufferings is even apparent externally: she is so altered upon her return that her own uncle does not recognize her. She is simply no longer what she was, and the process of her evolution, while sharing many characteristics with that of the male heroes of other romances, is nevertheless distinctly feminine. Before we consider Chaucer's employment of what is indeed a matriarchal initiation pattern, we must first examine those thematic and structural features of the tale that characterize it as a romance.

Northrop Frye and Joseph Campbell analyze the basic structure of romance in their division of the narrative elements of the typical romance into three parts. Frye, noting man's interest in the three-day disappearance of the moon at the beginning and end of the lunar month, and linking it to the preoccupation which much of pre-modern romance has with the tri-partite cycle,

pinpoints (1) "the perilous journey," (2) "the crucial struggle," and (3) "the exaltation" of the hero.<sup>7</sup> Campbell, who is primarily concerned with the concept of the hero as the ideal man, or representative and sometimes savior, of his society, and with the moment of the hero's initiation into the mysteries of the sacred or the other-worldly, sees the quest as an essentially tri-partite adventure. The first stage comprises the "separation" of the hero from his society, an act described as a "severe exercise of severance" which becomes a symbolic death or selfless submission.<sup>8</sup> This separation is invariably accomplished by means of a journey into an unknown and perilous realm, usually reminiscent of Hell and often represented as the belly of a primordial monster.<sup>9</sup> This realm is characterized by the standard romance features of dream-like landscapes and the annihilation of time. During the second stage, "initiation," the hero often receives the help of an other-worldly beneficent figure who aids him in conquering or deceiving the monster, or evil being, who guards the sought-after object, or knowledge. This stage is often characterized by the meeting, and often mating, with a life-giving all-mother, a supreme genetrix, or else the mystical marriage of the hero to an other-worldly maiden.<sup>10</sup> The final stage, "return," would seem to be of much more importance to Campbell than to Frye, to whom it is merely the necessary mechanism that enables the hero to be recognized by his less heroic contemporaries, as proof after the fact. Since Campbell holds that the function of the hero in the monomyth is didactic, both internally (by influencing his fellow characters in the tale) and externally (by affecting the reader), he finds it the duty of the hero to return to society and effect its renewal by removing its symbolic deficiency by means of the object or knowledge which has been obtained through the often visionary process of initiation.<sup>11</sup> Because the moment of initiation is a removal from time, it separates an initiatory romance—and for Campbell all romances are initiatory—into a *bi-partite* structure which counterbalances the original *tri-partite* narrative. According to Campbell, the first of the two parts extends from the separation to the point of initiation and is characterized by tragedy or the "down-going"; the second of the parts consists of the return from the point of initiation and is characterized by comedy, or the "up-going."<sup>12</sup>

Chaucer's *Man of Law's Tale* exhibits all of the functional divisions, both the tri-partite and bi-partite aspects of Frye's and Campbell's romance theory. In Chaucer's tale, the *tri-partite* structure is so pronounced that each section of the tale is built around a different geographical area. Thus in the first section Constance sets sail for Syria, where she will encounter death, symbolically in her isolation or separation from her known world and actually in the slaughter at the marriage banquet, and is then compelled to undertake the "perilous journey" in a rudderless boat. Constance's journey to Syria and danger represents the descent into Hell which both Frye and Campbell believe to be a central theme within romance, and which has as its most famous analogue Christ's apocryphal Harrowing of Hell. The *exempla* that Chaucer adds to

the tale at this point also bear out this analogue. Trivet cites only the *exemplum* of Noah, which would certainly fit the physical situation of the heroine at this point, for she is the righteous survivor of a deluge of misfortune who is adrift upon a boat driven wherever God wills. Trivet's *exemplum* of Noah does not contain the important image of Hell and the cave or pit of Leviathan, however, as do Chaucer's "Danyel in the horrible cave" (l. 472), "Jonas in the fisshes mawe" (l. 486), the "Ebrayk" people crossing the Red Sea (l. 489), and "Egipcien Marie in the cave" (l. 500). All four of Chaucer's *exempla* emphasize the theme of descent and enclosure before triumph, and all of the exemplary protagonists serve as types of Christ harrowing Hell.<sup>13</sup> In addition, Constance's descent into Hell is reinforced by Chaucer's portrayal of the sea as perilous, a significant alteration from Trivet's account,<sup>14</sup> so that the hostile sea which separates Syria from Rome further reinforces the association of the impassable gulf of death between the two countries. If, however, one adds the sense of death as selflessness, or a dying to the profane world which is the necessary beginning of the process by which one becomes initiated into the Divine, then the passages in *The Man of Law's Tale* borrowed from *De contemptu mundi*<sup>15</sup> (in which Innocent III advises death to the profane present world in order that one may gain the heavenly world of the hereafter) gain added thematic significance and thereby rise above the status of simple rhetorical accommodation designed to suit the tale to its teller.<sup>16</sup>

The second section of the poem, in which the protagonist arrives in Northumberland, details Constance's struggle, and it is important to note not only that it is at this point in the narrative that her spiritual apotheosis occurs (l. 693) but also that she survives the plots of both her murderous mother-in-law and the evil steward with supernatural aid. Campbell characterizes this second stage by initiation and mystical marriage with the divine partner—in Constance's case a "heavenly husband"<sup>17</sup>—which symbolizes union with the Divine.

Rome is the setting for the third and final section of *The Man of Law's Tale*. The return to Rome signifies the return to life and eventually exaltation when Alla, Constance, and the Emperor are reunited. The protagonist, who has undergone a period of individual testing, is brought back to society. One should also note that Campbell stresses at this point the redeemer-like qualities of the hero who returns to society in order to bring back a cure for its symbolic deficiency—as for example, Jason went to the ends of the earth in order to fetch the curative golden fleece for Thebes. In the same way, Constance journeys beyond the known world in order to bear a male child, for Rome's symbolic deficiency is the lack of a male heir, a condition which would not be lost on a medieval audience. It is extremely interesting in this connection that Alla, the principal male in the narrative, plays a shadowy role. He marries Constance, promptly gets her with child, and goes off to fight. When he is finally reunited with his wife, he lives for only another year. He is presented, in

effect, just long enough to fulfill his necessary biological function and is then quickly returned to the shadows whence he came.

*The Man of Law's Tale* may also be divided into a dichotomy whose halves comprise the journeys from Rome to England and from England to Rome, and in which Syria and the castle of the evil steward represent the perilous *symplegades*<sup>18</sup> that guard the regenerating realm. Moreover, one becomes aware of this bi-partite structure on the narrative level, since the first half of the tale begins with separation, after the Sultan hears the rumors of Constance's perfection and feels a very earthly and human love which bears almost the zeal of courtly love,<sup>19</sup> and ends with the death of the son at the mother's hands. In the second half of *The Man of Law's Tale*, Alla actually *sees* Constance (as opposed to hearing of her through rumor<sup>20</sup>) and feels a "non-human love"<sup>21</sup> for her. In addition, the contrast between the "down-going" and the "up-going" is such that instead of having Constance exiled after the murder of a son by his mother (as is the case in the first part of the tale), a mother is slain by her son—and with some authorial justification—*after* Constance has been set adrift from Northumberland. The second half of the tale then ends with a reunification of the father and daughter who were separated at the beginning of the tale's first half. Block points out that Chaucer changed the placement of the point at which the narrator tells of Alla's vengeance upon his mother,<sup>22</sup> perhaps in order to make the second half more completely antithetical to the first half in the sequence of action. An overview of the plot indicates that the first half of the tale is characterized by earthly love, tragedy, murder, the image of the tomb as presented in the four Biblical *exempla* and in Constance's own dire situation, and a passively suffering heroine, while the second half of the tale reveals a diametrically opposed set of elements: "non-human love," comedy in the medieval sense,<sup>23</sup> the birth of an heir, and a heroine who actively defends herself with divine aid. These two opposing halves thereby form a dialectical movement toward divine love over profane love, justice over murder, the womb over the tomb, action over passivity, and unity over diversity. Thus, as Frye, Campbell, and Morton Bloomfield point out,<sup>24</sup> comedy becomes the transcendence of tragedy, not its lower form, and the two halves of *The Man of Law's Tale* serve to illustrate the creation of "joye after wo" (l. 1161).

Nevertheless, the mere presence of these tri-partite and bi-partite elements does not prove that Chaucer was aware of and sought to highlight a pattern of distinctly *female* initiation in *The Man of Law's Tale*. It is certain that Chaucer recognized the Christian implications of the initiation attained by Constance on her spiritual quest, for he employs a series of *exempla* (Daniel, Jonah, the Hebrews, and Egyptian Mary) that emphasize the tomb/womb transformations of baptism, which is a central theme in the tale and which is a time-honored Christian *topos*.<sup>25</sup> The symbolism of baptism bears decidedly metaphorical sexual overtones,<sup>26</sup> and Chaucer calls these to mind in his

presentation of Constance, who survives the tomb to become, in effect, the womb, through her association with Mary and through her bearing of a son who is to function as a type of savior to his people. Yet the initiation that Constance undergoes is not merely the primarily spiritual initiation of baptism, in which the Old Man sloughs off the garment of sin and becomes the New Man, but is also one whose roots lie in the very source of the tale that Chaucer borrows from Trivet and that exhibits a clear pattern of distinctly female initiation. This pattern is borne out not only in the details of Chaucer's alteration of his immediate source, but also in the particular suitability of the tale's symbols to the role changes that Constance experiences.

## II

Chaucer appears to have been conscious of the *Märchen* origins of his tale,<sup>27</sup> for he substantively changes his treatment of the Constance story from that of his source, Nicolas Trivet, whose tale is remarkable for the large amount of unnecessary detail that the chronicler includes. Block, in discussing Chaucer's reworking of Trivet's tale, points out that Chaucer's omissions include chiefly names of people and geographical areas, as well as the great amount of historical detail that Trivet included. Block holds that Chaucer

did so with a purpose. That purpose, I suggest, was to lift Trivet's pedestrian story, crammed full as it was with pseudo-accurate circumstantial details regarding the characters, the setting, and the time element, into the realms of romance, remote in time and space.<sup>28</sup>

We would suggest that these omissions stem not only from Chaucer's desire to move the tale more directly toward romance, but also from his recognition of the *Märchen* origin of Trivet's tale and his subsequent attempt to render his version of the tale in a form closer to that of the folk tale. Both devices work toward the same end, for the *Märchen* tale may be considered a primitive form of romance, and both forms contain the simple characterization and dream-like transcendence of time and space discussed previously.

The relationship between the mythic folktale and romance has traditionally been understood as evolutionary. An excellent example of this evolution may be seen in the Celtic origins of the later Arthurian romances; and, as Mircea Eliade points out, when the formerly vital patterns of folk life became exhausted and lost their "ritual reality," they became conventionalized into literary motifs.<sup>29</sup> In this connection, it is stimulating to examine Margaret Schlauch's assessment of the basic *Märchen* plot of *The Man of Law's Tale*, which she holds to be the product of a society with strong matriarchal ties but which is, however, beginning to transfer its allegiance to the father. She finds the source of conflict within the plot to be the growing tension over the succession of property, power, and sovereignty within the family and points to "family hostilities" rather than international or even inter-family hostilities as the chief source of action and motivation.<sup>30</sup> Jack Reynolds, although he

does not deal specifically with Chaucer and *The Man of Law's Tale*,<sup>31</sup> also makes a case for a much longer transition period during the change-over from matriarchy to patriarchy than was ordinarily supposed, and suggests that survivals of this transition period which still have considerable matriarchal influence are to be found in much of the literature of the West. *The Man of Law's Tale* would appear to be such a transitional work, as is evident in an examination of the precise nature of its initiation myths, as drawn from the *Märchen* plot and glossed by the conventions of medieval romance.

"All pre-modern societies," according to Eliade, "accord primary importance to ideology and techniques of initiation."<sup>32</sup> In order, however, to understand fully the function of initiation within *The Man of Law's Tale*, the reader must realize that there are, indeed, two pre-modern societies represented within the framework of one tale, and both societies are interested in the initiation of Constance as symbolized by her translation from a princess to a queen. Chaucer, the poet of the medieval society, is primarily interested in the spiritual apotheosis of Constance through which she, like the Virgin Mary, becomes a "queene."<sup>33</sup> The semi-matriarchal society which is the source of the *Märchen* plot is, on the other hand, primarily interested in Constance's relation to worldly succession of power as a queen in the temporal world. Thus the interest of Chaucer becomes what Frye calls the "Great Adventure" (or major theme of the poem), while the formerly premier concerns of the older, matriarchal society have become relegated to the position of the "lesser adventures" (or minor themes).<sup>34</sup> Characteristically in romance the "Great" and "lesser adventures" are at some point aligned, or coalesce. In *The Man of Law's Tale* this point occurs at the point during the trial, following which the Man of Law states: "And thus Crist ymaad Constance a queene" (l. 693). In this fashion an alignment of initiations is completed and unity is achieved.

The initiation within the matriarchal plot logically conforms to what Eliade considers the universal themes and motifs of female initiation.<sup>35</sup> Eliade believes that female initiation is always individual and involves the segregation of the novice from the rest of society, as opposed to male initiation, which is often accomplished in a group ritual. This individual, rather than collective, nature of female initiation is due to the fact of menstruation, the onset of which is almost universally regarded as the signal for the commencement of a female's initiation. This physiological occurrence identifies the woman with the supreme genetrix or the generative, life-giving principle. The application of this pattern to *The Man of Law's Tale* is clear. Constance, who has reached marriageable or reproductive age, is sent off and thereby segregated from her society. Meeting a ritual death to her childhood, she journeys beyond the known world, wins a mate, and returns, now initiated, with the fruit of that initiation, a child who will some day rule the kingdom. In this action, Alla again plays the minimal but necessary role, and then disappears into the background. In abstract terms, the novice dies and enters the tomb, which

becomes translated into the womb or symbol of the great genetrix, from which the initiated woman emerges at the birth of her new existence.

The initiating schema is concretely borne out in Chaucer's text. Block writes:

Trivet twice refers to [Constance] as 'la pucile' [the maiden] when Maurice is five years old. Chaucer never calls her a maiden after she has married Alla and, when he does refer to her, calls her a 'wrecked womman' (l. 918), a 'wayke womman' (l. 932), or a 'holy creature' (l. 1149).<sup>36</sup>

Thus Chaucer clearly recognizes the altered state of Constance, and his recognition becomes more important and valid in that he deviates from his source in order to demonstrate that recognition. Trivet's use of "pucile" may, however, have suggested to Chaucer the identification he makes between Constance and the Virgin after Constance has given birth to Maurice.

In addition, Constance experiences another, and more obvious, change in status. She functions in and is initiated into three successive feminine roles, which conform, as might be expected, to the three major romance divisions discussed previously. In Syria, she functions primarily as a daughter to the Emperor, in England as a wife to Alla, and in Rome as a mother to Maurice. Thus Constance goes through the three stages which one would expect a complete matriarchal initiation to include. Constance's social roles become increasingly important when one recalls the succession of individual divine agents who protect her when she is threatened by hostile forces. While a daughter, she is saved by God, the Father (the Divine). While in England, where she functions primarily in the role of Wife, she is saved by Christ, the Bridegroom (the Divine made human), and while on her way to Rome, where she will be known as the mother of Maurice, the future emperor, she is saved by Mary, the Supreme Mother (the human made Divine), and hence a form of supreme genetrix. Thus in each case the intervening deity is particularly appropriate for Constance's social role.

The final result of the initiatory pattern deserves some attention, for Constance, having been initiated into queenship, becomes almost identical in circumstance to the two other queens who appear in the story, the satanic queen mothers. She is a queen without a husband and with an only son who will inherit the kingdom. Thus there would appear to be a continual representation of a dying matriarchy, unable to generate new queens, which yields to the male principle. The sultanness attempts to preserve her matriarchy by murdering her son, while Alla's mother tries to discredit her heir's wife. Alla and patriarchy eventually overcome, however, and destroy the matriarch. Constance, like matriarchy, eventually loses her vitality and dies, so that the kingdom passes to Maurice and patriarchy. Furthermore, the inheritance which is most important is that derived from the mother, the sovereignty over Rome, rather than over Northumberland. Jack Reynolds describes the



essence of matriarchy as "ownership" by the matriarch and "management," or the wielding of authority, by a male who is consecrated in office by the grace of the matriarch.<sup>37</sup> With the death of Constance, for the first time in the story, ownership and management revert into the same hands, and matriarchy is doomed.

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*The Man of Law's Tale*, because of its *Märchen* source and the particular redaction given to that tale by Chaucer, reveals a set of deliberately contradictory attitudes toward women. On the one hand, by positing a romance heroine who accomplishes a difficult spiritual quest, and whose efforts are furthered by deities, Chaucer elevates woman to a status usually reserved for her male counterparts, so that Constance's journey is a triumphant one set against the expansive background of the period of empire of Rome. On the other hand, by depicting his female protagonist as the potential or actual object of a debilitating succession of misfortunes and by showing women upon whom atrocities are committed (Constance, Hermengyld) or who commit atrocities (Alla's and the sultan's mothers), Chaucer reveals an anti-feminist bias wherein woman appears primarily as the descendent of Eve rather than of the Virgin.<sup>38</sup> This method of opposition is, however, peculiarly Chaucerian and is useful not only as a method of character juxtaposition, as in the cases of the Prioress and the Wife of Bath,<sup>39</sup> but also as a means by which the overall plot movement of *The Canterbury Tales* is advanced. To illustrate, one need only look to Constance, a powerful woman who is permitted to save her society but not to govern it, who laments:

Wommen are born to thraldom and penance,  
 And to been under mannes governance.  
 (ll. 286-287)

The lament obtains special significance in light of the poet's recognition of the matriarchal origins of his romance. By taking a tale of matriarchal initiation, in which the heroine is exalted, and by capping it with a description of the ascendancy of patriarchy, which effectively removes the focus from the woman, Chaucer both celebrates womankind and charts its fallen status, paying the way for a subsequent tale's attempt to amend the assessment. One can almost imagine the good Wife of Bath shifting energetically about on her already burdened mount, while awaiting the chance to tell her tale (which, according to Robinson,<sup>40</sup> should follow *The Man of Law's Tale*) and to correct the Man of Law's misconceptions concerning woman's fallen position, thus initiating the marriage debate.<sup>41</sup> It is no coincidence that the Wife of Bath subsequently mourns the passing of the rule of the Faery Queen, that matriarch of the dim past, before embarking on the saga of her own tumultuous sexual-political relationships with men.

## NOTES

1. In effect, woman can be viewed *in bono* or *in malo*. See D. W. Robertson, Jr., *A Preface to Chaucer: Studies in Medieval Perspectives* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962), p. 297. For an excellent bibliography pertaining to literary and non-literary approaches to the problem of medieval women, see Carolly Erickson and Kathleen Casey, "Women in the Middle Ages: A Working Bibliography," *Mediaeval Studies* 37 (1975): 340-359.

2. We cite from the following edition: *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, ed. by F. N. Robinson (Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1961).

3. Trevor Whittock, *A Reading of the Canterbury Tales* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), p. 115, has suggested that there exists an "anti-feminine and pro-masculine bias" in the tale.

4. See Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), pp. 186-187; hereafter cited as Frye.

5. See Michael R. Paull, "The Influence of the Saint's Legend Genre on *The Man of Law's Tale*," *Chaucer Review* 5 (1971): 179-194.

6. Mircea Eliade, *Rites and Symbols of Initiation*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), p. V; hereafter cited as Eliade.

7. Frye, pp. 186-187.

8. Joseph Campbell, *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*, 2nd ed., Bollingen Series 17 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), pp. 10 and 16; hereafter cited as Campbell.

9. *Ibid.*, pp. 58 and 90.

10. *Ibid.*, pp. 40 and 119.

11. *Ibid.*, pp. 20 and 37.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 28. One should note that this division of the tale into functional halves creates a series of contrasts, so that one finds the experience/innocence dichotomy which Frye believes to be at the heart of romance, as well as those of death/birth, tomb/womb, and exile/return. As can easily be seen, the elements of experience, death, the tomb, and exile belong to the tragic mode, while the contrasting elements of innocence, birth, the womb, and return belong to the realm of the comic.

13. In light of the Harrowing of Hell, one might understand Constance's apotheosis in terms of the fact that she may be thought of as a type of Jonah. Although she does not try to flee physically when called upon to go abroad and convert a pagan land, she does show a considerable amount of regret and makes a large lament—which constitute additions by Chaucer to Trivet's tale. Thus, even if she is physically making the journey to Syria, she is resisting it emotionally and is not making it with a "right and pure heart." It is not until after she has encountered the symbolic monster and has been delivered safely to land that she willingly begins to have an active rather than a passive ministry. Like Jonah, she is a truly reluctant prophet. If she is a type of Jonah, then she must similarly be a type of Christ harrowing Hell, since Jonah's fall was considered a type of Christ's descent into Hell on Good Friday, His sojourn there on Holy Saturday—which is, incidentally, the medieval church's day for adult baptism (the sacrament which figures heavily in *The Man of Law's Tale*)—and His deliverance on Easter Sunday. Constance not only leaves the known world through a form of initiatory death, but also visits a strange and foreign land and redeems the worthy (as did Christ in Hell). Because of Constance, Alla recognizes the sin of his satanic mother, slays her, and joins the ranks of the faithful by venturing to Rome. Thus, Constance has harrowed England and saved Alla, the worthy but knowledgeable soul, to travel back to Rome and life.

14. Edward Block, "Originality, Controlling Purpose and Craftsmanship in Chaucer's *Man of Law's Tale*," *PMLA* 68 (1940): 591; hereafter cited as Block.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 583.

16. R. M. Lumiansky, *Of Sondry Folk* (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1955), pp. 67-68.

17. Block, p. 586.

18. Campbell, p. 89.

19. The motif of loving before seeing is, of course, topical in medieval romance. By way of example, Gottfried von Strassburg employs this motif in Mark's case, although he scoffs at his own source's treatment of the motif.

20. Comparison of the tale with its source shows that Chaucer deliberately changed this detail in Trivet's account. See Block, p. 610.

21. *Ibid.*

22. *Ibid.*, p. 581.

23. For a fairly comprehensive discussion of the medieval comic mode, see Jeanne Thompson Mathewson, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight and the Medieval Comic Tradition*, unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Stanford, 1968.

24. See Morton Bloomfield, "*The Man of Law's Tale*: A Tragedy of Victimization and a Christian Comedy," *PMLA* 87 (1972): 388-389; Frye, p. 162; and Campbell, pp. 25-30.

25. See Eliade, pp. 116ff.

26. Gilbert Cope, *Symbolism in the Bible and the Church* (New York: Philosophical, 1959), p. 102, notes: "The traditional Christian [baptismal] font rituals . . . give full expression to the sexual aspects of the regenerative process of baptism. The font is unmistakably a womb, and in the Holy Saturday ceremonies the Paschal candle signifies the contribution of the masculine spirit. The massive candle is plunged three times into the font and, in some rites, the liquid wax is made to drip into the water, and in other rites oil is poured in." This ceremony, which was incorporated into the Papal liturgy in the twelfth century—see the *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 5 (New York: McGraw Hill, 1967), pp. 10-11—includes within its "blessing of the font" the phrase: "the spotless womb of the divine font" (Cope, p. 102). St. Ambrose of Milan's fourth-century commentaries offer additional proof of the acceptance of the generative aspect of baptism and the association of baptism with the womb in the writings of the Church Fathers (see Cope, pp. 102-103).

27. Margaret Schlauch, "Introduction" to Nicolas Trivet's *Life of Constance*, in *Sources and Analogues of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales*, ed. by W. F. Bryan and Germaine Dempster (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1941), p. 161, states that the story contains "motives drawn from the general body of migratory plots, superstitions, and popular beliefs commonly known as folklore." Earlier, in her exhaustive study of the "calumniated Wife"—see Margaret Schlauch, *Chaucer's Constance and Accused Queens* (New York: New York University Press, 1927), p. 113—Schlauch finds the basic plot of *The Man of Law's Tale* to be of folk origin because of the nature of the accusation brought against Constance, the type of persecutor who makes the accusation, and various other plot devices which are of distinctly *Märchen* origin. She also ("Introduction," p. 156) holds the tale to be a romance. Block, p. 581, notes: "It becomes, indeed, much more than a fairy tale, but it never completely loses the characteristics of one. These, in turn, reflect the folk origin of some of the material upon which Trivet drew, the essential characteristics of which, however, were submerged in a sea of words and circumstantial detail because of his diffuse narrative technique and pedestrian, prosaic mind."

28. Block, pp. 580-581.

29. Eliade, p. 126.
30. Schlauch, *Constance*, pp. 33ff.
31. Jack A. Reynolds, "Possible Survivals of a Matriarchal Tradition in the Literature of the West," in *A Chaucerian Puzzle and Other Medieval Essays*, ed. by Natalie Grimes and J. A. Reynolds (Coral Gables: University of Miami Press, 1961), pp. 87-88; hereafter cited as Reynolds.
32. Eliade, p. IX.
33. Constance is identified as the "Iomb" (l. 611) while being championed by Christ, and finds herself in a situation similar to that of the Virgin when her divine intercession aids Constance, who is fleeing with a child whose father is only a necessary but shadowy figure and who will someday be the ruler and redeemer of her native Rome. The parallels between Constance and the Virgin are clearly intended to evoke such an identification.
34. See Frye, pp. 161-162.
35. See Eliade, pp. 41-44.
36. Block, pp. 588-589.
37. Reynolds, p. 89.
38. For an excellent introduction to literary attitudes toward women in the medieval period, see Joan M. Ferrante, *Woman as Image: From the Twelfth Century to Dante* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975), pp. 1-15.
39. See Robert W. Hanning, "From *Eva* and *Ave* to Eglentyne and Alisoun: Chaucer's Insight into the Roles Women Play," *Signs* 2 (1977): 580-599.
40. Robinson, *Works of Chaucer*, p. 696.
41. Whittock, *A Reading*, p. 115.