

**John Gower's Transformation of the *Tale of Constance* from  
Nicholas Trevet's *Of the Noble Lady Constance***

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**Table of Contents:**

Introduction: Peter G. Beidler

1. The Heathen Merchants: Marcela Gamallo  
(*NLC*, 1-49; *CA*, II, 587-625; *MLT*, II, 134-210)
2. The Marriage Negotiations: Heather Urbanski  
(*NLC*, 50-72; *CA*, II, 626-38; *MLT*, II, 211-322)
3. The Murder of the Christians: Krista J. Sterner  
(*NLC*, 73-99; *CA*, II, 639-703; *MLT*, II, 323-436)
4. The Voyage to Northumberland: Kurt E. Douglass  
(*NLC*, 100-51; *CA*, II, 704-51; *MLT*, II, 437-539)
5. The Blind Man: Kimberly C. Robertson  
(*NLC*, 152-209; *CA*, II, 751-91; *MLT*, II, 540-581)
6. The False Knight: Wendy A. Deacon  
(*NLC*, 210-52; *CA*, II, 792-883; *MLT*, II, 582-686)
7. The King, Husband, and Father: Samuel H. Norwood  
(*NLC*, 253-65; *CA*, II, 884-930; *MLT*, II, 687-721  
and *NLC*, 305-17; *CA*, II, 986-96; *MLT*, II, 757-770)
8. The Substitute Letters: Ellen Lempereur  
(*NLC*, 266-304; *CA*, II, 931-85; *MLT*, II, 722-756)
9. The Second Exile: Eileen Radetich  
(*NLC*, 318-59; *CA*, II, 997-1083; *MLT*, II, 771-875)
10. The Attempted Rape: Peter G. Beidler  
(*NLC*, 360-94; *CA*, II, 1084-1125; *MLT*, II, 900-945)
11. The Return to Rome: Duane Graner  
(*NLC*, 433-83; *CA*, II, 1126-1225; *MLT*, II, 946-87)
12. The King's Revenge: Kimberly A. Racon  
(*NLC*, 395-432; *CA*, II, 1226-1309; *MLT*, II, 876-899)
13. The Loose Ends: Anthony J. Funari  
(*NLC*, 484-598; *CA*, II, 1310-1603; *MLT*, II, 988-1162)

## **Introduction: Peter G. Beidler**

My dozen students and I are pleased to offer this web publication of a comparison of John Gower's *Tale of Constance* in the *Confessio Amantis* (written in the early 1390s) with its immediate source in Nicholas Trevet's *Of the Noble Lady Constance* in his Anglo-Norman *Chronicles* (written in the early 1330s).

## **Set-up and procedures**

This work resulted from my fall 2005 graduate seminar at Lehigh University. At the start of the seminar I divided the story of Constance into thirteen narrative units and assigned one to each of my students and myself. The only exception was that one of the students, Samuel Norwood, had a split assignment—that is, two shorter narrative units, numbered here as 7, dealing with Allee, the king of Northumberland. The day we discussed the thirteen units in class I presented my students with a draft of a paper I had written on my unit, number 10, “The Attempted Rape.” That unit deals with the incident in which a renegade Christian from the coast of Spain comes aboard Constance's drifting boat and attempts to seduce her. I had found some interesting changes that Gower made. For example, while in Trevet, Constance herself had pushed the would-be rapist overboard, in Gower, Constance prays to God for help, and God then pushes the rapist overboard. In my essay I noted such alterations and wrote about why Gower made the changes he made. I encouraged my students to use my essay as a general model for essays they were to write on the narrative units assigned to them.

I suggested some general guidelines about how they would set up their own essays. Since most readers do not know well either Trevet's story or Gower's, it would be good, I said, to begin each paper with brief summaries of the plots of their portions of

the two versions, and then immediately summarize their own main conclusions about Gower's changes. Although our work does not discuss Chaucer's *Man of Law's Tale*, we felt sure that our essays would be of help to anyone working on the probable antecedents of Chaucer's story of Constance, so we would give in the table of contents parenthetical references to the corresponding lines in the *Man of Law's Tale*. We would generally quote from Trevet in the Old French of Correale's edition, but also cite Correale's excellent English translation. The line references would be to the French version. We would use Correale's spelling of the names when referring to the various characters (Alla, Maurice, Telous, Tiberius, Olda, Hermegild) from the Anglo-Norman text, but use Gower's spelling (Allee, Moris, Theloüs, Tiberie, Elda, Hermyngheld) when referring to the English ones. We would, for the most part, write only about our own sections of the narrative, but would if it seemed advisable refer in passing to relevant passages in a narrative unit assigned to someone else.

### **Collective conclusions**

Although we all worked independently, we have together compiled a list of collective conclusions about the general direction of Gower's adaptations of the raw materials he found in Trevet. The main events of Gower's version of the story track almost perfectly with Trevet's, but Gower's version is quite different:

—**Gower shortens the story** so that his account is only three-quarters as long as Trevet's. Gower cuts some events and characters and reduces others substantially. In some of the narrative units, however, he expands, as when he adds Constance's almost despairing lament when she is set adrift the second time.

—**Gower alters the character of Constance**, making her less saintly and more secular, with the feelings, fears, weaknesses, vulnerability, actions, and motherly instincts of a flesh-and-blood woman. She still converts pagans to Christianity, but Gower’s story can less be described as a conversion document than Trevet’s. It is more the psychological study of an unfortunate young woman whose life work is, through her beauty and her virtue, to lead others to salvation.

—**Gower makes Allee a more sympathetic king** than he had been in Trevet, less the bloody murderer of his mother and more the careful and kind husband, king, and Christian.

—**Gower reduces the role of the devil** as a motivator of the actions of evil men and women, leaving these men and women responsible for their own nefarious actions.

—**Gower reduces the focus on young Moris**. Gower’s story mentions the birth and youthful adventures of the future emperor of Rome, but the tale is far less about him than Trevet’s story was.

—**Gower is less interested in telling the history** of Rome and England and their various rulers and political skirmishes than Trevet was. To be more specific, he gives fewer facts and numbers than Trevet had, such as the number of heathens converted in Northumberland or the number of Saracens killed by Roman soldiers, and he is less interested in the relations between the English and their Welsh and Scottish neighbors.

—**Gower refocuses his version as a moral tale** illustrating the second deadly sin of envy and particularly one of its branches, detraction—that is, slander or backbiting. The confessor Genius sets the tale up in advance as a story illustrating to Amans the dangers of one of the “Envious brod . . . / Which cleped is Detraccioun” (CA, II, 383,

387). This personage who is given the name Detraction works behind the victim's back, seeming to offer praise but really finding fault:

. . . so that he pronounce  
A plein good word withoute frounce  
Awher behinde a mannes bak.  
For thogh he preise, he fint som lak,  
Which of his tale is ay the laste,  
That al the pris schal overcaste. (CA, II, 391-96)

The detractor is like the nettle that crowds out the lovely red rose and makes it fade and grow pale:

Riht so this fals Envious hewe,  
In every place wher he duelleth,  
With false words whiche he telleth  
He torneth preisinge into blame  
And worschipe into worldes schame. (CA, II, 404-08)

Even more graphically, the detractor is like the "scharnebude" or dung beetle that on a spring day in May ignores the lovely flowers and flies straight for a feast of animal excrement:

Lich to the Scharnebudes kinde,  
Of whos nature this I finde,  
That in the hoteste of the dai,  
Whan comen is the merie Maii,  
He sprat his wynges and up he fleth:

And under al aboute he seth  
The faire lusti floures springe,  
Bot therof hath he no likinge;  
Bot where he seth of any beste

The felthe, ther he makth his feste. (CA, II, 413-22)

Gower, through Genius, is clearly here setting up the *Tale of Constance* as a story about envy in general and about bottom-feeding dung-beetle detractors in particular—people like Domilde who refuse to acknowledge the moral beauty of the lovely flower Constance and try to make her appear ugly by spreading slanderous words about her.

Those are our collective conclusions. The authors of the individual pieces below have more to say about particular discoveries they have made. I should point out that, though we have all in some ways profited from the ideas and suggestions of others in our seminar, each of us has worked for the most part independently and is fully responsible for both the virtues and the flaws of her or his own narrative unit.

### **Earlier scholarly work**

As is too usual with Gower studies, little of substance has been done for us to build on in comparing the work of Trevet and Gower. Typically scholars are far more interested in what Chaucer did with Trevet in the *Man of Law's Tale* than with what Gower did with Trevet in the *Tale of Constance*. Still, some work has been done. G. C. Macaulay in his notes to the Early English Text Society edition, the four-volume *The Works of John Gower* (1900), has a long note on the differences between Trevet's and Gower's versions of the story of Constance. In volume 1 of the Oxford University Press edition of 1901, Macaulay lists some eighteen differences between the two versions (see his note to lines

587 ff., on pages 482-83). Macaulay does almost no analysis of the differences, however, except through quite general statements like “Gower has followed the original more closely than Chaucer, but he diverges from it in a good many points” (p. 482) and “These differences, besides others of detail, show that Gower treated the story with some degree of freedom” (p. 483).

More recent scholars have commented in general terms on the relationship between Trevelyan's and Gower's versions. V. A. Kolve, for example, tells us that “[f]or both Trevelyan and Gower, these are real personages inhabiting a real past, and they confer upon the whole narrative an important kind of medieval credibility; moral meaning emerges from a historical narrative” (*Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative: The First Five Canterbury Tales* [Stanford U P, 1984], p. 299).

Arno Esch admires Gower's skill at developing the parallelism embedded in Trevelyan's narrative:

Gower follows his source very closely. But he has not only left out superfluous passages, he has above all emphasised the parallelism in the story much more than is the case in Trevelyan's version. The events of the first part, from the beginnings in Rome and the journey to Syria to the expulsion and the landing in Northumbria, appear in fuller instrumentation in the second part, which includes both the events in England and Constance's second expulsion and rescue. The preliminary character of the first part is evident not only from the fact that it is only a third as long as the second; significantly, all of the major figures besides Constance and her parents remain nameless, while in the second part all the important

characters and even many minor ones are called by name. As the proposed wedding with the Sultan stands at the center of the first section, the marriage with King Allee stands at the center of the second. The conversion of the Syrian merchants corresponds to the conversion of Hermyngheld and Elda; the message of the merchants to the Sultan to that of Elda to Allee; the conversion of the Sultan to that of the Northumbrian king. The mothers of the Sultan and Allee are the evil intriguers. Twice Constance is exiled, twice she wanders for years upon the sea, and twice she is kindly sheltered. Through the emphasis on the parallel structure, Gower binds the different episodes together and makes the basic pattern of divine guidance transparently clear. (“John Gower’s Narrative Art,” translated from Esch’s 1968 article by Linda Barney Burke, in Peter Nicholson, ed., *Gower’s Confessio Amantis: A Critical Anthology* [D. S. Brewer, 1991], p. 97)

Peter Nicholson tells us, more helpfully, that

Gower’s tale was shorter, and clearer, and more sharply focused than Trevet’s was. Gower had eliminated most of what was extraneous in his source, and had preserved what was most apt. In cutting away, of course, he also gave shape: Gower had raised Constance above the background of the chronicle account of her life, and he raised the moral and emotional lines of the story above the elaborate account of movements and motivations in Trevet’s version; and it was he who first extracted from the mass of detail and episode in Trevet the simple tale of the trials and



endurance of the long-suffering heroine and gave it the form by which we know it so well now from the *Man of Law's Tale*. In doing so, he also sharpened the focus of each episode, providing in almost every case a memorable image or picture where Trevet was scattered or diffuse. ("The *Man of Law's Tale*: What Chaucer Really Owed to Gower," *Chaucer Review* 16 (1991): 170)

Most scholars, however, rush past Gower's version to praise what they see as the greater artistic glories of Chaucer's version. In our analyses below we attempt to discern in more specific terms the patterns in Gower's treatment of the story he learned from Trevet. To keep the attention clearly on Gower, we make no comparisons with Chaucer's version of the story of Constance, since virtually all scholars agree that Gower did not know the *Man of Law's Tale* (see especially Peter Nicholson, "Chaucer Borrows from Gower: The Sources of the *Man of Law's Tale*" in *Chaucer and Gower: Difference, Mutuality, Exchange*, edited by R. F. Yeager (University of Victoria, 1991], pp. 85-99).

### **Acknowledgments**

We are grateful to Bob Correale for generously allowing us to use for our class a pre-publication copy of his facing-page translation of Trevet's account from volume 2 of *Sources and Analogues of the Canterbury Tales*, edited by Robert M. Correale and Mary Hamel (D. S. Brewer, 2006), pp. 296-329. Our citations from Trevet are from that edition. Our citations from Gower are to Macaulay's standard EETS edition, referred to above. We found helpful Russell A. Peck's glosses in his selective edition of the *Confessio Amantis* (Medieval Academy of America, 1980 (for the *Tale of Constance*, see pp. 108-36). We are grateful to Robert F. Yeager, president of the John Gower Society,

for his encouragement of this project, and to Brian Gastle, manager of the Society's website, for his help in mounting this collection of essays. Finally, we want to thank Wendy A. Deacon for combining the various sections into one large document and for helping to prepare the final copy for this web publication.

## **1. The Heathen Merchants (NLC, 1-49; CA, II, 587-625)**

Marcela B. Gamallo

In the *Confessio Amantis* Gower retains the most important facts present in his source, Trevet's *Of the Noble Lady Constance*; however, he transforms the tale by adding some details, omitting others, postponing the reporting of information, and altering certain facts. In this essay I will analyze the beginning of each story to show how Gower changes the original story and to explain his possible intentions for doing so. In the first 49 lines, Trevet tells us in 490 words the background information the reader needs to understand the story:

Maurice is the eighteen year-old grandson of Emperor Tiberius and the son of Constance, Tiberius's only daughter, and Alla, the second Saxon king of Northumbria. Maurice is also said to be from Cappadocia because he was reared in the court of the Roman Senator Tarquinius, who came from that place. In a flashback to the past we are told about Constance's vast education. One day, merchants come to her father's court from the Saracen land. Constance, who is thirteen years old, goes to see their merchandise and to learn about their land. When she understands that they are heathens, she preaches them the Christian faith and has them baptized when they assent to the new faith. When the Saracens return to their country they are questioned by their families and neighbors and even

brought to the sultan's court, accused of having forsaken their previous beliefs. They successfully defend their newly acquired faith and praise Constance. After hearing their praise, the sultan decides to marry the maiden. He sends the same Christians and a heathen emir to the emperor with gifts and the promise of peace and an alliance between Christians and Saracens if Constance marries him. Tiberius first consults with Pope John III and with the Roman Senators, and then sends letters to the sultan saying he will agree to the marriage only if the sultan denies his idols and false beliefs and receives baptism and the Christian religion. The messengers return to the sultan praising Constance, Tiberius, and the court. The heathen emir agrees to become a Christian if the sultan consents.

Gower shortens Trevet's opening scene and retells the story in 223 words:

Tiberie Constantine reigns in Rome. He has a wife and a daughter called Constance, who is very faithful. When the heathen merchants come to Rome to sell their merchandise, Constance goes to see their goods. She buys their products and preaches the Christian faith to them. They convert and receive their baptism. On their return, the sultan asks them about their new faith. When he hears them praise Constance for her beauty and grace, he decides to marry her.

If we compare the two versions, we can see that they share the same basic information concerning facts and characters. Gower, however, makes changes that have an important impact on the overall effect of the story. He puts the events of the story in chronological

order, omits mention of Alla, Maurice, and other characters from the opening section, reduces the importance of the heathens and the sultan's reasons for marrying Constance, and presents Constance differently by simplifying her character, omitting her educational background, and emphasizing her faith.

The first major change worth mentioning is Gower's decision to tell the story chronologically. Gower omits the frame concerning Maurice and centers his tale immediately on Constance. In Trevet's version, the reader saw the name Maurice in the opening paragraph but had to wait for his name to be mentioned again and his story to be completed. In Gower's version, in contrast, the reader knows from the beginning that he is about to listen to the story of a woman called Constance who is "ful of feith" (CA, II, 598) and whose "goode name" (CA, II, 596) is widely known. Thus, postponing the mention of Constance's progeny makes the tale more linear and easier to understand for the reader.

Gower also omits some of the characters present in Trevet's story and reduces the importance of others. One of the most interesting changes he makes is to postpone the introduction of Allee and Moris. He also greatly reduces the role of the heathens. Of course, not presenting Allee and his son at the very beginning goes along with his decision to tell the tale chronologically. Gower not only postpones their first appearance in the text, but also reduces their roles. Whereas in Trevet, Alla was presented as a major character and Maurice was allowed to frame the story, in Gower, both Allee and Moris seem to be instrumental only in developing the story line. Apart from reducing the part Allee and Moris play in the opening of the story, Gower also reduces the heathens' role. In Trevet, the heathens went to Rome, then back to the sultan's country, returned to

Rome with a heathen emir, and went back to the Saracen land with Tiberius's letters and the emir's report. Moreover, their families and neighbors questioned the merchants about their new faith, and they were even brought before the sultan for him to judge them. Not finding anything wrong with their report, the sultan did not punish them. On the contrary, he became interested in marrying the maiden that converted them. In Gower's version, however, the heathens' second trip to Rome and the heathen emir are omitted altogether. The newly converted heathens are questioned only by the sultan, who readily decides to marry Constance. A further reduction occurs when Gower deals with the reasons the sultan falls in love with Constance. While the sultan in both versions decides to marry Constance based on the heathens' report and on their praise, Gower limits the heathens' praise to only two features that describe Constance: her beauty and her grace. Thus, in Gower, the sultan is apparently satisfied with his future wife's simple description. Perhaps the sultan finds these two attributes representative of what he desires to find in the woman who will accompany him during his life. In Trevet, however, the heathens described Constance as having a "haut et noble sen et sapience, et de grant et merveillous beauté et genterise et noblesce de sanc" ["high and noble mind and wisdom, great beauty, gentility and noble lineage"] (*NLC*, 31-32). No doubt the sultan was amazed by this highly qualified woman and decided to marry her. Yet, neither grace nor faith was directly attributed to her.

How does Gower deal with the depiction of Constance? Interestingly, Gower makes major changes in the main character. He chooses not to assign her a specific age and he does not mention her educational background. While Trevet mentioned that Constance was a thirteen year-old girl, Gower does not mention her age. The reader is

free to assign her whatever age seems appropriate for her to behave as she does and to perform the activities she carries out. Gower's Constance seems to be more realistic in the sense that a woman who is able to go to town to buy goods is more likely to be able to relate to heathen merchants on an equal basis than a girl of thirteen years of age. Even though Trevet made the merchants go to Tiberius's court so that Constance could see their goods and learn about their land, it is difficult to believe that a girl at such a tender age could communicate in such a persuasive way with foreign adult men.

Another major omission in Gower's tale is Constance's educational background. While Constance had an impressively vast knowledge of different subjects in Trevet, Gower greatly reduces that knowledge in his tale. In Trevet's version, Constance was taught the Christian faith and the seven sciences, which are logic, physics, morals, astronomy, geometry, music, and optics. She was also taught various languages. Gower, in contrast, deprives Constance of such a comprehensive education to the extent that he does not even mention her knowledge of different languages. After all, Trevet's Constance never used her vast knowledge, except perhaps her awareness of different languages to interact with the Old Saxons and the Spaniards.

Gower attributes to Constance only beauty, goodness, and grace. In fact, Gower seems to endow Constance only with the features she needs to carry out her mission. Gower emphasizes her faith rather than her knowledge, which in turn makes Constance a more consistent character. Gower makes his Constance more believable from the very beginning by commenting on her "feith" (CA, II, 598) in the first lines and by not mentioning her age at all. Her way of converting the heathens is also more credible since she goes to their territory and interacts with them commercially. While she buys their

goods, she talks in such a persuasive way that they are actually “buying” her discourse. How to perform business transactions is all these merchants know, and Constance apparently uses their market strategies to achieve her goal and convert them to her Christian faith. Constance does not only have them baptized, but also “alle here false goddess weyven” (CA, II, 610). Gower’s highlighting of this piece of information makes Constance’s understanding of faith more complete, since one cannot be baptized without renouncing other beliefs that are not compatible with the Christian faith. Interestingly, the word “faith” was mentioned four times in Trevet’s opening scene, while Gower mentions it five times in his more limited opening scene and reinforces Constance’s spiritual gifts by also endowing her with “grace.” Gower mentions that Constance is “ful of feith” (CA, II, 598); she teaches “Cristes feith” (CA, II, 607) to the heathens who, once they are “of the feith certain” (CA, II, 611), they their “ferste feith forsake” (CA, II, 615) and undertake “the rihte feith to kepe and holde” (CA, II, 617-18). Clearly, Gower wants to make faith an important attribute of Constance, who will be helped and strengthened by her faith in God in the trying situations she is to face. Furthermore, Gower will later show how God’s grace will always protect and assist Constance.

Gower has to make decisions on what to leave out when writing a shorter version of the original tale. While the most important changes and omissions are mentioned above, some minor changes are also significant in the overall rendition of the tale. For example, the setting is slightly different. Trevet’s story was not set in a specific place. The reader simply received a time clause: “taunt come il governa la court et les provinces de l’empire souz l’emperour Justin” [“when he (Tiberius) governed the court and provinces of the empire under the Emperor Justin”] (NLC, 10-11). Gower’s tale is clearly



set in Rome. Gower omits some minor characters such as Emperor Justin and Tarquinus, while postponing, as I showed above, the introduction of more important ones such as Moris and Allee. Gower also presents Tiberie slightly differently. He describes him as being a “*worthi kniht*” (CA, II, 587) while postponing revealing that he is also the emperor. This change may serve the purpose of highlighting Constance’s noble character, since she is the daughter of a worthy man. Gower seems to emphasize Tiberie’s noble character instead of his rank. Another minor change is that Gower does not mention that his story is an old Saxon chronicle. Gower solves the communication problem Constance may have encountered when living with the Saxons by not mentioning what language she spoke with them. Of course, since Gower’s Constance is endowed with “*grace*” (CA, II, 622), the reader can always find an easy answer as to how Constance overcomes all kinds of difficulties. Being protected by God, she does not fear trying situations.

Gower’s changes have a positive effect. His alterations and omissions make the story clearer and more focused. We can easily center our attention on Constance instead of becoming distracted by the presence of many characters who will play a part later in the text or who will not appear again. Most importantly, Gower, by emphasizing Constance’s faith and grace rather than her vast education, makes Constance a more spiritual character who submits herself to God’s will and trusts in his power rather than in her own intellectual capacities.

## **2. The Marriage Negotiations (*NLC*, 50-72; *CA*, II, 626-38)**

Heather Urbanski

Once the newly Christian merchants return home and spread the good word of their new faith, the Saracen sultan decides to propose marriage to Constance. This section of the story outlines the negotiations that occur between the sultan and our heroine's father, Tiberius, regarding the marriage. In Trevet's version, which runs approximately 280 words and is summarized below, considerable value is exchanged for this young maid's hand:

Once Constance's father has consented to the marriage, on condition that the sultan convert to Christianity, the Saracen leader sends his trusted emir and other powerful representatives to Rome, along with twelve hostages (sons of the greatest families of his land) as surety for Constance's safety. In addition, the emir carries with him letters declaring peace between the Christians and the Saracens, granting free trade throughout the holy land, surrendering control over Jerusalem to the Christians, and agreeing that all idols of the heathen religion could be destroyed by Christian bishops in their process of converting the people of the region. The sultan also woos the pope, clergy, and nobles of Tiberius's court with treasures and gifts in the hopes of completing the marriage contract for Constance. Once all the arrangements are made between the Romans and the sultan, Constance is

sent from her home to the heathen land and the people of the city mourn and lament her departure. Accompanying the new bride on her voyage are cardinals, bishops, clergy, knights, and even a Roman senator. Some of the many Christians are going on pilgrimage to the holy sites while others will take control of Jerusalem.

Gower makes significant alterations to the narration of these negotiations. His alterations consist primarily of deletions in a section that now contains just 84 words:

The sultan agrees to convert to Christianity as a condition of his marriage to Constance. Once this agreement is recorded, the negotiations are complete and the sultan sends twelve Saracen princes to Rome as hostages. This gesture pleases Tiberie, so he and the pope send Constance to Barbarie accompanied by two cardinals and many lords to act as witnesses that the sultan keeps his word and actually converts to Christianity.

While both texts address the negotiations surrounding Constance's marriage to the sultan, Gower significantly condenses the section, leaving only one-third of the text. The elements Gower deletes from Trevet's material are particularly telling in their overall effect of reducing the worth of Constance to her God from the Christian point of view, to her father (and his court) from an economic standpoint, and to her people from a socio-political perspective.

Perhaps the most obvious omission in Gower's version of Constance's story is the near-complete erasure of Constance's value from a Christian perspective, thus denying her the chance to bring glory to her God through her faith. In Trevet, this lone, pious,

thirteen year-old girl accomplished what centuries of later war and violence in the form of the Crusades would not: the recovery of Jerusalem for the Christian God. Constance achieved this victory, incidentally, merely by preaching to some heathen merchants whom she happened to encounter in Rome, forging a “bone et entiere pees entre touz Cristiens et touz Sarrasins” [“good and entire peace between all Christians and Saracens”] (*NLC*, 55) out of her piety and love for Christ, not through violent conquest nor at the expense of thousands of lives. As an added bonus, the sultan agreed to allow the Christian bishops to “enseigner les gentz de sa terre la droite foi . . . et de eglises faire et les temples de maunetz destrure” [“instruct the people of his land in the true faith . . . to build churches, and to destroy the temples of idols”] (*NLC*, 61-62). Thus, not only did the Christians gain physical and political control over the holy city because of a young girl’s piety, but they also destroyed the heathen religion in that part of the world, achieving a greater dominance of the “true faith” and the greater glory of God. While Constance’s story took place in the sixth century, approximately 500 years before Pope Urban II declared the First Crusade in 1095, the objective of the three centuries of war that followed are too similar to the Christian gains from Constance’s marriage to be a coincidence. For Trevet, writing in the early fourteenth century, and his readers, the Crusades would have been recent religious-political history, and a belief in the righteousness of the Christian reclamation of the Holy Land was still prominent enough to play a significant role in his tale of Constance.

None of this historical and religious context to the negotiations, however, is present in Gower’s version. The only condition of the marriage contract from the source material that remains in the *Confessio Amantis* is the sultan’s conversion to Christianity;

all the other rewards the church reaps from allowing Constance to be married to the sultan are dropped. Those deleted gains are arguably far greater for the religion as a whole than the conversion of a single heathen leader, thus reflecting the distinctly more secular purpose to Gower's tale. Rather than paint Constance as a holy warrior or instrument of God's will who advances the cause of her faith through her marriage, as Trevet did, Gower actually seems fairly uninterested in the negotiations related to that marriage. His radically condensed treatment presents the negotiations as if they are a necessary but unexciting plot element to be dealt with before Constance can be put in a situation where she could demonstrate the intended lesson against Envy, a purpose which I will discuss in more detail below.

A smaller deletion, in terms of the volume of text, relates to Constance's value from an economic perspective. Trevet's discussion of the marriage negotiations included, almost thrown in among the religious conditions, a commitment promising the Christians free travel and trade throughout all the Saracen lands. Later in the section, Trevet's sultan also sent to Tiberius, the pope, and every Roman senator "riches dons et tresours" ["rich gifts and treasures"] (*NLC*, 64-65). Thus, all the powerful members of the empire, both secular and religious, benefited economically, directly and indirectly, from the sultan's desire to marry Constance. Gower, however, makes no mention of the sultan's "gifts" of treasure to anyone who might be a party to the negotiations, nor of any trade alliance promised to Rome as part of the marriage contract. This omission of treasure is the first of what appears to be a pattern in Gower's revisions, which seem to reflect a general lack of interest in Constance's money. As I mentioned previously, the only element of the marriage contract that Gower includes is the sultan's conversion. No

narration of the negotiation process occurs at all in the *Confessio Amantis*, which further de-emphasizes both the value exchanged via the contract and the negotiations themselves in Gower's version.

The third element of Constance's value that differs significantly between Trevet's tale and Gower's adaptation is tied to her society, both from an emotional perspective and from a political one. Trevet described Constance's departure as being met with "a grant deol et lermes et crie et noyse et plente de tote la cité de Rome" ["great grief, tears, outcry, noise and lament from the whole city of Rome"] (*NLC*, 67-68). This great sorrow is not present at all in Gower, which indicates that his Constance is not important enough to her people for them to cry and lament at being forced to part with her. In fact, Trevet made it clear that Constance was "maunderent" ["ordered"] (*NLC*, 66) to leave her home and community in order to complete the marriage contract. Gower's version, however, omits all such language, and simply declares that Tiberie and the pope decide who "scholden go" (*CA*, II, 637) with Constance "To se the Souldan be converted" (*CA*, II, 638). On a more overtly political level, in Trevet's version, the pope, clergy, and senators were all involved, along with Tiberius, in the negotiations for Constance's marriage, directly benefiting from the rich gifts the sultan sent along (perhaps as bribes), as described above. In this way, Trevet demonstrated the material value Constance brought to her community's leaders. In Gower, however, the only other official consulted by her father is the pope, and no one, not even Tiberie, reaps any monetary gains from these negotiations.

Such glaringly obvious deletions that significantly devalue Constance lead us to wonder why Gower made the changes he did to his source material. One explanation is

that Trevet's version seemed to express a deeper distrust of the sultan on the part of Constance's father and the other Roman officials, or, at the very least, a greater resistance to the marriage that needed to be overcome through monetary, religious, and political appeals. In Gower, on the other hand, the only hint of mistrust between the two parties to the marriage contract—besides the unexplained twelve hostages he carries over from Trevet (see below)—seems to lie in Tiberie's need for assurance that the sultan will actually convert to Christianity. The diverging levels of mistrust seem to be connected to the purpose of each author in relating the tale of Constance. In the secular hagiography Trevet was crafting, such distrust between the heathen and the Christian leaders would be of critical importance as it would provide the historical context of suspicion between the heathens and the Christians, thus underscoring the miracles that resulted from Constance's piety overcoming issues of deep religious-political strife: the reclamation of the holy land, the defeat of the heathens, etc. In addition, Trevet's *Of the Noble Lady Constance* presents itself as a historical account based on the chronicles of old. As such, it would need to acknowledge the long history of tensions between the Saracens and the Christians. The excessive value that the sultan was willing to exchange for Constance allowed Trevet to do just that. Gower, on the other hand, is not claiming to present history or hagiography and thus such "realism" is not required. As part of the larger *Confessio Amantis*, with a decidedly non-Christian purpose, Gower's version of the story of Constance can eschew such historical detail as Trevet employed in favor of focusing on those specific elements of the story that fit within the revised goals.

Interestingly, the one element of the negotiations besides the sultan's conversion that both Gower and Trevet mention is the conveyance of twelve Saracen hostages as a

guarantee for Constance's safety. While Trevet was more direct in declaring the hostages to be a form of surety, thus emphasizing the mistrust between the parties, neither version returns to this plot element after the massacre of the Christians by the sultaness, nor explains in any more detail what possible role the twelve may have had in the negotiations. The lack of closure regarding this element could be explained as authorial error if it did not appear in both Trevet's and Gower's versions. The question of why these hostages are briefly mentioned and then completely forgotten is confounding, and the text does not provide many clues to help modern readers come to an acceptable conclusion. Perhaps there is a socio-cultural custom that contemporary readers would have immediately understood but that is missing from our modern awareness—a custom that would compel, for example, the presence of such hostages any time a dangerous trip of over hundreds of miles was required to complete a marriage contract. Unless historical research can uncover such a custom or some other reasonable explanation, the mystery of the disappearing hostages will likely remain unsolved.

Returning to the issue at hand brings me to another reason for the revisions that devalue Constance in the *Confessio Amantis* that is related to the first one: Gower's stated purpose is to craft a cautionary tale warning about the dangers of Envy, specifically those resulting from Detraction, while Trevet's was clearly to present Constance as a secular saint. This explanation certainly accounts for Gower's deletion of the significant religious and political benefits the Christian world attained through Constance's marriage in Trevet's version. Such a theological focus would detract from Gower's tale intended to convince a questionably Christian suppliant to Venus of the folly of Envy. It would also be unseemly to acknowledge the marriage market and women's value in that market



during a moral lesson aimed at a man who is confessing his sins of love. Marriage negotiations, after all, have little to do with matters of love, particularly when it comes to those conducted over such a long distance as in the tale of Constance in which the bride and groom have never even met. To spend any more textual time than absolutely necessary on this economic and political aspect of the story would likely introduce too much real-world materialism into Gower's moral tale. In this way, we can read both the deletion of the treasure emphasized in the source material and the extreme condensation of the contractual elements of love as strategic choices in Gower's project to present a "purer" vision of love, one without the vulgar economic implications and considerations that so often accompanied love in the reality of the medieval world.

A third, much more speculative, explanation for the revisions to the marriage negotiations is that Gower simply does not want to present a woman as particularly valuable. While there is little direct evidence in the text to support this conclusion, it seems difficult not to see the effect such deletions have on the presentation of Constance from a gendered perspective as Gower transforms her from the woman of incredible worth in Trevet's formulation to one of questionable value in the *Confessio Amantis*. Could these deletions simply be a reflection of Gower's either personal or cultural devaluation of women in general? Answering this question is not possible from an analysis of this small section of the text and would require a broader examination of the changes made to the whole story. An initial cursory glance, however, reveals conflicting evidence as Gower, in addition to devaluing Constance, also, in contrast, presents her as a more well-rounded character, in a sense as more human than saint, when compared to Trevet's Constance. One could argue that this revision makes her more valuable as it

treats her as a person and not as a mere instrument of God's will on Earth, passively accepting her fate, as Trevet most frequently presented her. Sorting out the conflicting interpretive evidence requires a sustained inquiry and presents a potentially intriguing opportunity for future Gower scholarship.

One of the smaller, less crucial details that Gower eliminates from his source material is the character of the sultan's emissary, the emir. This character does not exist in Gower, yet he played a key part in setting the marriage negotiations in motion for Trevet. Also missing are the other great Saracen men sent to Rome by the sultan. These omissions could perhaps be explained as merely an elimination of unnecessary characters, but may also be related to Gower's purpose of transforming a historical account, which required nods to accuracy and completeness, into a moral tale in which the focus is on envy, not piety. In addition, Gower's version of the story does not include the army of knights sent to Barbary along with Constance, thus setting up an alteration in the next section in which the sultanness arranges for the massacre of the Christians. Since Constance does not have an army with her, she and the clergy who accompany her are even more vulnerable to the wrath of her envious intended mother-in-law.

While Trevet's purpose in including the details of the marriage contract was to demonstrate the miraculous value that Constance was able to bring to her God, her family, and her people because of her enormous faith, the point of the negotiations for Gower is to get Constance into the orbit of the envious sultanness, which he quickly and efficiently does with a barebones narration of the conditions "on either side accorded" (*CA*, II, 630) that constitute the marriage of Constance and the Saracen sultan.

### **3. The Murder of the Christians** (*NLC*, 73-99; *CA*, II, 639-703)

Krista J. Sterner

After it has been decided that Constance will marry the sultan of the Saracen people, Trevet turns his attention to a character not mentioned previously in the tale: the mother of the sultan. The scene runs to nearly 350 words, which I give in summary here:

By the will of God, the mother of the sultan is still alive. Seeing that the Christians are destroying her religion, the sultanness decides to plot evil and treason against them. First, she secretly hires 700 Saracen people who are willing to live or die in a quarrel against the Christians. As Constance and her fellow Christians are nearing the Saracen lands, the sultanness goes to her son. She publicly thanks and praises God that the sultan will soon be a Christian, and she confesses to her son that she has always secretly wished to convert to Christianity. She begs her son to allow her to throw the first feast for Constance and her Christian people before the upcoming nuptials and he consents. On the day of Constance's arrival the sultanness holds the feast. All of the men dine in the hall of the sultan and the women dine in the hall of the sultanness. The 700 hired Saracens serve at both feasts. When the feast is at its most joyful moment, the 700 Saracens, along with some other Saracens they had recruited, launch an attack against the Christians. They follow the sultanness's orders and kill all of the Christians

except the maiden Constance. They also kill the emir and the sultan.

When the attack first begins, three Christian men escape from the feast and flee to Rome to report to the emperor what has happened. The men assume that Constance has been killed in the attack, and they report this assumption to the emperor as well. Everyone in Rome is devastated by this news and grief is displayed throughout the land.

Gower writes this scene quite differently in some 400 words:

No one is aware that envy is going to cause a disturbance in the upcoming marriage of Constance and the sultan. The sultan's mother is alive at this time, and she believes that if her son marries Constance she will lose her family (her only son), her religion, and her joy in life. Upset, she thinks of how she might be able to trick her son. When the two are together, she tells him that she is happy that he will soon be a Christian and that she has often desired for him to take a new faith that would make his life better. She also tells him that Constance will be a loveable wife and, as she is the daughter of the emperor, to wed her will be a great honor for the sultan. The sultanness, seemingly in hopes of gaining the same grace as Constance, asks the sultan if she may throw the first feast to welcome Constance. The sultan consents. The sultanness is happy because, along with these false words she has just spoken to her son, she is conspiring to cause death. When Constance and the Roman clerks and citizens are at the feast, the sultanness and those who are part of her conspiracy launch their attack against all those who know of and are a part of the wedding. The

sultanness brings her rage upon all of the Romans. Her own son is not spared, but killed also. God spares Constance, who stands amidst the killing frozen from fear. There is blood everywhere, including on the dishes and the silverware. Constance weeps and makes a moaning sound as she witnesses this scene of death.

Much of this scene is similar in Trevet and Gower. Gower, however, makes some minor yet significant changes. He makes envy, the second of the Seven Deadly Sins, the motivating factor in the murders, makes God more powerful, makes Constance more human, and makes the sultanness more evil.

The most significant change Gower makes is his use of envy as the motivating factor for the sultanness's actions. Whereas in Trevet, the sultanness saw her religion being lost and therefore "s'en pensa de mal et de treson" ["plotted evil and treason"] (*NLC*, 75), Gower has her act because of "Envie" (*CA*, II, 640). Gower's sultanness sees that if the sultan marries Constance she will lose her "joies hier, / For myn astat schal so be lassed" (*CA*, II, 648-49). She will lose her son, her religion, and her estate—everything that makes her happy in life. Gower further emphasizes the motivation of envy when the sultanness asks to plan the first feast for Constance. She mentions Constance's status: "And ek so worschipful a wif, / The doughter of an Emperour" (*CA*, II, 662-63). In Trevet, the sultanness made no mention of Constance's status. Whereas in Trevet, the sultanness begged to plan the first feast, in Gower, the sultanness also tells her son, "I you beseche / That I such grace mihte areche" (*CA*, II, 665-66). Here, the sultanness admits that she wants to host the first feast because she desires to be as graceful as Constance, again confirming that she is envious of Constance. And lastly, whereas in Trevet, the

sultanness hired 700 Saracens to help carry out the massacre, in Gower, “With fals covine which sche hadde / Hire clos Envie tho sche spradde” (CA, II, 683-84). The sultanness uses “envie” to gather together a “covine” or conspiracy to help bring death to Constance’s people.

Why would Gower want to make envy the motivating factor in the murders? The major reason is that Gower seeks to tell a tale about envy, while Trevet sought to tell a religiously motivated tale. As mentioned in the introduction to this work, Gower’s Genius wishes to warn Amans about the dangers of envy and specifically about the form of envy called detraction. Genius defines detraction as a type of envy in which a person acts by slandering or backbiting. Detraction is illustrated through the actions of the sultanness in many instances. While she expresses her happiness over the upcoming nuptials to her son, she “Covine of deth behinde his bak” (CA, II, 676). As she speaks of Constance as “so worschipful a wif” (CA, II, 662), she prepares to “slowh hem in a sodein rage” (CA, II, 688). Through the sultanness’s acts of detraction, Gower is able to demonstrate the detrimental effects that envy can have on a person; thus, he makes envy, and more specifically detraction, the motivating factor behind the murder of the Christians.

Another significant alteration is that Gower makes God more powerful. In Trevet’s version, Constance was spared from death at the feast, but Trevet never indicated why she lived through the massacre. In Gower’s version, he explicitly states that God spares Constance from the brutal death that meets her fellow Romans: “Bot what the hihe god wol spare / It mai for no peril misfare” (CA, II, 693-94). As she stands among the blood and gore, this “worthi Maiden” (CA, II, 695) stays alive because of

God's providence. Why would Gower make specific mention that God spares Constance and in doing so make God more powerful? One reason is that Gower seeks to tell about the dangers of envy. In specifically stating that the "hihe god" spares Constance, he is in fact saying that envy can kill even the innocent, and, that only God can stop envy from wreaking its havoc. Thus, Gower reinforces the danger and evilness of envy as he makes God more powerful in order to meet this end.

At the same time Gower makes God more powerful, he makes Constance less saintly and more human. In *Trevet*, Constance was defined through her exceptional religious gifts and talents. One example of her talent was seen when she converted a group of merchants to Christianity at the age of thirteen (*NLC*, 23). In Gower she is still a pious woman protected by God, but she is also more human. Constance's humanity is revealed through her emotions and reactions to the murders. In *Trevet*, the murders occurred and Constance was spared, but *Trevet* did not provide the reader with any reaction from Constance. In Gower, Constance is spared by God, and then she reacts to the bloody scene: she "Stod thane, as who seith, ded for feere" (*CA*, II, 696). This scene of death shakes Constance so deeply that she is frozen with fear. Gower describes her emotional response: "No wonder thogh sche wepte and cride / Makende many a wofull mone" (*CA*, II, 702-03). Gower also paints a much bloodier scene than *Trevet* did. Gower says that blood was everywhere: "The Dissh forthwith the Coppe and al / Bebled thei weren overal" (*CA*, II, 699-700). By using this bloodiness, Gower is setting up the scene so that Constance can respond. Her response is genuine: she cries and moans; she feels immense grief and fear as she watches her fellow Romans be slain. One reason Gower adds Constance's response to the murders is that he wants her to appear more

human. Gower wants to show the damage that envy has caused and the pain and grief that Constance feels because of this damage. By making Constance more human he makes the effects of envy even more detrimental. She is Gower's example of what happens when envy is at the helm.

Gower's making Constance more human is accentuated by another of his alterations to the tale: he makes the sultanness more evil. Gower accomplishes this change primarily through the addition of direct speech by the sultanness that was not present in Trevet's tale. How does this speech make the sultanness more evil? First, it allows for the sultanness to engage in detraction. While she exclaims, "Mi Sone, I am be double weie / With al myn herte glad and blithe" (CA, II, 656-57), her "fals covine" is preparing for a massacre of the Christians, a massacre in which her own son's life will be taken. The sultanness's speech is particularly powerful when juxtaposed against the murder scene. In a matter of 15 lines, Gower's sultanness goes from expressing joy for her son to participating in a bloody murder: "Sche slowh hem in a sodein rage" (CA, II, 688). Her seemingly genuine invitation to hold the feast quickly becomes a feast "torned into blod" (CA, II, 698). This juxtaposition was not matched in Trevet. Gower seeks to use the sultanness's direct speech and the bloodiness of the murders to emphasize what is presented by the sultanness to her son, compared to what she intends to do at the feast. What results is a more evil sultanness. By creating this more evil sultanness, Gower succeeds in showing the destructive power of envy.

Gower makes other changes in the scene of the murders. For example, whereas in Trevet, the sultanness told the sultan that she had always secretly wished to convert to Christianity, in Gower, she says that she has always secretly wished he would take on a



new faith. This change allows for the sultanness to turn to Constance's status as a "worschipful" (*CA*, II, 662) wife and to discuss how the marriage will be a great honor for the sultan. It also allows Gower to emphasize the sultanness's envy of Constance. Another major change involves the beginning of the scene. Whereas in *Trevet*, the scene began with the claim that the mother was still alive and "Allas! sil fut la volenté Dieux" ["Alas! It was the will of God"] (*NLC*, 73-74), in Gower, it begins, "Bot that which nevere was wel herted, / Envie, tho began travaile" (*CA*, II, 639-40). This change shows that Gower is immediately defining this tale as one driven by envy. A final change involves the end of the scene. Whereas in *Trevet*, three Christian men escaped and fled to Rome, no one escapes the murder in Gower's version. This change is most certainly due to the fact that there is not as large a party of Romans in the Saracen land as was seen in *Trevet*'s tale. Another reason for this change may be that Gower wants to reemphasize the extent of the murders. They are so brutal that no one—except Constance, who is handpicked for protection by God—can escape being murdered at the feast. Most of these changes are smaller and less significant than those previously discussed. It is important to note that all of these changes—especially making God more powerful, Constance more human, and the sultanness more evil—are intended to emphasize envy as the motivating factor in the sultanness's actions. Death and grief are the result of her envy.

#### **4. The Voyage to Northumberland (NLC, 100-51; CA, II, 704-51)**

Kurt E. Douglass

After the slaughter of Christians during the feast to celebrate the marriage of Constance and the Saracen sultan in Trevet's *Of the Noble Lady Constance*, Constance's fate takes her out of Saracen lands and to the kingdom of Northumberland. Trevet devotes roughly 580 words to his account of Constance's journey to and arrival in Northumberland, which I summarize here:

Finding herself alone among Saracen enemies, Constance resists pressure to deny her Christianity and convert to Islam, so the mother of the sultan devises a plan to torture Constance by setting her adrift on the high seas. She has Constance packed onto a boat with enough provisions to sustain her for three years and the treasure she has brought with her as dowry for her marriage to the sultan. At the sultaness's command, sailors tow Constance's boat out of sight of land and leave her to the mercy of the four winds without sail, oar, or any sort of human assistance. After three years and eight months pass God leads her boat to Northumberland. It lands on Christmas Eve in sight of a Saxon castle along the Humber. Some nearby sailors spot her boat, note the abundant treasure and the beautiful woman of noble bearing on board, and tell the warden of the castle, Olda, the news. Olda goes to the boat and asks Constance to give

an account of herself. The multilingual Constance tells Olda her story in fluent Saxon, but she omits significant details. Olda learns that she is a Christian of noble birth, that she was married to a powerful lord, and that she has been exiled from that lord's dominions after somehow displeasing other powerful people in his kingdom. Constance keeps secret from Olda that she is the child of Emperor Tiberius and that she has been married to the Saracen sultan. Impressed by her fluency in Saxon and the great treasure in her possession, Olda reckons that Constance hails from a distant Saxon land and must be the daughter of a Saxon king. He welcomes her enthusiastically to the castle and makes sure to safeguard her treasure in a chest, keeping one key to the chest for himself and giving a second to Constance. Olda then commands his wife, Hermegild, to receive Constance honorably. After freshening up and having something to eat Constance recovers her health and beauty, which nonetheless do not outshine her exceptional virtue. Constance's obvious nobility and great virtue cause Hermegild to love and become ardently loyal to her.

Gower condenses his own account of this scene in the *Confessio Amantis* to roughly 275 words:

After having orchestrated the slaughter of the sultan and all those who have been instrumental in arranging his marriage to Constance, the sultanness arranges for Constance to be set adrift on the high seas in a rudderless ship. Constance is put on the ship with all the treasure she has brought to Saracen lands and five years' worth of provisions. She is then

abandoned to the wind and waves. God, however, watches over her and, after she spends three years at sea, guides the ship to Northumberland. On a summer day, her ship comes up the Humber with the tide, landing near a castle that stands on the banks of the river. When the castle's warden and king's chamberlain, Elda, spies the ship, he dispatches some men to investigate. After a short time Elda and his wife, Hermyngheld, also go to meet Constance, whereupon they notice the great treasure she has with her. When they ask her about herself Constance refuses to divulge any information. Elda and Hermyngheld, nevertheless, honorably take her into their fellowship. Despite their friendliness, Constance is greatly saddened at finding herself in a heathen land. Still, she is nicely accommodated by Elda and Hermyngheld and comes to live with them, Hermyngheld feeling as much love for Constance as she does for her own life.

The framework Gower uses for Constance's sea voyage and arrival in Northumberland is generally faithful to Trevet's account of her journey. Gower does, however, change a number of details, which causes us to interpret the episode differently than we interpret Trevet's version of it. I focus here on important alterations Gower makes with regard to when and how Constance reaches Northumberland, who exactly is responsible for setting Constance adrift in the first place, and how Constance is received by the Saxon couple once she arrives in Northumberland. These changes are important because through them Gower, first, does away with suggestions in Trevet's account that God was the author of the evil as well as the good that befell Constance; Gower makes God, instead, more clearly the antithesis of evil. Second, he removes potentially blasphemous hints in

Trevet's version that Constance was a kind of Christ figure and in general downplays the mythic aura Trevet bestowed upon her in the episode. In this way, Gower makes Constance a more fully human—and merely human—instrument of God's will and recipient of God's beneficence. Finally, Gower suggests that, in addition to accepting Christianity as the true faith and being witness to a miracle or two, the true Christian is one possessed by the spirit of love and charity.

Gower omits details of Constance's voyage that in Trevet's tale raised the troubling question of whether God was as much the cause of Constance's tribulations as he was the cause of her salvation. Trevet described the sultanness as "le membre au diable" ["that member of the devil"] (*NLC*, 102-03) and attributed the diabolical plan to persecute Constance by setting her adrift at sea to the sultanness's malicious will: "la soudane, se enpensa de une novel tourment, qe tut le vensit de cruele volunté" ["the Sultanness . . . planned a new torture for her, which . . . came entirely from her cruel will"] (*NLC*, 103-04). Yet Trevet also wrote, "nepurquant la purveaunce Dieux n'i failli point" ["the providence of God was not lacking therein"] (*NLC*, 104), which reminded us that Constance's troubles were part of God's plan for her. Trevet's tale thus complicated the issue of who was to blame for Constance's troubles. Was it the sultanness alone? Was it the devil, since the sultanness was but a "member" or extension of him? Was it God, who was in charge of everything? Or was it a combination of the three?

Gower, on the other hand, simplifies things. When describing what causes Constance to be set helplessly adrift, he removes God from the equation. It is the sultanness, "this olde fend [fiend]" (*CA*, II, 705), who devises and initiates the plan to "take anon this Constantine" (*CA*, II, 706) and set her upon the wild waves in a "nakid

Schip withoute stiere” (*CA*, II, 709). God comes into the picture only in the role of helper and protector:

Bot he which alle thing mai schilde,  
Thre yer, til that sche cam to londe,  
Hire Schip to stiere hath take in honde,  
And in Northumberlond aryveth. (*CA*, II, 714-17)

God is here the force that shields or defends Constance from evil, and Gower places evil clearly in the hands of dark forces. The term “fend” can be read two ways: that the sultanness has an evil nature or that she is the devil himself in human form. Either way, Gower seems concerned to eliminate any suggestion that God has a hand in the evil that befalls Constance, to remove the mystery we found in *Trevet* regarding the origins of good and evil. There is a more Manichean vision—a simpler, more dualistic vision—of good and evil at work in Gower’s telling of the episode than in *Trevet*’s. In fact, Gower’s God also appears to be a little more vigilant and merciful than *Trevet*’s was in watching over Constance. He steers Constance’s ship to safe harbor after three years—when, as far as we know, she still has two years’ worth of provisions left (*CA*, II, 715). In *Trevet*’s tale, it was not until “[le oitime] mois del quart an” [“the eighth month of the fourth year”] (*NLC*, 117) that God “maunda un vent covenable et enchasa la nef en Engleterre” [“sent a favorable wind and drove the boat to England”] (*NLC*, 118-19), eventually landing Constance in Northumberland. That is, it was only well after her three years’ supply of provisions had presumably run out that *Trevet*’s God saw fit to bring her lonesome voyage to an end.

The difference between Gower's tale and Trevet's tale with respect to the timing of Constance's arrival in Northumberland also makes Constance seem more human in Gower than she appeared in Trevet. Trevet's Constance arrived in heathen Northumberland on "la veille de la Nativité Nostre Seignur Jhesu Crist" ["the eve of the Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ"] (*NLC*, 120-21). Trevet thereby drew a parallel between Constance and Christ, indicating perhaps that she herself had some element of divinity in her. Christ's birth, in the Christian view, was the coming of God in human form to redeem humanity of its sins. Because Trevet had Constance arrive in a heathen land on the eve of Christ's birthday, he hinted that she played a role similar to Christ's: she was figuratively "born" with Christ-like timing into a world mired in the sin of false belief, which she set about converting to true belief. Perhaps Gower was uncomfortable with Trevet's account, feeling that he came too close to saying that Constance was a Christ-figure herself. By transferring the date of her landing in Northumberland to a mundane summer day, Gower eliminates any potentially blasphemous implication that Constance is somehow equivalent to Christ; he makes it clear that, while she might be an agent of God, she is not herself of divine stock.

Gower makes a second change to the details of Constance's landing in England that causes his Constance to appear more ordinary than Trevet's: he omits Trevet's reference to Noah. Trevet set up an analogy between Constance in her boat and Noah in his ark by writing, "Dieux, qi governa le nef le seint homme Noé en le grant deluve, maunda un vent covenable et enchasa la nef en Engleterre desouz une chastel en le roialme de Northumbreland" ["God, who steered the ship of the holy man Noah in the great Flood, sent a favorable wind and drove the boat to England, beneath a castle in the

kingdom of Northumberland”] (*NLC*, 117-19). Gower does away with any mention of Noah and substitutes the lines quoted above: “he [God] which alle thing mai schilde, / [ . . . ] / Hire Schip to stiere hath take in honde, / And in Northumberlond aryveth” (*CA*, II, 714-17). Whereas Trevet stressed Constance’s mythic stature by placing her in the lineage of a Biblical “great” such as Noah, Gower implies that, if God watches over Constance during her journey, it is only because he watches over everything. That is, God merely does what he does for everyone when he looks after Constance—God shields all of us as much as he shields Constance. Through aligning Constance generally with “alle thing” rather than specifically with someone literally of Biblical proportions, Gower tells us that the favor Constance finds with God is equally available to us all, and is not reserved for a select group of the chosen.

Gower’s treatment of Constance’s reaction to her plight serves a similar purpose. Trevet did not indicate that Constance betrayed any emotion when her fellow Christians were slaughtered at her wedding feast. Likewise, Trevet’s Constance betrayed no emotion when God deposited her among the unchristian inhabitants of Northumberland. For all we know, she dealt stoically with all of the events surrounding her voyage to Northumberland, for she was come “cele qe Dieux avoit predestiné a grace et vertue [en] temptacion et joie” [“as one whom God had predestined for grace and virtue in temptation and joy”] (*NLC*, 148-49). Gower’s Constance, conversely, is more prone to betray emotion in the face of these events. Just as she weeps and wails, making “many a wofull mone,” when her wedding festivities become a scene of mass murder, so she is disappointed and distraught upon learning that Northumberland is not a Christian kingdom: “Bot sche no maner joie made, / Bot sorweth sore of that sche fond / No



crisendom in thilke lond” (CA, II, 744-46). Unlike Trevet’s Constance, she is not entirely above bemoaning the circumstances into which the “honde” of God has placed her. These emotional displays on the part of Gower’s Constance emphasize her humanity, her fallibility. Her emotions understandably get the better of her as she lives through what is, to say the least, a rather stressful period: the slaughter of her new husband and of all those “that hadden be / [ . . . ] / Of conseil to the mariage” (CA, II, 685-87), banishment from her adopted homeland, a number of years helplessly adrift on the high seas at the mercy of the wind and the “wawes wilde” (CA, II, 713), and arrival in yet another new land that, to her mind, is sunk in heathen darkness. In contrast, the apparent imperturbability and self-possession of Trevet’s Constance when faced with the same series of life-changing events seemed extraordinary and almost superhuman.

The manner in which Trevet depicted Constance’s introduction to Olda and his wife Hermegild also intimated that, in the eyes of the couple, the young woman had some special significance in the greater world. During her first encounter with Olda, Trevet’s Constance did not reveal to him the most specific details about her identity: “Et entre ses ditz riens ne voleit reconustre de Tyberie l’emperour, son piere, ne del soudan, qar l’aventure del murdre del soudan et de les Cristiens lui estoit ia [conue] par totes terres” [“And in her words she would reveal nothing about the Emperor Tiberius, her father, nor about the Sultan, for the story of the murder of the Sultan and the Christians was already known throughout all lands”] (NLC, 134-37). She did, however, reveal enough information about herself to allow Olda some idea of what sort of person she was:

Et [ele] lui respoundi en Sessoneis, qe fu langage Olda [ . . . ] et lui disoit  
qe quant a sa creance ele estoit de Cristiene foi; quant a linage qe ele estoit

de riches et nobles gentz estret; et qe par son linage estoit ele doné en mariage a un grant prince, mes pur ceo qe ele desplut as grantz de la terre, pur ceo fu ele en tiele manere exilé [And she . . . answered him in Saxon, which was Olda's language, and told him that as to her religion she was of the Christian faith; as to her lineage she was born of a rich and noble family, and that because of her lineage she was given in marriage to a great prince, but because she displeased the great ones of the land she was in such manner exiled]. (*NLC*, 129-34)

Although Trevet's Constance did not give away her exact identity to Olda, she did give him enough information to make him aware that he had stumbled upon a woman from a rather elevated social station, a woman of some worldly significance. It seems fair to say, therefore, that Trevet meant this information to figure as much as her "grant tresour" ["great treasure"] (*NLC*, 123) and fluent Saxon into Olda's assessment and approval of Constance: "esperoit qe ele estoit fille de ascun roi des Sessouns outre mere, come d'Alemayne, oue de Sessoine, ou de Suece, oue de Denemarche. Et a grant [joye], courtoisement et honorablement, la resceut en son chastel" ["he supposed she was the daughter of some king of the Saxons beyond the sea, as of Germany, or Saxony, or Sweden, or Denmark, and with great joy he received her courteously and honorably into his castle"] (*NLC*, 138-41). We might reasonably interpret the enthusiastic reception of Constance by Olda and Hermegild—Olda "comanda sa compaigne qe ele resceut la damoisele honorablement" ["ordered his wife to receive the maiden honorably"] (*NLC*, 143-44)—as grounded largely in Olda's recognition of ethnic loyalties and adherence to feudal social codes, specifically, his obligation to show due honor and respect to his

social betters. Only after he had concluded that Constance was, like him, a Saxon, and confirmed that she was of a class that, according to social custom, made her particularly worthy of his respect and honor, did Olda so enthusiastically welcome her into his home.

Elda and Hermyngheld's introduction to Constance in Gower occurs rather differently. They do notice the "gret richesse" (CA, II, 737) Constance has with her in the ship, but beyond that, the two receive no clues about her identity or background, for "sche hire wolde nocht confesse, / Whan thei hire axen what sche was" (CA, II, 738-39). Despite knowing effectively nothing about who exactly she is, the couple "with gret worschipe / [ . . . ] toke hire into felaschipe, / As thei that weren of hir glade" (CA, II, 741-43). It would be misguided to attribute this warm welcome to any suspect motivation on Elda and Hermyngheld's part, such as greed roused by the sight of her riches, since Gower informs us earlier in the episode that Elda is a "knyhtly man after his lawe" (CA, II, 727), that he is a man of good character. On the contrary, the fact that the couple embraces Constance so heartily despite knowing more or less nothing about her makes them seem almost like a childless couple with abundant parental love to offer a foundling. Whereas, for example, Trevet's Hermegild became fervently devoted to Constance only after observing her "noble vie et vertuouse" ["noble and virtuous way of life"] (NLC, 150), Gower's Elda and Hermyngheld are immediately glad to bestow their "worschipe" and "felaschipe" upon this woman who is a total stranger to them. Elda and Hermyngheld display more basic human trust than Trevet's Olda and Hermegild by unhesitatingly taking in this young stranger. Gower's couple love and accept Constance simply because she is another human being that life has brought their way.

In other words, although they are not Christians at this point in Gower's story, the couple already demonstrates the principal Christian virtues of charity and love of one's neighbor. Gower seems to want to suggest that this trust demonstrates that Elda and his wife are already halfway to becoming true Christians, that they already, in a way, have the seeds of Christianity—love and charity—within them when Constance arrives on their shores. It is only logical, then, that Hermyngheld quickly comes to love Constance “lich hire oghne lif” (CA, II, 750) without knowing anything about her background and receives the “creance” Constance has “tawhte” her “so parfitylly” (CA, II, 754-55) because Constance merely nurtures the seeds of faith that are already in Hermyngheld. And although Elda officially converts to Christianity after seeing the miracle Hermyngheld performs—when she cures the blind man simply by advising him to trust in “Cristes lawe”—Gower wants us to see that his conversion is not simply due to the miracle: Elda's conversion is consistent with his moral character as a “knyhtly man” (CA, II, 727). In this regard, Gower's tale implies that true faith spreads not simply as a result of obviously exceptional and holy people going around giving spectacular empirical proof, through miracles, of Christianity's truth; rather, faith comes when one is morally or spiritually equipped to accept that truth.

It is important to note as well that Gower takes care not to demonize the Saxon heathens of Northumberland. He portrays them as essentially good people overall: similar to Elda, the Northumbrian king, Allee, is a “worthi knyht” (CA, II, 723) whose only flaw is that he happens to believe “noght aright” (CA, II, 724). The basic goodness of the Northumbrians makes it relatively unproblematic for them to embrace Christianity and fix that flaw, as we see with Elda and Hermyngheld's conversion, a stark contrast to

the Saracen sultanness who is so infected with “Envie” (*CA*, II, 640) that she spectacularly and murderously rejects Christianity.

Through these modifications to the tale he borrowed from Trevet, Gower makes the Christian worldview that Constance brings with her to Northumberland one that is defined by compassion and that is somewhat more accessible than it seems in Trevet’s telling. Trevet’s Constance appeared at times—through her seamless, perhaps cold, impassivity in the face of suffering and the hint that there was a streak of the divine or mythic in her—to be made of superhuman stuff. Gower’s Constance, conversely, appears to be a bit more like us—a flawed human being—so that we are that much more able to identify with her. Similarly, Gower’s God is, in the episode, not quite a fire-and-brimstone, angry father given to testing his children’s faith with trials and tribulations. He is more of a friend and benefactor who watches over his children and helps them through their troubles. Lastly, by depicting the good-hearted heathens Elda and Hermyngheld as model Christians-in-waiting, Gower implies that Christianity is a kind of natural fit for compassionate, kindhearted people of all stripes.

## **5. The Blind Man (*NLC*, 152-209; *CA*, II, 751-91)**

Kimberly C. Robertson

In Trevet's version of the tale of Constance, after having floated for many years on the sea in the boat provided by the sultaness, Constance lands in Northumberland. She is well cared for by Olda, a kind steward, and his wife, Hermegild. Trevet then gives an account of the conversion scene in some 700 words, which I summarize here:

Hermegild greatly loves Constance because she seems so good and wise, and does all in her power to grant her every wish. Constance teaches Hermegild about Christianity. The specific content of the teachings is much elaborated upon, and includes Old Testament biblical history as well as the birth and Passion of Christ. Constance also teaches Hermegild about the sacraments of the church and about heaven and hell. Despite her wishes, Hermegild cannot yet convert because her husband is still a pagan. Then one day, as Hermegild, Olda and Constance walk along the beach, a blind Briton approaches them and requests to be healed by Hermegild, saying that her faith will make it possible. Hermegild is afraid, but Constance reassures her, and Hermegild restores the blind man's sight. Olda is amazed, requests instruction from Constance and his wife, and decides to convert. He orders all of the idols to be smashed. The Briton, having been well cared for in the household of Olda, is sent back to Wales

and returns with Bishop Lucius of Bangor, who ascertains that they have been well taught and baptizes ninety-one people in the household of Olda. Gower changes his version of this scene, shortening it to roughly 250 words. His version runs as follows:

Hermyngheld and Constance spend all their time together once Constance has been placed in the household of Elda, and Constance eventually teaches Hermyngheld how to believe. They go walking on the beach with Elda and are approached by a blind man, who requests that Hermyngheld restore his sight. Hermyngheld trembles, but accedes to his request. Elda is in awe of this feat and decides he must also learn the faith. The trio then rides back to Elda's estate in comfort, and Hermyngheld and Constance are constant companions. Elda then tells the unwedded Saxon king about the goodness of Constance, and the king agrees to see her.

The basic plots of the two scenes are parallel, though Gower greatly curtails or eliminates many details in order to include a few others. Gower does not include the content of Constance's teachings to Hermyngheld, Constance's reassurance of Hermyngheld on the beach, the references to the Welsh and Wales, or the baptism of the household, but he does add Elda's idea to marry Constance to the king. Many of these changes have the combined effect of eliminating much of Constance's agency.

Though not the most immediately obvious change, one of the most important changes Gower makes to Trevet's story in this section are the references to the Welsh and Wales—changes made in reflection of the contemporary Anglo-Welsh political situations. To begin with, Trevet described the man healed by Hermegild as being “un

povre Cristien Bruton enveuglés” [“a poor blind Christian Briton”] (*NLC*, 176). Gower merely describes him as “a blind man” (*CA*, II, 759) and mentions neither his social class nor his nationality or religion. These last two omissions are important, as it is the healing of the blind man that directly leads to Olda’s/Elda’s conversion. When Trevet wrote his redaction of the tale, England and Wales were experiencing a time of relative peace after England’s final takeover of the Welsh government in the time of Edward I. Trevet was, therefore, free to describe the man as being a Briton, an important depiction because of the contrasting of the Welsh and the Saxons during the immediately post-Arthurian period of the tale. The Welsh had been Christian at the time of the tale for around a century, having received the religion from Irish monks; the Saxons were still pagan and were eventually converted through the combined efforts of the Welsh, Irish, and Scottish missionaries. Furthermore, by naming the man as a Briton rather than as a Welshman, Trevet used the name the Welsh used for themselves, “British,” rather than the name “Welsh,” the word the Saxons used for them, from the Anglo-Saxon word “*waelisc*,” a pejorative term for foreigners. By allowing the blind man to be Welsh, Trevet gave the Welsh a role alongside Constance in the conversion of the Saxons. The nationality of the blind man then became even more important when he returned to Wales to retrieve Bishop Lucius of Bangor, a figure who became extremely important throughout the rest of the tale. In this section alone, Bishop Lucius cemented the conversions made by Constance through the baptisms of the members of Olda’s household.

By the time Gower wrote his version of the tale, however, the political situation between England and Wales had drastically deteriorated. Owen Glyndwr, later known mostly by the character based on him in Shakespeare’s *I Henry IV*, led the Welsh in a



major uprising against the controlling, colonizing power of the English (this being part of what led to the deposition of Richard II). The revolt was vicious, terrifying, and almost successful. Because of the fear inspired, when Gower—a supporter of King Henry, to whom the *Confessio Amantis* was dedicated—wrote his tale, nearly all references to the Welsh present in Trevet’s tale were eliminated. This is important as a reflection of the political times, but also works in the tale to give all the credit for the conversions to Constance herself—one of the only moments in which Gower gives Constance more credit and agency than did Trevet. Bishop Lucie appears once, much later, but at an intriguing moment: it is still Lucie who baptizes the Saxon king, Allee, in what must be a nod to the historical truth. He, and all other traces of Wales and the Welsh, then disappear altogether from the story.

Another change that Gower makes is the elimination of the different types of knowledge that Constance imparts to Hermyngheld. In Trevet’s version, Constance told Hermegild all about the Bible, including everything from the Genesis story of Creation to the flood and Noah’s ark in the Old Testament, to the birth of Jesus Christ, his Passion, resurrection, ascension in the New Testament, and also about the nature of the Trinity. Theology aside, Constance discussed the concepts of heaven and hell, and also told Hermegild about the various sacraments and the faith of the church. Gower eliminates all of this detail. We are told simply that “Thurgh grace of goddes pourveance / This maiden tawhte the creance / Unto this wif so parfitly” (*CA*, II, 753-55). Gower takes away any demonstration of Constance’s knowledge, instead allowing her to teach and preach perfectly because of the grace of God. There is no indication given as to whether Constance has any scriptural knowledge; she instead becomes a divinely inspired

missionary whose teaching proves the power of God. Closely related to this lowering of Constance's knowledge is Gower's elimination of the Welsh bishop from this section of the story. In Trevet's tale, when Bishop Lucius came from Wales to baptize Elda's household, he first tested them on their knowledge of the faith and found them to be very well taught. In eliminating Bishop Lucie from this scene, Gower does not validate the efficacy of Constance's teachings. We can believe her teachings in Gower's tale to be very good because of their divine inspiration, but there is no outside affirmation of this. Through this change, Gower works to make Constance a vessel for God's work, rather than an independent agent of evangelism.

Furthering Gower's diminishment of Constance's role is the scene on the beach where Hermyngheld restores the sight of the blind man. After the blind man requested the aid of Hermegild in Trevet, she faltered momentarily, and Constance said to her in Norman French, "Ne muscez pas, dame, la vertue qe Dieux te ad doné" ["Lady, do not hide the power God has given you"] (*NLC*, 183-84). After this reassurance, Hermegild said to the man in Middle English (what Trevet referred to as Saxon), "Bisne man [in] Jhesu name in [rode] yslawe, have thi siht" (*NLC*, 185-86). Trevet even changed languages, from Norman French to Middle English, within the text to further illustrate the language switch. Presumably, because the blind Briton of Trevet's tale would not have been able to understand the Saxon tongue any more than Hermegild and company would have been able to understand his Welsh, there was even a further miracle in the cross-linguistic understanding, which Trevet seems to have attributed to the power of the Holy Spirit. By eliminating the nationality of the blind man, Gower lessens the number of concurrent miracles on the beach. There is no switching of languages for understanding,

and, upon the request for healing, Hermyngheld merely trembles and then says, in almost exactly parallel language, ““In trust of Cristes lawe, / Which don was on the crois and slawe, / Thou bysne man, behold and se”” (*CA*, II, 769-71). In both tales, Hermegild/Hermyngheld makes reference to the death of Christ on the Cross in her healing, and therefore shows a small example of the actual content of her learning. In Gower, however, Constance is no longer needed to assuage the anxious Hermyngheld’s fears—she may not even be on the beach; the latter is fine on her own.

A final major change that Gower makes from Trevet’s tale is to eliminate the baptisms by Bishop Lucius. Aside from the ideas discussed above relating to Gower’s weakening of the Welsh role of the story, the lack of the baptisms in Gower’s story relates strongly to his diminishment of the power and agency of Constance’s role in the story. Trevet showed that not only did Bishop Lucius come from Wales in order to perform the baptisms, but also that he examined the knowledge of the prospective converts. The reader was therefore assured that Constance did, in fact, teach wisely and well, and that, furthermore, the conversions were indeed completed fully. In Gower’s version, however, no baptisms are ever performed by anyone. Although it seems that we can assume that Elda, his wife, and the king do convert, there is no actual confirmation of that fact for a long time, nor is there ever any sort of verification that Constance is true to the word of God in her teachings.

Gower makes a few minor changes. He does not, as did Trevet, enumerate the conversions accomplished by Constance in this part of the story. Gower also drops the blind man from the story immediately after he has had his sight restored; it is impossible to know whether or not the blind man has anything else to do with the conversions. In

Trevet's tale, when Olda asked his wife after the miracle how she had learned to perform such a feat, she told him about Christ and he decided to learn more about the faith. In Gower's tale, however, all Elda does is witness the miracle. It is this sight, rather than a question put to his wife, that makes him decide to convert.

## **6. The False Knight** (*NLC*, 210-52; *CA*, II, 792-883)

Wendy A. Deacon

When Olda travels to tell Alla about Constance in Trevet's version of the story of Constance, the knight left in charge ultimately brings grief to the household. The scene is given in almost 525 words, which I summarize here:

When Olda journeys to visit with Alla, he leaves one of the knights in charge who had been baptized after Hermegild's miraculous curing of the blind man. The knight has fallen in love with Constance and, through the instigation of the devil, tries to tempt her to consent to carnal sin with him. Constance refuses him three times and on the third refusal denounces him for his wickedness. The knight fears that Constance will tell Olda of his deed and he plots evil against her. On the night Olda is to return the knight waits for Constance and Hermegild to fall asleep after saying their prayers. He then cuts Hermegild's throat and hides the bloody knife under the pillow of Constance, who is sleeping next to her. When Olda returns Constance awakens at the noise and finds Hermegild covered in blood beside her. At her cry candles are lit and Olda and others witness the scene. The murderous knight speaks out and blames the death on Constance. He moves around in a mad fashion, pretending to be more affected by the death than others, and then he exposes the knife beneath

her pillow and accuses Constance of treason. When Oida refuses to believe that Constance could be guilty, the knight grabs a book of gospels by the bed and swears on it that she must be the murderer. The hand of God then appears in the air, strikes the knight down, and in doing so knocks out his eyes and teeth. The voice of God condemns the knight for his treacherous act against Constance.

Gower's somewhat altered adaptation of the scene is told in nearly 570 words:

When Elda visits with Allee and it is decided that the king will see Constance, Elda sends a knight, whom he has seen grow from childhood to manhood and greatly trusts, to tell his wife to prepare for the king's coming. On his journey the knight tries to think of ways that he might win Constance, but when he has no luck devising a plan, his desire for her turns to hate and envy of her honor, and he plots a treacherous act against her instead. He delivers the message and then waits for Hermyngheld and Constance to fall asleep. He then steals into the bedroom, cuts Hermyngheld's throat, and hides the knife under Constance's pillow. Elda returns the same night and discovers his dead wife. His cry awakens Constance, who is sleeping beside Hermyngheld. Constance swoons when she sees her. Elda wakes the men in the castle and shows them the scene. The false knight blames Constance and by quickly searching the room finds the knife he had planted under her pillow. When Elda refuses to believe Constance responsible, the knight grabs a book by the bed and swears on it that Constance is guilty. The hand of heaven then strikes him

down and knocks his eyes out of his head. The voice of God damns the knight to hell for slandering Constance and demands that the knight reveal the truth before he is put to death.

Although the scenes in the two versions of the story of Constance are similar, Gower makes several significant changes in his adaptation. He develops the relationship of the knight to Elda, removes the devil as a reason for the knight's evil deeds, omits other religious elements that serve to characterize Constance as a saintly figure, and alters God's punishment of the knight at the end.

Gower's most notable changes to this scene in the story of Constance concern the false knight. In Trevet the knight was simply described as one of the men of the household who had already been baptized and who was left in charge of the castle when Olda left to visit Alla. Gower complicates the story by developing a personal relationship between Elda and the knight. Elda's reasons for choosing this particular knight to deliver his message are explained at the start of the scene: the knight is one "whom fro childhode / He hadde updrawe into manhode" (CA, II, 793-94). Gower's Elda has a connection with the knight that was lacking in Trevet. He has seen him mature from a child to a man, and he trusts him with his thoughts—a trust that, we are told, he will soon regret. Gower changes Elda's relationship with the knight in order to further intensify the knight's treachery. The knight is not merely acting in response to his feelings for Constance; rather, he is betraying a long-time friend who fully trusts him. Whereas the knight's relationship with Olda was minimally described in Trevet, Gower alters it with several important details in order to enhance the deceit committed by the knight and to further characterize him as an evil man with no regard for the people he hurts, no matter

how close they may be to him.

Gower's other—and more important—change to the knight is his motivation for killing Hermyngheld and blaming Constance. Trevet's version of the story relied largely on the influence of the devil as the reason for the knight's betrayal. Trevet described the knight's endeavor to tempt Constance as a result of the “malveise emprise et temptacioun del diable” [“evil instigation and temptation of the devil”] (*NLC*, 214). The knight was furthermore “en la main al diable” [“in the hand of the devil”] (*NLC*, 223) when he plotted to kill Hermegild. Trevet portrayed the knight as acting under the influence of the devil rather than through his own volition. The devil instigated him to seduce Constance, and furthermore he was caught in the devil's control when he slit Hermegild's throat. In contrast, Gower gives the devil no role in his version of the scene. He first changes the knight's reason for killing Hermyngheld by removing him from the household. Gower's knight does not even approach Constance to seduce her. Instead, he struggles with his feelings for her privately and tries to find a way to win her on his journey home. When he fails, “his lust began tabate, / And that was love is thanne hate” (*CA*, II, 809-10). It is not the devil's influence that causes the knight to plot his evil but rather his own feelings as “A lesinge [deceit] in his herte he caste” (*CA*, II, 813). The knight casts this deceit himself without any help from the devil or any direct participation of Constance.

Gower omits the devil's involvement in order to make the knight fully responsible for his actions. He does not allow the knight any excuses of being caught in the devil's grip or acting under his influence. In denying the knight an external rationale for his actions he changes the emphasis of the motivation for his deed from an evil, supernatural influence to a more natural human desire and failing. Gower's story is less concerned



with finding religious justification for the knight's evil deed than it is with punishing him accordingly. Gower is less sympathetic to his knight than Trevet was. By first establishing a relationship between him and Elda, and then making him solely responsible for his actions in killing Hermyngheld and blaming Constance, he is depicting the knight as a man who commits a treacherous act of his own accord and wickedness. By refusing to allow any excuses for the knight's behavior Gower is ultimately justifying the need for his punishment of death by the hand of God and leaving no room to question its validity.

The omission of the devil is one of several changes concerning religion that Gower makes to this section of his adaptation of the story of Constance. In Trevet's version, the knight was one of those who were baptized after the miracle in which Hermegild restored the sight of a blind man. He was thus a Christian man caught by the devil's evil grasp. Furthermore, on the night of the murder Constance and Hermegild "fortment endormies après longues veiles et oreisons" ["fall asleep after long vigils and prayers"] (*NLC*, 222-23). Perhaps most importantly, the book that the knight swore on when he accused Constance of murder was "q'estoit livre des Evangeils, quel les seint femmes Hermegild et Constaunce" ["a book of the gospels that the holy women Hermegild and Constance"] (*NLC*, 242-43) had with them every night. Trevet's many references to the holiness of the women suggested to the reader that Constance would surely be saved by her faith in God, as she had been on prior occasions in the story. The knight was a fallen Christian man who was caught in the devil's grip and who needed to be punished accordingly, and Constance was a saintly woman who conversely desired to be saved because of her unwavering faith.

Gower omits all three references to religion in his version. We are not told that the knight has been baptized, so instead of being a Christian man caught under the influence of the devil he is a pagan fully responsible for himself. The women are said to have gone to bed after arranging things for the arrival of the king, but there is no mention of prayers prior to their retiring. Perhaps most significantly, the book that the knight swears on is not said to be a book of gospels. He picks up a book that could contain anything and swears on it that Constance is guilty instead of swearing on something holy used in the devotions of saintly women.

By making these changes Gower humanizes the scene. As we have seen in his omission of the devil as a factor in the murder, he is choosing not to put such an emphasis on religion in order to render the knight wholly responsible for his actions and moreover to portray Constance as more of a human than a saintly figure. The knight's motivation for framing Constance in Gower's version likewise suggests a humanizing of the scene. This knight does not fear for himself because of her refusal, but rather envies her honor. If we understand envy in this instance to consist of malice and resentment, it is clear that the knight begrudges the morality and goodness that make Constance unattainable for him. This instance of envy connects to the larger moral of the story. Envy is a deadly sin, and in the tale several characters, like the knight, are punished for acting under the influence of envy. In the scene of the false knight, then, Gower includes envy as part of the knight's motivation in order to offer an explanation for his cruel act and to justify the severity of his punishment. Gower thus makes the knight more human in that his own feelings lead him to commit a crime rather than the influence of the devil, and he makes

Constance more human by focusing the knight's envy on her goodness and virtue rather than figuring her as a saint.

Gower does not go so far in omitting religion as to remove God's punishment of the knight at the end, but he does make changes to it. In Trevet's version the hand of God literally appeared after the knight swore on the book of gospels that Constance was guilty and struck him down, knocking out his eyes and teeth. A voice then said, in Latin, "Adversus filiam matris ecclesie ponebas scandalum; hoc fecisti et non tacui" ["You were placing a stumbling block against the daughter of mother Church; this you have done and I have not remained silent"] (*NLC*, 251-52). God did not actually kill the knight. He punished him only in accordance with his crime against Constance. The knight was later put to death by the king for the murder of Hermegild. Gower offers a different version of the knight's punishment. When the knight swears on the book against Constance he is struck down, but the hand of heaven is not said to literally appear. Instead, he falls and only his eyes are knocked out of his head. The voice of God then speaks:

"O dampned man to helle,  
Lo, thus hath god the sclaundre wroke  
That thou ayein Constance hast spoke:  
Beknow the sothe er that thou dye." (*CA*, II, 880-83)

God does not merely condemn the knight for his treachery against Constance; instead, he demands that the knight confess. After confessing the knight dies—notably by the hand of God rather than the king. Also, we find here another reference to the knight's "sclaundre," or envy. The significance of envy in the tale is made apparent by the fact

that God is punishing the knight not for murdering Hermyngheld, but instead for his envy and slander of Constance. His speech indicates the severity of the knight's crime of envy, and again connects to the overall theme or moral of Gower's tale.

Why does Gower make these alterations of God's punishment of the knight? By not having the knight's teeth knocked out, Gower makes it possible for him to confess before he dies. We can, after all, scarcely imagine a toothless man with a mangled mouth speaking a confession—without laughing. The scene, while still not entirely realistic, is far less comical in Gower's version than it was in Trevet's. Gower maintains an element of the supernatural by having the knight's eyes knocked out while making the scene more effective by eliminating a comical element that took away from what was supposed to be a horrifying punishment in Trevet's version. Gower's punishment is also more fitting as a parallel to a prior event. Hermyngheld restores the sight of a good blind man as a result of her faith, but the knight loses his sight because of his evil deeds and lack of faith. The scene of Hermyngheld's miracle is less prominent in Gower's version than it was in Trevet's, which suggests that Gower is more concerned with humanizing the tale than focusing so closely on its religious aspects. God's demand for a confession and punishment of death can be attributed to the fact that the knight is not a Christian, and so cannot be absolved in the Christian sense. While God did not kill the knight in Trevet's version because of the knight's Christianity, in Gower the knight has no faith to protect him. Moreover, the knight has made a public accusation against Constance, and so he must make a public confession in order to clear her of guilt. Gower thus includes the confession because he takes away the various religious elements that serve to characterize Constance as a saint. Without such references to her holiness Constance is made more

human and thus would be less easily cleared in such a situation. God then demands the confession because it is necessary in order to prove Constance's innocence, whereas in Trevet it was enough for God to strike the knight down without requiring a confession because Constance was viewed as such a saintly figure. Without the presence of certain religious elements, Constance must be declared innocent both by the interference of God and by her own accuser so that there can be no doubt about its truth.

Gower makes other changes in the scene of the false knight that are less important than the ones analyzed here, but that are still notable for the comparison of the two versions of the story. For instance, whereas in Trevet, Constance was the first to discover Hermegild's death and cried out, "Ma dame est morte" ["My lady is dead"] (*NLC*, 231), in Gower, Elda is the first to see his wife covered in blood, and his cry wakes Constance, who swoons at the sight of the blood. The swoon suggests a weakness in Constance that was not found in Trevet's version. Gower is putting emphasis on Constance's human qualities in order to portray her as less saintly. Her faith here is not enough to sustain her from physically succumbing to the horror or alarm she feels. In addition to taking away some of her strength, Gower also denies Constance the only voice she was granted by Trevet in this scene, thus further removing her from the scene. In doing so he emphasizes her lack of involvement with the incident and denies her any agency in order to focus more fully on the knight. Furthermore, in Trevet the knight revealed the knife under Constance's pillow by acting like a mad man and leaping about the room until he found it. Gower does not have the knight use such a ruse, but instead has him go straight to the bed to search it after he accuses Constance. Gower is less concerned with giving the knight a cover for his deed than he is in having him quickly

expose the weapon. By doing so he further implicates the knight in the crime by having him so easily reveal the knife. Finally, whereas Trevet described the hand of heaven as actually appearing and striking the knight down, Gower refers to the hand without figuring it as literal. He thus omits another supernatural element in order to make the scene more realistic. These smaller changes coincide with the larger ones discussed in this essay, and their effects on the story further support Gower's reasons for making such alterations. Rather than focus on the role of the devil and the saintliness of Constance, Gower chooses to humanize the false knight in order to make him solely responsible for his evil actions and also to humanize Constance by making her less saintly and not able to be cleared solely by God. He also alters God's role at the end in order to justify the knight's punishment and leave no doubt as to Constance's innocence in the crime.

## **7. The King, Husband, and Father (NLC, 253-65 & 305-17; CA, II, 884-930 & 986-96)**

Samuel H. Norwood

**Special note to the reader:** I examine here two short narrative units that are unified by their focus on the role of the king. Ellen Lempereur discusses the bisecting unit (that is, *NLC*, 266-304, and *CA*, II, 931-85) in the subsequent analysis.

After Constance is acquitted through divine intervention of the charge of murder, she becomes Queen Constance, wife to King Alla, in Trevet's version of her tale. In fewer than 200 words, Trevet relates in whirlwind style a number of significant events, which I summarize here:

Olda foregoes sentencing the Saxon knight responsible for the murder of Hermegild, choosing instead to imprison him until King Alla arrives. Upon his arrival, the king sentences the knight to death. Filled with love for the maid and convinced by the miracles of God, King Alla decides to be baptized by Bishop Lucius. He marries Constance and fathers a male child with her. After six months, Alla leaves Constance in the care of Olda and Lucius and goes off to repel an invasion of his territory by the Scots. He charges her two guardians to inform him quickly of the birth of his child and to keep Constance at ease.

Following the birth of his son, Alla does not receive news from Olda and Lucius; rather, he is given falsified letters that contain reports of the evil, hideous natures of both mother

and child. In approximately 170 words, Trevet describes the reaction of the king to these reports fabricated by the king's mother and her clerk:

The messenger charged with delivering the letters from Olda and Lucius takes his leave of Domild, the king's mother, and promises to return that way again. In spite of an apparent hangover, the messenger reaches Alla and orally relates the joyful news about the king's new family. The king, however, sternly forbids the messenger to speak further of Constance and the child because he is instantly distressed by what he reads in the letters. Alla can scarcely believe the news, but, trusting the supposed sources, he writes a reply immediately, ordering the guardians to keep Constance and her monstrous spawn Maurice safe until he returns.

In Gower's version of the tale, as in Trevet's, God speaks in vindication of the accused maid Constance, but Gower offers a slightly different account of the subsequent events most closely paralleling the two sections outlined above. Here is an abridged version of the first part of Gower's parallel narrative, to which he dedicates nearly 100 words more than Trevet does:

Hermyngheld's murderer obeys the voice of God by confessing his crime and then dies immediately. Elda buries his wife, and when Allee arrives the next day, Elda informs the king of what has transpired and how God has taken action. Out of love for Constance, Allee offers to be baptized and to believe in Christ if Constance so desires. Furthermore, the king expresses his desire to marry the maid, and so Lucie comes from Wales to wed the two and to baptize Allee, along with many others. Constance



never reveals who she is or what her origins are, but the king is not disconcerted, for he rejoices in having found such a noble woman. The king is supremely glad when he discovers that Constance is to bear him a child, but he must ride to war. Before he departs, Allee appoints Elda and Lucie, men he knows to be holy, to watch over the queen.

As in the source version, Allee is informed of the birth of his child, but in his slightly different description, Gower uses only some 70 words:

The messenger awakens unaware of Domilde's deception and delivers to the king a letter that dishonestly notifies him of an unnatural child born to his wife, who, it is claimed moreover, is a fairy. The king writes in a wise manner that Lucie and Elda should keep Constance from going at large until he informs them further.

Although the events in Gower's tale correspond fundamentally to those found in his source, Gower alters several key elements in his version of the story of Constance. His changes make King Allee a more likeable character and render him less culpable for possibly doubting the noble nature of Constance.

In an effort to increase our esteem for Allee, Gower modifies plot components that might otherwise decrease or even realign our sympathies. In Trevet's narrative, the first act of the king was to sentence a man to death. As far as we knew, there had been no trial, no presentation of the evidence to the king that might warrant his sentencing of the errant knight to his death, and no chance for him to ask for forgiveness or to repent. There was no indication that the king had been informed, even informally, of the intervention of God on behalf of Constance. The possibility existed, then, that the king

acted vengefully, or perhaps even despotically, in punishing the murderer of the constable's wife. Regardless of our understanding of the "fairness" of the decision, though, it remains that King Alla's first act had been to sentence a man to death, and as readers our first impression of the king had negative undertones. Gower, however, avoids this difficulty by removing the burden of judging and sentencing from the king. In Gower's version, the knight must "beknow the sothe" (*CA*, II, 883) in a public form of confession, and then it is God, and not the king, who takes the felon's life. The hands of Allee remain untainted by blood, and Gower prevents the possibility of the negative associations with kingship evidenced in Trevet's account.

Gower makes further emendations to enhance the character of Allee in the episodes outlined above, especially in the early stages of his relationship with Constance. For instance, whereas in Trevet, the king simply "esposa la pucele" ["married the maiden"] (*NLC*, 257), we have the sense in Gower that Allee does not merely impose his will as the king, but rather, that he seeks Constance's approval, being baptized "if that sche wolde" (*CA*, II, 898) and expressing his desire, not a decree, that he "wol hire wedde" (*CA*, II, 901). Likewise, whereas in Trevet, Constance was responsible for the salvation of Olda and his household "al noubre de quatre vinz et unze" ["in the number of four score and eleven"] (*NLC*, 202), Gower attributes the principal role in this conversion to Allee, who is baptized in Elda's house "with many an other mo" (*CA*, II, 907) who seem to follow Allee's lead rather than Constance's prompting. Gower's king appears less self-centered and more charismatic than Trevet's, and we have a greater sense in Gower that the king truly loves his new wife and his people, who in turn follow the example of their wise king.

In Gower's description of the conversion, we see Allee as a divine instrument, yet Gower does not limit Allee's function as such to his role as the leader of the kingdom. Gower further enhances Allee's holiness by transforming him into an instrument used by God within the marital union. In his description of the conception of their child Moris, Gower goes into far greater detail than Trevet did, and Gower's additions produce a remarkable link between God and Allee. Whereas in Trevet, Constance simply "conceit del roi un enfant madle" ["conceived a male child by the king"] (*NLC*, 257-58), we read in Gower:

The hihe makere of nature  
Hire hath visited in a throwe,  
That it was openliche knowe  
Sche was with childe be the king. (*CA*, II, 916-19)

Allee is clearly not the "hihe makere of nature," yet after the "hihe makere" visits Constance, it is known that she is "with childe *be the king*." The line separating Allee from the divine "maker" is thus strangely blurred. In Gower's version, it seems as though the child is conceived when God visits Constance *through* Allee. To be sure, Gower's unique portrayal here of the king as an implement of the divine is meant to augment the nature of Allee as both husband and father.

Gower completes his enhancement of the character of King Allee by subtly altering the king's response to the "news" that his wife and son are evil and unnatural so that we see him in a much more positive light than we had in Trevet's tale. Gower editorializes, for instance, by adding to the material found in his source that the king writes his reply to Constance's two wards "in wys manere" (*CA*, II, 992), and he deletes

King Alla's disparaging reference to his son in Trevet as "le moustre" ["the monster"] (*NLC*, 316). The charge given to the guardians in Gower also seems to demonstrate more concern than does the instruction supplied by Trevet's Alla. King Alla's charge that Olda and Lucius should watch over Constance and her monster "tanqe a son retourner" ["until his return"] (*NLC*, 316-17) betrayed a greater concern for his business at hand than for his family issues at home. It seemed he could not be bothered with this domestic issue while he was at war and sought to put it on hold until he returned home. Gower's charge is subtle, but it is significant nonetheless. Allee's charge to Elda and Lucie is that they guard Constance "til thei have herd mor of his wille" (*CA*, II, 996). This order reveals his intentions to deliberate on the matter and to act decisively *while* he is still attending to the necessary business of war. The "problem" with Constance and his child is of great enough importance for Gower's Allee to give it at least some of his attention now, and his love for them therefore seems greater here. Thus, we see in the response to the falsified letters further evidence of the noble love of King Allee, who, Gower informs us in another expansion of his source material, had rejoiced in his son's coming birth "above al other thing" (*CA*, II, 920).

It is not surprising, then, that Gower seeks to relieve this good king of a great deal of the moral responsibility, and even guilt, for possibly believing that the noble Constance could be anything other than a virtuous creature. In both Trevet and Gower the king appears to believe the lie fabricated by his mother, but Gower again guides our understanding of King Allee through the adaptations he makes to Trevet's text. First, although we have the impression from Allee's disturbed behavior and his orders that Elda and Lucie "kepe hire [Constance] stille" (*CA*, II, 995) that Gower's king believes the

letter, his doubt of his wife's character is far less certain than it had been in Trevet. Trevet's Alla had, in fact, referred to his son as "le moustre"—signifying without question that he believed that his evil wife had spawned an unnatural, demonic being—even though he found the report "*apoi noun creables*" ["*almost unbelievable*"] (*NLC*, 315, emphasis added). The absence in Gower of any such pejorative language about either the mother or the child precludes the possibility of assigning blame so definitively to the king for accepting a lie and believing his wife to be an ungodly, inhuman monster. Indeed, in a tale used by Genius to provide Amans with a moral lesson about right living in spite of Envy and Detraction, it is significant that Gower's changes prevent Allee from becoming a slanderer himself, regardless of whether or not he believes the calumnious report. Trevet's Alla had, in his own letter, defamed his wife and child by naming his son "le moustre." The same is not true for Allee, though, and he thus remains a more laudable figure.

Though Gower's changes render less certain a clear judgment of the degree to which Allee questions the nobility of Constance, further modifications to Trevet's tale make it easier for us to understand how Allee could make such a mistake, thus removing his culpability, or at least softening any critique of his misgivings. In a remark not found in this section of Trevet's tale, we find Gower's first attempt to clear his king of potential accusations of transgressing in believing a slanderous report: "Bot for no lust ne for no rage / Sche tolde hem nevere what sche was" (*CA*, II, 910-11). Gower draws our attention here to the fact that Allee does not know anything about this woman's background, and he indicates that, in spite of the king's attempts to determine her origins, she will not tell him or anyone else "for no lust ne for no rage." This modification is

especially significant when viewed in conjunction with Gower's earlier alteration of the charge against Constance: Gower's Constance is accused of being "of faierie" (*CA*, II, 964), whereas Trevet's queen had been accused of being "malveis esprit en fourme de femme" ["an evil spirit in the form of a woman"] (*NLC*, 293). Rather than follow Trevet's more hagiographically consistent accusation of demonic possession (as evidenced in the Gospels or *The Book of Margery Kempe*), Gower shifts to a fantastical element more typical of folklore, and this shift must inform our understanding of Allee's reception of the news. A strange, beautiful woman has arrived in his land in a boat filled with "gret richesse" (*CA*, II, 737) and has refused to tell the king about her origins—for Gower's Allee, the explanation that she is "of faierie" is, in terms of folklore, plausible. In this context, we can forgive him more readily than Trevet's Alla, who never sought to discover the origins of his wife and who, in keeping with the hagiographical underpinnings, had supposedly been convinced of the maiden's saintliness by "les miracles par Dieux moustrez" ["the miracles shown by God"] (*NLC*, 256). Gower's alterations place his tale in the realms of folklore and make it more acceptable for Allee to question Constance's origins, if he does indeed believe the false report.

Gower changes other elements in an effort to encourage our sympathies for the deceived king. One such adjustment is Gower's removal of Alla's request that he should be informed "quant ele fut delivrés d'enfant" ["when she (Constance) was delivered of her child"] (*NLC*, 263-64). In Gower, King Allee goes off to war without ever mentioning a desire to be informed of the birth. Again, this is a slight alteration, but one possible explanation for Gower's decision to make the change is that Allee's acceptance of the strange news is more plausible—and perhaps more forgivable—if the news is

unexpected. If Allee had not asked for an update, why would the guardians send him news, unless something really was amiss? Furthermore, whereas Trevet's messenger had contradicted the letters' contents and "de bouche lui counta veritable novele et joyouse" ["related to him by word of mouth the truthful and joyful news"] (*NLC*, 308-09), the conspicuous silence of Gower's messenger further relieves the king of blame. Where Gower's king has no information to counter what he reads in the letter, precisely because Gower silences the messenger, Trevet's king actively elected to believe a slanderous lie over a truthful report and, in fact, forbid the messenger to speak further. Gower's Allee once again appears less worthy of censure if he actually does doubt the good, Christian nature of his new wife.

These alterations indicate a broad shift in Gower's version of the tale of Constance toward amplification of the king's goodness. We see later in his tale, for instance, that the people of the Saxon kingdom approve of the king's punishment of his mother, Domilde, which is significantly more rational and just than his punishment had been in Trevet. It is perhaps fitting that Gower, an English writer, would choose to emphasize the righteous nobility of the Saxon king and downplay what might otherwise be viewed as a glaring fault of the Saxon king in Trevet—his unwarranted doubt about the virtue of a popular saint.

## **8. The Substitute Letters (*NLC*, 266-304; *CA*, II, 931-85)**

Ellen Lempereur

In Trevet's version of the story of Constance, King Alla must leave Constance soon after their marriage in order to defend his land in Scotland against the people of Albany. He employs Olda and Lucius as the protectors of his wife's safety and comfort, particularly in view of the imminent birth of her son. I will briefly summarize the scene from Trevet's tale describing the exchange of letters between Olda and Lucius and the king regarding the birth of Maurice, which occurs in nearly 530 words:

By the will of God, Constance gives birth to a beautiful, healthy boy named Maurice. Olda and Lucius quickly send the good news to the king by means of letters. The messenger, however, must travel through Knaresborough, a place halfway between England and Scotland where the king's evil mother, Domild, lives. Domild mortally hates Constance. Not only does she blame her for making the king abandon his former religion, but she also envies Constance's reputation as the most beautiful and holy woman in the land. When Domild hears the news from the messenger she feigns joy and "celebrates" by intoxicating the messenger to the point of delirium so that she can do her evil. While the messenger lies insensible, Domild, by the consent of her clerk, opens the letters sent to the king and replaces them with her own fabrications. She writes that Queen Constance



revealed herself as an evil spirit in the form of a woman after the king departed for Scotland. The child she bore, then, is not of human form but of an ugly, cursed form such that Olda and Lucius had another boy baptized as Maurice for the sake of the public and had the devilish form locked up in an iron cage. Domild makes sure to mention at the end of the letter that the messenger knows nothing of such matters.

In his version of Trevet's story, Gower manages this scene differently, using some 200 words fewer than Trevet does:

Constance joyfully delivers her son soon after King Allee leaves for Scotland. Elda and Lucie send letters to the king through a messenger who must travel through Knaresburgh where the king's evil mother, Domilde, lives. The messenger tells Domilde the good news for which she feigns joy and showers him with gifts. Upon nightfall Domilde takes the letters and has new ones written. These counterfeit letters describe Constance as a fairy and her son as a changeling. According to the letters, in order to maintain a good image, Elda and Lucie have had a poor child baptized as Moris and kept the other strange child out of the public eye.

The letter ends by asking what the king's will is in this situation.

Although Trevet and Gower relate the same basic set of events, Gower shapes the narrative slightly differently than his source in order to achieve a didactic rather than biographical end. I will examine three major differences in Gower's text: the agency of Providence in Moris's birth, the author of the counterfeit letters, and the absence of the mention of envy as a motivation for Domilde to invent such scandalous stories about her

daughter-in-law. This last change is the most interesting considering that this is a “tale of gret entendement” (CA, II, 584). Why, in a tale that purports to be about envy, does Gower seem to miss his best chance to show envy by magnifying, rather than ignoring, the scene in Trevet that most clearly depicts a woman’s envy of Constance?

One of the first differences in Gower’s text is the absence of God in Moris’s birth. In Trevet it was only after “Dieux et nature voleient” [“God and nature willed”] (NLC, 275-76) that Constance gave birth to her son. Gower removes that agency and makes Constance give birth simply when the time “of kinde is come” (CA, II, 931). Trevet further gave readers the impression that God willed not only the birth of Maurice, but also the health and beauty of the “bien engendré et bien nee” [“well-begotten and well-born”] (NLC, 276-77) boy. Gower’s Moris is merely born “sauf and sone” (CA, II, 935), whereupon Constance is joyful and has him baptized. Gower further removes the religious implications of Trevet’s text by later replacing Trevet’s “mauveis esprit” [“evil spirit”] (NLC, 294) with the mystical fairy and eliminating the “fourme demoniac” [“devilish form”] (NLC, 298) for the child of such a fairy. Fairies traditionally had ugly children who whined and cried and had ill tempers. Fairy mothers, then, would abduct human babies and exchange them for their foul-mouthed infants. Gower is playing off of this fairy myth by having Domilde call Moris this kind of fairy child that Constance did not have the chance to replace, thereby revealing her true nature. Gower does not need the presence of God in his moral exemplum. While Trevet’s story had a more biographical end in which Trevet told the story of Constance and her religious journey, Gower’s version has a purely didactic goal: to exemplify moral behavior in the face of envy.

Another important change for Gower is his removal of Domilde's agency in writing the letter to her son. In Trevet's version Domild *herself* opened the letters and counterfeited them under the same seals. By having Domild take up the pen, a traditionally male instrument in the Middle Ages, and impersonate her son, Trevet defeminized the king's mother, allowing readers to differentiate between Constance's perfect "womanly" behavior and that of the other "mannish" women in the text. Here I do not speak of the phallic pen when calling a pen a "traditionally male instrument." Female literacy in medieval England was considered a threat to the patriarchal order, and most women were not given an authoritative voice even over their own work (Margery Kempe, for example, had to have two male scribes to validate her text in the male-dominated medieval tradition). Domild's direct agency in writing the letters, then, made her masculine. Gower, on the other hand, maintains Domilde's femininity by suppressing her literal authorship of the letters. In Gower's version, Domilde takes the letters "and let do wryten othre newe" (CA, II, 958), thus removing Domilde's direct agency and authorship of the letters. Later, Gower's choice of death for Domilde further evinces his attempts to effeminize Trevet's Domild. In Trevet's version, Domild was slaughtered by the sword, a traditionally male death. Gower, however, has Domilde burned at the stake—a punishment often reserved for women guilty of witchcraft, sorcery, or plotting against a lord. Readers sympathize more with Gower's Domilde than with Trevet's for other reasons as well. Gower presents Domilde as less conniving than Trevet did by not only eliminating her as the active agent in writing the false letters, but also by restoring at least some maternal instinct in her treatment of Moris. In Trevet, Domild had Maurice "[privément] fermé en un cage de fer" ["shut up secretly in an

iron cage”] (*NLC*, 298-99) for some undefined period of time. Readers could easily doubt the womanly kindness in Domild for such harsh treatment of a newborn babe. Gower’s Domilde does not lock Moris up, but merely keeps him ““out of the weie”” (*CA*, II, 968) to maintain a good public image. While we still do not sympathize with her, she is more likeable in Gower’s than in Trevet’s version.

The final way Gower softens Domilde’s masculine tendencies is by removing Trevet’s lengthy description of Domild’s motivations. At the very opening of the passage in question, Trevet described Domild’s “grant envie” [“great envy”] (*NLC*, 270) of Constance. Domild was not only angry that this foreign woman of unknown lineage had made her son abandon his ancestor’s religion, but was also jealous of Constance’s reputation as the most beautiful and holy woman in all the land. The text went so far as to mention that the “loaunge et gloire” [“praise and glory”] of Domild “fu ja [anientie] pur le grant pris [de] Constance” [“have been brought to nothing because of the great esteem for Constance”] (*NLC*, 273). Trevet, therefore, set the stage—envy—for Domild’s subsequent actions to rid herself of her biggest threat. Gower, on the other hand, eliminates any such motivation in his version of the scene. Envy in Gower is understood but never explicitly stated. The night she finds out that Constance has given birth to a male heir to the throne Domilde takes action. There is no mention of envy, no dwelling on jealousy, and no reference to diminished reputations. Why, in a tale first and foremost about envy, does Gower leave out Domilde’s envy?

Gower’s tale is, first and foremost, a tale about envy, and therefore any additional explanation is unnecessary. Trevet’s tale was a history and biography of a “noble lady” named Constance. He opened his story with claims to historical accuracy, alluding to

different sources such as the old Saxon chronicles. Trevet then went on to reconstruct Constance's genealogy according to what was said "solonc l'estoire de Sessons avantdite" ["in the aforementioned history of the Saxons"] (*NLC*, 5). Gower's narrator, on the other hand, does not include such details as Constance's lineage or the chronicles from which this pseudo-historical narrative has been based. Gower's story is "a tale of gret entendement" (*CA*, II, 584), "entendement" signifying French for "understanding." The title alone tells of a tale of Constance, in which "Constance" could refer not to a "noble lady" but to a virtue—"constancy" meaning fidelity, faithfulness, and dependability. Gower's tale, then, focuses on these virtues in the face of envy or detraction. Detraction, here, is the consequence of Domilde's envy; as a result of her envy, Domilde attempts to discredit Constance through slander (false letters). This explanation at the beginning of the tale allows Gower to truncate Domilde's scene and focus only on the actions taking place as a result of envy. At the beginning, envy is introduced as the cause for every action in this tale. Gower explicitly mentions "Envie" when describing the motivations of the sultanness (*CA*, II, 640) and the unfaithful knight (*CA*, II, 811). After setting the stage for envy, however, Gower's readers understand that King Allee's mother is motivated by the same reasons as the sultanness, and, later, Theloüs will be motivated by the same reasons as the knight. Trevet, on the other hand, did not open his story as a moral exemplum showing how to deal with envy. He therefore had to explain the actions of his characters in terms of their emotions toward Constance. For example, Trevet explicitly stated that Domild "plus pensa qe ne dit" ["intended more than she said"] (*NLC*, 285) to the messenger because, again, she had not

been established as a character who would be envious of Constance and attempt to detract from Constance's saintliness and holy reputation.

There are other minor differences in Gower's version of the story of Constance that I have chosen not to discuss at length here. In *Trevet*, for example, there was a clerk who consented to Domild's opening of the letters and counterfeiting them. The presence of the clerk may further explain the religious implications of the letter in *Trevet* as compared with the purely mythical elements of Gower's "fairy." Domild's letter in *Trevet* also specified the ignorance of the messenger to the reality behind Constance's birth in order to cover all questions of the messenger's very different perspective of the situation should he orally relay any messages to the king. Gower does not include this information about the messenger. Instead, Gower's Domilde ends the letter by having Elda and Lucie ask the king what they should do about the fairy child.

Although the differences Gower makes to *Trevet*'s story of Constance seem minor, they are of substantial importance when considering the purposes of each text. In the passages I have examined regarding the substitute letters of Domilde to her son, readers may witness the very different ends *Trevet* and Gower hoped to achieve. By the end of *Trevet*'s version Constance was established as a saintly figure through her ability to convert various heathen peoples to Christianity, as well as through her overall goodness and holiness in the most trying of situations. *Trevet*'s Domild seemed to exist only to highlight the goodness and womanliness of Constance by juxtaposing her virtues with Domild's evil and almost mannish actions. By the end of Gower's tale, readers have learned about the life of Constance, but only in terms of what is needed to serve as an example of how to respond to and correct immoral behavior such as envy. The saintly

nature of Constance is due neither to her ability to convert heathens nor to her virtuous, womanly behavior in any situation. Instead, the saintliness of Constance is a result of her ability to handle envy and detraction. Constance's ability to convert others to Christianity is used only as an enviable trait to provide a backdrop for Domilde's actions. Therefore, the presence of God in Moris's birth is not important, Domilde need not be presented as any less womanly than Constance, and envy need not be mentioned as a motivation for a particular action in a tale in which virtually every action is inspired by that very sin.

## **9. The Second Exile (*NLC*, 318-59; *CA*, II, 997-1083)**

Eileen Radetich

In response to the letters he believes came from Olda and Bishop Lucius, Trevet's King Alla sends the messenger back with instructions to keep Constance and Maurice safe until his return. The letters are intercepted, and counterfeited, and Constance and the baby are exiled once again upon the sea. Trevet's version is approximately 250 words, summarized here:

Domild, realizing that the messenger carries orders from her son, gets the messenger intoxicated (as before), opens the letters, rewrites her own set of orders in the name of the king, and places the king's seal on it for authenticity. The messenger delivers the forged letters. In the new letter, Olda is ordered under pain of death, loss of his entire property, and his lineage to prepare a boat for Constance and Maurice's exile. The letter also directs that the boat should contain five years' provisions and the same treasure Constance brought when she arrived in Northumberland. Furthermore, the letter orders that the exile begin within four days and the boat be launched without a sail or an oar. Lucius is also given a similar command, but his ultimatum differs from Olda's in that it is under pain of imprisonment. Constance, observing the reception of the letters, suspects foul play against Alla and begs to know the content of the letters. When



the lords sorrowfully relay the letters' message, she accepts the directive as God's will and thinks it is in the best interest of her countrymen. She unhesitatingly places herself in God's hands. Amid great sorrow from all, the boat bearing Constance and Maurice is sent to the high seas by sailors who commend Constance to God.

In Gower's version of the scene, although the storyline remains practically the same, there are important alterations and additions. Consequently, Gower's scene runs much longer to some 540 words:

The messenger tells the queen of the king's reaction. She gets the messenger intoxicated in order to gain access to the letters. She has the letters opened and has a new letter written. This letter says that Constance is a fairy and must be exiled so that Moris will be unable to claim heritage to the kingdom. The letter further states that the very same ship on which Constance arrived should be used to exile, within four days, both mother and son. Elda and Lucie are filled with sorrow at the news. At sea, Constance raises her hands to heaven and kneels on a bare knee. She asks God to have compassion on her and her son. She weeps, faints, and remains lying on the deck of the boat. When she spots Moris, however, she realizes that he needs her to survive. She stands, picks Moris up, and cradles him as she rocks him—her only child—realizing that he is under her care and that of God.

Gower makes several obvious alterations to this scene. Although there are many minor changes, the two most conspicuous ones occur in the description of the letter and the

depiction of the exile scene. Gower carefully discloses the reason for the exile as being Moris's claim to the throne. More importantly, Gower heightens the exile scene dramatically by giving us Constance's heart-wrenching, emotional display, and her subsequent resolution to accept her fate out of love for her son.

Gower quotes the entire content of the letter, whereas Trevet had merely summarized it. In Gower's detailed account of the letter Constance is called a "faie" (*CA*, II, 1019), with the implication that Moris, as her son, inherits her traits. Accordingly, Gower's exile is grounded in Moris's birthright and the urgency lies in displacing him as a potential heir despite the fact that he is a mere infant. The letter states, "Hire child schal nocht among hem duelle, / To cleyment eny heritage" (*CA*, II, 1024-25). The exile is commanded because Moris is Constance's son ("hire sone" is repeated twice in the letter). In Trevet's account, the reason for their exile was politically unmotivated: if Constance "ele en la terre demorat, ceo avendroit a guerre et destruction de tote la terre par estrange nacions" ["remained in the land it would bring war and the destruction of the whole country by foreign nations"] (*NLC*, 327-28). There was in Trevet no hint of inheritance or lineage. Gower, unlike Trevet, avoids any political ramifications and redirects his focus to the issue of mother and son and what is at stake when lineage dictates one's inheritance.

Although written under false pretenses by a spiteful, jealous grandmother, Gower's letter highlights an important element: maternity. The maternity theme escalates in Gower's version when Constance is exiled. Interestingly, in Trevet's account, as Constance increasingly became more stoic and saintly, she was significantly more distanced from her role as mother. In fact, her role as mother was relatively ignored.

Constance showed little or no emotion in her acceptance of exile; it was the lords and the townspeople, “riches et povres, veuz et jeuvens” [“rich and poor, old and young”] (*NLC*, 353), who expressed sorrow. Perhaps because Trevet’s version had concerned itself with the protection of the kingdom—both land and citizens—he conflated sorrow for the loss of Constance with acceptance for the country’s sake. The citizens even cursed Alla, although they realized he was “n’ust il coupe” [“not at fault”] (*NLC*, 357). Consequently, Constance showed little emotion other than bravery at her fate because she knew that God would save her. Her acceptance of exile, thus, became secular and ecclesiastical with an almost matter-of-fact form of heroism. She was completely devoted to God and loyal to her adopted country. Gower’s Constance, however, accepts her exile solely for maternal reasons and with great emotional display. She is totally devoted to her child.

Why does Gower dramatize this scene and recast Constance as such a defenseless woman? Why does he wait until she is surrounded by only the open sea and the heavens before he gives her a thespian acceptance speech? In contrast with Trevet’s disclosure of Constance’s quiet, compliant acceptance of her exile, Gower’s account of Constance’s exile becomes quite a theatrical event in which Constance not only speaks to God but also seems to speak to the audience. Even the setting of the scene differs conspicuously. In Trevet’s account, the setting was irrelevant. In fact, there was no reference to where Constance was when she verbally accepted her fate. On the other hand, Gower’s Constance immediately creates a powerful sense of exposed defenselessness:

Upon the See thei have hire broght,  
Bot sche the cause wiste nocht,  
And thus upon the flod thei wone,

This ladi with hire yonge Sone. (CA, II, 1051-54)

One reason for this dramatic display is that Gower wishes to capture the full intensity of the pivotal moment in which Constance sinks into the abyss of despair and hopelessness and then resurrects herself. Constance submissively kneels upon a bare knee as she begs God to have compassion on her. In the midst of a seemingly unending sea, “thane hire handes to the hevene / Sche strawhte, and with milde stevene / Knelende upon hire bare kne” (CA, II, 1055-57). She then swoons and falls to the deck of the ship. All the attention is centered on Constance’s fall and it appears that she longs for death. Gower consciously creates a character who is vulnerable and frightened; she is human, she is a woman, but she is also a mother. When Constance spots Moris, it is then, and only then, that she realizes she must survive in order for her son to live:

“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 thou schalt deie.” (CA, II, 1068-71)

She claims that she must survive for “Moderhed” (CA, II, 1073) if nothing else. Gower gives no other reason for Constance’s rejuvenated will to live and acceptance of exile except for her role as a mother.

In this scene, Constance regains self-control along with a renewed sense of self. Moris’s vulnerability and defenselessness, not hers, enables her to re-channel her own state of self-centeredness to a state of noble selflessness. Gower carefully crafts a pageant in which an emotionally distraught Constance is on the brink of total despair. He then dramatically turns the entire scene upside down as she not only regains control of

her own self at the sight of her son, but also vows her complete dedication to him. The final lines of Gower's version of this scene depict Constance gently weeping as she holds Moris in her arms. Then, in a moving portrait of motherhood, Constance nurses her child to sleep as she rocks him to the sound of her own gentle singing. There is no more powerful portrait of maternity than an infant at his mother's breast—an unbreakable bond of love in its most natural state. In all its simplicity, this nurturing bond of closeness depicts a mother as loving, caring, and devoted. Since Gower emphasizes so much more profoundly than Trevet did Constance's role as a gentle, devoted mother, rather than a strong, stoic saint, he elevates the concept of motherhood by focusing on a woman's devotion to the well-being of her child. Gower alters the position of saint to that of dedicated mother. This approach makes the story of Constance much more her story, a woman's story, a mother's story.

Trevet's Constance was exiled not only with her son, but also with the large treasure she carried during her exiles. There was a mystery in what constituted that treasure and in why she needed to have it with her. Gower all but removes the treasure in his version. Gower's Constance is given provisions on which to survive, but she has no treasure other than her beloved Moris. There is no mystery in her having only Moris to treasure since Gower's emphasis is on mother and son.

Gower defines woman through motherhood in his tale, but there are other mothers written into the tale who are unlike Constance. For instance, Constance's own mother, Ytalie, is mentioned once and then never appears again. Early in the story, Constance is said to be "the daughter of an Emperour" (*CA*, II, 663) and her father does the negotiating for her marriage. Gower makes no further reference to Ytalie. The other "moders" who

appear in the story are larger than life, unforgettable monsters. Both mothers-in-law are evil, aggressive, manipulative, deceptive mothers who create “treson” (CA, II, 1268), kill their “oghne Sone” (CA, II, 691), and send their grandson to exile. Yet, perhaps because these women wield secular power, Gower raises the idea that creating politically powerful women inevitably creates a dangerous situation. Is he attributing the idea that when women have too much power it is certain to lead to destruction? Childbearing is in itself a source of power which leads to an even greater and unique power—that of motherhood. In the story of Constance, the mothers, though all sharing maternal power, are also endowed with different kinds of power. Consequently, each uses her power differently.

In Gower’s version, Constance is more than ready to relinquish all power of self, but as she laments, she discovers something to live for: her son. This discovery empowers her greatly and gives her new life. Trevet’s Constance lived primarily for God and Trevet focused greatly on the role of God in her life. There was almost no light shed on Constance as mother. She had been cast as more divine and even more superbly human. There was more of a sense in Trevet of the role of good versus evil, saint versus sinner, and Christian versus heathen. Those contrasts inevitably focused Trevet’s story of woman more directly on her role as a saintly creature. Constance was a powerful tool for Christianity, using her power in a positive manner to convert others. Her power was used to propagate the faith. Religion does not escape Gower’s Constance, but it is not so forcefully emphasized through her character.

By focusing on the relationship between Constance and Moris, Gower demonstrates that Christianity is a religion of women, particularly those who are mothers.

Trevet's Constance, as her name implied, remained steadfast to her God and her country. Gower's Constance, on the other hand, waivers in a human way. Her moment of wavering becomes the catalyst of a defining moment in the tale. As she embraces God, she also embraces her son. For Gower's Constance, who becomes the mother of "the cristeneste of alle" (CA, II, 1598), motherhood is her most constant role.

## **10. The Attempted Rape (*NLC*, 360-94; *CA*, II, 1084-1125)**

Peter G. Beidler

As Constance drifts back toward Rome from Northumberland in Trevet's version of the story of Constance, Telous, a renegade Spanish Christian, boards her boat. The scene runs to nearly 450 words:

When God guides Constance's boat under a castle on the eastern shore of Spain, the local heathen emir has Constance and Maurice brought to his castle and instructs his seneschal, a former Christian named Telous, to take charge of her. Telous pities her and gives her good food and drink. He offers her lodging ashore, but she refuses, feeling better protected by God on the sea than ashore on heathen lands. The emir orders Telous to make sure Constance is not ill-treated by anyone. Telous, delighted with that task, carries down to her boat in the dead of night a sizeable treasure of valuable jewels, silver, and gold. Then he tells Constance that he had been greatly at fault for forgetting his Christian religion among the heathens and begs her to let him accompany her back to a Christian land where he can reclaim his Christian faith. Then with the help of his close friends, he casts off, and the boat soon comes to the high seas. There the devil moves the knight to try to seduce Constance. God, of course, will not allow her to consent. When Telous tries to force her, Constance



restrains his folly by arguing that the child Maurice, then two years old, might understand and remember his mother's sexual encounter. She asks Telous to look out on all sides to see if he might spy any land, promising that if they find a good place to land she will satisfy the renegade's desires in a suitably private place there. Telous likes this proposal and stands in the front of the ship looking all around to see if he can see land. While he looks so attentively, Constance sneaks up behind him and pushes Telous into the sea, where he drowns.

Gower renders the scene rather differently in some 275 words:

By chance, after a year of drifting on the seas, Constance's ship is driven by the winds of God eastward to Spain under the castle wall of a heathen admiral. This admiral has a steward named Theloüs, a false knight and a corrupt renegade, who goes out to check on the condition of the ship.

There he finds the lady with a child in her arms. He sees that she is beautiful and thinks that he will have his way with her that night. Taking care that no other men will see her, he lets her lie there in the ship.

Constance has no idea what he is planning. That night Theloüs takes a boat and rides out to her ship again, thinking to fulfill his lust. He swears that if she resists him, he will kill her. Seeing that there is no other way, Constance says that she will comfort him well, but asks Theloüs first to look out the door to make sure no one is near enough to observe them.

Theloüs is happy to do so and goes to the door. Then Constance prays to God for help. God hears her prayer and quickly throws Theloüs out of the

ship and drowns him, then sends a wind to blow the ship away from that land. Thus has mighty God protected Constance.

Although the incidents in the two versions of the story of Constance are broadly similar, Gower makes a number of important changes. He gives Constance less agency, makes Maurice younger, makes the would-be rapist more evil, and makes God more powerful.

Perhaps Gower's most obvious alteration is to take agency away from Constance. A small change is that whereas in *Trevet*, Constance had chosen whether she would sleep on land among heathens or in her lonely boat at sea under the protection of God, in Gower, Constance never goes ashore, never makes a choice about where she sleeps, and never gets to prefer the protection of God to the protection of heathens. Whereas in *Trevet* Constance had actively rejected *Telous's* initial sexual advances, in Gower she never has that opportunity. In *Trevet* Constance had said that she did not want to make love in the presence of her son and so had promised to satisfy *Telous's* desire on dry land, but Gower's Constance does not mention her son at all. Instead, she meekly asks *Thelouis* to look out the port to make sure no one will be watching them making love. Gower's *Thelouis* is happy enough to seek that assurance, since he had earlier indicated that he wanted to make sure no one else saw the lovely Constance. And, most important, whereas *Trevet's* Constance had snuck up behind her abductor and on her own volition pushed him overboard to a watery death, Gower's Constance merely prays to God, and then God takes the necessary action.

Why does Gower deprive Constance of agency, deprive her of virtually all personal independence and strength? One reason is that Gower wants to make Constance a less calculating woman than she was in *Trevet* by not risking letting readers think of her

as a sneaky murderer who would promise one thing to a man and then the next minute push him overboard. Gower prefers to let God do the dirty work. I shall say more about Gower's depiction of God below.

Gower makes another small but important change in the attempted rape scene—this one regarding young Maurice. Whereas Maurice had been a two year-old child in Trevet, Moris is but a one year-old baby in Gower. Gower can scarcely have missed the child's age in his source, because Trevet's Constance had made a point of indicating that he was, at two, old enough to be damaged by watching his mother engage in a sex act. She used his age, then, as an excuse for seeking dry land as a place where she and Telous could find a place to make love apart from the probing eyes of Maurice. Gower consciously reduces the age of the child. He specifically has Constance drift near the heathen Spanish castle after she had been at sea but a year: "Whan thilke yer hath mad his ende" (CA, II, 1085). And just before that he mentions that the child is still nursing: "And tho sche tok hire child in honde / And yaf it sowke" (CA, II, 1078-79). Moris's babyhood is emphasized again when she takes him in her arms, sings, and rocks him to sleep: "Sche wepte, and otherwhile song / To rocke with hire child aslepe" (CA, II, 1080-81). When Theloüs comes into her ship, he finds Constance "with a child upon hire hond" (CA, II, 1096), which I take to indicate the smallness of the baby who is not yet ambulatory, since she still holds him in her hands or arms.

Why does Gower make such a change in the age of Moris? One reason is to make the vulnerability of the intended victims even more heartrending. We have endangered here not a mother and young son, but a mother and babe-in-arms. That vulnerability of Constance and Maurice is more pathetic when Gower's Theloüs threatens to kill

Constance if she resists his sexual advances. To kill her would be necessarily to kill as well the infant who is so dependent on her for his very life. Trevet's Telous had never threatened directly to kill Constance, but had merely offered vague "dures manaces" ["harsh threats"] (*NLC*, 385) if she resisted. One effect of Gower's alteration, then, is to make Theloüs even crueller than he had been in Trevet.

That cruelty is part of a pattern of changes that Gower makes in the scene. Trevet's Telous had not been at first such a bad sort. He was a heathen, yes, an apostate who had allowed himself to be carried away from Christ, but it seemed that there was some Christian good left in him. When he first saw Constance, he felt great pity for her and received her graciously. He apparently offered her comfortable lodging, which she refused in preference to the relative safety of her own small boat. That night, in what was apparently a moment of Christian remorse and renewal, he took his treasure down to her boat and asked that he might put himself, through her, into the hands of God and sail with her back to a Christian land. As far as we can tell from Trevet's text, the noble and good Constance had made still another convert to Christ, and she agreed to let him join her on her journey home. The trouble came not apparently from his own nature, but from a force outside himself identified as "l'enemi" ["the Enemy," presumably of God] (*NLC*, 380). This satanic enemy was the guilty party, since through his grievous assault on Telous he tempted him to entice Constance to sin. Telous, then, was as much a victim of the devil's dire motives as an evil perpetrator himself.

Gower makes changes in ways that darken the character of Theloüs. Right from the start Gower tells us that Theloüs "al was badde, / A fals knyht and a renegat" (*CA*, II, 1092-93). He is not said to feel any pity for Constance, he never offers her food, comfort

or lodging ashore, is never inspired by her to seek out once again the roots of his Christian faith, and never asks to join her on a journey to a Christian land. On the contrary, all he can think of when he sees Constance is how pretty she is—“sche was a worthi wiht” (CA, II, 1099). For Theloüs, Constance becomes not the possible avenue of his salvation, but merely the object of his lust. He immediately makes plans to keep other men from seeing her beauty and desiring her also, because he has already made an evil plan to visit her ship at dusk to force his sexual will on her. There is no diabolical intermediary here tempting him to entice her. This man needs no devil to tempt him away from good and toward evil. Rather, he entices her out of his own totally depraved nature, the nature of a man who thinks only of himself with no concern whatever for Constance, her infant son, or the power of God to protect good people from evil influences.

That brings up the most important reason why Gower made the renegade more evil: to emphasize the eagerness of God to protect innocence against corruption. God was powerful enough in Trevet’s version. He instructed Constance not to assent to Telous’s evil proposition and he presumably stood with her against “l’emie.” But in Trevet one suspected that God came in less to help Constance, who never asked for his help, than to do damage to the devil, his old rival. In Gower, where no devil or “emie” is mentioned, God comes to help Constance as a result of her prayer: “Sche preide god, and he hire herde” (CA, II, 1120). God, not Constance, pushes the diabolical Theloüs overboard. The passage, then, praises not Constance’s cleverness or strength, but God’s attentiveness to prayer and eagerness to protect innocence. The closing summary leaves

no doubt: “And thus the myhti goddes hond / Hire hath conveied and defended” (CA, II, 1124-25).

There are other changes that Gower makes in the scene of attempted rape, but they are less important than those I have mentioned. For example, whereas Trevet had had Constance’s boat land on the eastern shore of Spain, Gower places the heathen castle on the western shore—her ship is “Estward . . . into Spaigne drive” (CA, II, 1088). The reason for that change is apparently a strictly realistic one, since Gower’s Moris is a year younger than Trevet’s Maurice. Gower apparently thought that Constance’s ship would not have had time to drift all the way around through the Straights of Gibraltar to the eastern side of the Iberian Peninsula. We find other small changes, as well. Gower gives the heathen admiral a far smaller and less kindly role in his tale than the heathen emir had had in Trevet, and he never gives Constance an audience with him in his castle, as Trevet had. Gower does not hint, as Trevet did, that the Christian God might have less power to protect Constance ashore in heathen territory than on the open sea. And Gower makes no mention of the would-be rapist’s bringing his own treasure to the ship—treasure then left in Constance’s possession at the drowning of Telous. Gower makes these changes for obvious reasons: to cut out unnecessary characters and events so that he can focus on more important changes, including the weakness of Constance, who is given almost no important choices in the scene, the pathetic helplessness of the baby Moris, the unparalleled intrinsic evil of Theloüs, and the power of God in immediately answering Constance’s prayers for aid in getting rid of the devil-driven man who would compromise her virtue and endanger her son. Gower’s changes may make Constance, from a modern point of view, a less interesting and less self-reliant person, but they show that he wrote

with his own clear vision of the story in mind. The scene is less about Constance than about the mercy of God in protecting the innocent. For Gower, Constance is driven by the wind rather than by her own strength. She is a woman whom God rewards for her passive faith and her prayers rather than for her actions.

## **11. The Return to Rome** (*NLC*, 433-83; *CA*, II, 1126-1225)

Duane Graner

After spending a lengthy amount of time in banishment on the high seas, Constance and her son Maurice make contact with a band of sailors in Trevet's version of Constance's tale. In this scene, which is about 600 words in length, these men bring Constance before the Roman senator Arsenius, who then becomes Constance's means of returning to Rome. Constance's voyage plays out thus in this summary of Trevet's narrative:

After sailing around the ocean in exile for five years, Constance catches sight of a large naval fleet in a city harbor. The sailors spot Constance's boat from the land and, assuming that the ship is deserted, set out to investigate. They instead discover Constance, her five year-old son, and her riches, as well as the fact that she has meager rations. These men ask Constance some questions before escorting her to the city and leading her to the palace of a man she knows: Arsenius, a Roman senator and the commander of the naval fleet. While Constance is aware of his worthy qualities and his loving devotion to her father, Emperor Tiberius, she is glad that Arsenius is unaware of her own true identity. In answering Arsenius's multiple questions about her past, she deftly obscures any information about her heritage or her connections to the emperor, such as



by telling him that her name is Couste, which is Saxon in origin. Constance inquires about the massive fleet in the harbor, to which Arsenius replies that they represent Tiberius's forces that were sent to attack the sultanness and the murderous Saracens for their treachery against the emperor's Christian allies. He also reveals that while every Saracen was killed and none of the Christian soldiers received any injuries, no one found the remains of Constance, who was reported by the Saracens to have drowned. Constance then asks Arsenius if she could accompany him to Rome, a request that Arsenius happily grants. Upon landing in Rome, Arsenius commends Constance to the care of his wife, Helen, a goodly and virtuous woman who is Constance's cousin. While Helen does not recognize Constance, she nevertheless finds unprecedented joy in loving and caring for Constance and her son. As Constance and Maurice stay with the childless couple, Arsenius and Helen, for twelve years, the senator and his wife show parental love and affection toward Maurice and announce that he will be the couple's heir.

Gower composes this part of Constance's tale with distinctive touches that deviate from the details of Trevet's story, with Gower's scene being over 620 words long:

As a part of God's design, Constance's three-year exile at sea culminates with her ship approaching a massive armada. Her ship drifts among and between the crafts, eventually stopping under the main vessel. The lord of this fleet observes Constance's boat and commands his men to descend into it and see what it contains. Constance attempts to hide from these

naval officers for fear of being discovered, but they uncover the mother and her son and take them to the inquisitive lord of the fleet, who interrogates her about where she came from, who she is, and what her religious beliefs are. While she divulges that she is a Christian, she prevents the lord from knowing too much about her. She reveals only that her husband ordered her and Moris to go to sea. After telling the lord that her name is Couste, she resolves to restrain her speech and not say another word about her situation. The lord then asks if Constance wants to join him on his voyage to Rome. After accepting his offer enthusiastically, Constance learns that the lord has just been waging a war against the treacherous murderers in Barbarie who had many years earlier killed Constance's Roman companions and set her adrift; the lord's forces killed the Barbarie murderers, but nobody knew what happened to Constance. Then, the lord's identity emerges in the story: he is a Roman senator who is married to Heleine, Constance's cousin. Upon their arrival in Rome, the lord entrusts "Couste" and Moris to the company of his good wife, who is happy to have this new companionship. Twelve years pass as Constance lives with the lord and his wife, and, while no one ascertains her identity or high status, all of the citizens show her love.

Gower's account of Constance's return to Rome bears some resemblance to Trevet's depiction of the scene. At the same time, however, the differences between Trevet's and Gower's versions are significant and merit further examination. Gower's alterations of the scene lend insight into what he attempts to achieve through his retelling of

Constance's journey. Specifically, Gower accentuates the ominous as Constance approaches the naval fleet, turns the discovery of Constance into a more harrowing situation, initially withholds expository information about the Roman senator's character, and stresses the intense effort that Constance makes in restricting her own speech.

One major change that Gower brings about in his version of Constance's tale is the addition of an ominous tone that surrounds the moment in which Constance comes upon the naval fleet. Trevelyan had undercut any real sense of dread in the moment that Constance caught sight of the naval fleet by portraying God as a considerate and well-meaning guide. Thus, Trevelyan's depiction of God kept the presence of the approaching sailors from seeming too menacing as he guided Constance towards them. Also destabilizing any portent of doom was the hopeful sight of the city and its harbor. The presence of the harbor—a place where ships could claim shelter from the tumult and unpredictability of the ocean—symbolically represented the notion that a positive end was in sight for Constance, especially when one considered the juxtaposition of God's benevolent guidance alongside the harbor's physically reassuring presence. In Gower's reconstruction of the scene, however, Constance drifts not toward a harbor but into the midst of an array of ships. He thus places Constance in a disconcerting environment. The image of Constance sailing between the naval vehicles evokes the alarming feeling that a massive and powerful force is overshadowing her. The unsettling sensation becomes intensified as her boat stops directly underneath the imposing flagship. Furthermore, Gower sets the scene in open sea as opposed to locating it within sight of a harbor or a city. His change of location communicates the idea that just as Constance is far away from a safe port, she is also at a distance from stability and security by being on

the ocean—an unpredictable and unsteady environment in which anything can happen. Finally, Gower complements the scene's ominous nature by being somewhat ambiguous about God's role in directing Constance. Though Trevet clearly indicated the compassion and protection that a kind God showed to Constance as he guided her toward the harbor, Gower portrays God in a more neutral and indistinct manner by stating that Constance's ship drifts among the naval fleet "as god wolde for the nones" (*CA*, II, 1130). Here, Gower casts God in a far less reassuring light than in Trevet's version, an alteration that in turn creates uncertainty about why God is directing Constance toward these ships.

Gower's changes to Trevet's story are not arbitrary or superficial. They are a means to a specific end. While the tone of Constance's approach in Trevet's tale was comparatively uncomplicated and mostly free of tension, Gower intensifies and darkens his story. He implements revisions to infuse his tale with more dramatic tension while simultaneously preventing it from becoming essentially one-dimensional in its positive atmosphere. Not surprisingly, this kind of dramatic movement is consistent with his other major changes.

In both tales, Constance makes contact with a band of sailors. Trevet's narrative did not reveal any fear or apprehension on the part of Constance as she encountered the sailors, nor did it allow for anxiety to build between the approaching sailors and Constance. She exhibited no internal apprehension, distrust, or any other adverse reactions to their presence. Even though Trevet's Constance possessed "tresour" ["treasure"] (*NLC*, 442) of which the sailors took notice, the presence of these riches did not provoke a disturbance, quarrel, or conflict between Constance and the men. Gower's

depiction of the scene, on the other hand, evokes a threatening aura as the sailors accost the seafaring Constance. Obeying their lord's orders, a small handful of sailors board Constance's ship, compelling the fearful woman to "hireselven hide" (CA, II, 1142). The inclusion of the sailors' descent into Constance's boat conjures foreboding undertones. The sailors' invasion of the boat creates the unsettling feeling that Constance's space is being violated by a group of men. Gower points to Constance's anxiety of violation and the possible menace that these men pose by illustrating her fearful and defensive reactions. Whereas Trevet's Constance did not hide from or even balk at the idea of making contact with sailors, Gower represents Constance as an individual who feels compelled to take evasive actions to protect her well-being. The fact that Gower shows the men bringing Constance out of her boat to the lord's flagship builds upon these fears of violation. In this moment when a group of strangers remove a reluctant and frightened Constance from her familiar surroundings in order to take her to their territory, Gower escalates the anxieties of the woman's possible exploitation at the hands of unfamiliar men.

Because of the nature of the changes that he makes to the story of Constance, Gower is able to add depth to his tale and to his protagonist. By having the sailors descend into Constance's ship and take her away without communicating with her as they had in Trevet's story, Gower not only imbues his tale with increased dramatic tension that prevents his narrative from succumbing to utter simplification, but he also provides dimension to the character of Constance. While these men ultimately do not violate or otherwise harm Constance, Gower shows her reacting to them in a fearful manner that did not appear in Trevet's tale. Thus, Constance's defensive hiding is indicative of her

anxiety over her situation. Although Constance showed no appreciable signs of trauma or upset in Trevet's version, Constance's frightened hiding in Gower's tale suggests a growing aversion to the abuse and mistreatment that she suffers over the course of her journey. In short, these changes give more definition to the narrative and to Constance's apprehensive psychological state.

Another significant change to Trevet's literary vision occurs as Gower takes Trevet's character Arsenius and initially withholds expository or identifying information about him. Trevet had immediately revealed a great deal about Arsenius as soon as Constance met him. When Constance was brought before Arsenius, Trevet not only showed that Arsenius was an intelligent and commendable "chivaler" ["knight"] (*NLC*, 447) as well as a Roman senator with whom Constance was familiar, but he also revealed that he was a trustworthy figure because of the affectionate bond he shared with Constance's father while serving as his advisor. Trevet thus kept suspense from surfacing in his story by unambiguously revealing Arsenius to be a trusty and dependable individual. Alternatively, Gower does not provide information about the Roman senator Arcenne when he emerges in the narrative. In fact, he does not reveal the nature of Arcenne's occupation or even his real name until well after Constance encounters him on the sea. Gower withholds any revealing information in the interests of presenting the lord as an enigmatic figure who may not be wholly trustworthy. Since Gower reveals nothing about Arcenne, the senator's question about Constance's faith and his offer to take her to Rome make him seem initially more suspect and questionable than in Trevet's work. An uneasy air of ambiguity surrounds Arcenne; his enigmatic introduction provides no clear indication of his disposition, traits, or intentions.

I have indicated above that Gower's changes are not merely cosmetic in light of how they carry out a deeper function and serve as a means to a structural end. His decision to withhold expository information about Arcenne is no exception. Whereas Trevet's immediate divulging of Arsenius's positive qualities had resulted in the unambiguous delineation of the senator's character, which in turn made this part of the story relatively uncomplicated, Gower initially makes him a suspicious figure. Gower raises the dramatic tension and suspense of this scene by plunging the reader into a state of uncertainty about the senator's true nature. Ultimately, Gower's conscious decision to envelop Arcenne in a shroud of mystery allows him to keep this scene from exhibiting the bland simplicity that marked Constance's meeting with Arsenius in Trevet's version, thereby making this scene more dramatic.

In one of Gower's most important changes, he reshapes Constance's behavior as she strives to hide the truth from Arcenne. Trevet's text depicted no clear signs of emotional or psychological distress—anxiety, nervousness, or overwhelming concern—on Constance's part as she answered the senator's questions about herself. Through his portrayal of Constance as an individual who wielded wisdom as she answered Arsenius's queries without divulging information about her "linage ou de l'emperour" ["lineage or the Emperor"] (*NLC*, 454), Trevet illustrated the composure and constancy that were the fundamental and dominant aspects of Constance's character. This show of mental durability was consistent with the way his Constance exhibited no lasting signs of trauma from the various trials, horrors, and injustices she experienced. While Constance's discovery of Hermegild's dead body caused her to express a brief display of "grant

affrai” [“great alarm”] (*NLC*, 231), for example, the effects of Constance’s alarm were fleeting and manifested themselves nowhere else in the text.

Gower, however, alters the way Constance avoids telling Arcenne any details about her life in order to reveal the psychological effects of her perilous journey. Throughout the tale, he makes a variety of aspects of Constance’s character available. For instance, as the story begins, Constance’s brave conviction and enthusiasm shine forth as she encounters “the greteste” (*CA*, II, 599) of the Barbarie merchants and “hath hem with wordes wise / Of Cristes feith so full enformed, / That thei therto ben all conformed” (*CA*, II, 606-08). Also, an exile-bound Constance displays melancholy and a fear of the future as she uses a “milde stevene” (*CA*, II, 1056) and prays to God to ““Tak of thi wofull womman rowthe / And of this child that I schal kepe”” (*CA*, II, 1060-61). In these examples one can see how Gower is interested in changing Trevet’s story in order to flesh out Constance’s character. In the scene in which Constance talks to Arcenne, Gower makes similar changes to her character’s depth as he alters Trevet’s representation of a constant and unflappable Constance. As the scene unfolds, the language illustrates that Constance wants to impose forceful restrictions over herself, lest the slightest fragment of information concerning her past should slip out and expose her identity:

Sche wolde him nothing elles sein

Bot of hir name, which sche feigneth;

*Alle othre thinges sche restreigneth,*

*That a word more sche ne tolde.”* (*CA*, II, 1166-70, emphasis added)

While Constance answered “plusours demaundes” [“several questions”] (*NLC*, 452-53) and maintained her composure in Trevet’s narrative, Gower forms a relation between



Constance's verbal restrictions and her anxieties about being discovered. That is, when we consider Constance's physically evasive and frightened tactic of hiding herself from the probing sailors' sight and observe a parallel in her verbally evasive manner of "hiding" her words from Arcenne's ears and refusing to say "a word more," Constance's highly defensive way of speaking then appears to derive from her fear of being discovered. Such a fear of being exposed through her speech is consistent with her anxiety of being exposed on her boat. Consequently, that Gower makes Constance less talkative and more protective of her speech transforms Constance from a stable and calm individual to an anxious and troubled one.

What purpose does it serve for Gower to institute such changes in the main character of this story? Constance's internal conflict corresponds to the other modifications that I have described above, in that Gower's changes infuse the tale with more dramatic depth and dimension. Constance's predominantly unflappable nature in Trevet's story did not allow for much dramatic tension. Gower designs a fleshed-out and fully dimensional portrait of Constance with the intention of adding depth to both the story and to his main character. As a result, his story contains an insightful psychological portrait of a woman who has lived through a number of fear-provoking circumstances, which in turn makes his story and protagonist more profound.

Aside from the major revisions I have described, the minor changes that Gower makes in depicting Constance's return are worth brief mention. Some of these alterations relate to Trevet's depiction of Helen, Arsenius's wife. Trevet revealed Helen to be a remarkable woman, an individual of complete "seinteté et bounté" ["holiness and goodness"] (*NLC*, 482). Trevet also designed his narrative so that Arsenius and Helen

declared Maurice to be their heir. Gower does away with these touches by merely describing Heleine as “a good wif” (*CA*, II, 1215) and by eliminating Trevet’s detail about Arsenius and Helen selecting Maurice as their heir. Considering how Gower’s other changes push for a movement towards intensified dramatic tension and depth, it appears that he makes these two revisions so as to prevent Trevet’s details from compromising the dramatic tension that he wishes to achieve. The superlative nature of Helen’s holiness and the undeveloped bestowing of the title of heir upon Maurice may strike Gower as overly sentimental and ideal simplifications that work against his deeper and more nuanced characterizations and plot structures.

These same motives compel Gower to revise Trevet’s description of the aftermath of the Saracen slaughter. In Trevet’s version, Arsenius informed Constance that while the emperor’s men killed each of the “unze mil” [“eleven thousand”] (*NLC*, 468) Saracen murderers who had slain Constance’s Christian companions, none of the emperor’s Christian warriors died or received injuries. The outlandish scenario of one army utterly wiping out another army and emerging completely unscathed counteracts Gower’s push for dramatic depth due to its overwhelmingly idealistic outcome. Accordingly, in his depiction of Arcenne’s army triumphing over the bloodthirsty Barbarie men, Gower downplays the details and indicates that none of the Barbarie fiends “from the sword alyve passed” (*CA*, II, 1186). Once these minor alterations are in place, Gower can construct a stronger and more cohesive work that adequately accommodates his major changes. In the end, by creating an ominous atmosphere as Constance advances towards Arcenne’s fleet, constructing the discovery of Constance in a more suspenseful manner, temporarily withholding expository information about Arcenne, and showing the extent

to which Constance will go to restrain her speech, Gower generates a higher level of dramatic tension and instills substantial depth and dimension not only in his tale, but in the remarkable protagonist as well.

## **12. The King's Revenge** (*NLC*, 395-432; *CA*, II, 1226-1309)

Kimberly A. Racon

When King Alla wins his battle with the Scottish Picts in Trevet's version of the story of Constance, he returns to England full of sorrow over the banishment of his wife, Constance, and their son, Maurice. The people yell insults at him as he passes until he finally reaches his castle. The scene runs some 520 words, which I provide in summary:

King Alla returns from Scotland, victorious over the Picts, yet is saddened by the banishment of Constance and Maurice. On his way back to his castle, he passes amongst the people—men, women, and children—he rules, all of whom scream insults at him while throwing mud, rocks, and stones, and proclaim him to be a ruthless ruler. He can no longer travel through his city during the day, so he returns to his castle under cover of night. When he arrives, he greets Olda and Lucius and demands to know where his wife and child are, both of whom he calls evil spirits and monsters. The two men, perplexed, say they do not know why Alla is calling his own by such horrid names; that both Constance and Maurice are excellent people. Alla questions them regarding their letters, and both men attest that there has been treason, for they neither wrote nor authorized such letters to be sent to Alla. They call in the messenger who carried the letters, and he swears that he is guilty of no treason, but points

the blame at Alla's mother, Domild. Alla finds his mother and wields his sword over her. Knowing that she will be killed, Domild confesses her crime, but Alla will grant no pity. He decapitates her and proceeds to cut her body into pieces. The scene concludes with Alla vowing never to marry again until God sends him word of Constance.

Gower renders the scene differently in some 425 words:

Allee returns home after the battle and asks his chamberlain and the bishop for the truth about his wife and child. He explains that he received a letter saying that his child was a boar and that his wife was a fairy, but both men reply that his wife and his child are absolutely fair. The men exchange their letters and discover the treason: the letters are false. The messenger who delivered them is sent for, and he attests that he never tampered with them, but confesses that the king's mother made him drunk. When Allee hears these words from the messenger, he feels in his heart that his own mother committed the treason. He takes his horse and leaves the castle, intent upon finding his mother, and a group of men go with him. He finds her and, in a rage, yells at her, calling her a backbiting beast of hell. He demands to know what happened to his wife and son, under penalty of treason. Allee proclaims vengeance and orders his men to make a fire and burn his mother in it. Before she is thrown into the flames, she is made to confess her sins, and then burned to death. The company of men that is with Allee hears her confess and witnesses her punishment, and all agree that her punishment is fitting for her crime. The

scene ends with Allee saying that he will never be happy again and will never wed until he learns how Constance has fared traveling on the sea.

While the incidents in the two versions of the tale of Constance are similar, Gower makes important changes from his source in Trevet. He places Allee's discovering of his mother's deceit when Constance has already found her way to Rome, removes the public scorn on Allee's return to the city following battles in Scotland, makes Allee discover or divine the identity of the treacherous person behind Constance's disappearance, and makes the punishment Domilde receives more public and, given the circumstances, less grotesque. I believe that all of the changes Gower makes in this section of his tale are done to make the figure of Allee more compassionate and more human, and to establish a sense of community through more unanimous opinions and judgments on punishment for transgressions.

The most obvious way Gower alters Trevet's tale is by moving the scene of discovery and revenge later in his version. In Trevet, Constance did not travel to Rome until after we learned of Alla's return and Domild's brutal and grotesque death. After Trevet spent some narrative time and space discussing Constance's means of getting to Rome through the help of Arsenius and his wife, Helen, we learned that while all of Constance's activity was going on, Alla, under advice from Lucius and Olda, was preparing for a pilgrimage to Rome. In Gower we learn of this revenge plot after we know that Constance is already in Rome. Directly after we read how Constance is settled with Arcenne and his wife, Heleine, Gower shifts the narrative attention back to Allee, who uncovers the truth of his false letters and takes his anger and vengeance out on his mother. Moreover, the shift of this scene in the context of the narrative removes the

possibility for a hostile re-entry into his city. In Gower's version of the tale, Allee is not met by an angry mob that throws mud, rocks, or stones at him. He simply returns to his city and talks immediately with the bishop and his friend about his wife and son.

Why does the shift of this part of the tale of Constance so greatly affect the progress of the story and character identification? In shifting this part of the narrative backward in the progression of the tale, Gower forces Allee to travel to Rome, in part to show how genuinely good a person Allee is. Allee's journey to Rome is akin to a religious pilgrimage to a holy city, which makes him seem more like a man who is a good Christian and not a brutal murderer. The pilgrimage to Rome humanizes Allee for Gower's audience. As Gower says in the scene immediately following the murder of Domilde, "That he to Rome in pelrinage / Wol go, wher Pope was Pelage, / To take his absolucioun" (*CA*, II, 1315-17). Allee also must go to Rome to eventually reunite with his wife. But by making Allee travel to Rome to ask for absolution, Gower shows that the man is not brutal, nor does he think of himself as someone above the rule of God. Similarly, by removing the angry mob, Gower makes not only Allee more compassionate, but also the crowds he encounters. This change alone is interesting because in *Trevet*, Alla had to encounter crowds that had gathered on their own volition, but these crowds were completely unaware of the situation behind Alla's anger toward his wife and son. Their ire towards him was caused by his presumed brutishness against his wife and son. Gower's narrative shift, however, puts the crowd on the side of Allee and makes him more agreeable to his public.

The next three changes that Gower makes I will examine together, as they are all related and they all are important aspects of the humanization of Allee and the

establishment of community in Gower's tale. First, in Trevet's tale, Alla learned of the treason his mother committed only through the mouth of his page, who served as messenger for the exchanged letters. By having the servant announce or accuse the guilty party, Trevet made the crime and its resolution more internal, more of a private transgression. In Gower, on the other hand, Allee questions the servant. Only after he is questioned does Allee know that his mother is the one who has committed treason against his family. Gower writes, "And whan the king it herde telle, / Withinne his herte he wiste als faste / The treson which his Moder caste" (CA, II, 1266-68). Allee seems to know by divination or instinct that his mother is the one who wrote the false letters and is responsible for casting away Constance and Moris.

Second, the vengeance Alla enacted in Trevet was excruciatingly brutal and grotesque. He was so enraged that he grabbed his sword and held it over Domild, who was naked in bed, demanding that she confess. After she did, he proceeded to decapitate and then dismember her, thus destroying the female body in a way that revealed his masculine authority and sheer power, while rendering the errant maternal figure not only powerless but also disembodied. In Gower, the shift in the punishment of Domilde is remarkable: she is not disfigured, but rather she is burned, making Domilde's death far less brutal than Domild's. Importantly, Gower keeps part of Trevet's tale that is essential to the punishment of Domild: Gower, too, has Domilde speak her crimes in a form of confession prior to her execution. Similarly, Gower does not allow Allee to grant mercy to his mother: she does, after all, die. Yet, an important change is that Gower does not make Allee the one to kill Domilde. Allee merely orders a fire to be built and his mother thrown in, but members of a gathered crowd put her in the fire.



Third, the reaction to the death of Domilde in Gower is also a shift from the Trevet. In Trevet's tale, there was no reaction for the death of Domild—she was merely killed and then the plot of the story progressed. Her death was significant only as an act of vengeance. In Gower, however, there is a voiced reaction. The crowd that gathers and helps in executing Domilde is the same crowd that reacts to her death. It shares the sentiment that Domilde's death is necessary because she is truly wicked. The crowd serves as a jury, passing on the belief to the reader or listener of Gower's tale that Domilde's punishment fits her crime.

Each of these issues—the messenger, the vengeance, and the reaction to the death of Domilde—serves essential narrative roles to humanize Allee and establish community in Gower's story. Allee is made more agreeable through the choices and decisions he makes. When his messenger first tells him he is not the cause of deception in the letters, Allee immediately—and as mentioned above, almost divinely—feels that treason rests with his own mother. Unlike the rage Alla felt in Trevet, Allee's approach to Domilde in Gower seems a much more realistic scenario. While he does use strong language to voice his displeasure with his mother, he does not find her naked in bed. The corresponding scene in Trevet was disturbing not only because of the manner in which Domild was killed, but also for the circumstances surrounding her eventual capture. The imagery contained in the section from Trevet—Alla's naked sword hovering over Domild on the bed—was deliberately phallic, suggesting some level of sexual incest between mother and son. The fact that Alla not only decapitated but also dismembered his mother made the act of killing her completely grotesque. Gower's shift, however, makes the idea of vengeance more communal. While Gower's Allee orders the death of Domilde, it is

actually other men who physically take her to her death by placing her in the fire. The acts of condemning someone to death and actually putting her to death become two separate occurrences. By making the actions of accusation, confession, and death public, Gower opens the text up to a notion of community. No longer are these important matters handled in private. This shift is important given the figure of Constance within the community. We see several times throughout Gower's tale how much the people love Constance and how bereaved they are when she is sent away. The death of Domilde is not just a way for Allee to get his vengeance, but also a way for the entire community to seek redress for a wrong done to it.

The main changes that I have noted above show that Gower's version of the tale of Constance serves two very important purposes: it makes the figure of Allee more compassionate while simultaneously creating a place in the story for the community. No longer, as in *Trevet*, do we have a system of justice that is closed and brutish. Crimes against someone who is a beloved member of the community are punished by the community, and, most importantly, the community declares that the punishment of death for Domilde is appropriate for her actions against Constance. Gower's Allee becomes, then, a sympathetic ruler, with a community of subjects who are supportive of his decisions and of his ruling style and authority.

### **13. The Loose Ends (*NLC*, 484-598; *CA*, II, 1310-1603)**

Anthony J. Funari

After Constance spends twelve years under Arsenius and Helen's protection, King Alla journeys to Rome on the advice of Olda and Lucius. The scene runs to nearly 1440 words, which I summarize here:

Having left Edwyn, his son and heir apparent, in charge of the kingdom, Alla makes a pilgrimage to Pope Pelagius, seeking absolution for his mother's murder. Before entering Rome, Alla sends Olda ahead to secure suitable accommodations. Olda meets Arsenius, the senator of the city, and informs him of Alla's coming. When he relays the news to Constance and Helen, Constance swoons, which she explains as a mental weakness caused by her years at sea. Learning that there will be a feast held for Alla's arrival, Constance instructs Maurice to be by Alla's side always and to attend to him. During the feast, Alla notices Maurice's resemblance to Constance and questions Arsenius about the boy's background. When he learns of the youth's name and how he has come to be with Arsenius, Alla begins to suspect the truth. After the dinner is concluded, Alla goes to Arsenius's house and is reunited with his wife. After spending forty days in Rome, Constance requests that Alla invite the emperor to dine with them. Maurice is sent to extend the invitation in the name of Constance,

whom the emperor presumes is still lost. Tiberius accepts the invitation, and Constance greets him, holding both Alla and Maurice by the hands. The emperor is so overcome with joy that he nearly falls off his horse. After all of Constance's adventures are recounted, and Maurice is named Tiberius's successor. Alla and Constance then journey back to England where, after nine months, Alla dies. Constance then returns to Rome and comforts her father in his final hours. Tiberius dies in Constance's arms, and Maurice assumes the emperorship as "Maurice the Christian Emperor."

Gower's revision of the scene, which occurs in approximately 1745 words, is summarized as such:

After having concluded his wars with the Picts, Allee decides to take a pilgrimage to Rome for absolution. He leaves his lieutenant and heir apparent, Edwyn, in charge of the kingdom. As he nears Rome, Allee sends Elda ahead to prepare for his arrival. When Arcenne relays the news of Allee's coming, Constance swoons. At the feast, Allee notices Moris, whom Constance has instructed to stand by him, and learns of the boy's background and the name of his mother, Couste, which Allee recognizes as Saxon for Constance. After being reunited with his wife, Allee begins to question Constance about her family background. In response, Constance requests Allee to invite the emperor to dine with them. As they go out to greet Tiberie, Constance requests that her husband and son stay behind while she meets her father alone. Tiberie is

awed to find his daughter still alive. After a brief period, Constance and Allee return to England, where Allee dies after an unspecified amount of time. Constance returns to Rome and cradles her father as he also passes away. Moris then becomes the emperor.

Although the resolutions of the two versions of Constance's tale are generally similar, Gower departs from Trevet's chronicle of the tale in significant ways. Gower directs the focus of his version more on Constance, is vague regarding the reason for Allee's seeking absolution, and recasts Edwyn as Allee's lieutenant rather than his son.

Gower's revision of the conclusion of Constance's tale appears to be more concerned with Constance rather than with Moris. First, there is Gower's handling of Allee's suspicions after having heard Arcenne's account of Moris's past. Whereas Trevet presented Alla's suspicions as being based on Maurice's name, his resemblance to Constance, and Arsenius's words, Gower depicts Allee as more surprised by hearing the pseudonym that Constance adopts when arriving in Italy: Couste. Although Trevet mentioned Constance's pseudonym, he did not explain that the name Couste was the same as Constance. Instead, Trevet simply claimed that Couste was the name given to her by the Saxons. Gower, however, indicates that Couste and Constance are the same name: "For Couste in Saxoun is to sein / Constance upon the word Romein" (CA, II, 1405-06). Also, in Trevet's account, Alla was never aware of the name of Maurice's mother. For Gower, in contrast, Constance's name is the most important piece of evidence in Allee's realization that his wife is Moris's mother. Second, another of Gower's departures from his source is the king's prying into Constance's lineage. After the reunion with Constance, Allee questions her as to "hire astat" (CA, II, 1452) and

“what contre that sche was bore” (CA, II, 1453). His inquiries into Constance’s past are the impetus for her requesting Allee to hold a feast and invite the emperor. Trevet, on the other hand, did not have Alla so concerned with his wife’s past. Alla never questioned Constance about her lineage. Finally, Trevet and Gower handle Constance’s reunion with her father very differently. In Trevet, as Constance went to greet her father, she did so holding her son and husband by the hands. In Gower, Constance requests that Allee and Moris stay behind while she goes to greet her father alone. The main focus for Gower is on Constance’s reunion with her father instead of the emperor’s knowing that he now has an heir.

Why does Gower direct the focus of the conclusion more on Constance than on Moris? One explanation is the different purposes of each writer for the story. While Trevet was more interested in presenting a historically oriented account of Constance’s tale, Gower’s intention is to write a morality tale. This explanation is also supported by the final lines of each work: whereas Trevet chronicled the date of Alla’s, Tiberius’s, Constance’s, and Olda’s deaths and the location of their graves, Gower ends with an admonition against lying. Gower’s is a moral tale, not a history.

Gower’s conclusion diverges in another small, yet interesting, way from his source: Allee’s motivation for his pilgrimage to Rome. In Trevet, Alla journeyed to Rome on the advice of both Lucius and Olda to seek absolution from the pope for having murdered his mother. In contrast, Gower does not ascribe any direct reason for Allee’s pilgrimage. Gower provides only a vague reference to Allee’s desire for a spiritual restoration: “And thoghte he wolde be relieved / Of Soule hele upon the feith / Which he hath take” (CA, II, 1312-14). Later, during Allee’s interview with Pope Pelage, Gower

again is obscure in citing what is plaguing Allee's conscience, claiming that Allee told the pope "al that he cowthe agrope, / What grieveth in his conscience" (CA, II, 1356-57). This omission on Gower's part raises the possibility that there might be other sins that Allee is hoping to have absolved. What other reasons could Allee have to make such a long and hazardous trek from Northumberland to Rome? The answer to this question rests in the context in which Gower presents Allee's decision. While Trevet had Alla's war with the Picts conclude prior to his murdering of Domild, Gower indicates that the war ends just before Allee decides to go to Rome. Although this change may seem trivial, the different chronology of the tale suggests the possibility that Allee is seeking absolution for sins committed during the war: his killing of the Picts. If Gower only provides the reader with Allee's need for spiritual renewal and the juxtaposition of the war's conclusion and his decision to make a pilgrimage to Rome, Allee's motivation seems to be in some way related to the recent war. Gower's changes place in doubt the assumption that Allee is making his pilgrimage because of his mother's murder.

Why does Gower alter the reason for Allee's journey to Rome? One explanation is that Gower does not present Allee's murdering of Domilde as a sin. There is an extreme brutality in the way Trevet depicted Domild's death that is absent from Gower's tale. In Trevet, Alla confronted and dismembered his mother in the privacy of her bedchamber, while Allee's execution of his mother is more public, with his men casting Domilde into a fire. There is a sense in which Allee's killing of Domilde is justified for Gower, indicated by the public sanction given: "Wherof these othre . . . / Sein that the juggement is good" (CA, II, 1294-96). Also, the state of mind that Alla was in when he committed the murder is different from Allee's. Trevet described Alla as "homme hors

de sen” [“a man out of his mind”] (*NLC*, 424), while, in contrast, Allee seems to be in complete possession of his faculties. Allee’s killing Domilde is not based on uncontrolled rage, but rather warranted by the “tresoun of hire false tunge” (*CA*, II, 1299). There is no reason for Allee to desire forgiveness for an obviously justified execution.

A third important difference between the two versions of the tale concerns Edwyn, a character mentioned in only one line by both Gower and Trevet. While Trevet identified Edwyn as Alla’s son, Gower recasts Edwyn as Allee’s lieutenant and heir apparent. Although this slight change regarding a very minor character may be easily dismissed, Gower’s divergence from Trevet has significant implications. I first would like to examine how Edwyn’s being Alla’s son affected Trevet’s version of the tale. When Trevet introduced Alla, there was no mention of any prior marriage, nor is his age given. The reader was left to assume that the king, who was still a bachelor, would have been a young man, possibly between twenty and twenty-five years old. With the appearance of Edwyn, however, Alla was consequently much older. To argue that Edwyn might be the offspring of subsequent marriage after Constance was sent away is untenable. That is, since Alla and Constance had been separated for nearly twelve years, Edwyn, if he was the product of a later marriage, could have been no older than that. It would then seem absurd for Alla to have placed Edwyn as his surrogate during his pilgrimage to Rome. This indication of Alla’s greater age then made his death nine months after his return more credible. Also, Edwyn’s being Alla’s son explains why Maurice did not return to England with his parents. If it were assumed that Alla’s throne was based on primogeniture, then Edwyn would have been ahead of Maurice to inherit



Alla's throne. Maurice would then have been free to be named Tiberius's heir. Also, Constance's introduction of Maurice to his grandfather took on the added importance of securing for her son a future position, which may explain why she held his hand as she met Tiberius.

In Gower's version, Edwyn being recast as Allee's lieutenant alters the king's past and complicates Moris's assuming the emperorship. Gower explicitly depicts Allee as a younger man than Trevet's Alla. Gower directly answers the question of whether Allee had been married prior to his union with Constance by referring to her as "his ferste wif" (*CA*, II, 1307). Also, Gower provides a clear indication of Allee's age in his reference to "his yonge unlusti lif" (*CA*, II, 1308). Allee can be then estimated as being in his twenties. In addition, Allee's death at such a young age is less realistic—a flaw that Gower attempts to remedy by citing death's power against which Allee "with al his retenance" (*CA*, II, 1576) could not defend. Also, Edwyn becomes Allee's heir apparent only after Moris is presumed to be lost. Since Allee is reunited with his only son, does Moris then have a greater claim to the throne than Edwyn? What is the fate of Allee's kingdom? If the same assumption is made that Allee's monarchy is based on primogeniture, then Moris is heir to both the throne of Northumberland and Rome. Gower mentions only how, on the royal couple's return to Northumberland, Allee's subjects rejoice to see Constance, who "was the confort of his lond" (*CA*, II, 1562). Gower leaves the reader to presume that Moris abandons any claims he may have had in Northumberland in favor of the emperorship.

The best explanation for Gower's alteration regarding Edwyn is that Allee's love for Constance appears greater than in Trevet's version. In not presenting Allee as having

been married before, Gower suggests a stronger connection between the two. His relationship with Constance is not merely one of several marriages for Allee. Also, Gower depicts Allee as being more grieved over his loss of Constance than Trevet's Alla was. After having avenged his mother's treason, Allee forgoes any possible marriage until he learns of Constance's fate. Allee's renouncing any marriages is even more significant now considering his youth.

Other alterations that Gower makes in the conclusion do not affect his version as profoundly. For example, Trevet actually noted the date on which Constance was reunited with her father: the vigil of the feast of St. John the Baptist. The reason for Gower's omission of this detail is that, whereas Trevet was concerned with producing a historical account of Constance's story, Gower is more interested in writing the narrative as a moral tale. This is the same explanation for Gower's leaving out the location of the major characters' graves. Also, Gower adds to the tale the detail that Constance is on a "Mule whyt" (*CA*, II, 1506) when she meets Tiberie. Possibly this augmentation strengthens Gower's depiction of Constance as a Christ-like figure. Finally, while Trevet had Maurice named as Arsenius's heir, Gower neglects to keep this detail. This omission indicates that Gower is less interested in Moris than Trevet was. These are minor details, though. The significant alterations Gower makes in his version are that the tale focuses more on Constance, Allee has a noble reason for journeying to Rome, and Edwyn becomes Allee's lieutenant instead of his son.