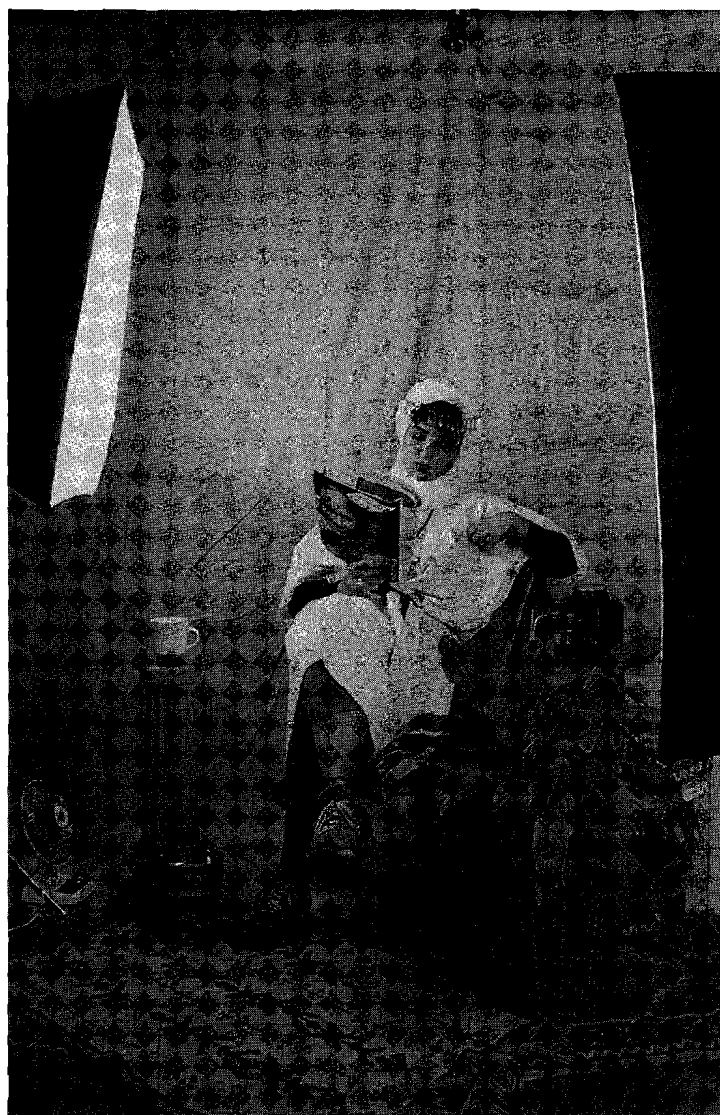


Western Representations of the Muslim Woman



Mohja Kahf

WESTERN REPRESENTATIONS
OF THE MUSLIM WOMAN
From Termagant to Odalisque

UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS PRESS



Austin

FRONTISPIECE: *Untitled, Self-portrait #3* by Yasmîna Bouziane

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To my parents, with love & thanks



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Alhamdulillah.

16.

17.

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Western Representations of the Muslim Woman

Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

A distinct narrative representing the Muslim woman abides in Western culture today. This narrative has formed a central part of Western discourse on Islam ever since the eighteenth century. The expository tenets of the narrative are “that Islam was innately and immutably oppressive to women, that the veil and segregation epitomized that oppression, and that these customs were the fundamental reasons for the general and comprehensive backwardness of Islamic societies” (Ahmed, 152). The core narrative itself, whittled to one sentence for working purposes, is this: the Muslim woman is being victimized. There are variations on the narrative: the woman may be a willing accomplice, or she may be escaping her victimization. But “the Muslim woman is being victimized” is the common axis undergirding a wide variety of Western representations.

The narrative about the Muslim woman is so diffuse as to be part of conventional wisdom in the Western world. A corporate advertiser can appeal to this received image in producing advertising copy precisely because the narrative operates at almost all levels of culture, from high to low.¹ Not only can a television cartoon program churn out a *Heathcliff the Cat*—level, children’s version of the stereotype,² but a university professor or an article in a major metropolitan newspaper can refer to the basic elements of this narrative without finding it necessary to substantiate them. This narrative

is so ubiquitous as to be invisible, except when crises cause it to be deployed in a direct fashion, as during Operation Desert Storm, when the narrative of the Muslim woman was activated to round out the story of the need for a civilizing American presence in the Gulf.

Challenges to Western representations of the Muslim woman, from feminist as well as Islamic apologist starting points, have tended to ignore the “representation” part and instead contest the realities of “the Muslim woman.” Those realities are the subject of historians and other social scientists, and require methods different from those of literary research. The actual condition of Muslim women is a serious and complex topic. Its study, however, does little to explain the development of the Western narrative. This narrative has a genealogy and logic of its own, emerging from developments in Western representations of gender, of the self, and of the foreign or Other.

The genealogy of the narrative, the study of its descent, “requires patience and a knowledge of details, and it depends on a vast accumulation of source material” (Foucault 1977, 140). There is nothing essential or timeless behind Western representations of the Muslim woman; they are products of specific moments and developments in culture. Recognizing these developments depends on a broad knowledge of Western cultural history, and familiarity with texts in which nary a Muslim woman surfaces but which are haunted by her presence nevertheless. It depends on the ability to detect the absence of this dominant narrative of the Muslim woman as well as its presence.

This book is a history of Western literary representations of the Muslim woman from medieval times to the period of Romanticism in the early nineteenth century. The value of such a history is that it will open today’s narratives of the Muslim woman to new interpretations, allowing us to see them not as “culminations” of a natural truth, but “merely the current episodes in a series of subjugations” (Foucault 1977, 148).

Before the time that Islam appeared on the world stage, “the West” did not exist; the peoples of what is now called western Europe did not conceive of themselves as a community. Memories of the Roman Empire had left traces of some differentiation between Europe and Asia (even though that empire had included parts of both). However, large numbers of European peoples had remained outside Roman civilization and outside Christianity (by then split into Western and Eastern branches). Then the Frankish Empire, allied with the Western Christian Church, emerged dominant.

After clashing with enemies to the north and the south, Christianity became the religion of the European peninsula (later with the significant exception of Spain). From these events came the wealth of legends around which a western European sense of identity coalesced and which later discourse (e.g., of the Renaissance, of Romanticism, of Modernism) bonded into a cohesive history, connected backward with Rome and Greece and forward with the modern European nation-states and their “New World” progeny.

Why then use the word “Western?” I am aware that to speak of “Western” culture, “Western” literature, a “Western narrative,” and so forth, is not to speak of one stable unitary field but of a multiplicity of cultures that have been soldered together at various times in history, sometimes violently, for ideological purposes. In each chapter I refer to specific texts and literatures: British, French, Spanish, and so forth. When I review trends and patterns throughout these bodies of literature, I use “Western” as a shorthand. Arthurian romance, for example, is simultaneously a product of England, France, and Germany. And despite the enormous differences between the Italian Renaissance and the English Renaissance, one can still speak of the Renaissance as a development in “Western” cultural history. I do not intend, by this usage, to make essential or exclusive claims about what constitutes “Western.”

I examine mainly canonical, male-authored texts in the Western tradition. At times, women have applied themselves to the patterns of Western representation of the Muslim woman which I describe. Even a Muslim woman writer could conceivably author such representations, since the issue is not the identity of the author but the mobilization of the core “Western” narrative.

The same objections can be raised about the term “the Muslim woman.” Is it not too nebulous and ahistorical? Who is this creature whose feet never touch earth? Why not speak about representations of Arab women, Turkish women, African women? Such distinctions may be valid when it comes to social science analysis of women in Islam. However, a basic point of this book is to rip apart at the seams the apparent fit between “the Muslim woman” as the object of representation in Western texts and real Muslim women with live cells and nerves and muscle tissue, women whose feet touch earth in Hamah or Rawalpindi or Rabat.

My subject is not “women who are Muslim” but “Western representation of the Muslim woman,” a category shaped by the literary conventions,

linguistic tropes, and narrative processes within Western cultural traditions. Using this category makes it possible to analyze representations across racial, ethnic, and even religious³ lines which become artificially separated if studied within the confines of the obscuring terms used by the various texts (such as "Macon," "pagan," "Paynim," "Saracen," "Turkish," "Circassian"). This is not to belittle the independent significance of the overlapping categories. "Muslim" and "Islamic" here refer to a general civilizational heritage, in which religious minorities have played an integral part, more than to the religion for which that heritage is named. The texts themselves do not refer to these figures as "Muslim women"; I offer the term as a useful way of seeing patterns in the representations of disparate literary periods.

The image of the Muslim woman in Western culture has been a changing, evolving phenomenon. Some of the basic elements of her image congealed even before there were any real Muslim women, because the representation builds on conventions of representing alien women (pagans, foreigners, Old Testament figures) already formed in Western texts before the advent of Islam. Afterward, the emphasis accorded the female image in the overall Western narrative of Islam undergoes transformations as that narrative alters.

The Muslim woman occupies a much smaller and less central place in that narrative in medieval texts than she does in the texts of the nineteenth century. Her nature, too, is different. Western concerns about Islam in medieval texts cluster around concerns other than women. The success of the world of Islam was the source of resentment in medieval outlooks which equated success with right. How could blasphemy be allowed to gain power and glory? Technological expertise, magical knowledge, and superhuman power help explain this conundrum and constitute major elements in the medieval Western narrative of Islam. The Muslim woman in medieval literature typically appears as a queen or noblewoman wielding power of harm or succor over the hero, reflecting in this the earthly might of Islamic civilization. These figures are loquacious and transgress the bounds of traditional femininity, reflecting the failure of their parent religion to inculcate proper gender roles. The rhetorical move of many medieval literary texts involving a Muslim woman is to subdue her, not to liberate her.

The basic plot of the story of the Muslim woman in medieval texts runs like this: A high-ranking noblewoman becomes attracted to a Christian man imprisoned by her father or husband and aids him in a battle between

Christians and Muslims. At the end of the battle, the lady converts, transfers the father's or husband's treasures to the Christians, embraces a more passive femininity, and becomes part of the European world. Despite this obligatory transformation, the image that remains dominant is the powerful female figure that was present through most of the text. Sometimes this exuberance is manifested in the physical size of Muslim "giantesses." In other instances, it is expressed as "wanton" or intimidating sexuality of the Muslim woman, who also holds higher social rank than the Christian hero.

"The Muslim woman is being victimized" is the litany of a later age in Western discourse. There is no veil and no seclusion in her medieval representations. There is often an attempt to recuperate her as a Christian or a European, rather than an emphasis on her irreducible alienness. The notion that a (formerly) Muslim woman could enter Europe as an equal—and even more than equal—character in a story, and the desirability of her doing so, is a characteristic of medieval literature; it could never happen so easily in nineteenth-century literature.

During the centuries of early European exploration, commercial expansion, and incipient empire-building, the Western narrative of Islam expands moderately in range and sophistication. Still, interest in the Muslim woman increases only minutely in proportion to the overall discourse on Islam. Traces of the medieval legacy are detectable in some Renaissance literature, but much of the aggressive, exuberant nature of the Muslim termagants and queens in medieval stories has dissipated. The Muslim woman in European literature of the Renaissance is between myths. In some texts, the Muslim female character shows features of the "wanton" queen of old; other texts provide foretastes of the helpless damsel, a type which emerges more fully in later periods. In many texts she is constituted by rather the same gender constraints as her Western counterparts, functioning in a field of similarity and "indifference" rather than in one of "Otherness."

In the seventeenth century, the veil and the seraglio or harem enter into Western representation of the Muslim woman. The veil still appears on European women as well, and has not yet become a prop associated exclusively with Islam. The word "seraglio" surfaces in English in 1581 and "harem" in 1634 (OED). Meanwhile, across the channel, "serails" materialize on the French stage, and Muslim slave women appear in some texts. Although the Muslim woman character is still to some extent "on the loose" early in this period, the "wanton" model drops away bit by bit, and a very diminished figure emerges. Gradually, the seraglio slides into place as

her setting. By the eighteenth century—but not before—it becomes the proper space of the Muslim woman in Western literary representation. The odalisque, or concubine, is the character who inhabits this new place, abject and angry or virginal and victimized, but always an oppressed creature. Though only recently confined to this cell, she is held to have always been there.

Historians, who of all folk should know better than to claim timelessness for any concept, still make such assertions as: “The harem has always pricked the imagination of Western people. . . . Students of exoticism and Orientalism have noted the *longevity* of the *topos* of the harem and its endurance in the face of political and cultural changes. From the earliest encounters between Christians and Muslims till the present, the harem as the *locus* of an exotic and abnormal sexuality fascinated Westerners” (Melman, 59–60; emphasis hers). Historians are human and may be excused for making the ubiquitous assumptions of the rest of our kind; still, it is my job here to point out mildly that none of these claims, as a matter of history, is true. Any survey of Western discourse on Islam that goes beyond the last three hundred years will not bear such statements out. The veil and the harem do not exist in medieval representations of the Muslim woman and are barely present in the Renaissance.

And yet, after the beginning of the modern era, a representation of the Muslim woman not linked to veil and harem is almost unimaginable. What causes this fascinating change of paradigm?

It is true that “the issue of women only emerged as the centerpiece of the Western narrative of Islam . . . as Europeans established themselves as colonial powers in Muslim countries” (Ahmed, 150). The “rise” of the subjugated Muslim woman concurred with the build-up of British and French empires in the nineteenth century, which, in subjugating whole Muslim societies, had a direct interest in viewing the Muslim woman as oppressed—even as their policies had oppressive effects on flesh-and-blood Muslim women. However, causally linking the rise of “harem discourse” to colonization proper is too specific and limiting. The question of the liberty, or lack thereof, of the Muslim woman appears as early as the seventeenth century. “I have heard that Christian ladies live with much more freedom than such as are born here,” says a Muslim woman in an English drama produced in 1624 (Massinger’s *The Renegado*). Ironically, her statement cues a misogynistic satire of English women’s “liberties,” and I believe the answer to the question lies in this most unexotic, homeward direction. If direct

Western colonialism and administration of Muslim societies were the only factor responsible for the emergence of the narrative of the Muslim woman as victim, this narrative should not begin to emerge so early. To imagine that the first shufflings of European states to establish trading outposts in the Muslim world instituted imperialist domination overnight is to indulge in an overreaching hindsight. Because we are so familiar with the shape of Western global dominance, we may seek it as an explanatory factor in vague ways, over periods when it does not apply.

The beginning of the question of liberty for Muslim women coincides with the beginning of the whole question of liberty in Western political discourse. Before the seventeenth century, the modern vocabulary for discussing individual liberty and human rights did not exist. The dawn of the harem issue also coincides with the beginnings of a gradual but pivotal shift in Western cultural norms of femininity and gender. The position of “man” in the universe seemed to have shifted in Europe, calling everything else, including the position of woman, into question. The middle ranks of the old society were stirring into early capitalist forms of production and reorganizing the sexual division of labor; the Church was losing its grip on society; monarchies were consolidating and centralizing into the form of the modern nation-state; European commercial enterprises across hitherto unknown oceans were flourishing, bringing them into novel forms of contact with multitudes of foreign peoples and civilizations. Europe’s sense of itself was changing.

An important change within the West concurrent with the earliest beginnings of its expansion into Islamic lands was the rise of the “domestic woman,” the altered, specifically modern criterion for what was desirable in a female (Armstrong 1987a, 3). This new ideology of middle-class female domesticity, coming into circulation in the eighteenth century, pushed against older, aristocratic notions of the female and the family, and against working-class realities. At the same time it pushed a new Muslim woman into the field of representation as a sort of negative female ideal. This discursive tactic allowed disparate groups within changing European societies to articulate common values by giving them a single social image they could agree to disparage. The image helped create the fiction of a Western, a *not-Oriental*, identity—and thus to prepare a supportive culture for colonialism as it began to gather momentum.

Both the external and internal processes, both the domination of foreign lands and the remapping of gender boundaries within European societies,

combine to compose the new Muslim woman in the Western imagination. I will explore how the narrative of the Muslim woman is intimately connected to dramas unfolding within “the West,” as well as between the West and the Islamic Other, to try to explain this distinct breach between the older model of the exuberant and overbearing Muslim woman—the ter-magant—and the model of the helpless, inferior Muslim woman—the odalisque.

The explicit association of Islam with the oppression of women does not reach full fruition until the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. When the Orient was Orientalized (to paraphrase Edward Said), when a vast and complex body of knowledge about the Islamic Other developed simultaneously with Western subjugation of that world, the image of the Muslim woman most familiar in the West today emerged. Relative to the growth of the discourse on Islam in general, the Muslim woman character grows all at once (as if she had eaten one of Alice in Wonderland’s distending cakes) into one of the overarching concerns of that discourse. Paradoxically, her figure simultaneously shrinks in subjectivity and exuberance. In the eighteenth century, the Muslim woman character turns into an abject harem slave, the quintessential victim of absolute despotism, debased to a dumb, animal existence. Then in the nineteenth century, this harem slave is rescued by the Romantic hero and recreated as the ideal of numinous femininity. The recurrent drama of incipient colonization, that of a heroic male conquest of a feminized Oriental land, is played out in literature upon the inert body of the Muslim woman. To turn to ironic use a couplet from an earlier century,

And when her city and her state was lost,
Then was her person lov’d and honor’d most.
(Tasso, 6.56)⁴

The Muslim woman character is “loved” and “honored” (to death) by the Romantic hero. The literature which condescends to express the most tender concern over the Muslim woman is the literature in which she is the limp shimmering object of a fetishizing male gaze and absented, if not killed outright. Romanticism inaugurates a portrayal of the Muslim woman in which these new clusters of elements are key: irredeemable difference and exoticism; intense sexuality, excessive ornamentation and association with fetish objects; and finally, powerlessness in the form of imprisonment, enslavement, seclusion, silence, or invisibility. These elements

are often manifested in a kind of narrative shorthand by the veil and/or the harem. A basic plotline is the battle between the Romantic hero and a Muslim man over possession of the Muslim woman, often figured as a contest of who can penetrate the harem wall and/or her veil and be master of the gaze over her body.

From bold queens of two worlds who bully, boast, and beckon in the early texts of Western Europe, to helpless harem slaves mutely marking space for two sets of masters at the other end of history, how did the image of the Muslim woman evolve? What caused her textual presence to deteriorate so? The question requires study of the intersection between two broad swathes of Western cultural history: the discourse on Islam and the discourse on gender. At each pivotal moment, what is the contact “on the ground” between the West and the world of Islam, including the variations among differing positions within those two categories? How do these material forms of contact inform Western discourse on Islam? At the same time, what, broadly speaking, are the material conditions informing gender issues within the Western world?

These two questions touch the fundamental issue of Western self-definition, both in relation to other civilizations and in relation to “Woman,” who has traditionally figured as the Other within. Against an understanding of the intersection of these two sets, I will study representations of Muslim women in Western literary texts spanning the period from the middle of the eleventh century to the middle of the nineteenth century. There are many cultural questions that may be so answered, and perhaps a personal one. Is there any way that I as a Muslim woman can deflect the debilitating impact upon me of dominant Western representations of “the Muslim woman” through a strategy of wayward readings of texts which contain her? I will suggest openings for such rereadings along the path of her history. Perhaps such a strategy may prove a means of eluding the crushing weight of this heritage while retaining its textured literary pleasures. Or perhaps it may, in the end, only resuscitate the authority of those representations. What is to be done with the history of “the Muslim woman” may emerge only after this history has been done.

Chapter Two

THE MUSLIM WOMAN IN MEDIEVAL TEXTS *“Dame, ne parlez tant!”*

How is the Muslim woman represented in medieval European literature? What is her significance in the European imagination when she first appears? It is not possible to address these questions today without beginning in the negative, by understanding what the Muslim woman in medieval texts is *not*. She is not what we expect her to be. The very notion of “medieval,” first of all, places us squarely in a European perspective because “for all non-European peoples, this much is common: that the concept of a Middle Age has no relevance” (Daniels 1975, 3). To be discussing Muslim women in this category of literature at all gives us a specific perspective. We who live at the end of the twentieth century, who are readers and writers of English or French or Spanish or German or Italian and who are, directly or indirectly, heirs to the cultural traditions of Europe, expect the Muslim woman to be represented in certain ways. The development of these expectations and these ways is precisely the subject of this work.

When we travel backward to the entrance of the Muslim woman into Western culture, there is a risk of burdening these first representations with later accretions—much as someone might attribute the current meaning of a word, with the sum of its accruals over the years, to its medieval cognate. Students asked to describe the role of Bramimonde in *La Chanson de Roland*

after she has been introduced as a woman on the Muslim side have responded that she is submissive and secluded. This response has not the slightest connection to the text itself.¹

The accretion with which the reader is likely to load medieval representations of the Muslim woman is the Western narrative of the Muslim woman from about the eighteenth century on, the narrative that represents her as innately oppressed, veiled, secluded, and silenced. Yet this characterization is entirely absent from the medieval representations. Such an absence cannot be completely accounted for by the formal limitations of medieval literature.

This chapter is not meant to be a comprehensive catalogue of all the Muslim female characters in medieval literature—there are too many. It is an appraisal of certain common features in their representation and asks how this figure is produced in these texts, at this time.

BRAMIMONDE AND HER HISTORICAL CONTEXT

One of the earliest portrayals of a Muslim woman in a European text is that of Bramimonde in *La Chanson de Roland*. The poem (its origins disputed by scholars who line up along a range from folk transmission to a single author-bard, Turolf) recounts the death of Charlemagne's nephew Roland at Roncevaux in 778 C.E. at the hands of the Saracen King Marsile of Spain. Bramimonde is Marsile's wife and first appears in *laisse* (stanza) 50 of this founding text of French literature.² The scene is Ganelon's meeting with King Marsile. The two have just sealed their plot against Roland by swearing, Ganelon on holy relics, Marsile on a book containing "the law of Mahomet and Tervagan." Valdabrun is the first to present a gift to Ganelon in the courtly gift-giving that follows the oaths (*laisse* 48). After Valdabrun, another "pagan," Climbörin, comes forth and presents Ganelon with his helmet. Queen Bramimonde, Marsile's consort, is the third gift-giver; she steps forward and gives Ganelon jewelry for his wife:

Atant i vint reine Bramimunde:

"Jo vos aim mult, sire" dist ele al cunte,

"Car mult vos priset mi sire e tuit si hune.

A vostre femme enveirai dous nuschas:

Ben i ad or, matice e jacunes,

*E valent mierz que tut l'aveir de Rume.
Vostre emperere si bones n'en out unchesu
Il les prises, enn sa hoese les butetu. (50³)*

(Queen Bramimonde came up that very moment:
“I love you dearly, sir,” she tells the count,
“my lord and all his men respect you so.
I’m sending these two brooches to your wife;
fine work of jacinths, amethysts, and gold,
they’re worth far more than all the wealth of Rome.
Your emperor has none so beautiful.”
Accepting them, he put them in his boots.)

The same phrase which brought in Valdabrun, “*Atant i vint*,” is used to introduce Bramimonde. She is one more personage in the courtly receiving line—a high-ranking one, but there is nothing more striking about her entrance than that of the other characters. The speech she makes is similar to those of Valdabrun and Climborin; each says something to the effect that there was no better in the world of the item they were giving. Her more elaborate boast specifies that neither Rome nor the emperor has anything to compare to the pieces she gives Ganelon—more on this later. Why should Bramimonde signify anything more than a minor figure at the edges of this drama, which is, after all, about the activities of men in a very martial, male-dominated world? How does Bramimonde resonate with wider circles of meaning in historical context?

Commonly dated around 1100, *La Chanson de Roland* emerged after a century in which two closely related processes had been developing: first, the “notion of Christian unity and of a certain internationalism” had begun to take hold in that area we have come to know as western Europe (Brault, 17). Second, “the dim realization that Islam constituted a widespread and growing threat to Christendom” ushered in a new awareness, albeit mostly hostile, of the Islamic world (Southern 1953, 54). This may seem, today, to be stating the obvious. However, the disparate peoples of the former western half of the Roman Empire had not previously perceived Islam or its peoples as the major challenge on their horizon. For example, over a century after Islam had appeared on the world stage and even after Muslims had taken al-Andalus (as the Arabs called Spain), crossed the Pyrenees, and occupied a chunk of southern France,⁴ the Carolingian chronicles (ca. 793)

regarded the Saracen⁵ advance as just another attack on par with the pagan Saxon threat in the north: "two terrible afflictions arose in two different parts of the empire" (in Rodinson, 4). The Low Middle Ages are characterized by a general lack of curiosity and interest in the world of Islam. The Carolingian Empire was oriented away from the Mediterranean Sea, inland and northward. Neither Christendom nor Islam in the eighth century regarded the other as a discrete entity, much less as the arch-enemy. "We must think in terms of gradually developing and changing cultures, not of abrupt transitions, and not of absolute demarcation between Arabs and Europeans . . .," Norman Daniels cautions (1975, 9).

In the tenth century, however, Otto I united what are today Germany and northern Italy (with its ports and Mediterranean outlook) and earned papal sponsorship to establish the Holy Roman Empire (962), which introduced pretensions to universal rule into the language of the times. "The imperial Carolingian ideology centered on continental Europe gave way to the ideology of Rome, which was founded essentially on the religious values of the papacy" (Rodinson, 6). The papacy was also active in the wars against Arab raiders and occupiers of Italy throughout this period, and discouraged the strategic alliances rival petty rulers had traditionally made with the Muslims. In addition, by the eleventh century, many of the northern European tribes had joined the Franks in Christianity, while Islam and its domains in Spain and elsewhere remained outside the fold. Residual Christian hostility to Roman and local paganism fused with hostility to Islam. The Reconquista began in the 1000s, as small guerrilla assaults on Muslim frontier posts in Spain. After 1050 it assumed the form of organized warfare, and by 1085, Christians had captured Toledo. Meanwhile, in 1060 Sicily had been wrenched from Muslim rule after 235 years.⁶ Religious homogeneity became the ascending rhetoric of the day in Europe: Muslim communities could no longer be tolerated in its midst.

The language of holy warfare was in full swing after the mid-eleventh century, as Cluniac monks, wanting a greater role for France, began to encourage Frankish knights to win glory for God and do penance for sins by fighting in Spain. Meanwhile, the Seljuk Turks had converted to Islam and were pressing on Europe from the East, finally pushing the Byzantine emperor to make the appeal to Latin Christendom that launched the Crusades. This increased the general sense that Europe was being squeezed between the pincers of a vast and powerful alien force. "This little portion of

the world which is ours is pressed upon by warlike Turks and Saracens: for three hundred years they have held Spain and the Balearic Islands, and they live in hope of devouring the rest," declared Pope Urban II at Clermont in 1095 (Southern 1953, 71). Urban's speech is signal not only because it inaugurated the First Crusade, but because it expresses a coming-to-consciousness of Europe as Europe, a discrete cultural entity distinct from Asia and Africa, and one which by right ought to be unified under Latin Christendom.

It matters little, in terms of relations with the Islamic world, whether *La Chanson de Roland* actually emerged in 1100 or, as disputed, a few years earlier, before the First Crusade. The "Latin Christian world's gradually developing ideological unity" had been producing a sharper image of the enemy before the Crusades commenced (Rodinson, 7). Crusading emotion had been building for decades, and with it, the image of Islam and its people as *the* paramount danger to the Christian world. When Bramimonde was produced, sometime between 1090 and the early years of 1100, this xenophobic emotion had risen to the highest pitch it would attain.

Thus if there is such a thing as a European outlook on the world, a sense of what is European as distinct from not-European, it began to develop and define itself in opposition to Islamic civilization. "Europe's notion of any foreign culture has been profoundly affected by its longer experience, up to the colonial age, of no other culture but Arabic" (Daniels 1975, 3), although when the Ottomans took the place of the Arabs, this was modified from "Arabic" to a vaguer, multi-ethnic "Islamic." China does not have a fourteen-hundred-year relationship of constant intimate comingling with Europe. Japanese did not cross-fertilize the languages of Europe with the vocabulary of astronomy, optics, mathematics, textiles, or of agricultural staples such as "rice" and "sugar," as Arabic did. India had no equivalents to the Mozarabs and Mudejars of Spain.⁷ Buddhism, Hinduism, and Taoism were not perceived as such grave dangers as to generate thousands of Christian polemical treatises, as Islam did. Negative images of pagan civilizations that preceded the Islamic, including Roman and Old Testament pagans, were absorbed into the image of the new enemy. From approximately the beginning of the eleventh century, Islam began to acquire a special and negative meaning in European discourse. And what could the Muslim woman signify, as the Other within that powerful Other?

LIMITATIONS OF THE "ORIENTALISM" ARGUMENT:
GEOPOLITICAL LANDSCAPE AND GENDER FOOTINGS
OF MEDIEVAL TEXTS

15

*The Muslim
Woman in
Medieval
Texts*

This sea change in the direction of Europe and its relationship to the realm of Islam which evolved during the eleventh century created a boom market for images of the Muslim world. Thus it would be natural, if one were looking for the origins of that "way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient's special place in European Western experience," to begin in this epoch (Said, 1). Nothing could be more misleading, however, than to subsume under the term "Orientalism" the production of texts about the Islamic world that began to thrive in the High Middle Ages. For Orientalism, as it has come to be defined after Edward Said's groundbreaking work, is not merely the distinction between "Orient" and "Occident" as a starting point for epistemology, a definition which could as easily apply to Homer as to Sir Richard Burton. Orientalism, in the specific sense that Said describes it, is a product of Western hegemony over the East, a discourse created from the relationship of Western power over the Orient to Western knowledge about the Orient. Said says:

Orientalism depends for its strategy on this flexible *positional* superiority, which puts the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the relative upper hand. And why should it have been otherwise, especially during the period of extraordinary European ascendancy from the late Renaissance to the present? The scientist, the scholar, the missionary, the trader, or the soldier was in, or thought about, the Orient because he *could be there*, or could think about it, with very little resistance on the Orient's part. (7)

It was very much otherwise in the Middle Ages; the European soldier, trader, or scholar ventured into the Islamic world at his greater or lesser peril, depending on the country and the circumstances. Christians made no serious sustained efforts to convert Muslims. They worked instead on the remaining northern pagans and contented themselves with fantasies of Prester John, a legendary Christian king supposed to live deep in Africa or Asia, who would one day conquer Islam from the East, convert everyone, and join his vast empire with Latin Christendom to form one universal

world Church. Scientists as such are too few to speak of, although there are translators of scientific texts; these scholars usually approached the Islamic urban centers of learning only after the tide of Muslim political power had receded (Southern 1953, 66).

There is no question who had the upper hand from the eighth to roughly the fifteenth century. Nor is there any question that Europeans perceived an Islamic hegemony, despite myriad political divisions within the world of Islam, and even despite the Mongol invasions and the fluctuation at the boundaries of Muslim empires. From the point of view of Muslims, a sense of cultural identification with "Dar al-Islam," the Abode of Islam, extending from al-Andalus to Southeast Asia, existed simultaneously with political divisions and doctrinal differences. For example, although the fourteenth-century globetrotter Ibn Battuta "was introduced in the course of his travels to a great many Muslim peoples whose local languages, customs, and aesthetic values were unfamiliar in his own homeland at the far western edge of the hemisphere, he never strayed far from the social world of individuals who shared his tastes and sensibilities and among whom he could always find hospitality, security, and friendship" (Dunn, 7). "Security" is the most important word there,⁸ as an indicator of political-military power and stability. It is easy to forget, when the lists of sultanates and emirates are dizzying to the eye, that long, stable periods are represented by words we read in a flash like "Ayyubid" or "Aghlabid." From a European perspective, too, the sun never seemed to set on the Abode of Islam. "To the South and the East of the Mediterranean as far as the mind could reach or report could verify, there were Moslems" (Southern 1953, 71). Even while Muslim dominion was receding in Spain, it was steadily advancing into eastern Europe under the Turks. There was never a break in the European sense of besiegement.

Thus European discourse about the world of Islam in the Middle Ages was not, strictly speaking, an imperialist project, nor did it accompany an imperialist project, as did nineteenth-century European discourse on the Orient. It is true that this discourse began at about the same time as the Crusades, but two factors differentiate that territorial aggression from imperialism. For one thing, it was, overall, a political and economic failure. A handful of tiny, disunited, short-lived outposts of European states may be an interesting experiment, or "heavily garrisoned trading post[s]," but they do not constitute imperialism (Daniels 1975, 201). For another, the Crusades were characterized by a lack of interest or competence in cultural

domination. Efforts at conversion of the Muslims were quickly abandoned, if they were even tried. There was no attempt to impose European language, customs, or culture on the indigenous population. If anything, the current flowed the other way: the Frankish settlers in "Outremer," as they called Syria-Palestine, adopted some local customs within a generation, to the shock of fresh arrivals from Europe (ref. Reinert). The object of the Crusades "was primarily European, not missionary; not to extend religion abroad, or even defend it from invasion, but to make its rule effective at home" (Daniels 1975, 113).

Not even the Reconquista, although it was ultimately successful, qualifies as imperialism proper. Despite the fact that by the eleventh century, Muslims had lived in al-Andalus as long as people of English stock have lived in America today, and despite the fact that most of the Christians involved had no actual hereditary claim to the regions taken, the Reconquistadores always maintained that they were only taking back what had originally belonged to them. While the Reconquista may have shown glimmers that would later develop into Iberian imperialistic ambition, the movement was too slow, too politically fragmented, and too piecemeal to be termed imperialism. Moreover, the reality on the ground and its perception by people who write are two different things. The Christian advance and Muslim retreat was so gradual (lasting at least from 1085 to 1492), and Christians were so used to seeing themselves as the underdog in this struggle, that even when Muslim power was seriously depleted in Spain, it took literary discourse on both sides some time to catch up. By no means do these harried motions bear resemblance to the age of European imperialism and its "sovereign Western consciousness out of whose unchallenged centrality an Oriental world emerged . . ." (Said, 8).

Said himself is careful to specify that Orientalism began as a discipline only after the middle of the eighteenth century (42). His thesis exposing the relationship between imperialism and Orientalism cannot be pinned willy-nilly onto the very different medieval European discourse about Islam, although some have tried to do so. Were we studying how contemporary texts from the Islamic world discussed medieval Europe, Said's general analytical approach might be applicable. Was there a tendency in classical Islamic discourse to "occidentalize" the Europeans because of the material relationship of this discourse to the realities of empire, particularly in those areas where Muslims ruled European minorities or initial majorities, as in Spain, former Byzantine territories, and the Mediterranean islands? (True,

the terms are not precisely reversed, since Islamic rulers never administered as colonies the heartlands of western Europe.) Such questions are outside the scope of this research. If it is medieval European discourse we want to study, we must take Said's starting point—the relationship of discursive knowledge to hegemonic power—and reformulate his questions to suit the study of a discourse produced by a vulnerable, overshadowed part of the world about a politically, militarily, economically, and culturally stronger one.

If they are not imperialistic energies, then, just what are the energies that went into the production of discourse about Islam and specifically the Muslim woman in medieval Europe? What are the material realities which pressed upon European writers and their audiences in this age and shaped the way they represented Islam and its peoples? How did the intensely perceived hegemonic dominance of Islamic civilization produce the European representations of the Muslim woman in high medieval texts?

To address these questions, approaches to Islam in medieval discourse need to be broken down and their connections to material realities examined. For example, at the same time that routine remote rivalry with the realm of Islam gradually metamorphosed into active focused hostility, the western European economy began to emerge from several centuries of subsistence-level stagnation. Trade with the Islamic territories was one factor in this slow economic growth. Islamic countries began importing raw materials, such as lead, silver, and copper, and also continued to import slaves from Europe (McEvedy, 58), while exporting luxury goods, which were nearly the only products cost-efficient enough to transport overland to the as-yet very small and out-of-the-way European market towns. Europe had only silver currency, while gold, with its obvious advantages for economic growth, was the currency of Islamic and Byzantine lands. The influx of money from Islamic lands to cash-poor Europe was needed for the economic development of market towns that would become urban centers and for the consolidation of the ruling aristocracy; it was the gold of renaissance. Reprehensible as every other aspect of Islamic civilization was to the orthodox clerical viewpoint, the material wealth of that civilization could not but be envied. Certain class or socioeconomic groupings thus had conflicting interests and ambivalent attitudes in representing Islam.

On one hand, ecclesiastical discourse needed Crusade propaganda from 1095 through the next century and a half and continued to emit Crusade-inspired material long after the Crusades were effectively over. This type of

discourse needed to represent Islam as persecutor, as in Pope Urban's speech, often nostalgically building on the type of the pagan Roman ruler as persecutor in the tradition of the ancient Church Fathers. While the *chansons* are obviously not Church or religious literature, their preservation, "canonization," and survival depended on the involvement of churchmen and Church institutions. Although they may have been popular, many of the *chansons de geste* and certainly *La Chanson de Roland* also enjoyed official sanction, and their outlook is aligned, to some (not entirely stable) degree, with that official sanctifying power.

In this view, the superior power and wealth of Islamic civilization is an affirmation of its corruption and of the moral superiority of the Christian through virtuous poverty. At the same time, such wealth is cause for half-acknowledged envy, resentment, "the hatred of the unprivileged for the privileged" (Daniels 1975, 23). Speaking about the persecution complex of the Christians of al-Andalus, Daniels says:

An approach to Islam which contributed to the common European tradition grew out of a seed-bed of resentment. The Christians were too many to forget that they had once been the masters. For some individuals the strain of living on the margins between different communities was intolerable. The difference could only draw attention to those aspects of Christian life which were flourishing in other parts of Europe, but which were not shared by the dominant Muslim community . . . These three factors gave Christians their vivid sense of being persecuted, even when nothing could be further from the facts. The Christian who did not attack Islam was sure of being left undisturbed, but he must always know that he was not free to attack. (1975, 31)

On the other hand, aristocratic or aristocratically sponsored texts, such as the cheerfully anticlerical *Aucassin et Nicolette*, might not toe the clerical line on Islam, just as aristocrats such as Frederic II Hohenstaufen flouted papal authority and sometimes made benign contact with real Muslims.

The aristocrats of the First Crusade shared ideological as well as territorial goals with the Church; they saw themselves as the instruments of God, who would act through them, his chosen people, to recover his land. Their religious motivations were no less genuine for being combined with a healthy attention to personal and dynastic profit. At the same time, rulers and local lords, both Muslim and Christian, often found it in their interest to make alliance with one another for economic or political gain, some-

thing which papal policy vehemently opposed. Such alliances might also open cultural avenues, if the parties involved happened, for example, to employ a Mozarab or Mudejar singer to entertain them while they were at it.

On the level of popular culture, melody, song, and folk stories poured into Europe from and through the Islamic world, carried by pilgrims, minstrels, merchants, and others who ventured in between. The extent and significance of their influence on European culture—or, more specifically, on the romance genre—still has not been adequately researched. The entry of romances from and through Islamic lands to medieval Europe was not a matter of Europeans finding “inspiration” in some remote Islamic fantasy realm of their own creation, as would happen later. Rather, textual materials from literature in Arabic, Persian, Turkish, and other languages of the region imposed and impressed themselves on a Europe that was in a position to receive such impressions without being entirely able to dictate the terms of the exchange. At a higher cultural level, there was grudging respect for the Islamic sciences, not just for their preservation of classical Greek scholarship, but for their obvious practical advances in technology and medicine. Translations from Arabic were a part of Islamic civilization that was valuable for Europe. This was acknowledged indirectly by the volume of translation in the twelfth century, whether sponsored by Church institutions or aristocrats.

On the gender horizon, as in the realm of cultural interaction, change was afoot. The eleventh- and twelfth-century Gregorian moral reform “marks a nadir in ideas of what women could and should be, setting ideals of womanhood which were both impractical and passive” (Stafford, 195). Such ideals co-developed with a curtailment of women’s property rights and of opportunities for female regency. This must have been notable in contrast to the abundance of women regents in earlier centuries, especially the late tenth century, when great chunks of western Europe were ruled by female regents. “The tendency, as the Middle Ages progressed, was toward a lessening of the public activity of women, a lower place in ecclesiastical opinion . . .” (Stuard, 9). Coupled with the trend to consolidate aristocratic lines and preserve family property by primogeniture (which generated discontent and frustration among younger sons that was only partially released through the Crusades), such a social role change in Europe helps to explain the lurking menace of female power, represented as politically transgressive, in *Roland* and other texts.

All the different kinds of material Muslim–European relationships I have cited are neither comprehensive nor mutually exclusive; they overlap and mingle in many representations of Islam. Together with the broad outlines of the gender ideology of the times, they produce features in the representation of the Muslim woman that are unique to medieval texts.

BRAMIMONDE THE TERMAGANT⁹

Roughly between 1100 and the 1400s, the new cognizance of Islam—this awakened curiosity, this kindled resentment—became manifest in the literatures of the area now known as western Europe. The Islamic hosts entered epic and romance, poetry and prose, aristocratic and popular literature; and the Muslim woman stepped into Western imagination.

Bramimonde is among the first, and the most prominent, examples of the figure, since the *chansons de geste* were the basis of much later literature. She is a character with a distinctive voice. It can be bitter: “*E! Sarraquce, cum ies oi desguarneie . . .*” (O Saragossa, today you’ve been despoiled . . .) (laisse 188). It can be stingingly caustic: “*Mar en irat itant!*” (He needn’t go so far!) (196). It can be whining: “*Dolente, si mar fui!*” (I’ve been doomed to wretchedness!) (201). It can rise shrilly in desperation: “*Aiez nos, Mahume!*” (Give us aid, Mohammed!) (264). But it is ringing, emphatic, unmistakable. It is textually produced and acknowledged: “*A l’altre mot, mult haltement s’escriet . . .*” (She cries out in a piercing voice . . .) (188); “*A voiz s’escrie . . .*” (She screams out shrilly . . .) (264). Her speech has plot repercussions. Bramimonde’s lament for Saragossa in laisse 188 is the first mention of the emir; she is the one to introduce, through speech, this important new element in the story. In the scene in which the emir’s envoys arrive in Marsile’s court to bring news of reinforcements, the overactivity of her voice twice interrupts the message being delivered. The envoys begin by asking the gods to “[s]alvent le Rei e guardent la Reine!” (protect the king and keep the queen from harm), at which:

*Dist Bramimunde: “Or oi mult grant folie:
Cist nostre deu sunt en recreantise:
En Roncesvals malvaises vertuz firentu
Noz chevaliers i unt laissiet cire;
Cest mien seignur en bataille faillirent.*

*Le destre puign ad perdu, n'en ad mie,
Si li trenchat li quens Rollanz, li richesu
Trestute Espaigne avrat Carles en baillie.
Que deviendrai, dulususe, caitiveu
Lasse! qu n'ai un hume ki m'ociet!" (195)*

("Such silliness I hear!" says Bramimonde.
"These gods of ours behave like renegades.
At Roncesvals they worked malicious wonders;
they let our chevaliers be massacred,
forsook this lord of mine in the thick of battle.
His right hand's gone—he'll get no help from it—
that rich count Roland cut it off for him.
All Spain will be in Charles' keeping now;
forlorn, aggrieved, what will become of me?
Alas! Will no one here put me to death?")

Finally the envoys can take no more. "*Dame, ne parlez tant!*" (Don't talk so much, my lady) one of them tells her curtly (196). But as soon as the envoys state the message from the emir, Bramimonde butts in again sardonically:

*Dist Bramimunde: "Mar en irat itant!
Plus pres d'ici purrez truver les Francs:
En ceste tere ad estet ja set anz,
Li emperere est ber e cumbatant,
Meilz voelt murir que ja fuiet de camp;
Suz ciel n'ad rei qu'il prist a un enfant,
Carles ne creint home ki seit vivant." (196)*

(Says Bramimonde: "He needn't go so far,
for you can find the Franks much nearer here;
they've sojourned in this country seven years.
The emperor's a noble fighting man;
he'd rather die than flee the battlefield;
to him each king beneath the sky's a child:
King Charles does not fear any man alive.")

Her husband senses the not-so-subtle rebuke in her words: Charles would never flee the battlefield as Marsile did. Marsile, too, tries to silence her and reclaim center stage:

"Laissez c'ester!" dist Marsilies li reis.

Dist as messages: "Seignurs, parlez a mei!" (197)

("Have done with that!" the king Marsilla says.

He tells the messengers: "Address me, lords.")

The dying king struggles to assert his presence from behind his overbearing wife. Finally, Bramimonde is so insensitive in attending, or not attending, to her wounded husband, that she seems to accelerate his death of grief—"de dol"—with her intense vocalization of despair. She is in the sickroom, but she is watching and reporting the result of Baligant's fight against Charles; when Marsile hears her shrieking the news of failure and shame, he gasps his last. Bramimonde is more interested in the significant action out on the battlefield than in the traditional female role of nursemaid to the wounded man in the bed behind her; in a sense, her shrieks kill him.

Bramimonde is always pushing forward, beginning with "*Atant i vint reine Bramimunde . . .*," her first appearance. She is frequently "in front of"—"*dedevant*." When her husband flees the battlefield and dismounts in the shade of an olive tree in Saragossa, there she is "[d]edevant lui," in front of him (187). When Emir Baligant arrives, Bramimonde "*vient curant cuntre lui*" (went running toward him) (201). She is the first to rush out to speak to the emir, not on behalf of her husband or his kingdom, but her own unhappy self: "*Dolente, si mar fui! / A hunte, sire, mon seignor ai perdu!*" (201) (I've been doomed to wretchedness! / I've lost my lord, sire, so disgracefully!). She is no object of the gaze in this state of forward presence; rather, she is "*curant*," running. Moreover, Bramimonde has a gaze of her own (264): "*Quant ele vit Arrabiz si cunfundre . . .*" (On seeing the disorder of the Arabs . . .) None of these qualities of Bramimonde is produced as good. Bramimonde, by acting aggressively and loudly, almost usurping power from her husband in the court scene with the envoys, fits the type of the shrew. This is consistent with the view of women in general in the medieval epic, in which assertive qualities are acceptable only in women who are Christian saints or martyrs, and thus dissociated from ordinary womanhood. It is also consistent with the tenor of the Gregorian reforms which span this period. Speaking of women in Anglo-Saxon epics, Jane Chance says queens without religious sanctity who behaved unconventionally are marked as immoral or diabolic (53).

One would expect the condemnation to be reversed in this case, since

Bramimonde's behavior is disruptive not to good Christian society, but to "tort" (wrong) Muslim society. And it is true that Bramimonde's interruptions contain material that is preparatory for her conversion, such as her increasing admiration for Charles. But does bad behavior in a "tort" society add up to ultimate good? Not quite. Pushy Bramimonde can be censured whichever way she is measured. This is due to the strange cohabitation of Christian values and knightly feudal values in the epic.

In the misogynistic quasi-clerical bent of the poem, the only good female is a passive one. We observe the behavior of an exemplary Christian woman in Aude, a completely inert figure whose only action is to die and whose only speech is to cancel her existence: "*Ne place Deu ne ses seinz ne ses anges / Après Rollant que jo vive remaigne!*" (268) (May God, his angels, and his saints forbid / that after Roland I remain alive.). Roland exegetes usually point to Aude's willed death as an "extension of her fiancé's" (Brault, 317), as a martyrdom "in witness to a principle" (Cooke, 177). However, Roland has a character and a life in the text before his sacrifice. Aude's physical presence is nothing but a negation of herself.

Meanwhile, in terms of values based on the feudal economy, such as shame, honor, vengeance, and loyal vassalage, Bramimonde's speech in front of the envoys is tinged with disloyalty to her lord and husband. It has often been pointed out how similar the Saracens in *La Chanson de Roland* are to the Franks. They have not only the same equipment, but also the same values, the same concepts of shame and honor, the same type of feudal hierarchy. They even speak the same language, French, and understand each other perfectly without interpreters. Marsile gives his glove to his vassal in the same way Charlemagne does; Marsile's nephew takes twelve peers to attack Roland and his twelve comrades; the Saracens worship a trinity just like the Christians', except that it is false. And Bramimonde's first appearance as gift-giver resembles that of many other European women in medieval epic. For example, in Anglo-Saxon literature, the aristocratic woman's "bond with her husband as well as with the warriors of her tribe was expressed symbolically through the giving of treasure" (Chance, 5). The fact that Bramimonde is a Saracen does not change the criteria by which she is measured as a woman from those which would be applied to any Christian European woman in similar circumstances. It is the wrongness, not the difference, of Bramimonde and the Saracens that has been emphasized in *Roland*. As Roland says, "*Paien unt tort e chrestiens un dreit*" (Pagans

are wrong and Christians are right) (laisse 79). It doesn't matter if her lord is a "tort" Muslim; the feudal codes still hold. Even the other Muslims are better than Bramimonde on the level of feudal values: at least many of them are admired for their military prowess and loyal vassalage. "Turolde," if fleetingly, wishes some of the finer knights were Christians.

Thus Bramimonde can be blamed by both overlapping value systems, the one based on Christian dogma and the one based on the late feudal economy. The amalgamation of those values produced not only *La Chanson de Roland* but the First Crusade. This is one point on which they agree.

While she is "forward" in other ways, Bramimonde is not explicitly sexualized. Although her first words are "*Jo vos aim mult, sire*" (I love you dearly, sir), this public sentiment is an extension of Valdabrun's ceremonious declaration of *amitie*, love or friendship, as well as of her husband's alliance with Ganelon, as she indicates: "*Car mult vos prisent mi sire e tuit si hune*" (My lord and all his men respect you so). As many medievalists have pointed out, the verb *amer* indicates a diplomatic or political relationship and not an emotional one; it is frequently used in *Roland* in the sense of "to make peace with," "to cease hostilities," "to form alliance with" (Jones, 36). There is scholarly agreement that *Roland* contains almost none of what have come to be called "courtly love" conventions. In the context of Bramimonde's speech, "*aim*," love, can be understood best as public esteem.

It is odd that Gerard Brault, who cautions that "one must not mistake *amistiez* in v. 622 for anything but a convenient and temporary alliance" (157), goes on to characterize Bramimonde's speech to Ganelon as one of "veiled eroticism," veiled because outright eroticism would tarnish too much a character Turolde is reserving to illustrate the theme of conversion (158). This despite the fact that other works of the period—including the version of *Roland* in *The Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle*, "the clumsy handiwork of pious propagandists eager to turn to the Church's advantage the broad appeal of popular, poetic legend" (Short, 1)—find no difficulty in portraying sexually aggressive Muslim women who are later redeemed through conversion. Although Brault affirms the conventional and impersonal nature of Bramimonde's actual words, he continues, "Yet Bramimonde's words become bold and suggestive when situated in their true context, for the voluptuous and amoral Saracen lady is a stock character in epic literature" (157). Not yet. Bramimonde cannot be described in terms of this particular stock character because she is its prototype. Brault's assumptions about Brami-

monde demonstrate the retroactive fallacy described at the beginning of this chapter, interpreting the medieval character through the grid of later accretions in the representation of the Muslim woman.

A person is hard put to find textual support for calling Bramimonde “voluptuous.” In a text predominantly inhabited by men, Bramimonde’s appearance does not stir up erotic desire in the way Aude’s, for example, does. Aude’s beauty and her death make her the point of intersection of two very strong emotive currents, both closely related to sexual desire.

However, there is contextual basis for attributing to Bramimonde some transgressive sexuality, although not of the scopophilically organized kind that focuses on appearance. In the poem’s celebrated parallels between the Muslims and the Christians, Bramimonde is Aude’s pagan mirror image. Just as Aude greets the emperor upon his arrival in the city, Bramimonde greets the emir; Aude seems to faint at Charles’ feet, while Bramimonde before the emir theatrically parodies that faint. Given this, the emphasis on Aude’s virginal quality would imply the opposite quality for Bramimonde. The original audience would likely have understood this hint at Bramimonde’s transgressive sexuality; it could have come out in the unwritten parts of the poem’s performance, such as tone of voice.¹⁰ Another contextual factor is the medieval heritage of images of pagan women. Because Bramimonde is not Christian, the qualities of earlier not-Christian, “*tort*” women accrue to her. And nearly every “*tort*” woman in medieval texts, from Eve, Jezebel, and Delilah, to Semiramis and Cleopatra, is transgressively sexual.

Still, sexual aggressiveness is a relatively slender part of Bramimonde’s character. There is a lack of eroticization of Bramimonde’s body. Again, compare her to the inert Aude: Roland’s fiancée comes in as “*une bele dame*” (a lovely girl) and dies in a faint at Charlemagne’s feet as “*Alde la bel*” (Alde the Beautiful). These two phrases frame her brief appearance in the text like a halo or a mystique (268, 269). The few lines the poem spares to Aude formulaically describe her complexion, her posture, her anatomy, and so provide a scopophilic approach (i.e., an approach organized around visual pleasure):

*Pert la culor, chet as piez Carlemagne,
Sempres est morte; Deus ait mercit de l'anme!
Franceis barons en plurent si la pleignent.* (268)

*Alde la bel' est a sa fin alee
 Quidet li reis que el se seit pasmee;
 Pitet en ad, si'n pluret l'emperere
 Prent la as mains, si l'en ad relevee;
 Desur l'espalle ad la teste clinee. (269)*

(Her color gone, she drops at Charles' feet,
 is dead—may God have mercy on her soul!
 The lords of France will weep and mourn for her.

The end has come for Alde the Beautiful,
 although the king believes that she has fainted.
 The emperor feels pity for her, weeps,
 and takes her by the hands to lift her up;
 her head has fallen down upon her shoulder.)

Aude is thus doubly an object of the male gaze, the gaze of Charlemagne and the barons, and that of the jongleur and his audience. But Bramimonde is not given scopophilic treatment, not even when she is baptized in the waters at Aix (laisse 290), a scene which could easily have lent itself to the pleasure of the look. Bramimonde is no Flaubertian Salamambo. Unfetishized, not the object of intense sexual attention, she moves briskly from action to action. There is no mysterious revealing or titillating unveiling when Bramimonde enters; the possibility for scopophilic pleasure is unexploited.

As a “forward” woman, the character of Bramimonde inserts into the poem a subtle challenge to its dominant feudal-Christian ideology. However, the text shunts her aside so much that many first-time readers cannot recall her, while many specialist studies of *Roland* barely mention her. Most *Roland* scholars consider her marginal to the central topics: the conflict between the outnumbered Christians and their pagan ambushers, the contrast between Roland and Oliver's characters, the betrayal and punishment of Ganelon, and the Abrahamic figure of Charlemagne. Some discuss her in terms of Turol's aesthetic talent, crediting Turol with skillfully developing Bramimonde to illustrate the “Theme of Conversion” in the poem, for example: “Thus the surrender of Saragossa by Bramimonde, which represents, at the level of the plot, the culmination of Charlemagne's expedition into Spain, succeeds at the same time in expressing, on a metaphorical level,

the idea of spiritual conquest, a simple variation of the Theme of Conversion" (Brault, 313).

Yet Bramimonde is more deeply embedded in the central conflict than is apparent at first glance. She is an active participant in the intense competition between the Franks / Christians and the Saracens / "pagans." Her opening remarks in the gift-giving speech to Ganelon hurl defiance against the icons of Frankish power and indicate her will to participate in what Gilbert and Gubar call "significant action" rather than the idealized feminine role of "contemplative purity." While the other gift-givers merely say that the world in general has no better of the item they are giving, the queen names names:

*Ben i ad or, matice e jacunes,
E valent mielz que tut l'aveir de Rume.
Vostre emperere si bones n'en out unches.*
(50)

(Fine work of jacinths, amethysts, and gold,
they're worth far more than all the wealth of Rome.
Your emperor has none so beautiful.)

With this barb, Bramimonde launches the first attack on the Franks in this martial epic. She strikes a blow at the prestige of the empire by disparaging its wealth, in a value system in which wealth and success are inseparable from moral superiority. "Rome" and "emperor" are icons not only of Carolingian power in the historical setting of the story, but more pointedly of Latin Christendom's power in the era spanning the First Crusade. Bramimonde carries the gold of Islam. The association of women and war loot is an old familiar one.¹¹ The *Roland* text accomplishes a metonymic substitution of Bramimonde for Saracen treasure. That is why not only must Saragossa be conquered, but Bramimonde must be carried back to France, specifically to Charlemagne's capital, Aix. On the way home, Charles stops at Bordeaux to place Roland's horn on the altar of the city's most ancient church, a horn he has filled to the brim with gold. Saragossa, Bramimonde, military victory, and gold are linked together in the same *laisse*:

*Passet la noit, si apert li clers jurz.
De Sarraguce Carles guarnist les turs,
Mil chevaliers i laissat puigneurs;
Guardent la vile ad oes l'Empeur.*

*Muntet li Reis e si hune trestuit,
E Bramimunde, qu'il meinet en sa prisun;
Mais n'ad talent li facet se bien nun.
Repairiet sunt a joie e a baldur.
Passent Nerbone par force e par vigur
Vient a Burdele la citet de valur:
Desur l'alter seint Sevrin le barun
Met l'olifant plein d'or e de manguns:
Li pelerin le veient ki la vunt. (267)*

(The night goes by, the light of day appears.
King Charles has manned the Saragossan towers.
He stationed there a thousand fighting knights;
they occupy the town for the emperor.
The king mounts up, along with all his men
and Bramimonde—he takes her as his captive.
He only plans to do what's good for her.
They head for home, rejoicing and triumphant.
With lively force they take Nerbonne in passing
and reach Bordeaux, the city of [renown].
On the altar of the noble Saint Seurin
he sets the horn, brimful of gold mangons:
the pilgrims going there can see it still.)

With this, Charles has parried Bramimonde's initial blow at his personal and imperial wealth. Success, wealth, power, and "*dreit*" are zero-sum quantities in the outlook of *Roland*. The gold was on the Muslim side at the beginning of the conflict; at the end, it appears on the Christian side, Bramimonde having acted as the transferring agent. What is more, with this touch the poet vouches for the authenticity and legitimate descent of the poem. Anyone can go and see the gold and relics at Bordeaux, he claims. The three centuries separating Charlemagne from the First Crusade thus drop away, and the latter Franks can find support for their crusading enterprise in the example of the earlier Franks as perceived by their heirs.

For this descent of the poem to be legitimate, both the gold and Bramimonde must be cleaned of the taint of "paganism," or Islam, with which they are initially associated. Before she can be incorporated into the heartland of Europe, Bramimonde must be emptied of her Saracen content. In her case, this means not only changing her name for a Christian one, but

also erasing all the facets of her character that have been developed through the poem thus far. Bramimonde must be converted by the end of the poem, not only to Christianity, but to Christian, or Aldian, femininity. Her presumption in jumping into the fray of male action is rebuked by the forcing of feminine passivity on her.

This surrender is accomplished not only in the content but also in the form of the text. Her surrender of the towers in *laisse* 265 is also the surrendering of her character's voice in the poem; this is the first *laisse* in which Bramimonde is spoken of and does not speak. Up until this point, Bramimonde has spoken every single time her name has been mentioned in a *laisse* (50, 187, 188, 195, 196, 201, 264). She has also usually been the subject of the main clause of the sentence, as in 187: "*Devandat lui sa muiller Bramimunde / Pluret e criet . . .*" (In front of him his woman, Bramimonde, / is sobbing, wailing . . .); and 195: "*Dist Bramimunde . . .*" (Says Bramimonde . . .). By contrast, in the surrender verses, which approach the scene from the point of view of Charlemagne, Bramimonde is part of a conjunctive clause: "*Fiers est li reis a la barbe canue, / E Bramimunde les turs li ad rendues*" (The grizzle-bearded king is filled with pride, for Bramimonde has given him the towers) (265).

Making her surrender in *laisse* 265 more dramatic, the preceding *laisse* raises Bramimonde to the highest point possible in the narrative, physically, by placing her in the tower, and in terms of narrative, by allowing a rare, brief convergence of the narrative point of view with a woman's point of view. "The rout of Baligant's army is first narrated as if seen by a spectator on the battlefield itself (*laisse*s 262–263), then, as the remnants of the Saracen horde, shrouded in a sinister cloud of dust (v. 3633), approach the gates of Saragossa, the point of view changes—this shift is marked by the phrase *d'ici qu'en Sarraguce* in v. 3635—to become that of Bramimonde" (Brault, 311).

The queen gives up her vantage point on the towers whence she had surveyed the battleground. Her uncharacteristic silence and passivity, which continue for the remainder of the poem, begin here: "*En France dulce iert meenee caitive / Ço voelt li reis, par amur cunvertisset*" (She is to be led captive to sweet France. / The king desires that she recant through love) (266). Taken under guard to convert in France, Bramimonde, queen now only of passive grammatical constructions, makes no more speeches. (Again, it is difficult to accept the cognate-derived translation "love" for *amur* here; it is more likely that *amur* in this context is related to the political / diplomatic meaning of "peacefully") (Jones, 36).

The *Roland* lacks the sophistication to imagine an enemy that is truly different, let alone to exoticize that difference, to make alluring what is strange. In all the *laissez* that describe the Saracens—their physical appearances, their actions and deeds and world—there is not a single exotic object, prop, or phrase, not a single curved sword hilt, snowy white turban, or cry of “Amaun!” Perhaps the only sight in the poem that would qualify as exotic is the black army which enters the fray just after Roland has sounded his horn:

*Quant Rollant veit la contredite gent
Ki plus sunt neirs que n'en est arrement,
Ne n'unt de blanc ne mais que sul les denz,
Ço dist li quens: “Or sai jo veirement
Que boi murrum, par le mien escient.” (144)*

(As soon as Roland sees this outlaw race,
whose members all are blacker than is ink
and have no white about them, save their teeth,
the count says: “Now I’m absolutely sure,
beyond a doubt, that we shall die today.”)

Difference is monstrous; it brings death. The sight of real, unerasable difference, face to face, is unbearable. The idea that strangeness and unfamiliarity can exude an allure—the idea of the exotic—is unthinkable in this context.

Bramimonde is doubly strange, by creed and by gender, and doubly unbearable for the dominant ideology of the poem, more so because of the material advantage of “Islam” that was manifest in European political life and perceived in European writings. She has to be properly feminized for the story to be closed. Only when Bramimonde has been converted to Christianity and to femininity is the battle really over. Christened and quieted, she is renamed Julianne.¹² Yet even after she has been “julienned,” she materializes as Bramimonde once again, in the last *laisse*. After the whole course of the poem, Charles is disturbed to realize that yet more unconverted pagans plague the borders of his world.

*Quant l'emperere ad faite sa justise,
E esclargiee est la sue grant ire,
En Bramimunde ad chrestientet mise,
Passet li jurz, la nuit est aserie,*

*Li Reis se culchet en sa cambre voltice.
Seinz Gabriel de part Deu li vint dire;
"Charles, sumun les oz de tun emperie,
par force iras en la tere de Bire,
Rei Vivien si succrras en Imphe
A la citet que paien unt asise.
Li chrestien te recleiment e creint."
Li Emperere n'i volsist aler mie:
"Deus!" dist li Reis, "si penuse est ma viel!"
Pluret des oilz, sa barbe blanch tiret.
Ci falt la Geste que Turolodus declinet. (291)*

(The emperor, on meting out his justice
and satisfying his enormous rage,
led Bramimonde to Christianity.
The day goes by, and night comes quietly:
the king has lain down in his vaulted chamber.
Saint Gabriel came down from God to say:
"Call up the armies of your empire, Charles,
for you are to invade the land of Bire
and there assist King Vivien at Imphe,
the city which the pagans have besieged;
the Christians there call out and cry for you."
The emperor had no desire to go:
the king cries "God, how tiring is my life!"
His eyes shed tears, he tugs at his white beard.
The story that Turolodus tells ends here.)

The Frankish emperor occupies a telling space in Bramimonde's opening speech: she has mentioned him in five of her seven speeches. Now, on the opposite side, Bramimonde occupies the penultimate spot in the emperor's closing thoughts. This *laisse* is often cited as an indication of "Tur-old's" ingenuity (e.g., Brault, 336–337) because with it he brings the story back to its beginning; he produces the metaphysical cause of Charles' egress, thus making the narrative circle perfect and circumscribing Bramimonde within it.

Yet after the reverberations from the last *laisse* have died down and the poem is over, the old Saracen Bramimonde overshadows her pale Christian successor. It was a sudden silencing that wrenched out the old Brami-

monde, cut her vocal cords mid-shriek, and substituted for her a flat, undeveloped Julianne. This woman's conversion, her being Julianne, is crucial to "Turol's" meaning—yet in the very last *laisse*, just before Charles' divine dream, she is referred to again as Bramimonde. The poet is not in full possession of Bramimonde's meaning; he has difficulty making her "Julienicity" stick. The "Theme of Conversion" backfires. It is the bad Bramimonde, the "*tort*" Bramimonde, whom the poem has convincingly brought to life and cannot seem to kill. Bramimonde is simply a more successful creation than Julianne. Termagant Bramimonde's vituperations echo in the ear afterward. This jarring quality of Bramimonde remains to bother the edges of *La Chanson de Roland* and undermine the perfect circularity of its logic.

THE LIKES OF BRAMIMONDE

The overbearing Muslim noblewoman who converts and leaves her country to enter a Christian European society appears over and over in medieval texts. The Anglo-Norman cleric Orderic Vital invents a Saracen princess when he tells the story of Bohemond's Eastern imprisonment in his *Historia Ecclesiastica* (1130–1135); she falls in love with the prisoner, converts, and follows him to France. Orderic is the first to introduce what F. W. Warren calls "the story of the enamoured Moslem princess," whose essential elements are "the release of a prisoner by the daughter of his captor; her conversion to his faith; her return with him to his native land" (346). To which we may add, the woman's active pursuit or wooing of the man and the conflict with her father which this precipitates. This character type, called a "wanton queen" in some romances, has great rank and power in her own country, but leaves it for a lower ranking, less powerful position as a Christian wife. Despite that, the lasting contribution, the collective impact, of these representations is the initial character of the termagant.

Orderic's story is this: the Frankish crusader Bohemond is captured by the Turkish Emir and imprisoned with other Frenchmen. The Emir's daughter, Melaz, visits them in the dungeon, avidly discusses comparative religion, and befriends them. Two years later, the Emir is at war with his brother. Melaz lets the prisoners out to help her father on the battlefield. When they return to their prison as promised, she incites them to seize the citadel, which "held an immense treasure" (Warren, 341). Her father returns and upbraids Melaz, who announces her Christianity. Melaz proceeds to "arrest all the Moslems in the palace, garrison it with the

French and usurp the power" (342). The Emir gives in, promises safe passage to Antioch for the Franks, gives Melaz permission to marry Bohemond, and even joins his daughter in Christianity. After the Christians have been escorted to Antioch by its king, Bohemond convinces Melaz to accept his cousin Roger as husband in his stead. Thus with peace and harmony all around, "in the midst of universal plaudits the wedding took place" (343).

Warren traces some elements of this story, minus conversion, all the way back to Seneca, but maintains that Orderic knew nothing of this source. Orderic's source, via pilgrim or knight, is the *Thousand and One Nights*, which contains several stories that have all these elements—except, of course, the conversion is to Islam (Warren, 348; Metlitzki, 165). Melaz is Orderic's invention (her name comes from a Greek word meaning "swarthy"), whereas the other characters, as well as the bare facts of Bohemond's imprisonment and his captor's skirmish with a neighboring Muslim ruler, are historical (Warren, 348–349; Metlitzki, 162). Orderic, as a churchman, involves Tancred in Bohemond's rescue "to convey the impression of Christian unity," when actually the king of Antioch did not even contribute to Bohemond's ransom (Metlitzki, 165). Nor did the historical Bohemond keep his promise of peace; upon release he promptly attacked Aleppo.

Josian is another Saracen princess who converts for love of a Christian knight and follows him to England as his wife in the Middle English *Sir Bevis of Hampton* (1300), a romance so popular it "acquired a circulation from Ireland to the Urals" (Bolton, 78). Once again the Muslim princess "characteristically pursues her own ends with cool deliberation" (Metlitzki, 168). The beautiful Josian, white as "snow on red blood," enters unbidden into Bevis' chamber, cures him with her medical arts "so well taught" (Ellis, 243), throws her arms around his neck, and otherwise makes her desire obvious. It is Josian who dresses him for battle and gives him the magnificent sword named Morglay and the famous steed named Arundel. After the battle, she brings him into her own chamber, wines and dines him, and announces to him that she wants "Thy body in thy shirt all naked" more than "all the good that Mahoun maked" (251). Her promise of conversion is a desperate last attempt to overcome Bevis' virtuous objections to her wanton proposition, and it works. Markedly contrasted to this is her utter passivity in the conversion scene, in which she speaks no words and submits "white as any swan" to the submerging by the bishop, who is Bevis' paternal uncle (264).

In *The Romance of the Sowdone of Babylon*¹³ and of *Ferumbras his Sone who conquere Rome* (early 1400s), the Sultan's daughter Floripas converts, heaps abuse on her father and his religion (besides murdering several Muslims), then marries a Christian knight who had been her father's prisoner, and defects to his land. In this popular second-rate romance, the Sultan dotes on Floripas ("My doghtir dere, that arte so free"), listens to her counsel, forgives her for smashing the jailer's skull with a key-clog, and entrusts her with his valuable Christian prisoners (l. 1615). The rather fierce Floripas pushes her hapless old duenna, who would not let her feed the prisoners, out a window to be dashed against the rocks, preaching "who so wole not helpe a man at nede / On evel deth mote he dye!" (ll. 1581–1582). Floripas keeps the prisoners in her bedchamber, where she forces a proposal of marriage (mitigated by her promise to convert) on Sir Guy, whose options are understandably limited. Having extracted Guy's promise, celebrated by kissing and merrymaking among all the prisoners in her chamber, Floripas unleashes the Christians against the well-stocked palace; they seize it and throw her father out. Before the battle is pitched the next morning, wanton Floripas bids all the Christian knights "take your sporte" (l. 2087) that evening with her fair maidens, who, even in "Babylone," are "white as swan" (l. 2749). During the blockade of the castle, Floripas relieves the Christian knights' hunger with her magic girdle. When they run out of projectiles, she gives them her father's silver and gold to throw, upon which the Sultan, afraid for his treasure, stops the attack.

After many tedious plot twists, Charlemagne arrives and saves the day. Floripas presents him with holy relics from Rome, won by the Saracens in previous battles. The Sultan is given an opportunity to convert—although his daughter hollers for his immediate execution—but he spits in the baptismal font and gets the axe. Floripas is then baptized. Not surprisingly, all direct speech by Floripas stops at this point; the baptism of this erstwhile very busy and outspoken woman is conducted in one short phrase in the passive: "Dame Florip was Baptysed than" (l. 3191), and that is her last mention. Just rewards are distributed all around by Charles:

Thus Charles conquered Laban
The Soedone of Babyloyne
That riche Rome stroyed and wan
And alle the brode londe of Spayn.
(ll. 3259–3262; p. 93)

and the story is closed with Charles-come-lately in the spotlight and Floripas nowhere to be seen.

Unlike Bramimonde, Josian and Floripas are sexy minxes, no mistake. So are numerous other "wanton" Muslim queens and princesses in the *chansons* and romances. The transgressive quality which is expressed as shrewish loquaciousness in Bramimonde manifests itself in sexual looseness with later Muslim heroines. But they are not merely passively seductive; they are active seducers. These Muslim princesses initiate much action in numerous *chansons de geste* and romances (Daniels 1984, 79; Warren, 357). They are often knowledgeable in the medical arts, with a hint of magic. Thus their sexual confidence is often linked to superior scientific, technical, and supernatural knowledge. It is an active sexual quality rather than one which would render them objects of the gaze.

In medieval texts, the sexuality of Muslim women is not a state of objectification for male pleasure to which they are condemned by a severe, prohibitive religion, as eighteenth-century views of Islam will represent. Here the Muslim woman's sexuality is an indication of her outrageous liberty and a part of the permissive, orgiastic morality which medieval Church polemicists saw in Islam¹⁴ and fussed about as a cause of much Christian renegadism (Daniels 1984, 70). Meanwhile the loose sexual mores of these Muslim women are not all that different from those of courtly European women: the preoccupations of the religious line of thought do not make the whole picture. But as far as the secular voice in medieval literature is concerned, there is little attempt to represent the actual manners and customs of other peoples; all the dalliances are based on high medieval European conventions of amour, *fin* and not so *fin*. "The great knights and ladies, both Saracen and Christian, behave according to the poet's fancy, but behave alike" (Daniels 1984, 78).

There is one remarkable footnote to Floripas in *The Sowdone*: the giantess "Barrok, the bolde," is the only other named Muslim woman in the story. This superhuman "dame" appears and is dispatched within all of sixteen lines, but not before she takes her toll. She is the wife of the tollman Alagolfre, who is killed for refusing to let the Christian knights across the bridge. Barrok then rages forth, smiting all whom she strikes with her scythe "like a develle of helle" (l. 2948) and doing much damage to the Christians until King Charles bashes her brains out of her head and the "cursed fende fille down dede" (l. 2952). "Many a man hade she there

slayn, / Might she never aftyr ete more brede!" the next lines exclaim. She is mentioned again briefly after the Saracens have been vanquished, when her two giant infants are found by a Christian knight. Charles is delighted and christens them Roland and Oliver, anticipating the accrual of their fighting strength to his cause—they are already a strapping four feet tall at seven months. But they refuse all food, wanting only their "dame's" milk; this adds, in retrospect, a kind of desperate pathos to Barrok's earlier viciousness. Finally, "Thay deyden for defaute of here dam" (l. 3036). Here is one of the few Muslim women in medieval texts who is not noble or royal. She shares, however, Floripas' iron gut for murder and mayhem and a certain fierce quality. Other Muslim women tower above the Christians in aristocratic stature; deprived of that type of power, this lower class Muslim woman is still represented as a formidable challenge. She is a kind of Grendl's mother who, despite the inevitability of her destruction, manages to leave behind a striking picture of the enemy superpower of Islam in female form.¹⁵

One issue in the "converts, marries, and defects" theme—though not the only one, and maybe not the one that explains the most—is obviously the traffic in women as a function of the power struggle between men. The sultans and emirs, fathers and husbands of the women who convert are typically portrayed as inept rulers, warriors, and strategists despite their authority over vast realms. That their daughters or wives betray them and get into bed with Christians expresses a will to challenge Islamic power, using women as accoutrements. This is a variation on the "master-plan" of a medieval usurper: "murder the king, get the gold-hoard, marry the widow. Since the widow usually sat on the gold the two went together" (Stafford, 50). That the commodity value of Muslim women is so great, usually greater than that of whatever Christian women are in the texts, and that they are so prized as ornaments, is in striking contrast to the representation of Muslim women in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when they are more pathetic than prized.

Melaz, Josian, and Floripas do not just marry, but physically change countries. They will live and reproduce in Europe, will gift their commodity value to Europe, like women who "passed from court to court as formal gifts to seal peace" (Stafford, 46). As the vessels through which kingship, property, and inheritance are passed, these royal princesses transfer the wealth of Islam into European hands through their marriages. It is

reasonable to predict that even though no mention is made of marrying Bramimonde, Charles will probably soon gift her to a baron he wishes to reward, as in fact happens in other versions or continuations of the *geste*. Such a royal widow could not possibly stay on the shelf for long (Stafford, 50).

Such cross-civilizational transfer is perhaps the ultimate expression of the roles of the noble lady as gift-giver and the royal foreign bride as peacemaker, and it points to the ambivalence of those roles. "Women were less rooted in the soil than men; they brought new influences from distant parts and established bonds between men . . .," but these multiculturalism workshops were not quite welcomed with open arms (Southern 1953, 76). A foreign bride was a constant reminder of the war and tensions she had been married to settle; if it was her family that had suffered defeat, she could become an agent of vengeance (Stafford, 45). The romances (especially *Bevis*) stress the complete elimination of their Muslim princess's filial feelings toward her defeated father, as if to stave off any possible future disturbances from her presence in the bosom of Europe.

The rebellion against the father led by the daughter in each of these stories might also be a "way of talking about developments in Christian society and concomitant discontents in the Christian West, and especially in its overcrowded privileged class" (Daniels 1984, 92). From this angle, the main accomplishment of the motif of the "enamoured Muslim princess"—or better, the "transformed termagant"—is the disintegration of a ruling family and the encroachment of a new family on its ancient privileges. Perhaps the theme is a reflection of inchoate social transformations and economic developments in high medieval Europe.

All of these representations insist that the women are not forced, but come of their own accord—"par amour"—to the Christian side. These heroines do not act for personal liberation. (In fact, they give up a great deal of personal status and liberty by defecting.) They do not even change sides because of the greater power of the Christians: they usually express the desire to convert while the Christians are still underdogs and the odds against them seem great. That the women simply see the innate truth, "*dreit*-ness," of the Christian side indicates how powerful was the appeal of the ideal of world harmony and universal order under the homogenizing leadership of Western Christendom.

Orderic's *Historia* is dated at 1130–1135. The preserved *chansons* about the legend of William of Orange were composed in the 1130s and 1140s (Passage, 281). *La Prise d'Orange*, completed before 1200, modifies the "enamoured Moslem princess" theme by bringing the hero to her land, Orange,¹⁶ not as captive but in disguise. The Christian this time is already in love from afar with the Muslim queen Orable and comes seeking her, but is then discovered and captured. Orable, who is wife of the Saracen king of Orange, visits him in jail and promises to free him and his friends if he will marry her: she will also convert (thus rendering her marriage to Tibalt null). Orable further urges William to seize the tower and depose her husband. He agrees; the plan is carried out; when they marry, she gives William Orange as her dowry.

Orable "possesses Melaz's prudence and wise determination" (Warren, 350); Wolfram von Eschenbach expands on this trait in *Willehalm*, his contribution to the William material (ca. 1221), where Arabel-Gyburc becomes ideal woman. This unfinished story tells how Gyburc's father, King Terramer, and her ex-husband, King Tibalt, pursue her and William to Orange and wage costly war to get her back. All William's kin and the king of France besides are enlisted against the monumental Saracen host. Gyburc dons armor and sword to fend off her father's attack on her husband's estate, provides the proper sexual comforts to her returned husband, and advises her maidens on the best feminine comportment. She graciously entertains her husband's people and even preaches to his war council on the finer points of Christian chivalric behavior, urging mercy toward the Saracens should they be captured. Her love of Willehalm leads her to divine love, the supreme goal of all Wolfram's characters, and so sanctifies her that Wolfram invokes her in prayer as a saint.

By Wolfram's day, the crusaders' black-and-white division of the world into Christians versus Saracens had been modified. The Mongol invasions in the thirteenth century made Europeans realize that there was a pagan world beyond Islam. In Wolfram's *Parzival* (1197–1210), the hero's father Gahmuret can earn his fame fighting for the Caliph of Baghdad and keep the sympathy of the poem's audience; this could never have happened in the world of *The Song of Roland*.

The twelfth century saw a flood of translations from Arabic into Latin, translations which expanded the field of European vision. Wolfram's own fanciful claim that he got the Grail story from "Kyot," who had translated it from the "heathen writing" of a half-heathen scholar "Flegetanis" (possibly al-Farghani) of Toledo (stanza 453), has inspired much unresolved speculation. At least it points to an awareness that much popular romance material came from Eastern sources. In any case, crusading hostility against the Islamic "infidel" had crested and calmed since Urban's galvanizing appeal at Clermont in 1095. Christians and Muslims had settled into a more nuanced range of relationships.

This is reflected in Wolfram's work. Instead of a dogmatic division of the world into "*tort*" and "*dreit*," Wolfram, however muddled his information may be about the world outside Europe, maintains that certain concepts, such as "*triuwe*," steadfast devotion (Gibbs, 65), operate on a basic human level common to all peoples. Certainly these concepts are derived and universalized from European court culture and from Christianity, but they soften the rigidity of the Christian-Muslim divide. In *Willehalm*, for instance, the poet always maintains that Gyburc's former husband, King Tibalt, is acting out of grief and love when he pursues her, even when he attacks Provence. The Saracen's motives are perfectly understandable on a basic human level.

It is true that in *Parzival* the blackness of the Zazamancians initially makes Gahmuret "ill at ease" (11), and that when the governor's wife kisses him he little relishes it (13). However, Gahmuret's uneasiness pales in comparison to Roland's horror at the sight of the army of black men with nothing white about them but their teeth, an omnivorous, monstrous image. Gahmuret is no provincial paladin but a world traveler in an era when to be cosmopolitan meant knowing the great Muslim centers; times had changed since *La Chanson de Roland*.

Belakane is another Muslim queen whom Wolfram adds to the medieval repertory in *Parzival*. She is "in the midst of a brave defense" of her kingdom when she first appears in the story (stanza 16; Passage, 11). Queen of Zazamanc, she enlists the service of the gallant French knight Gahmuret, with whom she has fallen in love at first sight, and promises marriage and her throne in return. Queen Belakane is both a Moor and black, and Wolfram enjoys joking about her complexion: "If there is anything brighter than daylight—the queen in no way resembled it." But quickly he establishes

that “a woman’s manner she did have, and was on other counts worthy of a knight” (stanza 25; Passage, 14). It is “as though Wolfram wishes to stress the difference in color from the beginning, precisely to make it clear that it is not important to Gahmuret” (Gibbs, 88). What is stressed about Belakane is that she has the qualities “universally” admired in a lady: purity, love, loyalty, suffering; this is what makes Gahmuret fall in love with her. Belakane’s essential qualities make her as worthy of love, and as capable of suffering for it, as a Christian woman. “Never was there a woman more endowed with charms, and that lady’s heart never failed to include in its retinue a worthy company of womanly virtues and true modesty” (stanza 54; Passage, 31).

There is still the matter of her faith, but her inner qualities are enough to overcome even that: “Gahmuret reflected how she was a heathen, and yet never did more womanly loyalty glide into a woman’s heart. Her innocence was a pure baptism . . .” (stanza 29; Passage, 17). This, in a medieval text, is a remarkable treatment of an unconverted woman. Consider that Belakane could have been portrayed as sexually aggressive in her pursuit of Gahmuret, since she is the one who falls in love with him and offers herself to him if he vanquishes her enemies—certainly a forward if not wanton lady. She is a woman ruler under no male authority, nominal or otherwise. A woman in such an unconventional position, unsanctified by Christian values, is usually represented in medieval texts as transgressive, immoral, diabolical (Chance, 53). Instead, Wolfram gives her dignity and treats her wooing of Gahmuret with delicacy.

Gyburc’s sexuality, too, is an explicit part of her idealized womanhood. In one remarkable scene that proves Wolfram was one medieval romance poet who diverged from the “courtly love” tradition of portraying love as foreign to marriage and sex as outside the bounds of the sacred, Gyburc has sex with her “ami” Willehalm and then, lying naked with him against her breast, addresses a solemn prayer to God (stanzas 100–102; Passage, 71–72). An Orderic or a “Tuold” could never have pulled that off. Nor is it likely that they would have found her open mantle before a hall filled with dinner guests as benign as Wolfram does: “From time to time she allowed the mantle to sway open a bit, and any eye that glanced beneath it then caught a glimpse of paradise” (stanza 249; Passage, 145). This, by the way, is the only reference to Gyburc which is organized to produce scopophilic pleasure; even the sex scene is not scopophilic; rather, it represents Gyburc

in terms of touch ("In softness the Queen herself was like a very gosling"). At any rate, as much as Charles Passage insists that Wolfram was a devout Christian with "no tinge of heterodoxy" (6) because of approving references to him in clerical texts, this is a decidedly unvirginal "holy lady." Surely from an orthodox point of view there is something not quite kosher, so to speak, about Wolfram's unequivocally laudatory treatment of a woman whose character, in less forgiving hands, could have had many aspersions cast upon it. As a foreign bride who brought war upon her husband's people she could have become resented and suspected, but Wolfram executes a stalwart defense.

Wolfram is equally forgiving toward Belakane's unbaptized state and considers Gahmuret's abandoning her the one blot on his record (Christoph; 42). His departure causes Belakane, with whom we are clearly meant to sympathize—she is compared to a turtle dove on a withered bough, bereaved of her mate—suffering unto death. Although Gahmuret claims in his letter that he left Belakane because she was not a Christian, it is clear that he would not return if she were to become one. In fact, when she reads Gahmuret's parting letter, Belakane indicates her willingness to receive baptism for his sake. "In this, Belakane anticipates Gyburc, who comes to a knowledge of God through Willehalm, and so, by perfect human love . . . comes to know divine Love" (Gibbs, 89). The real reason for Gahmuret's departure is his love of adventure, the same reason for which he hesitates to marry Herzeloyde, Parzival's mother. He cautions her: "If you do not allow me to go jousting, I still know the old trick that I used when I left my wife When she applied the checkrein to keep me from battle, I forsook a people and a country" (stanzas 96–97; Passage, 55).

Belakane and Herzeloyde have in common "the perfection of their womanhood" (Gibbs, 92), their love of Gahmuret, and also the suffering he has caused them. As women, queens, and wives, then, Wolfram's Christians and Muslims share qualities and experiences which blur differences in race and religion. Moreover, the Muslim is a greater queen, as a ruler in her own right; she has the power to endow Gahmuret with a domain. Gahmuret returns to Europe as the king of Zazamanc, having acquired from a Moorish queen the title, land, and name with which to re-enter the courtly society he had left as a landless younger son. At the end, Belakane is a passive, suffering woman, who only realizes her heart's desire—love, ultimately divine love—through her son Feirfiz (who converts and marries into the Grail family). The initial image of Belakane, that of an indepen-

dent queen undertaking the military defense of her land with dignity and pursuing the man she desires, has clear affinities with the termagant model but offers a variation on it.

The female focus of *Willehalm* does not easily stay passive. The story begins after Arabel has become Gyburc, whose conversion and perfection of character make her an honorary European, pushing her “Saracenicity” into the background—but not entirely. Although Gyburc has not only converted, but left the native lands over which she was queen to become the wife of a petty local chieftain, Wolfram frequently calls her by her former title, “queen.” But “Giburc the Queen” (stanza 108; Passage, 76) is a contradiction in terms, since each half of the name undoes the other. Arabel was a queen; Gyburc is a margrave’s wife. Arabel no longer exists, or does she? This resurfacing of her old identity subtly underlines the higher rank and greater power of the Saracen world she has brought into their midst. She may be, then, “Wolfram’s most complete demonstration of his ideal, womanhood realized to its utmost limits” (Gibbs, 74), but some of her “ideal” features can be read waywardly rather than simply as evidence of Wolfram’s consummate artistry.

For example, Gyburc’s much-vaunted quality of Christian poverty may be disguised disgruntlement with the conditions of her present life. She says, “I was a queen, however poor I may now be. In Arabie and at Arabi I walked with a crown upon my head in the presence of princes, until one prince embraced me. For his sake I determined to practice poverty . . .” (stanza 216; Passage, 128). When her husband’s father arrives at her doorstep with a host of warriors to be fed, and this just after the castle has been besieged and depleted thanks to their lateness, Gyburc offers to serve them personally—but not without reminding them of her former wealth in the same breath: “And if all Todjerne, Arabie and Arabi were free of heathen and in my service, I would still entrust everything to you. I surrendered those for this poverty of ours” (stanza 262; Passage, 151). Gyburc may be a termagant in disguise.

The *Willehalm* narrative shies away from dogmatism in developing Muslim characters, considering them in terms of chivalric virtues rather than true or false creed, as when Gahmuret speculates on Belakane’s heathenness and deliberately turns from it to more important criteria for her worth. This attitude toward interfaith marriage seems to emerge from Wolfram’s moves toward cosmopolitanism and universalism, an impulse more typical of early Renaissance than of medieval texts.

A century and a half after Wolfram, the fact of one such marriage was causing major discomfort. In 1346 the Ottoman Sultan Orkhan married the Byzantine Princess Theodora; she went to live with him in the Turkish capital. Their wedding was celebrated with enormous pomp on the European side of the Bosphorus, which was still under Byzantine rule. Neither of them changed their religion. The papacy had always been opposed to matches with infidels, but the realities of Ottoman invasions and the need for good economic relations overcame the finer theological scruples; the official hope was that Christendom would benefit and its followers eventually increased by this tactic. Still, the event was hard to digest for the rest of Europe, which did not have the unique relationship that Italy enjoyed with the Ottoman Empire in the fourteenth century. The anxieties about Christian-Muslim miscegenation that underlay medieval culture are expressed in one of Chaucer's narratives.

In *The Canterbury Tales*, the Man of Law tells how the Sultan of Syria falls in love with Constance, daughter of the Emperor of Rome. The Emperor accepts the Sultan's proposal of marriage to Constance because of the Sultan's conversion and promise to convert his subjects. This prospect angers the Sultan's mother, a "welle of vices," who plots with her courtiers to feign Christianity until she can kill the Sultan at his wedding-day feast:

"Lordes," she said, "ye knowen everichon,
How that my sone in point is for to lete
The hooly lawes of oure Alkaron,
Yeven by Goddes message Makomete.
But oon avow to grete God I heete:
The lyf shall rather out of my body sterte
Than Makometes lawe out of my herte.
"What sholde us tyden of this newe lawe
But thraldom to oure bodies and penance,
And afterward in helle to be drawe
For we reneyed Mahoun oure creance?
But, lordes, wol ye maken assurance,
As I shal seyn, assentyng to my loore,
And I shal make us sauf for everemoore?"
(ll. 330–343)

The Man of Law, whose priggish self-righteousness has already surfaced among the company of pilgrims, is inspired at this juncture to tirade, first against the Sultanness, then against all women:

O Sowdanesse, roote of iniquitee!
 Virago, thou Semyrame the secounde!
 O serpent under femynynytee,
 Lik to the serpent depe in helle ybounde!
 O feyned womman, al that may confounde
 Vertu and innocence, thurgh thy malice,
 Is bred in thee, as nest of every vice.
 O Sathan, envious syn thilke day
 That thou were chaced from oure heritage,
 Wel knowestow to wommen the olde way.
 Thou madest Eva brynge us in servage;
 Thou wolt fordoon this Cristen mariage.
 Thyn instrument so—weylawey the while—
 Makestow of wommen, whan thou wolt begile.
 (ll. 358–371)

The lineage of the Muslim woman wends through Semiramis, founder of sensual Babylon, to Eve in her most misogynistic formulation. Like women in general, she is the preferred instrument of Satan; being Muslim, she has even more reason to perform his work against Christians. The Sultanness leads the nobles of Syria into a bloody plot to oust the Christian presence from the land, the success of which reflects the final failure of the Crusades (the final political vestiges of the crusader states were a hundred years gone by Chaucer's day). She has the Sultan and all the Christians, immigrants and converts, hacked to pieces at the feast, and achieves her ambition to rule, "For she hirself wolde al the contree lede" (l. 434). However, she spares the innocent Constance, who is put to sea with food and wealth and told to wend her way back home alone.

The Sultanness is not mentioned again. When the Emperor of Rome later hears of the terrible end to his daughter's first marriage, he sends troops to take revenge on the Syrians; "They brennen, sleen, and brynge hem to mischance," but the Sultanness does not appear to be touched personally by this general vengeance. Not only does she undergo no conversion, which would transform her Bramimondian shrewishness into accep-

table femininity, but by faking conversion, the Sultanness mocks the whole baptism-into-world-harmony fantasy, the naiveté of which was completely apparent by Chaucer's time. This she does to uphold the "law" of Islam, a word which implies the temporal sway of Islam as much as its spiritual realm. In defending the faith and leading the Muslims, she becomes, by implication, a caliph of sorts.

The Sultanness does not convert and is not recuperated by her meritorious qualities, like Belakane. Given that, the most notable thing about the Sultanness is that she stays: she lives. Chaucer's Man of Law finds the Sultanness of Syria very disturbing and yet cannot finish her off in the narrative, although the English mother-in-law is punished for her similar persecution of Constance. Thus the Sultanness remains a loose end in a tale in which every other end is tightly wrapped up in a moral, in which everyone else gets their just desserts. For all we know, the Sultanness survives this raid to continue "leding" "al the contree."

The Man of Law was anxious about consequences, but a lighter contemplation of love across faiths began even before Wolfram conceived his cosmopolitan ideal. *Floire et Blancheflor*, a French romance ca. 1155–1170, itself of Arabo-Persian origins (Bolton, 78), tells of a Muslim prince and his Christian beloved. Floire's mother figures as a wise queen in the story, and several lesser Muslim women help Floire in his search for Blancheflor, the lovely Christian maiden of noble origins who was raised in his parents' home as a servant, then sent away when Floire's interest in her became apparent. The king to whom Blancheflor is sent does mew her in isolated women's quarters with his other concubines-to-be, in possibly the first prototype of the seraglio or harem in Western material on Islam. Yet this is presented as an exceptional kingly custom, reminiscent of the Tower of Maidens in the biblical story of Esther, rather than associated with a specifically Islamic tradition—after all, Floire's father is a Muslim king too, and he does not enclose his women in such quarters. Moreover, most of the Muslim women in the story are outside this enclosure and appear to lead lives indistinguishable from the lives of ordinary European women. Since the story deals entirely with Muslim characters except for Blancheflor, the terms of self/other are reversed: Muslim is the norm and Christian is the foreign element. At least it is so until the last moment of the denouement, when the fluid terms of this playful romance are aligned with the Church-dominated ideological superstructure of the medieval world, by hook or by crook. And so our erstwhile gentle hero Floire, at the cost

of verisimilitude, not only embraces the faith of his bride but, as the new king, beheads, burns, or flays anyone who does not follow suit.

In *Aucassin et Nicolette* (ca. 1200), which has roots similar to those of *Floire et Blancheflor*, the boy is Christian and the girl, with whom he is finally reunited, is Saracen. Aucassin and Nicolette find the pleasures of interreligious love great enough to risk censure from any authority. The boy's love of the Saracen girl makes him an intransigent son who does not fulfill the duties of his social and economic class, "*rien faire de tout ce qu'il aurait dû*" (does nothing of all that he should be doing) (Michaut, 123). Here the anticlerical sentiment is voiced explicitly and by the hero himself. When he is told that he risks hellfire by loving Nicolette, a Saracen girl who was bought, baptized, and raised by his father's vassal, and thus triply forbidden by the class barrier, the (residual) Saracen taint, and filial loyalty, he says:

En paradis? Qu'ai-je a y faire? Je ne cherche pas a y entrer: mais que j'aie Nicolette, ma très douce amie, que j'aime tant! Car en paradis vont seulement ces espèces de gens que je vais vous dire. Ils y vont, ces vieux prêtres et ces vieux "éclopés et ces manchots," qui, tout le jour et tout la nuit, restent à croppeton devant les autels et dans les vieilles cryptes . . . C'est en enfer que je veux aller! Car en enfer vont les beaux clères et les beaux chevaliers . . . Et la vont les belles dames courtoises, qui ont deux amis ou trois outre leur mari; et la vont l'or et l'argent et les fourrures, le vair et le gris; et la vont harpeurs et jongleurs et ceux qui sont les rois de ce monde . . . (Michaut, 125–126)

(In Paradise what have I to do? I care not to enter, but only to have Nicolette, my very sweet friend, whom I love so dearly well. For into Paradise go none but such people as I will tell you of. There go those aged priests, and those old cripples, and the maimed, who all day long and all night cough before the altars, and in the crypts . . . But in Hell I will go. For to Hell go the fair clerks and the fair knights . . . And there go the fair and courteous ladies, who have friends, two or three, together with their wedded lords. And there pass the gold and the silver, the ermine and all rich furs, harpers and minstrels, and the happy of the world. [Mason, 6])

One can see from this that authority figures do not come off well in this romance. The father gives a false promise to allow Aucassin one kiss with Nicolette if he fights for the patrimonial estate. When the father breaks his word, Aucassin flouts feudal convention by releasing his father's archenemy

and begging him to attack and bother his father. Aucassin is loyal only to Love, “*qui vaint tout chose*” (which conquers all) (Michaut, 123). This nose-thumbing at the old feudal order is in the rebellious-young-man tradition of courtly love poetry.

We know we are not at Ronceveaux when the hero “*était beau et gracieux et grand et bien fait de jambes, de pieds, de corps et de bras; il avait des cheveux blonds et boucles menu et les yeux vifs et rians . . .*” (Michaut, 123). (Fair he was, and pleasant to look upon, tall and shapely of body in every whit of him. His hair was golden, and curled in little rings about his head; he had grey and dancing eyes . . . [Mason, 2]). He looks exactly like his *ami*, who is the same age and has the golden ringlets, blue laughing eyes, and shapely figure. That we have totally left behind the world of the *chansons de geste* with its knightly ethos is clear when Aucassin rides listlessly into his father’s battle, his arms limp by his sides, striking no blow, paying no mind when his lance is taken, intent on neither spoils nor honor but daydreaming about Nicolette. Only when he is captured does he wake up and defend himself, for the sake of seeing her again. When his father imprisons him, the boy moans for Nicolette or death but makes no move to escape. All the heroism in the story is Nicolette’s.

The invention of an imagery of feminine heroism is one of the remarkable achievements of this little work. Take the scene in which Nicolette escapes from the cell in which she, meanwhile, has also been imprisoned, and about which she sings (in contrast to Aucassin’s passive hopelessness):

Lack, great pity ’tis to place
Maid in such an evil place. . . .
Men have done me foul despite,
Sealed me in this vaulted room,
Thrust me to this bitter doom,
But by God, Our Lady’s Son,
Soon I will from here begone,
So it be won. (Mason, 5)

She lies one night looking at the moon and listening to a nightingale’s plaint—quite traditional images so far (although at this point in history maybe they still have some freshness). Then this enterprising teenager gets up, puts on her best silk mantle, and slips out the window on a rope of tied bedsheets, landing in the garden. She delicately and purposefully “took her skirt in both hands, the one before, and the other behind, and kilted her

lightly against the dew which lay thickly upon the grass, and so passed through the garden" (Mason, 13) (*Elle releva ses vêtements d'une main par devant et de l'autre par derrière, à cause de la rosee qu'elle voyait abondante sur l'herbe, et descendit à travers le jardin* [Michaut, 127]). What a perfect medieval version of "how to succeed in a man's world without smudging your makeup!" If ever Anonymous was a woman, surely it must be so here.

Nicolette visits the tower where Aucassin languishes, gives him a lock of hair through a crevice, and bids him farewell. When guards approach, she draws the folds of her cloak about her and crouches in between the pillars until the dangerous moment passes. She climbs a fence and then has to walk across the moat and scale the side of the castle. No problem: our heroine carves footholds in its walls with a sharpened stake. (This is the girl against whose translucent insteps daisies make black bruises.) Undaunted, Nicolette enters the woods—

Since I die, ah, better then
Trust the boar than trust to men
(Mason, 18)

—and engineers a house: "very pretty it was, and very dainty, and well furnished, both outside and in, with a tapestry of flowers and of leaves" (20). She tests Aucassin's gumption there in the woods, after which she performs quick surgery on his dislocated shoulder.

Finally, the two of them, reunited, set out to sea to escape Aucassin's father. The lovers are tossed up by a storm in the land of Torelore, where the king is confined to childbed:

"I'm a mother," quoth the King
"When my month is gone at length,
And I come to health and strength,
Then shall I hear Mass once more
As my fathers did before."
(Mason, 30)

Meantime, the queen is waging war—by pelting the enemy troops with baked apples and fresh cheese. The lovers live blithely in Torelore for three years. A Saracen pirate invasion separates them again, but begins their restoration to their rightful places. Aucassin is welcomed as ruler to his country, his father having died during the Torelore sojourn. Nicolette is restored to her father, who turns out to be the king of Carthage. When he plans a

royal match for her, she flees in disguise and returns to her adoptive land as a minstrel. Conveniently, her master has died; she confides in his (heretofore unmentioned) wife, a sympathetic and loving mother figure. This woman helps Nicolette restore herself to Aucassin. They are married with much song and joy and Nicolette is crowned Countess of Beaucaire.

Nicolette is Saracen, yet she is Christian too. She has been baptized and has known no other religion since early childhood. Yet she is always the girl from a far country, "*de terre étrangère*," the girl from Carthage, the girl bought from the Saracens (Michaut, 124). Although she is Christian, the joy of her father when she is returned to him is sympathetically related, and religion is not a problem for anyone. She does not need to hurl invectives at his religion, dispossess him of his treasure, or turn him or his kingdom over to Christian lords. It does not matter that he wants her to marry a Saracen; the problem is that he wants her to marry anyone at all, while she loves Aucassin. The Saracen invasion of Torelore is not a cataclysmic devastation but what makes possible the eventual restoration of the lovers to bliss. Orthodox religious dogma matters very little ("Preach me no preachings—" Aucassin to his father [Mason, 10]); those are not the sensibilities this story satisfies.

Nicolette is different but the same. She is "*étrangère*," but there is no attempt to make an exotic spectacle of her. Physically, she and Aucassin are identical, with matching blond ringlets and blue eyes. So then why does her Saracenicity keep popping up? Is Nicolette simply a European lady with a "Saracen" tag stuck on her? Is Bramimonde based on a Basque queen? Are any of the medieval Saracen characters based on "true models?"

Labeling a character "Saracen" has significance, however transparent or cosmetic the label may seem. Realism is not a formal goal in medieval romance. Somehow it is important that Nicolette is foreign and that she comes from the enemy—and, not just any enemy, but The Enemy. The fact that she is called "Saracen" inserts her into the conventions used for representing Muslims. If Nicolette deviates from those conventions, that too is significant. At the same time, she is deliberately represented as wholesome, normal, quite the girl next door . . . next castle, that is. Perhaps this defiant assertion of two seemingly contradictory conditions is the whole point. Perhaps Nicolette is "Saracen" for the sake of that very same flouting of religious authority that makes Aucassin snub paradise, for the delight of creating a successful quasi-interfaith couple whose triumph is the vanquishing of parental authority and official dogma.

Few of the familiar medieval motifs regarding Muslim women appear in the characterization of Nicolette. Technically, she is certainly a “Forth-Putting Lady,” but this element is not developed in the way it is for Josian or Floripas, as a somewhat crude, shocking sexuality. The text makes it appear as the most natural thing in the world for Nicolette to behave in ways which would earn her censure by dominant moral standards. The three years Aucassin and Nicolette lived in the castle of Torelore in “ease and great delight,” what were they doing? The question is gracefully dodged. She can climb towers like Bramimonde and throw her arms around her lover like Josian in her bedchamber and still get to keep the halo of Aude.

We cannot get much further from *La Chanson de Roland* in style and substance than *Aucassin et Nicolette* at the other end of the century. *Roland* is a carefully crafted epic poem which has premiere place in the canon of French literature, and on it distinguished scholars have hung their careers. *Aucassin et Nicolette* is a light-hearted “cantefable” mixing together prose and poetry, “which betrays its Arab inspiration in the name of the hero, al-Qasim, as well as in its prosimetric form, characteristic of Arab narrative style” (Metlitzki, 245), and which is not considered a major work in surveys of the period. *Roland* ties up all loose ends under the banner of Charlemagne’s empire in the spirit of the First Crusade’s aggrandizing mission. *Aucassin et Nicolette* blithely asserts several contradictory things at once. For example, in a poetic section, Aucassin’s prison is first described as an underground vault, but later, in prose, it is a castle tower to which Nicolette perilously climbs. The wife of Nicolette’s godfather suddenly appears at the end of the story without explanation. These might be considered defects, sloppiness in aesthetic standards. Or they may indicate that the story is being contested by editors between tellings and has been caught in unfinished process—or simply that its pleasures lie elsewhere than in narrative logic, proper form, and aesthetic perfection. In *Roland*, the character of Bramimonde resists the either/or, good/evil determinism which binary logic requires and forms a knot in the text that can help us read against the grain of the poem’s dominant discourse. Nicolette, in an entirely different genre, is not a resistant character because there is no binary stratification in the text to resist. The text tosses around binary terms like apple pies, and Nicolette is one factor in its zigzagging treatment of man and woman, Saracen and Christian, enemy and friend.

Christine de Pisan’s *Le livre de la cité des dames* (1405) merits brief mention here, although it contains not a single Muslim man or woman. Christine’s

is a work of moral didacticism, part of her "ardent campaign to rehabilitate her sex in her contemporaries' eyes" (as Warner says in her foreword to Pisan, xiii). This is an enormous enough task, given the barriers she faced. Including a Muslim woman, a representative of the most powerful enemy faced by medieval Christian Europe, in the *Who's Who* she compiles would have undermined its legitimacy.¹⁷ It is enough that the first woman she lists is not a European but Nicaula, empress of Ethiopia, and that she includes the Arab queen Zenobia of Palmyra; enough that she redeems Semiramis, Circe, and Dido, all pagan prototypes which influence the representation of the Muslim woman in medieval literature. It is enough that the Amazons, women at the borders of Europe whose conquests straddled Europe and Asia, draw her praise. Christine's unwillingness to add to the Western narrative of the Muslim woman is, at least, a meaningful abstinence.

RESURFACINGS

Nicolette and Bramimonde show the range and the common features of medieval European representations of the Muslim woman. The Muslim woman generated in these texts is higher ranking than the Europeans, men as well as women. Bramimonde, despite her silencing, remains the highest ranking woman in *La Chanson de Roland*; the Franks are not portrayed as having any woman of her stature in their lands. Gyburc is the only queen in sight in Orange, and is represented as certainly a better one than King Louis' wife. Belakane gives Gahmuret the rank without which he might not have been able to return to Europe. The "enamoured Moslem princesses" in Orderic, *Sir Bevis*, and *The Sowdone of Babylone* all rank higher than the Christians with whom they dally. This holds true for the Sultaneess of Syria and even Nicolette. Her rank is not an empty title, moreover; it generates a problematic that is not directly acknowledged but simmers underneath the text. How to explain the "masterful nature" (Warren, 357) of these women? How to account for the way these characters, once introduced, lunge forward into the narrative fray? There is something "too much" about the Muslim women characters produced in these medieval texts, as if a giantess were lurking or a genie bubbling inside them. The task of these texts, having created this representation and this problematic, is to reduce this raw "too-muchness" to manageable proportions.

Since medieval European texts were not in a position to “orientalize” the Orient, to create a system of knowledge about it, to delimit and differentiate it, their tendency is to do just the opposite: to make it the same. If nineteenth-century French and English literature will tend to feminize the entire Orient in relationship to a dominant Europe, representing even its men as effeminate, these texts seem to masculinize even the women of Islam. Instead of distancing, othering, making Oriental, these texts are “same-ing.” For one thing, they assume that the Muslims are at least the equals of Europeans. (Some, like Wolfram, go further, as when he daringly calls the Saracen king Terramer “the mightiest man who wore a crown in those times,” while King Louis of France is shown as an inept ruler [*Willehalm*, stanza 302, Passage, 172].)

These texts do not produce the Saracens as an entirely different, inferior, exotic species, nor as subhumans¹⁸ who can be dissected, fragmented, and possessed through scopophilic representation. That project is for the literature of Orientalism to undertake in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It is as superpowered superhumans that Muslims must be accounted for in a discourse that does not have the prerogative of scrutiny, the tools of classification and representation, to encompass them. Thus the Muslims are confusedly “normal” (like-European, like-male) people who, however, do all the “*tort*” (wrong) things (e.g., the woman acts “*tort*-ly”: she is unfeminine, assertive, belligerent). The logic in epic and romance is either to eradicate the Saracens or to finish their normalization, to “same” them, although this ideological imperative often fails to cohere. Most often, the Saracen men are eradicated and the woman—for there is usually only one Muslim woman in the story—is “samed.”

This disquieting female is remade into a Christian and into a woman who fits a dominant medieval conceptualization of the normative feminine. Her excessive speech, her direct discourse are silenced in the narrative; her excessive motion and “forwardness” in the plot are rendered inert. At the same time her character is fitted smoothly into the patriarchal economy by becoming the vessel through which desirable wealth passes into Europe. These texts move steadily toward homogenization, until at the end the Muslim woman can be absorbed into Europe in a way which is simply impossible in nineteenth-century texts. She can be “as one” with her Christian husband, can blend in and be accepted as if she had never been “Saracen” at all.

Except of course that the Saracen residue is never totally erased. The way the Saracen residue resurfaces is the way the figure of the termagant disrupts the smoothness of the text. I have now charted such resurfacings in a generous cross-section of medieval literature.

The need for homogenizing difference is understandable in the *chansons de geste*, which presume a state of cataclysmic conflict between Europeans and a Muslim enemy. But if a regenerative homogeneity is the goal of the romance, then why make the lady-love initially Saracen at all? Why not simply present a "home-grown" medieval romance? One must ask whether exogamy is the root of romance generally, and whether the local roots of medieval romance are inextricable from its foreign sources. Does the romance, a development of the later Middle Ages, have something to do with the quest for marriage partners further and further afield, after the early medieval fluidity of tribes and families had solidified and the Church's broad classification of relationships prohibiting marriage had increased its sway? Was the oriental romance material so popularly absorbed during this period, and did the romance genre flower so quickly, in part because of a readiness and need to explain the presence of the foreign element at the hearth?

That the aristocratic foreign bride could be a destabilizing element in noble households was recognized. And Islamic elements, though they had abided in the heart of Europe since 711, were rediscovered as devastatingly alien when the concept of a European/Christian identity boiled toward the First Crusade mark, and beyond. That romance narratives over and over process a foreign bride to the point at which she can be accommodated in the ancestral home parallels the process by which Islamic cultural material, disturbingly reminiscent of economic, military, even colonial-settler domination, is made admissible in the European imagination. The two processes merge when the foreign female is a Muslim woman.

Chapter Three

THE MUSLIM WOMAN IN RENAISSANCE TEXTS *“Una mujer a la morisca vestida”*

SYCORAX AND ZANTHIA AT THE THRESHOLD

From about the middle of the fourteenth century, the Italian city-states began to flourish. The preceding century of commercial prosperity had increased urbanization, improved travel between cities and communication in general, accelerated social change, and stimulated intellectual growth in ways that produced a new consciousness. What became known as Renaissance soon spread to the rest of Europe. Salient features of this new era most relevant to Western relations with the Islamic world are the beginnings of European exploration and expansion overseas; the start of the Slave Trade;¹ the development of modern nation-states in Europe; and the end of religious ideological unity in Christendom, along with a general decline in the power of the Church. Features most relevant to gender issues in Europe are changes in prescriptive male views of women through the trends of secularization, Reformation, and Counter-Reformation; the embryonic growth of the middle ranks of society with their new sexual division of labor; and the birth of new concepts of individualism and domesticity. Obviously the two sets are not neatly separable.

It is even more difficult to speak of the West as a unit in this era than it was in the Middle Ages. Written discourse about Islam now comes from a

wider variety of sources. There is greater variation in the concrete experiences of European nations vis-à-vis the Muslim world—or that part of the Muslim world which touched them. However, the primary broad historical trend is the increased power and resources of European nations, concurrent with a very gradual, imperceptible decrease in the power and resources of the Islamic world. Islamic empires in and close to Europe begin to decline and European states begin to build overseas empires, creating a shift in the distribution of power between the West and Islam.

The years 1492 and 1699 make a convenient and meaningful frame for this period. The first, the fall of Grenada to the King and Queen of Castile, marks the end of independent political existence for Muslims in Spain. The second, the year of the Treaty of Karlowitz (in which the Ottoman Empire was forced to relinquish Hungary, Croatia, and Slovenia to the Austrians), marks the effective end of Ottoman domination in eastern Europe. Between them is another milestone—the 1571 Battle of Lepanto, at which the Ottoman navy was unexpectedly crushed by a combined European fleet. However, the era between Grenada and Karlowitz also saw the Battle of Alcazar (1578), at which Turkish viceroy Abdul-Malek defeated troops drawn from all over Europe. It was not Europe's world yet. Thus the other broad feature that characterizes these centuries is the uncertainty of the result in the contest for world resources and power, the fluctuation of the pendulum between Lepanto and Alcazar, and between a hundred smaller Lepantos and Alcazars.

Historians, even those who are critical of European hegemony, tend to exaggerate European ascendancy during this period, looking for the earliest traces of factors that became the foundations of colonialism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. While it is easy to see with the advantage of hindsight that this period did witness a shift in world power in favor of Europe, that shift only subtly and gradually registered in the discourse of Western self-perception, let alone in the rest of the world's appraisal. European nations were just beginning to assert themselves as equals among the great empires of the world, although ideological superstructures would never permit them to admit explicitly that they had not perceived themselves as equals before. And if their contact with so-called "primitive" societies in the New World and Australasia generated a sense of European superiority, their increased contacts with the Islamic behemoth certainly did not yet do so. The Ottoman Empire, the Moghuls in India, the Safavids in Persia, and others were to varying degrees still vigorous, powerful states,

still regarded themselves as such, and for the most part were still so regarded by others. The nascent European empires had to use negotiation, compromise, ingenuity, diplomatic bargaining, and ingratiating ambassadors (often bearing comically unwieldy gifts as tribute), in addition to military force, to gain their first foothold on the ladder of world power.

For example, the Portuguese, in setting up their string of trading posts along the African and Indian coasts, were too few to impose their authority or culture on the populations they encountered. They faced mostly Muslim rulers, hostile and protective of their trade monopolies. "Recognizing, where need was, native kings, treating, trading, settling, mingling, and marrying among the native races . . .," it is difficult to say if they mastered or were mastered by their experiences abroad (Abbott, 1:158). The little-mentioned return portion of da Gama's voyage is revealing: having roused the enmity of the Moghul ruler of Calicut, who assembled forces to destroy these upstart intruders into Arabo-Indian trade routes, da Gama and his crew beat a fast retreat "[w]ith the pumps in their hands and the Virgin Mary in their mouths" (Abbott, 1:104), barely making it to the Azores Islands with a loss of two-thirds of their number, including da Gama's brother. Portugal spent the next several years fighting Muslim alliances for control of the seas.

In the 1530s and 1540s France was a fast ally of Turkey, and at one point submitted to the sojourn of the colorful privateer Khayr al-Din Khidr (known in the West as Barbarossa) with his fleet at Toulon, where he not only required that church bells temporarily suspend their ringing but openly sold Christian slaves recently captured in his victory over Italy's Charles V (Durant, 515, 697). England obsequiously solicited Ottoman favor, perhaps outdoing itself with the 1599 offering of an elaborate organ complete with artificial chirping birds and wooden angels that blew trumpets at clock-work intervals (Chew, 164). These are not isolated incidents but representative illustrations of the fact that in this phase of expansion Europe was still compelled to acknowledge the sovereignty and integrity of Islamic countries. Perhaps one of the most characteristic and revealing features of this era is that while Europeans had begun to take slaves systematically to build their own empires, they knew they themselves could still be randomly enslaved by Islamic powers.

So it is difficult to maintain that "the idea of European identity as a superior one in comparison with all the non-European peoples and cultures" (Said, 7) is the foremost shaping factor in Western representations

of Islam at this early date. For while “with the emergence of colonialist exploits came also the insistence upon the otherness of the other, upon the absolute difference between the dominating and the dominated culture” (Bartels, 2), neither the domination nor the insistence sprang up overnight. Even after European states had in fact, by the end of this period, superseded most of the above-mentioned empires in the race for world resources and power—not to mention in sheer ambition—the non-European world (at least the Islamic parts of it) still had some power and authority to resist. The West did not yet have the power to completely subdue that world, even in its own cultural discourse. An enterprise which requires acknowledgment of other forces in the arena has discursive practices different from those of an enterprise which affects the absolute subjugation of all others.

It is true, as Abena Busia points out, reading Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* as colonial metaphor in discussing the representation of the black African woman, that Caliban’s mother, Sycorax of Algiers, is deliberately silenced, unvoiced, “constructed as being essentially absent from any locus of dramatic action or power” (86). It is also true that in two other English plays, *The Knight of Malta* (staged 1619) and *The White Devil* (1612), a very vocal black (“blackamoore”) woman, named Zanthia in one play and Zanche in the other, picks up a pistol onstage and shoots a European man at the center of the dramatic action. Busia is correct in unearthing prototypes for what was later to become the dominant way of representing the African woman. However, at the time, a variety of modes of representing her overlapped and coexisted and mingled. Some of these reflected the new will to conquest in its crudest form, while others reflected a lively awareness of the obstacles to such conquest. At the time, who but a few visionaries would have known that Sycorax, and not Zanthia, was the shape of things to come?

How is the Muslim woman represented in Western literature from the Renaissance to the end of the seventeenth century? What in Western approaches to Islam, as well as Western understanding of gender, now shape the representation of the Muslim woman? This chapter will profile a range of variations rather than make assertions about one unified Western image, for representations of the Muslim woman in this period defy linear charting.

The era contains a Renaissance humanist discursive practice which approaches the Muslim woman without the distancing and displacing mechanisms of imperialist/Orientalist domination—that is, it displays a genuine indiscriminacy between Muslim and Christian women, rather than an

artificial dichotomy between the good “us” and bad “them.” Second, it contains the seeds of the prototype of the Muslim woman in later colonial literature. A representative example appears in a text from Spain, whose overseas empire had expanded earliest and whose subjugation of its Muslim population approximates later efforts by European colonial powers to control Muslim societies: this is Zoraida of the Captive’s Tale episode in *Don Quixote*. Muslim women on the Jacobean stage form another cluster; their portrayals combine several tangential traditions, such as that of witch lore, misogynistic discourse, and the discourse on Africa, to produce curious twists on the stock material of the Muslim woman in the context of an expanding, naval-based commercial empire. Finally, the late seventeenth century French stage provides a representation of the Muslim woman that reflects the rigidity of a consolidated absolute monarchy and the moral severity of the Counter-Reformation. However, before addressing this complexity, I will discuss a transitional precursor to Renaissance modes of representing the Muslim woman.

THE PLATEAU OF INDIFFERENCE

In terms of the Western encounter with the world of Islam, as in much else, the Italian Renaissance opens a rich vein of experiences. Italy, standing between the mountain passes into northern Europe and the trade routes to points East, had always had strong associations with the Byzantine Empire (northern Italy had been part of Byzantium). When that empire was overcome by the Turks and the affiliation of the area turned from Christian to Islamic, political allegiances may have become more complicated, negotiations more delicate, but the routes of exchange on the ground (and the sea) remained, despite official ideological animosity. “In Italy . . . every state of any importance sought, at one time or another, the assistance of the Turks in fending off their rivals. . . . the Ottoman Turks may therefore have been accepted as Europeans of a sort . . .” (Rodinson, 35).

This Italian intimacy with the Islamic Other—traditional foe of France, far-off enemy of England, overbearing nemesis of Christian Spain—lends a unique cosmopolitan feeling to Italian Renaissance explorations of identity. It never occurs to Giovanni Boccaccio’s Florentine storytellers in *Il Decameron* (1348–1353) to reflect on the religious or racial difference of Muslim characters who crop up in their tales. Pico Della Mirandola in his *De Hominis Dignitate* (1486) has no problem drawing from Arabic (“Chaldean”)

philosophy to articulate his notion of humanism. Even when the sources of extraction are not that explicit, even when a more orthodox Christian attitude toward Islam is consciously adhered to,² the influence of Islamic structures of thought, the experience of Islamic modes of reference, even of fabric, food, music, military technology, and aesthetic objects of Islamic production, permeate Italian consciousness in this era.³ For example, gold coins, traditionally associated in medieval Western texts with the Islamic world (and commonly used there and in Byzantium), had been introduced to Europe via Florence and Venice in the 1200s, and revolutionized finance.

Italy remained the middleman between Europe and the East until Portugal began importing gold, ivory, and slaves from the west coast of Africa after 1415. A healthy awareness that Italian prosperity depended in some part upon mutually respected trade relations with the Islamic world produced a new conceptualization of the relationship between "Islam" and "the West." And "the West" here is specifically Italy; this new conceptualization fleetingly infiltrates Western discourse in general inasmuch as Italian texts form part of a Western tradition; its residue occasionally turns up in the texts of other European nations.

The striking feature of this new approach to Islam is its sense of confraternity and equality with the Ottomans. Here it must be made clear that the Ottoman Empire remained during most of this period, for Italy as for the rest of Europe, a dominant world power.⁴ Beside the seemingly inexorable Ottoman march into eastern Europe, the wars and invasions between various European kingdoms seemed petty scufflings. However, the commercial success of Italy's city-states made them at least the economic partners of the Turks (who nevertheless required tributes and elaborate diplomatic overtures to deign to enter mutually beneficial agreements with the Italians—from the Ottoman point of view, there was no question of equality).

From the Italian perspective, a novel sense of equality was enabled by both material and ideological factors. First, in their prosperity, the Italian city-states did in fact narrow the quality-of-living gap that existed between Europe and Islamic lands, and their financial clout gave them respected positions at the world trade table dominated by Turks, Persians, Moghuls. This equilibrium allowed for an ebb in the traditional European resentment of Islamic power. Second, the rejection of the idea that persons are to be defined solely by communal boundaries in favor of a philosophy of in-

dividualism enabled a genuine curiosity about Muslims, who could now be considered as people like any others. It was a short-lived attitude, but one which deserves mention here because it produced a certain plateau in the Western representation of the Muslim woman. Her treatment, in this unique context, fits into neither the medieval nor the seventeenth-century modes.

Just as Italy, in this period, is the middleman between the West and Islam, so Boccaccio is a kind of bridge between the medieval and Renaissance worlds. The seventh story on *The Decameron's* second day, on the theme "Of those who after being baffled by divers chances have won at last to a joyful issue beyond their hope," relates the adventures of Alatiel, beautiful daughter of the Sultan of Babylon. Sent by ship to her bridegroom, the King of Algarve, she is stranded in Italy and, because of her beauty, is involuntarily recruited as the mistress of one man after another for a total of nine men in four years, all the while managing to hide her identity. She finally gets to return home and marry her intended after all, and make him think she's a virgin, to boot. Pamfilo tells this that the ladies might not desire beauty so much, seeing how many trials Alatiel's superlative beauty caused her.

Elisa tells how the daughter of the King of Tunis falls in love, by reputation, with the Christian Prince Gerbino of Sicily, and he with her (fourth day, fourth story). They exchange tokens. She is promised to the King of Granada; Gerbino pursues the ship on which she sails to her betrothed. His grandfather, King Guglielmo, has promised the King of Tunis safe passage for the ship. When the Saracens guarding the Princess are overtaken by Gerbino, they kill the Princess before his eyes and dump her body overboard. Guglielmo executes Gerbino, "choosing rather to abide without posterity than to be held a faithless king," in a conclusion which abundantly satisfies the day's theme, "Those whose loves have had unhappy ending" (250).

No one converts. No one discusses theology. No one insults their own gods, or anyone else's. Interfaith marriages are not the key to world unification under the banner of Christianity; neither do they have to precipitate or follow cataclysmic struggle between good and evil. One is assumed to be able to identify the geography and the Muslim and Christian identities of the various characters, without its having that much relevance for the story. When the Sultan of Babylon bids his daughter farewell, he commends her to God, "*l'accomando a Dio*" (sentence 9). The word is simply

"Dio," the same "Dio" that Emily, Pamfilo, and the rest of the company would naturally name—not Tervagent, Mahound, or any foreign-sounding idols.

The values of Muslim and Christian kings are mutually supportive, as King Guglielmo's execution of his grandson shows. Pamfilo assumes the ladies will be able to empathize with Alatiel without Alatiel being required to betray her father or renounce her creed. In the story of the Tunisian princess, in which young lovers rebel against parental figures, the listeners' sympathies are directed toward both lovers, even though the man betrays a king of Europe, a Christian, his grandfather, for the sake of a Muslim woman. She is not made into a seductress for this. There is no sense of Europeans versus non-Europeans, but a nonchalant worldliness which takes for granted the motley of languages, creeds, and races that criss-cross the Mediterranean, having arrived because of common interest at a pragmatic *modus vivendi*. The interest that binds them all together is mercantile.

The second day's ninth story tells of a Genoese woman falsely accused by her husband and sentenced to die. She escapes and, disguised as a man, serves the Sultan of Alexandria until she exposes the man who framed her, recovers her husband, reappropriates her female identity, and returns home rich. The happy denouement is put into motion by a great trading exposition sponsored by the Sultan: a "great assemblage" of "merchants, both Christian and Saracen . . . to which, in order that the merchants and their merchandise might rest secure," the Sultan dispatches his guard, headed by the disguised Genoese woman, "who was by this time well versed in the language of the country." This great assemblage of merchants is precisely the field from which Boccaccio's text, his Italy, his Florentines, and his Muslim characters emerge.

Alatiel is shrewd enough to know her market value. If her beauty causes her problems, she knows that revealing her royal status would make her an even more valuable commodity and rule out hope of a safe homecoming. Although privately strategizing with her ladies, she makes public silence her defensive weapon and manipulates what resources she has until the Mediterranean waters return her home. Even after she returns home and can speak again, her clear sight of women's commodity value is not blurred by sentiment. With cool deliberation, she preserves the life and status she wants for herself and out-maneuvers male commodification of her body by making her husband believe her a virgin. The character delineated resists definition as passive object of male desire. The Princess of Tunisia is not

so clear-sighted, but she belongs to a different type, the type of the star-crossed lover. She retains elements of the forward princess, since it is she who first falls in love with Gerbino. The plot is forwarded because she is represented as having spoken her desire for him; word reaches him, and he reciprocates.

The point is, neither Alatiel nor the Tunisian Princess are seen as exotic, foreign, *different* creatures. No assertion of European superiority, a feature of colonialist literature, is apparent. There is a certain indiscriminacy, a lack of proper distinctions, in Boccaccio's representation of Western and Islamic women. Alatiel is beautiful in the same way any of the Florentine ladies could be beautiful, not (looking ahead toward Romanticism, for example) in some dark-eyed "Oriental" way. Even this beauty, which could have lent itself easily to a mode of visual pleasure that highlights and fetishizes her difference, passes quickly as a plot element rather than a scopophilic image. Moreover, it is not necessary to erase the Muslim nature of Alatiel and the Tunisian Princess and have that nature persistently resurface, as in medieval texts. Thus there is no need to change her from an active to a passive woman, or to associate her being Muslim with a transgressive female personality in the first place.

These Muslim ladies are rather less "masterful" than earlier medieval examples. They seem no more exemplars of difference than Lisabetta, Simona, or any of the European women in *The Decameron's* other stories. Like these, their lives are circumscribed by the gender constraints of a uniformly and interreligiously patriarchal Mediterranean world. Boccaccio's Muslim women do not convey a double Othering—the difference of being Islamic plus the difference of being women. Only sexual difference, which they have in common with his representations of European women, remains. Being a Muslim woman is here a matter of *indifference*. Textually no preference is shown for Muslim or European. Yet these characters remain, simply as women, always within the category of difference—and this inevitably has a subliminal connection to the world of other Others without, and thus to their Muslim-ness, hovering in the background.

In *The Decameron* it is accepted that the Islamic world routinely rubs elbows with the European world. This is not a bad thing or a good thing, it is just *there*, an indifferent matter—for after all the jostling, the two worlds (at least as they meet in the Mediterranean) are not so alien after all. It is not necessary to expend tremendous narrative energy to homogenize Islamic elements or Muslim women because they are already homocentric,

having as their common center that great assemblage of goods and people, the Mediterranean marketplace. Patriarchal modes of control are as agreed upon throughout it as are weights and measures; throughout it, women's bodies are as exchangeable as other commodities.

Marguerite D'Angouleme represents no Muslim women in *The Heptameron* (1558), a collection modeled on *The Decameron* and concerned with the corruption of the clergy, the jealousy of husbands, and women's strategies for circumventing these and other injustices. She has the occasional soldier returned from war with the Turks or captivity in Tunis (see story 10). She pointedly declares that the truth came from a foreigner, a Turk, about an incident in story 13. The closest she gets to empire or Muslim lands is Candia (off Greece), in a story which begins with a botched colonial-settler enterprise and centers on the resourcefulness of a woman stranded on a desert island, a sort of female Crusoe but without the will to conquest and profit (story 67). Marguerite, like Christine de Pisane, is silent on the matter of the Muslim woman.

MOMENTS OF EQUILIBRIUM: ZENOCRATE AND THE GLORIOUS ENTERPRISE

Traditional medieval myths of Islam waned or went into latency in this period because the forces producing them (e.g., the Church) had stalled. And the engines (e.g., of modern European colonization) which were to churn out the great Orientalist modes of knowing Islam had not yet begun to rumble; indeed only the first pegs and rivets of this machinery had been soldered. This is a curious lull, then, in which older Western myths of Islam, cut off from their sources, mutate, transform, and seem to float randomly, while emerging new myths are still vague and unsteady.

As for the old hostility, three factors caused it to lose momentum. First, whereas the medieval West seemed to have no other anvil but Islam against which to hammer out its perceptions of itself in the world, the introduction of further elements into the arena mitigated this confrontation. In the thirteenth century, the Mongols arrived on the scene, mowing down Muslim and Christian alike. At first the West believed that these were the long-awaited pro-Christian powers coming to eclipse Islam and unify the world, but that bubble burst quickly. Beside the ferocious Mongols, the erstwhile "pagan" Muslims seemed positively brotherly, and "the original division of the world between Christianity and Islam must have yielded to . . . a greater

relativism in ideological vision" (Rodinson, 28). European rulers' realization that the Persians, too, were bitter enemies of the Ottomans added to this relativism.

The second factor which diminished traditional enmity toward the Islamic world was the passing of ideological unity within western Christianity. The third was the waning of Church power in favor of secular protonational rulers. Islam had long been considered a schism, a heresy broken off from Christianity. When such schisms multiplied in the sixteenth century, the Islamic schism no longer seemed such an atrocity; Christian sects were busy accusing each other of many of the offenses that used to be attributed to Islam. Moreover, some humanists injected a current of skepticism in religion altogether. At the same time, stepping into the power vacuum left by the Church, national monarchies, "well on the way toward absolutism," had by the end of the fifteenth century replaced the medieval organization of political life in Europe (Abbott, 1:110). These new polities had a more pragmatic than religious approach to relations with Islamic states.

As for newer attitudes toward Islam, these were beginning to form against the backdrop of European maritime exploration, new-found commercial prosperity, and the growth of several European states into transoceanic empires that could compete with Islamic empires. First Portugal and Spain, then England, the Netherlands, and France, inched their ways along the coasts of other continents in a bid to establish trading outposts and colonies abroad. Most portentously, Europe's detection of a hemisphere hitherto unknown to it meant that the search for gold and glory could circumvent the entrenched Islamic powers; at long last, another source of wealth, another outlet for surplus populations, another focus for reserve energies, ambitions, and desires, and one more vulnerable to them, was available. A quick sketch of the inaugural era of European imperialism will provide some historical context for the changing representation of the Muslim woman.

If Italy negotiated mutually profitable relations with the Ottoman Empire, the Iberian kingdoms attacked their own Muslim frontiers with a fierce will to eradicate the Moors by military "re-" conquest. The final blow was the defeat of the last Muslim kingdom, Grenada, in 1492, the year of the trans-Atlantic voyage that would forever alter the balance of world power. Meanwhile, Portugal had actually captured Ceuta, a Muslim city just across the Strait of Gibraltar (1415). The capture of Ceuta marks a

threshold, "a turning-point in human affairs. . . . it was the connecting link between the older crusading movement which sought to win back Jerusalem and the Holy Sepulcher from the infidel, and the modern conception of winning the world for commerce and for Christianity" (Abbott, 1:85).

Under the driving energy of Prince Henry "the Navigator," Portuguese ships pushed down the west coast of Africa, setting up stations to import gold and ivory. By 1446 the first thousand black Africans were brought to Europe as slaves; the systematic import of black Africans for slavery in Europe and the Americas had begun. When da Gama rounded the southernmost point of Africa in 1497, his Portuguese king wasted no time in styling himself "Lord of the Conquest, Navigation, and Commerce of Ethiopia, Arabia, Persia, and China" (Abbott, 1:105). This would have been laughable had it been known to the inhabitants of those lands, but no one laughed when the Portuguese reached the west, or Malabar, the coast of India, and later Indonesia, at last circumventing the resented Turks. Spain conquered great chunks of the newly "discovered" territories and, through forced labor of the indigenous population and imported slave labor from Africa, overshadowed Portugal in the New World enterprise during the sixteenth century. In the meantime, Ferdinand Magellan circumnavigated the globe (1519–1521), allowing Spain to invade the Asian routes thus far monopolized by Portugal among European states. The upper hand in world trade began to circulate from one aspiring European empire to another.

Francis Drake's 1572 plunder of a Spanish New World island made him a hero in England and was hailed as a harbinger of English imperial ascendancy; this was realized in England's defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588. Queen Elizabeth founded the Levant Company for trade with the Ottoman Empire, followed by the East India Company, establishing the economic backbone of the empire. (It was at this point that the queen rather disingenuously suggested to the Turks that fellow monotheists such as themselves join hands against idolatrous Spanish papists, showing how far ideological relativism had come.) England made overtures to Persia as well, and when in 1596 the cape of Africa was once again rounded, this time in England's name, the English too achieved the coveted back way to the East. Barrier after barrier that had delimited the old world fell away before European enterprise, and the horizons of human endeavor seemed boundless.

Christopher Marlowe's interminable drama *Tamburlaine* (1587–1590) appeared in the context of both the Renaissance humanist straining against

the traditional limits on thought and Europe's widening arm of empire. The historical Timur (d. 1405), a Mongol conqueror who swept through Asia, had been "praised in a long series of humanistic histories as a successful ruler whose own cruelty had been a visitation of punishment upon sinners" (Ribner, xxv). The English considered his humbling of the Ottoman Sultan Bayezid, who had reduced much of eastern Europe to vassalage, to be particularly expressive of divine retribution at work. While Marlowe uses the "Scourge of God" idea, the play is a youthful exaltation of a human prowess that in its glorious enterprise defies all boundaries, including those of conventional religion, be it Christian or Islamic. By presenting a drama in which almost all the major characters, both heroes and villains, are Muslim, this text leaves behind medieval literary conventions of the Muslim as the infidel arch-enemy bearing the diametric opposite of every quality found in the Christian heroes.

Marlowe's Tamburlaine is nominally a Muslim, but in spirit a classical pagan in the mold of Ulysses and Achilles—or a Renaissance man in the mold of Faustus. In his burning the "Alcoran" and defying "Mahomet" there is a protest against orthodox religion generally, and Christianity most pointedly. To religious superstition he contrasts "[t]he God that sits in heaven, if any god, / For He is God alone, and none but He" (pt. 2, V.ii.199–200), without specifying this God as Christian in any way (there is no mention of Jesus, cross, Trinity, or any identifiably Christian association). Marlowe uses the freedom to criticize "Mahometan" religion as a cover for criticizing Christianity, and any belief in a personal God who guides the daily lives of people (Ellis-Fermor, 142). If there is any divine spirit, Marlowe strongly implies, it is manifest in the human ambition to rise to sublime heights (Ellis-Fermor, 140). The embrace of a pagan spirit of *virtu* over orthodox Christian pietism places this text in a line of humanistic discourse, starting with Machiavelli, which has a relativist, pragmatic, even realpolitik approach to the relationship between the West and Islam—a discourse which identifies with the party of the devil.

Naturally, the exaltation of human *virtu* is mostly an exaltation of male *virtu*, and the glorious human enterprise leaves women in their traditional social berths. Whether wives, mothers, maids, or concubines, the women in *Tamburlaine* are trophies and accessories to men and rarely budge from rather wooden roles. Zenocrate, daughter of the Sultan of Egypt, is waylaid by Tamburlaine on the way to her intended husband. He decides she must be his empress, and she, absorbed by the indomitable will he exudes, agrees.

Zabina is the empress of the Turkish Sultan Bajazeth, and like him, is completely crushed by the fall from glory they experience at the hands of Tamburlaine. When her husband bashes out his brains rather than suffer ignominious captivity, she, with some delirious ranting, follows him.

Zenocrate and Zabina seem but shadows of their husbands. They even catfight while their husbands take the field (III.iii), parroting the men's rhetoric of conquest and glory. Only after Zenocrate has witnessed some of the human cost of this rhetoric—her husband's slaughter of the Virgins of Damascus; his ravage of that city, her hometown; the suicide of the noble couple Bajazeth and Zabina—does she begin to question it. She says, in one of the few vibrant passages given a woman character:

Those that are proud of fickle empery
And place their chiefest good in earthly pomp,
Behold the Turk and his great emperess!
Ah, Tamburlaine my love, sweet Tamburlaine,
That fights for scepters and for slippery crowns,
Behold the Turk and his great emperess!

.....

Ah, mighty Jove and holy Mahomet,
Pardon my love! Oh, pardon his contempt
Of earthly fortune and respect of pity,
And let not conquest, ruthlessly pursued,
Be equally against his life incensed
In this great Turk and hapless emperess!
And pardon me that was not moved with ruth
To see them live so long in misery!
Ah, what may chance to thee, Zenocrate?
(V.ii.291–308)

But since the overall movement of the play valorizes Tamburlaine's magnificence of spirit even in its amazing cruelty, and since she reverts to passive endorsement of Tamburlaine's ideals, Zenocrate's critique remains a faint remonstrance. It is a piece of conventional piety movingly expressed, rather than a foreshadowing of the truth or a powerful indictment. Olympia (in Part 2) is another loyal wife, whose heroic mettle in executing a family suicide pact (she kills her son, burns his body with that of her soldier husband who has died of war wounds, and prepares to kill herself) is called worthy of Tamburlaine's admiration (III.iv.40). The fortitude with

which she tricks her captor into fulfilling her resolve to die is a female reflection of that will to mastery embodied in Tamburlaine; self-annihilation rather than conquest is apparently the only direction it can lead in a woman.

In the context of the great “discoveries” and the imperial enterprises upon which Europeans had embarked in the sixteenth century, *Tamburlaine* is at once a paean to man’s will to power and a howl in protest of its limits. As such, Marlowe’s play, which enjoyed a popular reception, goads its audience to see Tamburlaine as European man at the threshold of glory, daring the things that had never been dared before. “Give me a map,” Tamburlaine declares, “then let me see how much / Is left for me to conquer all the world” (pt. 2, V.iii.123–124). At Damascus, “he boasts that with his sword for pen, he will anew reduce the countries to a map, of which the meridian-line will pass through that city” (Seaton, 164). This is no random metaphor for conquest in the midst of intense controversy among European nations about the Line of Demarcation. Neither is the imagery which clusters around Tamburlaine unrooted in historical conditions, an imagery “brilliant, with the hard, blatant lustre of gold and jewels” (Ellis-Fermor, 153). This is the specific, concentrated form of wealth of sixteenth-century empires, which relied on the transport of precious metals over long routes.

By expressing the condition of modern man through a hero who is Muslim (but also an enemy of Muslims), Marlowe’s text signals an absorption into European identity of all that had heretofore been admired in the powerful Islamic nemesis—admired, envied, and cast in negative terms because of ideological inhibitions which the Renaissance lifted. The worldliness, the virility, the Machiavellian qualities of the lion and the fox, for which Islam had earlier been castigated by chroniclers and popes, were now provocatively suggested as the desirable ideals. Those disturbing qualities which had once and would again be projected onto an alien and unequal Islam could be momentarily incorporated into the self. If Europe was preparing to step into the position that until then had belonged to Islamic empires straddling the world, Nemesis could briefly be Mentor. Who better to embody that glorious human endeavor than a Muslim conqueror, since Islam had already soared to where Europe hoped to soar? Marlowe’s text is a clapping on the shoulder of the Muslim—brother, peer, colleague in the glorious endeavor.

The Muslim woman, in such a scenario, is not represented as a function of civilizational or Islamic difference. Just as Tamburlaine is represented in human terms rather than in terms of the literary conventions of the Mus-

lim/pagan Other, Zenocrate, Zabina, their maids, Olympia, the Virgins of Damascus, and the Turkish concubines are represented as a function of the simple difference of female gender, and not the complex difference of Islamic Other/female gender. The representation of the Muslim woman here bears traces of what I have termed Boccaccio's "indifference" to the Christian-Muslim divide, in that it does not use that divide as the ultimate marker of meaning. The portrayal of Zenocrate, for instance, employs conventions of the noble maiden in distress, the loyal wife, the good mother, the decorous queen, but no conventional Muslim woman material. "As far as Zenocrate is anything at all she is a virtuous, god-fearing Elizabethan matron . . ." (Ellis-Fermor, 149). Perhaps the most that can be said is that Tamburlaine's acquisition of Zenocrate as she treks across the Islamic heartland in the rather confused geography of the play may parallel the ardent European ambition to intercept coveted Islamic trade routes. In this frame, it comes as no surprise that Zenocrate's beauty is described in terms of commodities that were at the core of global rivalries between empires: "silver tresses," showers of pearls and sapphires, and, specifically, an "ivory" complexion (pt. 1, V.ii). This is in line with the increase of precious mineral imagery in the blazon of the female body in Elizabethan love sonnets. The way patriarchy at home uses the female body parallels the way empire abroad appropriates valuable commodities. What is notable here is that this commodification is entirely a function of the gender differentiation at home; it is very difficult to substantiate any textual use of "Islam" material to complicate the differentiation. This textual practice assumes an equality and interchangeability between Muslim and Western women.

There is virtually no trace of the stock medieval material of the "enamoured Moslem princess" in *Tamburlaine*, the use of which would entail activating Islamic difference as a force. There is no aggressive or errant femininity posited as Muslim which needs to be transformed into seemly Christian femininity. Except for scattered petitions to "sacred Mahomet," a novel form of Islamic invocation, there is precious little in their speeches to differentiate these women as Muslim. Nor is there yet a sign of the Muslim woman, still an emperor's wife more than a slave or concubine, being pushed into an entirely inferior, voiceless difference through the insidious knotting together of colonialist narratives on Islam and femininity. An exhilarated strand of Renaissance humanism in the text of *Tamburlaine* has caused the absorption, the evaporation, of her Islamic Otherness, and has

postponed that extreme differentiation which the beginning of European imperialism would accelerate.

BLOND PAGANS AND THE EQUIVOCAL ENTERPRISE

The Muslim woman in medieval texts is represented not as a function of European supremacy over all others, but as a function of Christian resentment of superior Islamic power; she is differentiated as the intimidating and powerful female factor of an intimidating and powerful enemy. When that power differential begins to level off, as it does in fits and starts between the fifteenth and the seventeenth centuries, two things happen to the representation of the Muslim woman in the moments of equilibrium.

In some texts, the level of differentiation itself slides to the point of indiscriminacy between the representation of Muslim women and Western women, and the Muslim woman's textual presence declines or wavers significantly in relation to what it was before. (In late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century texts, the decline will continue further, until the Muslim woman is far inferior to the Western woman in textual presence.) Elsewhere, texts which do activate the Muslim-Christian binary by manipulating the Muslim woman material simultaneously deconstruct that binary and the ideology which produces it. Subversive textual elements, as well as historical contexts, prevent any smooth reading of European supremacy versus Islamic inferiority or evil.

The first case is clear in the example of Zenocrate. Torquato Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata*, as we shall see, provides more equivocal examples of the second. While Tasso's epic poem, the expression of a Renaissance humanism more religious than that of Marlowe, reactivates Islamic difference and does not represent the Muslim woman in terms of gender alone, it undermines its own distinctions between Christian and Muslim. It well illustrates how wider changes in notions of gender also yield changes in the representation of the Islamic difference.

Copious discourse on the role of women "blossomed forth about 1500," showing how central a redefinition of gender was in the transition to early modern Europe (Bange, Dresen, and Noel, in Dresen-Coenders, 12). The Renaissance generated a new set of attitudes toward sexuality and gender which generally improved upon the old view of women as dangerous sexual beings, thus opening novel social spaces.

“For the first time in Western history,” for example, “men stressed the fact that females should be educated. The Platonic orientation in humanist thought may have spurred them to do so” (Bell, 182). Education was not meant to overturn woman’s subordinate domestic role, for its primary purpose was to make her a worthier wife and an abler mother. However, it served to enlarge her influence, at least within the household. Of course, it was mainly aristocratic women who benefited by this trend; the witch-hunts can be read in part as an indicator of the extreme fear of the power of poor women in a turbulent century of peasant revolts, religious wars, and plagues. Yet the expectation that upper- and middle-class women be book-learned and eloquent is noteworthy in comparison to medieval ideals which equate women’s book-learning with black magic and loquacity with unchastity. Many medieval representations of Muslim women associate them with a learning and loquacity that is suspect; changing Renaissance ideals subdue that suspicion.

The Reform movement, the religious arm of the Renaissance, also ushered in a revision of religious positions on marriage, even among those who did not split from the Church. The misogamy which had typified the Church’s approach to family life was now contested by a new philogamy. Reformers’ rejection of celibacy as an ideal and their valorization of the marital state enhanced the position of women in the family (at least on the level of ideology). So did the fact that a greater number of texts were being written by married laymen and by women themselves. A pivotal related change was the revaluation of sexuality as a good in itself, separate from procreation. This is obviously a striking departure from medieval Church thought and is connected to Neoplatonism. The novel proliferation of nudes in painting, especially religious painting, shows how sexuality, the senses, and the body were given new value and even sacralized. That such nudity “creates a tension between erotic attraction and religious meaning” and contests Church doctrine is evident from the Church’s response: the Council of Trent in 1563 tried to ban nudes in religious paintings, with uneven success (Miles, 203).

The status of courtesans, a new class of refined, educated, and very influential prostitutes openly patronized by aristocrats and monarchs, is another indicator of the revaluation of sexuality. So is the striking new element of sexual display in aristocratic clothing. Loose medieval robes disappeared. The naked leg became acceptable for men—and who could overlook the codpiece, that “phallic exhibition padded into permanent

erection" (de Marly, 35)? For women, the beribboned petticoat was suddenly exposed, "bringing glamour and sex appeal to underwear" (Ewing, 26), and hair, previously cowed, capped, or wimpled, could fall long and loose in sensuous disarray on court occasions.

The relative sexual hedonism of aristocrats was not a paradise for women, however. It also allowed the female body, still the locus of what is now a celebrated rather than a condemned eroticism, to be reappropriated in new ways for male sexual pleasure, as in the blazon conceit of the Renaissance love sonnet. Sexual freedom in practical terms meant more (although not absolute) sexual freedom for men. This ethos was partly a response, after all, to the exigencies of aristocratic marriages, which were always political alliances or property exchanges more than romantic attachments, and it offered no alternative to the commodification of women implicit in such arrangements. Further, after the early phase of the Renaissance, a conservative reaction retrenched against some of the general opening toward sexuality.⁵ Yet if sexuality gained some positive value in itself, then women, having always been seen from a male perspective as the locus of sexuality in the universe, were bound to improve appreciably in standing. Any reevaluation of sexuality also served to soften the traditional indictment of Islam as sensual and Muslim women as sexually overbearing.

To review, the essential elements of the "enamoured Moslem princess," as I have sketched her in the medieval section, are her high social rank and aggressive, forward personality, frequently manifested as loquacity or "wanton" sexuality and sometimes aided by magical knowledge; her active pursuit of a Christian man held captive by her father or husband; her release of him from captivity and aid to him against her father and the Muslim forces; her conversion to his faith and transformation to a passive femininity; and her journeying with him to his native land, transferring to him her father's wealth and property.

Jerusalem Liberata takes this "enamoured Moslem princess," one of whose stock qualities was being the only major female Muslim character in the story, and splinters her into three Muslim princesses involved in three variations on the conventional plot. The three subplots end with different ambiguous messages rather than with the single homogenous one of medieval treatment. Although Boccaccio's blithe indifference to the Christian-Muslim divide is gone, this text undermines any absolute demarcation of that divide. Several Muslim women in the *Liberata* are drawn, like *Tamburlaine's* women, in terms of conventional Western gender cate-

gories, a representation which minimizes their “Islamic” evil but deflates their textual presence. For example, Altomoro’s absent loyal wife has been likened by critics to Andromache, Hector’s wife in *The Iliad* (Stephens, 176). Yet there remains one Muslim female who has as subversive a textual presence as the medieval Muslim woman, and who needs to be overthrown, re-deemed, and integrated for the epic plot to reach fulfillment and the allegory to achieve wholeness.

Of Tasso’s three Muslim princesses, Erminia superficially approximates the conventional type. She has high rank as the daughter of the King of Antioch; this is literalized in her elevated physical position on the ramparts overlooking the battle (reminiscent of Bramimonde) when she identifies Christian combatants for the Muslim leader. She takes the initiative in pursuing the Christian knight Tancred. Her leaving the embattled city in disguise to seek the object of her unrequited love is something of a betrayal of Muslim forces, since she intends to use her medical skill to heal a prominent foe. However, a major shift in the balance of power has taken place: Instead of having fallen in love with Tancred while he was the prisoner of her father, Erminia fell in love with him when he took her captive after defeating and killing her father:

And when her city and her state was lost,
Then was her person lov’d and honor’d most.
(6.56)⁶

It is her captivity, not his, that is the springboard for transformation. Since her father’s kingdom has already fallen, she is not needed to transfer wealth and land through union with the Christian. Nor is she key in helping the Christians take Jerusalem—she cannot even govern her horse, which carries her off into a pastoral interlude tangential to the battle (canto 7).

The woman is thus removed a degree from the center of the dramatic action and assigned a secondary feminine sphere, while the primary struggle—the struggle for Jerusalem—takes place in a masculine world. Her femininity is not portrayed as errant and in need of transformation; she is already a seemingly, virtuous woman as a Muslim. She is not a wanton like *The Sowdone of Babylon’s* Floripas or *Bevis of Hampton’s* Josian, but a blushing virgin; “The heav’nly beauty of her angel’s face,” no less, shines forth from this (pagan!) damsel (7.18), who dresses in saintly blue and sports “locks of shining gold” (6.90 and 6.92). Since her action of seeking out her knight’s chamber is not all that different from theirs, and since she prac-

tices the medical arts as they do, this shows how notions of acceptable feminine behavior expanded during the Renaissance.

Significantly, Erminia's stock conversion is entirely missing. Because her Islamic-ness has been so underemphasized, because she has been so blond and so angelic and so *good*, it is as if, on a covert level, the text is indicating that she needs no conversion. Most readers find her conversion implied, but the fact that it is not actualized leaves an indeterminacy to the plot and an ambiguity about the Christian-Muslim divide which ideological imperatives in this post-Tridentine text by a devout Catholic would not be expected to allow.

The aggressive quality absent in Erminia can be found in another natural blond, Clorinda, the warrior woman who "hated chambers, closets, secret mews, / And in broad fields preserved her maidenhead" (2.39). She obviously takes direct part in the male world of significant action, the battle for Jerusalem. Despite this transgression of traditional female behavior, Tasso protects her from any charge of wantonness by insisting on the chastity of the "warlike maid," as in the above lines from Fairfax's translation, thus restricting her potential danger—and reducing her potential power, if Tasso's claims are taken as effective. She also has a Christian counterpart in the chaste wife Gildippe, which serves to remove any Islamic specificity from her martial activities and further reduces their disruptive power. This reflects a new appreciation and appropriation of the "heroic" woman which some scholars consider characteristic of the Italian Renaissance; it is an outlook in which "virago" becomes a word of praise instead of censure (see Jacob Burckhardt, in Bell, 200–205). Yet Clorinda, far from being a wanton lady, is the unknowing object of Tancred's love and gaze and pursuit, from when he spies her face under her lifted visor (1.47). First he penetrates her shiny armor with his gaze; later, "His sword into her bosom deep he drives" (12.64); she dies at his hand.⁷

All this is further complicated by the mid-story revelation that Clorinda is actually a Christian by birth, daughter of the black queen and king of Ethiopia. Her mother, unable to explain the birth of the white child and fearing the wrath of her very jealous husband, switched her with a more suitably tinted infant, and Clorinda was mistakenly raised in "Macon" lore. Even after she discovers her origin, she prefers to remain loyal to the people among whom she was raised; only when mortally wounded by Tancred does she request baptism. Is this a last-minute saving of Tancred from the censure of having loved a "paynim?" For by the moral standards of heav-

only Jerusalem, the Christian knight must virtuously refuse to fall for any “pagan” maidens. Aucassin loved Saracen Nicolette only in open defiance of father, religion, and country, and she was even baptized; Tancred is the Christian hero of a holy Crusade and no such open defiance of dogma is tolerable in him—but an equivocal resistance may be obliquely conveyed by delaying her conversion to the last minute.

In any case, the revelation of Clorinda’s origin undermines the demarcation between Christian and Muslim that is crucial to the overt ideology of the text. Ostensibly, the poem is supposed to inspire its contemporaneous readers

[t]o win fair Greece out of the tyrant’s hands
And those usurping Ismaelites deprive
Of woful Thrace, which now captived stands,
You must from realms and seas the Turks forth drive,
As Godfrey chased them from Judah’s lands,
And in this legend, all that glorious deed
Read, whilst arm you: arm you, whilst you read. (1.5)

Yet if a white infant can be born to black parents, if Christians can be black and non-European, if staunch defenders of Islam can turn out to be secret Christians unbeknownst even to themselves, if in killing what he thinks is his male Muslim foe Tancred unknowingly kills his female Christian beloved, how can Tasso’s contemporary Christian reader raise his hand and smite? The best he can do is read the poem as an allegory of the soul (which it is) and smite the evil within himself, embrace the blond pagan struggling toward grace within himself. The stability of the line dividing one group from the other is shaken, no matter how much the official ideology of the poem insists otherwise.

Tasso scholars have previously pointed out the ideological inconsistency of the *Liberata*, in which overtly declared doctrines are undermined by the covert effects of the text (Stephens, 169–174). A deconstructive critic calls the poem “the first manifest example in Italian literature of a conscious identification (although repudiated at the level of ideology) with the forces of evil, the first great example of solidarity with the ‘pagan enemy’” (Sergio Zatti, in Stephens, 170). Feminist critics have suggested that the text does not differentiate substantively between Christian and Muslim female characters, subordinating both to patriarchal order (see Stephens, 172)—which is not inconsistent with the notion that the text identifies with the

(male) pagan Other. Other critics maintain that Tasso's devoutly Catholic intentions and his own explication of the *Liberata* in other writings ought to be the primary criteria for reading the text (Roche, 49–50). Yet no matter how anxious Tasso was to prove the orthodoxy of his epic, the richness, depth, and empathy with which he portrays the Muslim side exceed the ideological necessities for such description.

Armida, the very blond and lovely enchantress and princess of Damascus, is the woman whose presence most infuses the text of *Gerusalemme Liberata*. In canto 4 she enters the Christian camp and, following her magician father's instructions, plays damsel in distress so persuasively that the cream of the Christian knights follow her out. These fifty she lures to her castle on the Dead Sea. There she, with a hundred virgins serving, wines and dines them, tries to make them convert, then turns them into fishes for refusing (except one apostate). Rinaldo appears and rescues them, and they hurry back to camp, contrite at having been tempted by Armida's wiles. Meanwhile Armida falls for Rinaldo and he is enchanted by her. She flies him off to her Atlantic island, where she reigns as queen and he is willing to live in "bondage" in her "empire" of sensual delights (16.21).

Godfrey, the Christian commander, told in a vision from heaven that Rinaldo's return is critical for the Christian cause, sends two knights to retrieve him. As they advance through the Strait of Gibraltar, the knights ask the mysterious woman who navigates the ship if anyone has ever passed this point, and what lies beyond it. Only Ulysses has crossed before, she answers, and he never returned; as for the lands beyond,

As divers be their nations (answer'd she)
Their tongues, their rites, their laws so different are.
(15.28)

The Christians, bent on obliterating the one different law that has absorbed their energies for so long, are thus made aware of a vast panorama of differences still awaiting subjugation. This point will be crossed again, she foretells, by a "knight of Genoa," when the unknown sites will be named and their profane people converted to the true faith. Tasso thereby links the explorations of his own times to both the classical Greek heritage and the Crusades, loading territorial expansion with ideological value for the very cultural identity of Europe.

The knights' task, upon which the fate of the Crusading army awaits, is to rescue Rinaldo from what is described as Armida's "*Impero* / *imperio*

(*imperium*), the military and political term for the power to command” (Stephens, 194). This term is also used in the original text (according to Stephens, 194) to describe the authority of Godfrey, the supreme Christian commander (1.33). The empire ruled by the Muslim witch-princess undermines European *imperium* and must be broken before Jerusalem can be won in the battle proper.

What seemed obvious by Tasso’s time but of course never occurred to his medieval sources was that the path to Christian (now better called European) victory over the *imperium* of the Islamic East lay due west. It was America that ended Europe’s obsession with Islam as its ultimate nemesis and alter ego. By sailing beyond the Gates of Hercules to sneak a furtive back entry to the East, and stumbling upon another enormous source of wealth along the path, Europeans ensured the eclipse of Islamic hegemony, which had stymied their every other effort. The “position of the Ottoman Empire in the world trading network had altered substantially” by the end of the sixteenth century; gone was its “stranglehold” on trade routes (Lee, 86). Gone also was Islam’s stranglehold on the Western imagination of the Other, although it retained a unique footing in that imagination.

Yet Italy’s peculiar position in the new age of imperial expansion was ambiguous. The “knight of Genoa” would find no support in Italy, and no wonder: The movement west, the waning of Muslim power, meant that Italy’s importance as middleman would also fade. Italy’s prosperity was in many ways dependent on Ottoman prosperity. On the other hand, Italy was the seat of the papacy, with its strident views on the necessity of Christian supremacy over Islam. The challenges of the Reformation had given impetus for a revitalization of the Church Militant, in the forms of the Inquisition, the Council of Trent, the Jesuits, and other orders. Tasso’s text evinces a peculiar Italian ambivalence toward the Muslim world.

The *Liberata* posits this ambivalence in the form of a Muslim woman. Armida is declared a “wanton” and a “virgin” in the same breath (4.31–34). She is called a Circe (4.86) and yet described in the very vocabulary of Petrarch’s Laura and even the Virgin Mary (Stephens, 174). She is overtly condemned as a witch who seduces the soldiers of the Lord, and yet the stanzas blazoning her beauty and describing her real anguish at Rinaldo’s rejection work the conceits of Renaissance love poetry quite earnestly to evoke attraction and empathy. Most remarkably, she is recouped at the end, and this without a baptism scene or even an explicit conversion (although her conversion is implied).

As Stephens asks, “Why should the vain and willful Armida be salvaged at the cost of Gildippe, who is both a Christian and a faithful wife?” (175). Why, if not to recuperate her sensuality and redeem the Islamic materialism she represents? For all its moralism, the text conveys a sensitivity to the real beauty of Armida’s world, its waters clear and fresh, its snow and greenery, its golden light—not to mention “[t]hese naked wantons, tender, fair and white,” who

[m]oved so far the warriors’ stubborn hearts,
That on their shapes they gazed with delight;
The nymphs applied their sweet alluring arts,
And one of them above the waters quite
Lift up her head, her breasts, and higher parts,
And all that might weak eyes subdue and take;
Her lower beauties veil’d the gentle lake. (15,59)

Now, the knights resist, as they must, and liberate Rinaldo from all this exquisite lust. Yet, in the context of the greater acceptability of nudity in sublime Italian Renaissance painting, in the context of a more open integration of sexuality in daily life, are these delights really to be as sternly eradicated as the morality of the poem insists? Pagan Armida is a witch, it is true. Yet the ugly aspects of witch-hood are relegated to Alecto, the Fury in the enchanted forest, who takes the shape of an enormous hundred-armed giantess who goes out in a blaze of glory, vanquished by the repentant Rinaldo in canto 18. This leaves Armida the glamour of flying through the air and other winsome witch activities. Falling for her charms is really rather delightful—and the tempted men, while not exactly excused, elicit sympathetic understanding and classical parallels:

What wonder if Achilles were misled,
Or great Alcides, at their ladies’ sights,
Since these true champions of the Lord Above
Were thralls to beauty, yelden slaves to love?
(4,96)

The relationship of Armida and Rinaldo, founded on lust, remarkably survives. He finds genuine value in her which he wishes might be won over to Christianity. He could have left her to kill herself, if the moral schema of the poem were strictly condemnatory of her values. Instead he wants to make her queen (of her rightful kingdom)—if only she would remove the

“veil” of paganism from her heart. These are the lines in which her conversion is strongly implied (but not explicitly proclaimed):

*“Ecco l’ancilla tua: d’essa a tuo senno
dispon,” gli disse “e le fia legge il cenno.”*

(Behold [she says] your handmaid and your thrall,
My life, my crown, my wealth, use at your pleasure. —
Thus death her life became, loss prov’d her treasure. [20.136])

This turn reverses the terms of power that governed their relationship on the island, giving the *imperium* to its rightful owner in a Pauline model of marriage (Stephens, 194). Not only does Rinaldo redeem Armida, but Tasso puts in her mouth the words of the Virgin Mary, “*Ecco l’ancilla tua*” (Behold your handmaid) (Luke 1:38), causing a prominent Tasso critic to “wince” (Giamatti, 209).

Ambivalence toward the still somewhat powerful, still magical, still seducing Muslim woman is a product of both the flux in social appraisal of gender roles and the ambiguity in Western, especially Italian, relations with Islam. Tasso’s intense anxieties about orthodoxy—he was afraid the poem had too much love and magic, submitted it to numerous critics, and only authorized publication of a sternly edited version (Nelson’s introduction to Fairfax, xv–xix)—may indicate that, on some level, he was aware of this ambivalence.

SHE IS WHAT WE HOPE SHE IS NOT: ERASING ZORAIDA

Spain’s relationship with the Islamic world was from the beginning mediated almost wholly by its Moors. It was unlike Italy’s relationship with the Ottomans in that the Moors had been an organic part of Iberian society. Clearly and unambiguously by the sixteenth century, they had become a powerless minority in their own land, targeted for total eradication by the imperatives of a consolidated, absolutist state and a repressive, militant Church. While the Renaissance (at least the early Renaissance) elsewhere in Europe produced transitional moments of supple equivocality, of subdued differentiation between Christian and Muslim, in Spain Islamic difference became the site of intense ideological anxiety. Church and state in Spain worked assiduously to scrub out every residue of Islamic presence in

the interest of national unity. Only among the large landowners, who valued their numerous Morisco farmers and tenants, were there pockets of resistance to the general policy, and the power of these aristocrats diminished steadily in this age of absolute monarchy.

Initially the terms of Granada's capitulation guaranteed Muslim rights, but the conversion rate was too slow for the Catholic kings, who decided to apply harsher methods of persuasion. This tactic provoked the Revolt of Albaicín in 1500; after suppressing it, the monarchs punished all the Moors of Castile with a choice between baptism or exile (Chejne, 7). In 1524, the Moriscos⁸ of Valencia and Aragon were given the same ultimatum and prohibited from using the Arabic language or maintaining Moorish customs. A revolt there produced a compromise guaranteeing Morisco rights, which was rescinded shortly thereafter because of charges that the Moriscos were supporting enemies of Spain. Suppression led to revolts, which produced further suppression. The Revolt of the Alpujarras, as late as 1568, protested a 1566 edict

prohibiting the Moriscos the use of the Arabic language, annulling of all contracts written in Arabic, surrendering all Arabic books within thirty days, and prohibiting any Moorish rite, Moorish clothing, and the use of Arabic names and customs. The edict also called for destroying all public baths, requiring Moriscos to leave the doors of their houses open, unveiling women and requiring Castilian dress, and ceasing to dance the zambra and sing. (Chejne, 10)

The Moors were always suspected of links with the powerful Turks, with the Mediterranean pirates who plagued Spanish shipping, even with Lutherans—and, after 1588, with agents of the anti-Spanish coalition comprising England, Holland, and France. As early as 1582, expulsion was one of the options on Philip II's table; other solutions for the Morisco problem, besides sporadic suggestions of re-education, charity, and patience, were ghettoization, a ban on intermarriage, and castration (Chejne, 13). In 1609, Spain finally decreed the expulsion of Moriscos "so that," as the Duke of Lerma put it, "all the kingdoms of Spain will remain pure and clean from this people" (Chejne, 13). The goals of the self-exorcism were so extreme that "[e]ven the word *Morisco* was decreed to be forgotten, for its use would constitute bad taste" (Chejne, 13).

Under these conditions, the representation of the Muslim woman is suddenly more highly charged than ever before. The Muslim woman gains

importance as the object of ideological contest, even while her textual presence is muffled and her power circumscribed. It is the Moorish taint in the very appearance of the Captive and his lady companion at the inn in *Don Quixote* (pt. 2, chap. 37) which disrupts the conversation of the Spanish gentlemen (even though she herself, it later appears, is enveloped in a new and strange silence):

Muchas palabras de comedimiento y muchos ofrecimientos pasaron entre Don Quijote y Don Fernando; pero a todo puso silencio un pasajero que en aquella sazón entro en la venta, el cual en su traje mostraba ser cristiano recién venido de tierra de moros, porque venía vestido con una casaca de paño azul. . . . Entró luego tras él, encima de un jumento, una mujer a la morisca vestida, cubierto el rostro con una toca en la cabeza; traía un bonetillo de brocado y vestida una almalafa, que desde los hombros a los pies la cubría. . . . (660–663)

(Many compliments and offers of service passed between Don Quixote and Don Fernando, but they were all silenced by a traveler who at that moment entered the inn. By his dress he appeared to be a Christian newly arrived from the land of the Moors. He wore a short blue-cloth tunic. . . . Behind him on an ass came a woman dressed in Moorish fashion, with her face covered and a veil on her head; she was wearing a little cap of gold brocade and was swathed in a cloak that enveloped her from her shoulder to her feet. [384])

On the surface, the Moorish presence, marked sartorially, momentarily disrupts the very civilized discourse between two men, at least one of whom represents the landed nobility of Spain. The underside is that this only appears to be very civilized discourse; in fact, one man is crazy and the other is humoring him. The binary between order and disorder, seemingly figured as Christian Spanish versus Moorish or Morisco, is already cleverly displaced in Cervantes' text by Don Quixote's craziness, the disorder within the Spanish side of the binary.

Its publication in 1605 meant that the first part of *Don Quixote* preceded the "abrupt muffling of the 'Morisco problem' in official discourse" which happened after the expulsion was completed in 1614 (Burshatin, 113). Nevertheless, the highly charged meanings dress conveys immediately alert us to the irreducible difference of the Morisco or Moorish element; not only do Moors dress distinctively, but apparently even a visit to a Moorish land

is enough to mark a Christian with telltale taints of Moorishness. These require storytelling, explanation, to defuse their danger. As for the woman, "*a la morisca vestida*" (translated "dressed in Moorish fashion," although "dressed in Morisco fashion" may be more accurate), she is already in direct violation of the law of the land.

We have never before encountered such a thing as Muslim or Islamic dress in any European representation of the Muslim woman. Twice again the narrator refers to the strangeness of her dress in the paragraph describing her entrance to the inn, even naming her as "*la que en el traje parecía mora*" (663) (she who seemed from her dress to be Moorish [384]). Her attire is referred to two more times in conversation before the Captive's Tale even begins. Even the name of the garment she wears, "*una almalafa*," points to an irreducible Islamic difference, *al malafa* being Arabic for "the cloak" or "the wrapper." *Una* redundantly adds the Spanish (indefinite) article to the Arabic (definite) article, making a hard, indigestible unit out of the two Arabic components, and *almalafa* underlines the impossibility of describing a Moorish woman without using the outlawed Arabic language. Cervantes' choice of language undermines official ideological insistence on the "purity" of Spanish and its separability from Moorish elements, even while showing the effects of this ideology at work—for without it, "*a la morisca vestida*" would not exist.

Zoraida, the woman dressed in Morisco fashion, is a turning point in the representation of the Muslim woman. Conditions which had produced the earlier, more powerful Muslim female image stubbornly lingered past their prime in the larger European scene, manifested especially in European-Ottoman relations. Spain was part of this larger scene, but its unique domestic situation simultaneously created another set of representational conditions.

Spanish state policies for the administration, control, and subjection of Muslim communities had already advanced to a point that England and France would achieve only in the nineteenth century (and not in quite the same way). What Said calls the "positional superiority" (7) of the West over the Muslim world is in place at this point—but only inside Spain itself. Outside, Spain could exercise dominance over Muslims only equivocally.⁹ Outside played havoc with inside; the possibility that the powerful Turks would come to the aid of their Moorish co-religionists worried Spanish rulers constantly. Even after Philip III ordered the expulsion of all

Moriscos in 1609, “there remained the preoccupation of cleansing the land of the remaining infidels and those who managed to return from exile” (Chejne, 13).

Dorotea asks the Captive, “*esta señora es cristiana o mora? Porque el traje y el silencio nos hace pensar que es lo que no queríamos que fuese*” (664) (is this lady a Christian or a Moor? Her dress and her silence make us think she is what we hope she is not [385]). “[W]hat we hope she is not” . . . we are insecure, but we hope. Residual Moriscos in Spain were always suspected of being what authorities hoped they were not. Further elision suggests that “she is . . . what she is not.” The Moriscos (being Morisco) are what they officially are not, since the sixteenth-century edicts no longer allowed such a thing as Morisco ethnocultural identity.

What accomplishes such erasure? What can simultaneously signify presence and absence? The text itself tells us: “her dress and her silence.” Dress and silence are the marked components of a new version of the Muslim woman. Together they make up the meaning of her veil. It is this veil, and the fabrication of her veil in the Western narrative, which absents the Muslim woman from the scene.

Cervantes’ text (actually his Moorish narrator, whom I will discuss shortly) refers to Zoraida as *la embozada*, the muffled or veiled one; her *almalafa* completely covers her, *la cubría*, so that she is there and not there at the same time. This veil is a sign of erasure which leaves telltale traces, a narrative repetition of the process which preoccupied Spain throughout the sixteenth century, the erasure of the Moorish presence. So there is a great difference in meaning between Zoraida’s veiling and Dorotea’s or Luscinda’s. For Dorotea too veils her face upon hearing of the arrival at the inn of Luscinda’s party, consisting of Luscinda and four masked men; Luscinda herself arrives with her face veiled.¹⁰ But only Zoraida’s veiledness becomes a metaphor for her identity and embodies this quality of absence in presence.

“[I]f the Arab woman’s introduction at Juan Palomeque’s inn is characterized by the ‘embozo’ which hides her features, her presence in the ‘Captive’s Tale’ is similarly obscured, remaining ‘muffled’ behind the metaphor of the veil which personifies her in the story” (Garces, 70). As a Moor in Spain at this juncture in history, Zoraida can only be represented as nullified. Nullification is evident even in her announcement of her name: “*Si, si, María: Zoraida macange!—que quiere decir no*” (665) (Yes, yes, Maria—Zoraida macange, that is to say, not Zoraida at all [386]). Now the Aquilar edi-

tion (eds. Soriano and Morales) glosses *macange* thus: "*Macange, del arabe ma kan chey*." But *ma kan chey* in Arabic means more than simply "no" or "not Zoraida at all;" it suggests that Zoraida *never* existed, that Zoraida has never been anything: it is a denial of history, echoing the Spanish state policies that strove mightily to make it seem as if the Moors had never existed, had never been in Spain at all. Yet Cervantes' text contains fissures that deliberately undermine the ideological edifice that walls Zoraida into the void.

The figure of Zoraida thus heralds a new type of representation—a type that will become well entrenched under Western colonialism—while retaining features which destabilize and delay that entrenchment. Elements of the "enamoured Moslem princess" still inform Zoraida, yet we find an increasing emphasis on elements of what I term the "rescued Muslim maiden," a latecomer to the gallery of the Muslim woman in Western literature.

Thus Zoraida's high rank is indeed literalized in the elevated position of her window overlooking the courtyard of the Christian Captive's prison, but instead of having authority and influence, she is as much a captive as he is in this place. While the Christian man is indeed a prisoner in Muslim territory, he is no longer directly a captive of her father. She does initiate contact with him and propose marriage, but this time in so laborious, so coded a manner as to emphasize the impediments to her speech instead of her loquacity or eloquence. She does assist the Christians against the Muslims, but waits for them to develop and initiate the plan of escape, rather than aggressively and directly initiating the central action herself. Conversion, betrayal, and abandonment of the father, transferal of his wealth and jewels, and the voyage to Christian land are retained without much change because they are compatible with the new narrative of the rescued Muslim maiden. No longer is she evil, even in her pre-Christian state; instead, she is romanticized and idealized—and silenced—as an object of pity and compassion, and of the gaze. The central change in the Muslim woman from active to passive is indicated by the fact that the enamoredness of the enamored Moslem princess springs from herself, whereas the rescued Muslim maiden needs to be rescued by another.

Yet all this story is narrated in Cervantes' text by a Moor, or ostensibly by a Spaniard who had to translate from the romance Arabic of the Moorish/Morisco Cide Hamete Benengeli, "*autor arabigo y manchego*" (424) (the Arabian and Manchegan author [209]). With this device, this reminder of the inextricability of Spanish and Moorish identities, the text slyly sabo-

tion is reinforced by her passive body language, but most of all by her silence, that distinct silence to which Dorotea refers when she says "her dress and her silence make us think she is what we hope she is not" (emphasis added).

The din made by this silence is deafening. Suddenly there is a need for translators at every juncture between Christians and Muslims. Bramimonde, Belakane, and Floripas needed no translators; neither did Erminia, Clorinda, and Armida. The Captive's Tale posits communication between Christian and Moor as a formidable difficulty at a time in history when chairs in Arabic were being established in the European universities, when scores of people still moved, voluntarily or involuntarily, between Spain and North Africa, depositing reams of words in each other's languages. The representation of the language barrier in this text is therefore as much a function of the official ban on Arabic as of realism. The effects of ideology can be seen, for example, in the phrase "*no sabía hablar cristiano*" (663) (she did not know the Christian tongue [385]). "The Christian tongue" is a completely meaningless term except in the context of the dominant, Golden Age Spanish ideology's equation of Arabic with Islam, and its obsession with erasing it.

Zoraida is not uncommunicative. She speaks with her body, as when she makes a deep bow in response to Dorotea's overture. She signals with her hand, communicating through her window with the Captive in the prison courtyard below. Notably, she is, as Garces puts it, "a writer, who writes the corpus of her own story in the three letters dedicated to the Spaniard" (67). Most important of all, in the beginning she literally speaks, and fluently: "let us recall the Moorish woman's voluble conversation with the Captive, in her father's presence, where her discursive abilities are enhanced by the subtle double-entendres with which she questions the Spaniard about his plans to leave Barbary" (Garces, 72). In fact, in addition to Arabic she speaks a pidgin tongue "*que ni es morisca, ni castellana, ni de otra nación alguna, sino una mezcla de todas las lenguas con la cual todos nos entendemos*" (705) (which is neither Morisco, nor Castilian, nor of any nation, but a medley of all languages, by means of which we can all understand one another [415]). If she has such an ability and knows a language with such remarkable scope, by what criteria can she possibly be characterized as silent?

Zoraida's silence is similar to the silence of other African women characters in European literature, which Busia describes as "a deliberate *unvoicing*, rather than any intrinsic absence of speech on the part of the woman"