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## The Sultana and Her Sisters: black women in the British Isles before 1530

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ABSTRACT This interdisciplinary study examines cultural representation of black women in the British Isles before 1530. It addresses a lacuna in the historiography of black women which has, hitherto, paid little attention to the fact of their existence in the British Isles *before* British involvement in the slave trade. Representations of black women in stained glass and in poetry of the Middle Ages are examined and their meaning and function interrogated through an analysis of the medieval discourses which framed them and through which they were refracted: biblical exegesis, natural histories and travel literature, bestiaries, constructions of female beauty and medical treatises. These images suggest that the bodies and behaviours of black women were the site for a definition of gender and racial *otherness* long before the development of the slave trade of Elizabethan and Jacobean England.

As far as African women are concerned ... the history of Britain, like that of the other European countries, is replete with the full measure of their presence. Evidence of this presence, however, has almost never found its way into the pages of Western European scholarship. And the odd times when it has, it has always been tinted by pens dipped in racism.[1]

Since Edward Scobie made this observation in the mid-1980s, a feminist reconfiguration of black historiography and literary criticism has sought to return their histories to black women and to signal the racism inherent in their exclusion from western European history. Scholarly interest in black women and racial discourse in the British Isles begins usually with the xenophobia and expansionism of the Elizabethans and Jacobeans. Since the mid-1990s, literary historians have demonstrated how black women were represented in English works, particularly in drama, during the early modern period. Margo Hendricks and Patricia Parker analyse how gender,

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race and class play against each other in the representation of black women in early modern texts and the representation of black women in a variety of Renaissance literary genres is explored by Kim F. Hall.[2]

When medievalists have expressed interest in black women, they have focused largely on the cultural interaction during Muslim and Christian encounters on either side of the Straits of Gibraltar from the eighth century onwards and during the European Crusades, which took place between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries to recover Jerusalem from Muslim rule.[3] To date, the presence of black women has been examined in the life and literature of those countries at the epicentre of the meeting of Europe and Africa: namely France, Spain and Portugal. José Piedra provides a brief examination of the black prostitute, Mari López, who features in a fourteenth- or fifteenth-century Spanish epic poem, *La Carajicomedia* (The Prick-a-comedy), and most recently, Jacqueline de Weever has analysed the presentation of white and black Saracen women in medieval French epic.[4]

As we enter the second millennium, it is salutary to note that black women had arrived in the British Isles by the beginning of the first. The remains of a young African girl were found in a burial dated c. 1000 AD at North Elmham in Norfolk, about 25 miles north-west of Norwich.[5] She is believed to have been aged between twelve and fourteen.[6] At the opening of the sixteenth century, Africans were attached to the court in Edinburgh, of James IV of Scotland. In 1504, there is mention of payment in the Lord Treasurer's Accounts for the transport of 'More lassis' [Moorish girls] from Dunfermline to Edinburgh.[7] Another group of Africans appears to have arrived in Scotland as a result of tit for tat pirateering, probably taken from Portuguese slavers by the Scottish privateers, the Barton brothers.[8] At least two of the group were female, who became known as 'blak Elene' and 'blak Margaret', and who were still at the Scottish court in 1513 when the King gave as his New Year gift 'to the twa [two] blak ledeis [ladies], x Franche crounis [crowns]'. [9] In addition to his financial gift, the Accounts record considerable monies given for purchasing slippers, gloves and dresses for them and 'xij ½ elne [a cloth measure of 1¼ yards] Birge satin to be tua gowns to the blak ladyis madinnis [maidservants]'. [10] James's queen, Margaret Tudor, had a 'blak madin' amongst her attendants.[11] There is reference in 1527 to 'Helenor, the black moir' [12] and if this is the same 'blak Elene' who arrived from the Portuguese ship at the start of the century, it is possible that she lived out her adult life in Scotland.

In addition to a literal presence, black women exerted a cultural presence here through their representation in language and in a variety of artistic media. As early as the twelfth century, a black woman appears in the stained glass windows of Canterbury Cathedral. From the close of the fourteenth century to the beginning of the sixteenth, representations of

black women feature in poetry of both the English and Scottish courts, in travel writing and in encyclopaedic works.

Although Scobie states that 'the history of Britain ... is replete with the full measure of their presence', black women are difficult to locate. Evidence has been gathered from their consignment to an occasional footnote in a secondary source. Their presence as recorded in cultural artefacts is more readily available but the significance of these representations has not, hitherto, been fully explored. With the exception of an image in stained glass, the primary sources examined are poems, the literary nature of which presents special problems for historical analysis. They cannot be treated as factual reports yet are a valuable source because, as John Tosh advises, 'all creative literature offers insights into the social and intellectual milieu in which the writer lived'. [13] Faced with such material, this article follows Gabrielle Spiegel's advice and focuses:

on the ways in which the historical world is internalized in the text and its meaning fixed. This process of 'inscription' (or the fixation of meaning) is not to be confused with 'written' in the traditional sense of 'recorded'. Rather, it represents the moment of choice, decision, and action that creates the social reality of the text, a reality existing both 'inside' and 'outside' the particular performance incorporated in the work, through the latter's inclusions, exclusions, distortions, and stresses.[14]

These representations of black women were created in a society whose knowledge of races other than European was shaped, in part, by the influence of Christianity, through real-life contact in warfare during the Crusades to the Holy Land to reclaim Jerusalem from the Saracens, and through trade. Many, however, had limited or no real-life contact with black people, and so their understanding would have been inspired by a symbolic as opposed to a physical presence. The meaning and function of the representations discussed in this article, an African Queen, African slaves and a Muslim Sultana from the Middle East, are interrogated, therefore, through an analysis of those medieval discourses which frame the categories of *woman* and *race* and through which they are refracted: natural histories and bestiaries, travel literature, biblical exegesis, constructions of female beauty and medical treatises.

The article begins with an analysis of medieval understanding of black women through their presence in medieval language and their construction into 'fantastic other' in encyclopaedias and travel literature. The discussion then moves on to examine how biblical exegesis framed the earliest representation of a black woman included in this study in its attempt to 'whiten' the exotic blackness of the Queen of Sheba, as portrayed in the stained glass of Canterbury Cathedral. The representation of black women in English poetry is interrogated, demonstrating the ways in which the black

woman's body, found wanting according to medieval standards of female beauty and motherly behaviour, consequently was interpreted as ugly, evil, on occasion 'mannish', and always the antithesis of that of her white sister. The discussion of literary representations concludes with an analysis of the only poem written about a real black woman, whom the author most probably knew, an African who lived at the court of James IV of Scotland. In each of the representations, the representer's focus is on the alterity of the black woman's body and there is some liking, but mainly loathing, conveyed by the white, male producer of the images.

### Black Women's Presence in Language and Natural History: the construction of the 'fantastic other'

Black women exerted a cultural presence through their recognition in Middle English and late medieval Scottish vernaculars. Although Old English offers us little more than the word *blacche* (with its variant regional spellings) for a black person [15], by the thirteenth century, Middle English had acquired two key terms with which to signal non-white skin colour; *More* and *Saracen*. Each has variant regional spellings and neither is gender-specific, as both were applied equally to men and women. A third and rarer word was *Sowdonesse* (in Modern English, Sultana), the female form of *Sowdon* or Sultan, which was understood to mean the female ruler of a Muslim country. In late medieval Scottish, the variant *Moir* is that which is used to describe someone of African descent.

*More* was a term derived from Latin and signalled both skin colour and geographical origin. It was used to describe men and women from 'hot lands' and/or, more specifically, those from the inner part of Ethiopia or Mauritania. John of Trevisa explains in his 1398 translation of an encyclopaedia of natural science, that 'in hote lands cometh forþ blake men & browne, as among þe moores (Latin *mauros*)'. [16] *Saracen* is used most frequently to describe Muslims or followers of Mohammed whom Middle English calls *Mahond*. [17] Like *More*, this term also could be applied to both men and women and it too has a skin colour signification. In the *Sultan of Babylon*, written c. 1400, the three hundred thousand Saracens who fell in battle are described as, 'some bloo, some yolowe, some as blak as more'. [18] Saracens are presented as comprising peoples of different colour: blue (blue-black), yellow (very light skin) and black as moors. In the British Isles, *Saracen* and *Moor* were used interchangeably with little regard for racial and cultural difference, as is illustrated in a case in the Calendar of Patent Rolls of Henry III, dated 21 June 1259, where a runaway 'Saracen slave [*servus*]' is referred to as 'the said Ethiopian' in the same document. [19] The belief that Saracens could be as black-skinned as Moors gives rise in the Middle Ages to a confusion regarding who was designated

by the term *Moor*, which clearly continued into the early modern period when, as Michael Neill notes, *Moor*:

could refer quite specifically to the Berber-Arab people of the part of North Africa then rather vaguely denominated as 'Morocco', 'Mauritania', or 'Barbary'; or it could be used to embrace the inhabitants of the whole North African littoral; or it might be extended to refer to Africans generally (whether 'white', 'black' or 'tawny' Moors). [20]

The discourse of natural history also contributes to the information about black women by disseminating details of strange humans whose physiology was different from Europeans. The construction of the 'fantastic other' begins as early as the Greek historian, Herodotus (490-425/420 BC) and continues well into the sixteenth century in the writing of the Renaissance diplomat and spy, Richard Hakluyt (1551/52-1616). [21] In Book Two of his *Histories*, Herodotus defines contemporary 'Greekness' through comparison and contrast with non-Greek peoples. [22] For Herodotus, 'What is not "at home" is "away", alternatives in space and time' [23] and this is illustrated in his description of Egyptian women's physiology and customs, which serve as an example of how unlike the Greeks the Egyptians are:

the Egyptians themselves in their manners and customs seem to have reversed the ordinary practices of mankind. For instance, women attend market and are employed in trade, while men stay at home and do the weaving. ... Men in Egypt carry loads on their heads, women on their shoulders; women urinate standing up, men sitting down. [24]

The construction of the 'fantastic other' is reinforced in the work of Pliny the Elder (23-79 AD). In his *Natural History*, Pliny talks about how the outermost districts of Ethiopia produce such human monstrosities as tribes of people without noses, those who have no upper lip and others without tongues. In Book VII, ii, 21-24, Pliny cites Ctesias as the source of the story of a tribe of Indian men called the Monocoli who have only one leg, and who move in jumps with surprising speed; the same are called the Umbrella-foot tribe, because in hotter weather they lie on their backs on the ground and protect themselves with the shadow of their feet. [25]

By the Middle Ages, the description of other races began to appear in travel writing which owed a great debt to the classical scholarship of the historians, Herodotus and Pliny, on which it is largely based. Mary Louise Pratt has analysed how travel writing by Europeans about non-European parts of the world, between the mid-eighteenth and late twentieth centuries, 'produced "the rest of the world" for European readerships at particular points in Europe's expansionist trajectory ... [and] How ... it produced differentiated conceptions of itself in relation to something it became possible to call "the rest of the world"'. [26] Pratt argues that in these late

eighteenth-century works, which present the 'fantastic other', indigenous voices are almost never quoted, reproduced, or even invented and what results is the 'creation of a speechless, denuded, biologized body'. [27] This same principle of defining the white European through 'realising' the dark-skinned 'other' who is often found wanting and 'fantastic' by comparison with its white counterpart, is prevalent in the encyclopaedias and travel writing of the Middle Ages, as is the presentation of the dark-skinned body as silent, stripped naked of its customs and its biological alterity exposed.

In the fifteenth-century, Middle English translation of John Mandeville's travel writing, composed originally in French around 1356-57, Mandeville tells fabulous tales of women from, amongst other places, Turkey, Syria, Arabia, Egypt, Libya and India, and their remarkable characteristics: the Amazons will allow no man to govern that land, women with jewels in their eyes who can kill with an angry look and wives who celebrate the deaths of their children. [28] Sounding very similar to Pliny, Mandeville also describes a people who live in Ethiopia who each have only one foot which is so large that they use it to shade themselves from the sun. [29] In each case, white, European physiognomy and custom is set up as the 'norm' and the dark-skinned body's deviance displayed through its biological (jewels for eyes, lethal looks, monopode) and cultural (women who deny patriarchal rule, who take joy in the death of offspring) difference. Such travel literature informed medieval thinking about why certain people were black, by providing a climatological thesis of colour. According to Mandeville, black people's colour is explained because they lie naked in the sun from morning to noon, a theory still current in 1480, when it can be found in Caxton's Middle English encyclopaedia, the *Mirroir of the World*. [30]

It was this construction of the 'fantastic other' in the natural histories, encyclopaedias and travel writings that informed about black women's physiognomy, customs and manners. Women labelled *More* thus signalled dark skin and a geographical origin from that part of Ethiopia called Mauritania; a land inhabited by beings who were physiologically 'other' than Europeans. Women labelled *Saracen* were understood to be Muslim and if a *Sowdanesse*, to be the mother or wise of a ruler of a Muslim territory and also to have a non-white skin colour; blue-black, yellow or as black as Moors. The presence and depth of their colour was the result of direct exposure to the heat of the sun's rays. Fluidity in the use of *More* and *Saracen* elided these women's cultural differences but both were understood as signifying 'non-white'. The details that construct the 'fantastic other' are given the same textual space and credence as the information about the geographical origins of the *Mores* and *Saracens*. As shall be seen, when applied to women, *More*, *Saracen* and *Sowdanesse* had a cultural significance far greater than solely the ethnographic signification of 'not white'. These

details appear in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century texts. For a much older response to black women, and from a work that formed the teleological backbone of much medieval discourse, the Bible provided a response to black skin.

### Whitening Exotic Blackness: the exegetical tradition

Many aspects of medieval life were informed and regulated by spirituality, and this included responses to black skin. Two black women feature in that aspect of medieval Christianity known as the exegetical tradition. From the early Church Fathers, the exact meaning of the Bible had been subject to interpretation. The Christian tradition of exegesis, or interpretation of Biblical passages, down to the Middle Ages was informed by the commentator Origen (c. 185-254). One black woman subject to exegetical analysis is the Bride in the *Song of Songs* (*The Song of Solomon*). In Jerome's (c. 342-420) Latin Vulgate translation of the Bible, the Bride says, '*Nigra sum sed formosa*', that is, 'I am black but beautiful' (1:5). [31] Origen's interpretation of this verse is complex. He argues that the black Bride represents the Church of the Gentiles (Christians), which is black because of, firstly, its obscure origins (thus differing from the well-documented origins of Synagogue or Judaism) and, secondly, its prefiguring in Moses's marriage to an Ethiopian woman (Numbers 12) which itself signified the union of the spiritual law or Judaism (Moses) with the Gentile nations (the Ethiopian woman) and out of which the Universal Church or Christianity arose. According to Origen's interpretation, the Bride is beautiful *not* because of her colour but because of the internal ordering of the members of the Christian Church which she represents. Here the black female body is granted beauty solely on an allegorical plane: because of what she *represents*, which transforms and militates against what she actually *is*. The Bride/black body will be transformed for the better through Christian belief and salvation. [32]

A second black woman features in the Old Testament. The Queen of Sheba appears in the Bible in I Kings, 10-13 and 2 Chronicles 9: 1-12, where she comes in search of King Solomon's wisdom. Josephus, a Jewish historian writing in the first century AD, believed her to have ruled over Egypt and Ethiopia. [33] Having had all of her questions answered by Solomon, the Queen recognises the blessing that Israel has received from God by His making Solomon king. The Queen enters the text as an exotic ruler accompanied by a large retinue, and camels bearing vast quantities of spices, gold and precious stones. She leaves having given these worldly goods to Solomon but replete with Solomon's answers to 'all that was on her mind'. (I Kings 10: 2).

Like the Bride, the Queen of Sheba was subject to a wealth of allegorical interpretation. Origen presents her as the image of the lovely pagan whose faith could be her salvation, a reading echoed by Jerome, who believed that Ethiopians were black because they were born of the Devil and because of their ignorance of God – once metaphorically ‘slain’ by the word of God, they will become, again metaphorically, white and pure – and later by Isidore of Seville (c. 570-636), who saw the Queen as representative of those who came from paganism to Christianity by their own volition.[34] Although the Queen is sometimes portrayed as black, as in the fragment of a medallion window, the Church of St Thomas, Strasbourg, dating c. 1270, and on an enamelled plaque of an ambo (raised reading desk or pulpit) by Nicholas of Verdun in 1181, she is often portrayed in Western tradition as *white* because of her allegorical interpretation: her white skin illustrates the effects of her receiving the wisdom of Solomon and the throwing off of the spiritual darkness of paganism.[35]

The Queen is represented in the late twelfth-century stained glass of Canterbury Cathedral. Here her portrayal mirrors her allegorical representation in biblical exegesis. The Queen, who is white, is depicted as she moves toward Solomon whilst her two servants watch, mounted on dromedaries. The servants are portrayed thus:

one wears a turban, while the other is a black recognised by his facial traits, his woolly hair and his blue tinted face – a convention followed in thirteenth century windows to render black color.[36]

The servants astride dromedaries and their large saddlebag that contains the spices, gold and precious stones signal her worldly wealth. Devisse argues that the iconography of the Queen of Sheba confirms the symbolic significance, not the ethnic implication of colour [37], but this is to ignore the presence of the servants in the Canterbury glass who *are* portrayed as black. The Queen’s presentation as white instigates important binary oppositions between white (herself) and black (embodied in the servants who wait on her); Christian (hence with the potential for salvation) versus pagan and unsaved unless converted; intellectual superiority versus intellectual inferiority; wealth and power versus servant status. In addition, an image of her race/country is suggested in the goods that she brings: spices, gold and precious stones. As Marina Warner observes:

In the figure of the Queen of Sheba, the beckoning and voluptuous Orient becomes embodied; its imaginative territory in classical sources encompassed meridian and outlandish exoticism, sensuality, wonders, luxuries.[38]

According to biblical exegesis, both the Bride and the Queen have bodies which are the site of spiritual enlightenment, and in the case of the Queen, physical enlightenment also. Both women’s blackness is interpreted as

*spiritually negative or lesser than* whiteness and, as De Weever observes, ‘such analyses form a foundation for interpreting blackness, both for laypeople who would hear them in sermons and for scholars who study texts and provide interpretations’.[39] One should not ignore, however, that both the Bride and the Queen of Sheba are recognised as beautiful and exotic. Medieval spirituality inherited a bifocal attitude towards the black female body: her black skin colour signalled her non-Christian status, a corollary of which is the superiority of Christian white skin, and yet the dark-skinned body could be physically attractive and exotic.

Such bipolarity as encouraged by biblical exegesis was not sustained when faced with the reality of black skin. As medieval Europe explored way beyond the Mediterranean, responses to black bodies shifted from the realm of spiritual allegory into the world of realpolitik and attitudes towards the black body crystallised into hostility. Of course, not all contact between Europeans and peoples of colour can have been hostile, yet much was undeniably so. The Crusades to the Holy Land (to free Jerusalem from the grip of the ‘infidel’), the impulses which promoted Christian missionary activity, and the attempt in 1481 by English merchants to enter the African slave trade demonstrate a construction of racism founded upon a sense of white, Christian superiority over and separateness from those with black skin and who could be Muslim in faith.[40] It is interesting that it is probably during the fourteenth century that the Queen of Sheba’s exotic beauty becomes tarnished and she is transformed into a ‘fantastic other’. According to a story from a Jewish Haggadah (tales derived from Scripture) that was known in the British Isles, the Queen of Sheba was believed to have had hairy feet, an attribute which Solomon thought masculine and therefore unattractive and inappropriate for a woman: ‘Thy beauty is the beauty of a woman, but thy hair is masculine; hair is an ornament to man, but it disfigures a woman’.[41]

Recognition of the difference between white European and black Muslim extended to the social realm of sexual intercourse and marriage. Marriage between Christians and Saracens and other non-Christians, whilst disapproved of from very early on in the history of the Church, was opposed with renewed vigour in twelfth-century ecclesiastical law in those countries such as Spain (with its history of invasion and rule by Muslims) and the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem where such unions were a probability.[42] If a couple was found guilty of fornication (unmarried sex), usually the Church tried to rectify the situation by encouraging the couple to marry. By the thirteenth century, an important exception to this rule concerned fornication between Christians and non-Christians. In Spain and the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem, penalties for miscegenation were severe: execution of religiously mixed couples who were caught *in flagrante delicto* either by burning or hurling from a precipice and if not taken in the act, public flogging and

exile.[43] Church law that governed the formulation and practice of marriage helped further construct a notion of alterity and distance between white Christian and Muslim based on religious difference.

The secular poetry of the fourteenth century examined in the following sections was produced in such a cultural climate. It distances itself from the possibility of black female beauty and the potential for spiritual enlightenment available to all who embrace Christianity that is present in biblical exegesis, to reveal a harsher, overtly critical response to the black female body, which is found wanting in comparison with her white counterpart.

### Medieval Standards of Female Beauty and Sexual Desirability: the black female body found wanting

The Middle Ages had standards for female beauty and its paradigm was a *white* woman. In John Gower's long Middle English poem, *Confessio Amantis* (The Lover's Shrift), written around 1390, an old woman's looks are compared unfavourably to a Moor in the 'Tale of Florent'. [44] In Book One of the *Confessio Amantis*, the main character, a knight called Florent, meets a 'hag' who offers to provide him with the answer to a question which will save his life on condition that Florent marry her. The question is, 'what do women most desire?' and the answer given: to be sovereign or ruler of a man's love. The 'hag' is the antithesis of the medieval paradigm for female beauty and what is especially interesting is one of the defining characteristics of her 'hagdom':

Her nose was flat, her eyebrows high;  
Tiny her eyes, and deeply set; ...  
Her lips had shrunk, she was so old.  
She had no beauties to behold:  
Her forehead narrow, her locks hoar  
(And she peers out as does a Moor) ...[45]

Several discourses intersect here to frame Florent's disgust. The first is the dominant paradigm of female beauty: a slender, white, young woman with beautiful long hair, a fine forehead, a fair-skinned face and lovely, large grey eyes as is described in the late thirteenth-/early fourteenth-century lyric, *Love for a beautiful Lady*. [46] The 'hag' is rendered the complete opposite of the courtly heroine; her hair is grey, her forehead narrow, her eyes tiny and deep-set, her nose flat. Her old age and her looks render this woman 'loathsome' and as such, an unfitting object for Florent's courtly love and service. Shulamith Shahar has written on the significance of the old body in medieval culture, and argues that an old woman's physical repulsion reflected that she had a sinful or perverted soul and if she wished to continue her sexual life, then she was condemned or depicted as

grotesque.[47] Whilst the tale requires such a debased object for Florent's bride in order to render his obedience in love to her more impressive, and her subsequent transformation into the beautiful courtly heroine an appropriate reward for such a deserving hero, there is no structural reason for her to 'peer out as does a Moor'.

That this aspect of her hagdom should be associated with black women may owe something to the travellers' tales about such women. Black women's eyes were believed to be a source of fatal power if they were angry. As we have seen, Mandeville tells of women from India who have precious stones in their eyes and, if they look in anger upon a human without such eyes, they will kill him or her.[48] Medieval medical theory maintained that eyes reflected the libido of the subject. The deterioration of the eyesight was constantly mentioned as damage caused by coitus, and, drawing on Aristotle, it was believed that those who over frequently indulge have noticeably sunken eyes [49], as, of course, does our 'hag'. Medical treatises related also how black women in particular were highly sexed because of their colour. Albertus Magnus (d. 1280) argues that 'since Black women are hotter and more swarthy, ... [they] are the sweetest for mounting, as the pimps say'. [50] In addition, medical treatises related how, during her menses, the gaze of a woman could become poisonous to that which she looked upon. The toxic quality of menses appears as early as in Pliny's *Natural History* where he writes:

Contact with it turns new wine sour, crops touched by it become barren, grafts die, seeds in the gardens are dried up, the fruit of trees falls off, the bright surface of mirrors in which it is merely reflected is dimmed, the edge of steel and the gleam of ivory are dulled, hives of bees die, even bronze and iron are at once seized by rust, and a horrible smell fills the air; to taste it drives dogs wild and infects their bites with an incurable poison.[51]

The danger of women's looks during menstruation is explained by Albertus in his *Quaestiones super De Animalibus*:

the eye being a very passive organ, it receives during the woman's period the menstrual fluid which imbues it; so every object placed in front of the 'menstrual' eye will be infected. ... it is not the eye itself but the noxious vapour that it gives off, which imbues everything placed near it.[52]

According to Albertus Magnus, the gaze is even more dangerous in post-menopausal women, because the poison accumulates, as she has become incapable of eliminating the superfluous matter from her body. Albertus adds that lack of bodily heat due to age and poor diet greatly contributes to this phenomenon.[53]

The way in which the 'hag' looks at Florent causes him to feel loathing. He feels, although the mores of courtly romance forbid his mentioning, fear engendered through a web of discourses which unite to inform his understanding of the old woman's gaze; the lethal power of exotic women's looks, the legacy written on the body of one who has been over-lascivious and may very well still be interested in sex (as is borne out by the next part of the tale) but whose age/ugliness permits her no right to be and finally, fear of the power of the menstrual cycle. As this poem is of the courtly romance tradition, the morality (here obedience) of the hero can overcome the bewitching which has transformed the woman into the apotheosis of the courtly romance heroine. On changing back into the pubescent beauty with 'the fairest of visage'. (l. 902), the 'hag' becomes the traditional heroine of romance literature and her eyes lose their Moorish quality, regaining the power to delight rather than create loathing.

#### Monstrous Mothers and Mannish Freaks: the threat from the East

Black women were also found wanting in terms of successful mothering, which, for medieval culture, was a key facet of the construction of womanhood and at whose zenith reigned the Virgin Mary, mother of Christ. In Chaucer's *Man of Law's Tale* (1392-95) from the *Canterbury Tales* [54], the Man of Law tells of the deeds of the *Sowdanesse* or Sultana of Syria and her involvement in the affairs of state when her son proposes marriage to an Italian beauty called Custance (Constance). The primary source for the Man of Law's Tale is Nicholas Trivet's *Anglo-Norman Chronicle*, written c. 1335, also the source for yet another version of the story in John Gower's *Confessio Amantis*. [55] It is probable that Chaucer made some use of Gower's version but Chaucer's characterisation of the Sowdanesse and her mothering is far more developed than either of his sources and its vicious attack against the Sowdanesse is a feature unique to Chaucer.

The dominant narrative in the tale is that of the hagiography or saint's life of the heroine, Constance, the daughter of the Emperor of Rome. Constance is a missionary bride sailing from the Latin West to the Islamic East to marry the Sultana's only son (no other children are mentioned), the Sultan of Syria, who chooses to renounce Islam so that, according to ecclesiastical law, the marriage may take place.

Foregrounded in Chaucer's characterisation of the Sultana is her religion/race. She is made into a hostile religious other by virtue of her motivation: she plots to murder her son, and thus stop both the marriage and the Sultan's conversion to Christianity, rather than lose Mahommed's law from her heart. In this respect, she is an anti-type of the Queen of Sheba, who renounces her paganism to embrace Christianity, and in emphasis of the evil of Islam, Chaucer portrays Islam as an idolatrous

religion.[56] The Sultana has no name but is known only by a title, which emphasises that she is Muslim and mother of the ruler.

Much of the approbation expressed towards the Sultana is directed against her body and her femininity. She is introduced after Constance has agreed to go 'unto the Barbre nacioun' (into the pagan world) and pronounced that 'Wommen are born to thraldom and penance / and to been under mannes governance' (ll. 286-287). In contrast to Constance, the Sultana is proactive in her fate; she would rather die than renounce Islam. To achieve this end, she plots to murder the Sultan at a feast. It is from this point onward, after having decided to pervert her maternal role by the murder of her son in order that Syria will remain Muslim, that the terms used to describe her link her religion and race with a condemnatory synonym relating to her body and her femininity.

The Sultana is labelled a 'virago' (l. 359), a term which Jill Mann suggests has overtones of 'mannishness'. [57] In medical discourse, being a virago could be applied positively, suggesting that the woman had particular strength or the virtues of incorruptibility and the ability to resist feminine passion. [58] Pagans could be virtuous viragos but it is clear from the later 'O feyned [counterfeit/false] womman' (l. 362) that this is not the intention here. The Sultana's 'mannishness' is of a very different kind. She is a serpent hiding in a woman's form, like the Devil himself, 'O serpent under femynynytee, / Lik to the serpent depe in helle ybound !' (ll. 360-361), an image informed by the theological doctrine of portraying the serpent who tempted Eve as a snake with a woman's head. Such a representation can be seen in the late fifteenth-century stained glass of St Mary's Parish Church, Fairford in Gloucestershire.

The animal comparisons continue when she is called a scorpion (l. 404); an exotic creature considered unmaternal because, according to Pliny, it broods eleven at a time and kills all but one and, according to the early thirteenth-century *Ancrene Riwe*:

The scorpion is a kind of serpent with a face, so it is said, rather like a woman's, while its hind parts are those of a serpent. It makes a show of fairness, practises deception with its head, and stings with its tail. This is lechery. [59]

Calling her a second Semiramis (l. 359) signals her associations with a Queen of Assyria who was routinely accused of 'sexual promiscuity of the grossest and most vivid kind' [60], including dressing to pass as a man and committing incest with her son. [61]

The implication of the insults thrown at her is that the Sultana is a counterfeit and antipathetic woman (in Western eyes) as opposed to the white Constance, who is the 'real' and ideal woman. The Sultana's sins in the eyes of Western patriarchy are multiple; she rejects the role and lot of Western women, as expounded by Constance, which is one of 'thraldom and

(70)

penance', she is sexually promiscuous, indulging in sexual behaviour like that of Semiramis, and betrays her maternal role, even the act of giving birth where, because of her malice, her womb has become the nest of every vice. She counterfeits even the behaviours required of a woman/mother and later those of a prospective mother-in-law, when she *pretends* to be glad to welcome Constance (ll. 395-397).

Donegild, the Dowager Queen of Northumberland and the second mother-in-law in the tale, also chooses action over suffering [62] and is accused of being 'mannysh' (l. 782), yet the Sultana's and Donegild's characterisation is qualitatively different. As Glory Dharmaraj has noted:

While the second mother-in-law, Donegild, is an embodiment of a folklore motif, the first mother-in-law, the Sowdanesse, is an ideological construct. ... Inscribed as a hostile religious other, the Eastern mother-in-law ... is situated in a material world unlike the world of the second mother-in-law Donegild, whose existence is defined mostly by 'marchen' motives.[63]

Donegild is a faery figure, the stuff of which nightmares are made, whilst the Sultana is evil truly embodied, in the sense of made human; she and her son operate in the medieval world of realpolitik, of Syrian merchants who cross the Mediterranean and trade their spices, silks and cloth of gold in Rome. Donegild, however, inhabits Northumberland, which is presented as a land from which most Christians have fled and which is largely pagan. It is as if, in the presentation of this section of his tale, the Man of Law has slipped into a different time frame, contemporary neither with the rest of his story nor with Chaucer's own world. One of its effects is to transmute Donegild from contemporary medieval dowager Queen to the wicked mother-in-law of fairy tale. As such, her evil cannot be interpreted as a genuine threat to the contemporary medieval world, in the same way as can that of the Sultana. This is signalled in the plot resolution of this section of the tale; Donegild's son is able to kill her, thus nullifying the threat she represents, while, at the close of the tale, and as it were back in the 'medieval world', the Emperor of Rome sends his senator to take revenge on the Syrians and 'brennen, sleen and brynge hem to meschance' (burn, kill and bring them to misfortune) (ll. 960-965). Here the Man of Law breaks off and we are never quite sure whether the Sultana has been killed or if she continues to live on in Syria, the ever-present and unconquerable threat to the West of the non-white Eastern 'other', who overturns Western paradigms for proper feminine sexuality and specifically, maternal behaviour.

All of the representations examined so far were most likely created with limited, if any, real-life contact with black women. The final poem to be examined is qualitatively different from the preceding ones as the poet most probably knew the black woman whom he describes and that she was in the

British Isles as a direct result of the development of the European slave trade which was to become such a feature of the early modern period.

#### Close Encounters in the Scottish Court of James IV

More than a century after the death of Chaucer, in around 1507-08, the Scottish poet William Dunbar wrote a five-stanza poem of twenty-five lines called 'Ane Blak Moir'. [64] William Dunbar's poem is unusual in that the poet probably knew the black woman whom he describes as having landed in Scotland 'furth of the last schippes' (stanza 1, l. 3), perhaps at the port of Leith. [65] It is possible that the woman in the poem is either 'blak Elene' or 'blak Margaret', taken from the Portuguese slavers by the Barton brothers. Although the British were not yet involved in slavery, Dunbar is writing in a period when the European slave trade is getting under way and had touched Scotland. Black people were for sale in Scotland at the beginning of the sixteenth century: in 1505, two years before Dunbar wrote his poem, a ship's captain, one William Wod, had been paid for 'the fraught [freight] of the Portugall quhit [white] hors, the must cat, and the jenet [small Spanish horse] and the Moris'. [66] According to Kinsley, the black women at the Court of James IV enjoyed 'in royal service a benevolent form of black slavery which became common and fashionable in southern Europe during the fifteenth century'. [67]

Benevolent or otherwise, Dunbar must have known that the Africans had arrived in Edinburgh via being enslaved by the Portuguese and continued to be enslaved as the 'court curiosities', so much so that one of them became the prize in a tournament held in 1507 and repeated more elaborately on 31 May 1508, and for which Dunbar's poem is believed to have been written. [68] Called the Tournament of the Black Knight and the Black Lady, it was attended by lords and barons from Scotland, and gentlemen from England, France and Denmark. Along with the Black Knight and his lady, another knight and a lady called the White Rose were present. The Black Knight, possibly King James himself [69], won the Black Lady because of his prowess at arms. The jousting lasted for 40 days, after which the King hosted a great 'triumph and banquet' at Holyrood House, which lasted for three days. On the final day of the banquet, the entertainment concluded with a cloud descending from the roof, cloaking up the black lady so that she became invisible. This was thought to have been achieved by the art of necromancy.

In Dunbar's poem, the focus is again on the black body, and once more, the black woman is found wanting in comparison with her white companions. What is perhaps shocking to modern readers is the cruel attack on the woman's African features. Whilst Dunbar is known for his comic satire of aspects of courtly behaviour, Robert F. Fleissner's 1980s

assessment of the poem as 'Dunbar's slapstick', and his assertion that there was little or no hostility towards members of a different race in those days cannot remain unchallenged.[70] Dunbar's portrayal of the black woman creates a very unfavourable contrast between black female physiology and that of white ladies at court. The paradigm for female beauty at work here is that which informed a reading of Gower. Dunbar's portrayal of the Moor centres on her physical description: specifically around her mouth, skin colour and anus and her differences from such as the 'White Rose'.

Every stanza closes with a refrain calling her 'My ladye with the mekle lippis' (My lady with the large lips), a feature upon which Dunbar appears fixated and which he feels distinguishes her from the 'ladyes quhytt [white]' (l. 1) about whom he usually writes. Medieval discussions of physiognomy inform that large lips were not only ugly but also a sign of folly.[71] Not only does she have large lips but 'schou is tute mowitt lyk ane aep' (she has a mouth like an ape's) (l. 6). According to one fifteenth-century writer on physiognomy, John Metham, 'thyk lypys, rounde, stondyn owte' (thick round lips which protrude) signify one who eats much meat, drinks heavily, who does much harm, is obstreperous and shrewish, without discretion and is foolish.[72] The phrase which follows the discussion of her mouth reads in manuscript, 'lyk a gangarall onto graep' (l. 7). Editors remain uncertain of the exact meaning of 'gangarall', suggesting that it may mean either 'wanderer' or a 'toad', and vary in their interpretation of 'graep', suggesting that it is either a scribal error for 'gaep' (gape) or means 'grasp or touch'.[73] Whilst a reading of 'wanderer' is relevant to the woman's recent travel history, a reading of 'gangarall' as 'toad' (whether one reads 'gaep' as gaping or grasping) is persuasive. It reinforces the racist noting of the size and nature of her mouth, demonstrated by both the refrain of each stanza and the simile in the previous line which compares her large, protruding lips to an ape's, by suggesting that her mouth is either as wide as or feels like that of a toad. To read 'gangarall' as toad is in tune, as shall be seen, with Dunbar's *modus operandi* of comparing the woman with animals with unpleasant associations.

Comparison with apes and toads immediately locates the black woman within the animal kingdom and thus other and separate from the courtly, refined white women who surround her. Dunbar is not alone in likening human beings to animals. Following the tradition of the *Physiologus*, an anonymous Greek text written between the second and fifth centuries, and Isidore of Seville's sixth-century encyclopaedia, *Etymologies*, medieval Bestiaries provide a description of a number of beasts, birds and fishes, each of which has its own nature, habits and scriptural significance and in whose behaviour the sinner could see the world of mankind reflected and learn the way to redemption.[74] This is what Dunbar replicates, even in his choice of comparative animal, since apes and toads commonly feature in Bestiaries.

The Barbary ape was familiar in medieval Europe and was regarded as *turpissima bestia*, an evil animal.[75] Written onto the black woman's body, as on the 'hag' in 'The Tale of Florent', is evidence of an evil nature. The choice of an ape has additional significance in this context, in that this creature is capable of 'aping' but never exactly replicating, human behaviour because humanity is higher up the chain of being, separated from the lower orders by its capacity for reason. The black woman can ape the behaviour of the white courtly lady, appearing in tournaments and wearing 'reche apparrall' (rich apparel) (l. 11). The aping of the courtly heroine who presides over the tournament can be seen in the description of the black woman as she watched the lists. Kinsley describes her thus:

The lady sat in a 'chair triumphale' adorned with red taffeta; she wore a gown of gold-flowered damask, with bordering in green and yellow taffeta, and black sleeves and gloves. Her attendants were dressed in white coats and green and yellow taffeta gowns.[76]

The black woman can ape the outward appearance and behaviour of her white sisters but will always remain other and separate.

The significance of toads in late medieval culture functions as another detrimental comparison. Toads were considered ugly and could be messengers of the Devil, sent to trap the virtuous and divert them from the path of righteousness, and their urine and spittle were considered highly venomous.[77] They were also considered symbols of gluttony, one of the Seven Deadly Sins [78] and could even signify the vagina.[79] Should Dunbar indeed use 'gangarall' to mean 'toad', this comparison intimates that the black woman is ugly, poisonous, sent from the Devil, gluttonous and sexually voracious, as her mouth is as wide as or feels like a toad or the vagina that this beast could symbolise. The animal comparison is complete with the description of the black woman's nose as cat-like or snub (l. 8): she lacks the long, aquiline features required of the courtly romance heroine.

The description of the Moor's skin indicates that she shines not like the sun but like black soap, then used chiefly for washing clothes rather than persons.[80] Even when richly appalled, she gleams only like a tar-barrel (l. 12), perhaps suggesting also that she is round, which, in turn, recalls her gluttony signalled by her comparison with the toad. Black skin and dark complexions signified sullenness, perversity (in the sense of being unreasonable) and duplicity; as John Metham writes, 'Blak coloure, the qwyche comyth off complexcion [that which comes from dark complexions], sygnyffyith onmyghtynes [sullenness], frowardnes [perversity], and doubylnes [duplicity]'.[81]

When related to the black body, the epithets of courtly romance used to describe the female form are inverted and subverted; this 'heroine' of the lists is ugly, wide-mouthed (this is possibly, even more grossly, inferred about her genitalia also through the connection between toads and the

vagina), with protruding lips, black and corpulent, fit only for comparisons with evil animals and everyday objects. Unlike the 'hag' in Gower's tale of Florent, this woman is not bewitched but a living entity who will *not* transform like the Queen of Sheba into a fair-skinned courtly heroine. Nor is she a menace who threatens from a geographically safe distance – she is present at court. For the knight who rides for her and fights under her banner, his reward is to kiss her ass: 'Sall cum behind and kis hir hippis' (l. 23). The inverted kiss is a commonplace humiliation in medieval fabliaux (recall Chaucer's 'Miller's Tale'). Dunbar may be suggesting that debasing one's knighthood to joust for such a lady merits no more than an inverted kiss; it symbolises the detriment of the aristocracy and in so doing, he continues the parody of the courtly romance genre. Michael Camille notes about medieval manuscript illumination that those illustrations that focus on the liminal boundaries of the body – mouth and anus – allowed the artist to pun on and poke holes in the sacred page.[82] By focusing on the black woman's mouth and anus, Dunbar pokes holes in a society willing to invert the most aristocratic of entertainments; the tournament, and its traditional heroine, and points out how black women are found physically wanting in comparison with their white sisters at the court of James IV.

### Conclusions

Any history of the British Isles needs to take full measure of the presence and cultural significance of black women. As is often the case with women's history, the material recovered allows no opportunity to hear the women's own voices and their experience of living in the British Isles in this period. How and why an African girl came to die in eleventh-century Norfolk may never now be known. The black women who lived in the court of James IV were slaves of the Portuguese who were then recaptured as payment for monies outstanding. They became servants at court. Although Kinsley terms this royal service 'benevolent slavery', it was slavery just the same: these women were commodified and given financial value. It is clear from Dunbar's poem that they also had the 'entertainment value' of the exotic yet were considered physically lesser than the white women who surrounded and outnumbered them.

Although we do not have access to how these women felt, we can reconstruct how the real and the imagined black women of cultural productions were understood and interpreted through acknowledging and analysing the web of discourses which framed them and through which they were refracted; spiritual works, natural histories and bestiaries, travel literature, constructions of female beauty and medical treatises. Black women were judged, as were their fair-skinned sisters, by way of their bodies. These bodies were dangerous. As Michael Camille has argued:

Women were associated with the dangers of excess. ... According to misogynistic medical discourse, their bodies overflowed their boundaries and they could infect others with their venomous menstrual looks.[83]

It was at the site of the body that black women entered the cultural consciousness of the British Isles, yet her colour and physiognomy rendered her *less* and *other* than her white sisters; like all women she was dangerous by virtue of her body, but in addition, the black woman could lack Christian salvation, could be unwomanly in her role as mother and subhuman in the sense of bestial, evil and, to Western male eyes, physically ugly. She was, of course, breeder of future black bodies who were less and other than their European counterparts; indeed, according to the court of Edward IV, fit for commodification as slaves. Examples of medieval cultural production demonstrate that the body of the black woman was the site of a developing definition of gendered racial *otherness* long before the slave trade of Elizabethan and Jacobean England.

### Acknowledgements

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### Notes

- [1] Edward Scobie (1985) African Women in Early Europe, *African Presence in Early Europe: Journal of African Civilisations*, 7, pp. 203-222 (p. 203).
- [2] Margo Hendricks & Patricia Parker (Eds) (1994) *Women, 'Race', and Writing in the Early Modern Period* (London: Routledge); Kim F. Hall (1995) *Things of Darkness: economies of race and gender in early modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press).
- [3] For a discussion of Muslim-Christian encounters in Europe, see William Montgomery Watt (1991) *Muslim-Christian Encounters: perceptions and misperceptions*, pp. 74-75 (London: Routledge). J.R.S. Phillips (1998 reprint) *The Medieval Expansion of Europe* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, first published 1988) provides a very detailed study of European encounters with Palestine and Syria.
- [4] José Piedra (1996) In Search of the Black Stud, in Louise Fradenburg & Carla Freccero (Eds) *Premodern Sexualities*, pp. 23-44 (New York: Routledge); Jacqueline de Weever (1998) *Sheba's Daughters: whitening and demonising the Saracen woman in medieval French epic* (New York: Garland).

- [5] Peter Fryer (1989 reprint) *Staying Power: the history of black people in Britain*, p. 2 (London: Pluto Press, first published 1984).
- [6] Paul Edwards & James Walvin (1983) *Black Personalities in the Era of the Slave Trade*, p. 4 (London: Macmillan).
- [7] *Ibid.*, p. 6.
- [8] After their father's ship had been seized by a Portuguese squadron, the Barton brothers had been authorised by James IV to seize Portuguese ships until the equivalent of 12,000 ducats was recovered. Fryer, *Staying Power*, p. 2.
- [9] Edwards & Walvin, *Black Personalities*, p. 6.
- [10] *Ibid.*, p. 6.
- [11] Fryer, *Staying Power*, p. 4.
- [12] Edwards & Walvin, *Black Personalities*, p. 6.
- [13] John Tosh (1991, 2nd edn) *The Pursuit of History: aims, methods and new directions in the study of modern history*, p. 38 (London: Longman, first published 1984).
- [14] New Historicism, and its offshoot, Cultural Materialism, has sought to return history to the study of literature and literature and its criticism as legitimate sources in historical analysis. Gabrielle M. Spiegel has written of the pitfalls involved in this enterprise in 'History, Historicism, and the Social Logic of the Text in the Middle Ages', *Speculum*, 65 (1990), pp. 59-86 (p. 84).
- [15] My thanks to Maureen Alam for this information.
- [16] John of Trevisa, *Bartholomaeus de Proprietatibus Rerum* (1398), as quoted under the entry for *More* in H. Kurath & S. Kuhn (Eds) (1952) *Middle English Dictionary*, 8 vols, vol. M-N (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press).
- [17] *Mahond* is used interchangeably with *Machameth*, for Mahomet, in Derek Pearsall (Ed.) (1981) *Piers Plowman by William Langland: an edition of the C-text* (London: Edward Arnold). See Passus III.481, XVIII.151 and XX.293.
- [18] Alan Lupack (Ed.) (1990) *Three Middle English Romances*, p. 34, l. 1005 (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University).
- [19] (1910) *Calendar of the Patent Rolls. Henry III 1258-1266*, p. 28 (London: HMSO).
- [20] Michael Neill (1998) 'Mulattos,' 'Blacks,' and 'Indian Moors': *Othello* and early modern constructions of human difference, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 49, pp. 361-374 (p. 364).
- [21] J. Beeching (Ed.) (1972) *Richard Hakluyt, Voyages and Discoveries: the principal navigations, voyages, traffiques and discoveries of the English nation* (London: Penguin). See especially Captain John Lok's voyage to Guinea in 1554 (pp. 66-68) and John Hawkins's voyage to the coast of Guinea and the Indies in 1564 (pp. 105-116).
- [22] Aubrey de Sélincourt (Trans.) (revised edition 1996) *Herodotus: The Histories* (London: Penguin, first published 1954).
- [23] D. Lateiner (1989) *The Historical Method of Herodotus*, p. 149 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press).
- [24] Sélincourt, *Herodotus*, Book 2, section 35, p. 98.
- [25] See H. Rackham (Trans.) (1961) *Pliny: Natural History with an English translation*, 10 vols, vol. II, Book VI, pp. 476-485 (London: William Heinemann).
- [26] Mary Louise Pratt (1992) *Imperial Eyes: travel writing and transculturation*, p. 5 (London: Routledge).
- [27] *Ibid.*, pp. 52-53.
- [28] Oxford, Bodleian MS Rawlinson D. 99, as printed in Malcolm Letts (Ed.) (1953) *Mandeville's Travels: texts and translations*, 2 vols, II, pp. 419-468 (London: The Hakluyt Society).
- [29] *The Voyage and Travaile of Sir John Mandevile, KT* now London, British Museum MS Cotton Titus C XVI (c. 1400-1425) as printed in K. Sisam (Ed.) (1982) *Fourteenth Century Verse and Prose*, p. 96 (Oxford: Clarendon Press).
- [30] Letts, *Mandeville's Travels*, vol. 2, p. 439. In Caxton's *Mirroure of the World*, a Middle English translation of a French encyclopaedia, *Image du Monde*, the colour of Ethiopians is explained as coming 'for hete of the sonne'. Oliver Prior (Ed.) (1913) *Caxton's Mirroure of the World*, p. 94 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co.)
- [31] Jerome's translation as quoted in De Weever, *Sheba's Daughters*, p. xxxiii, note 2. I have followed Jerome's translation as it was the most frequently used during the Middle Ages.
- [32] See Jacques Devisse (1979) *The Image of the Black in Western Art*, 3 vols, vol. I, p. 15 (Lausanne: Hanspeter Schmidt).
- [33] Josephus as quoted in Marina Warner (1995) *From the Beast to the Blonde: on fairy tales and their tellers*, p. 106 (London: Vintage).
- [34] For Origen and Isidore, see Devisse, *The Image of the Black*, vol. II, p. 129. Devisse translates the relevant section of Jerome, *In Zachariam*, 2.9, in *The Image of the Black*, vol. I, p. 17.
- [35] Devisse, *The Image of the Black*, vol. II, p. 130. The plaque can be found reproduced in Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde*, p. 96. This may be an attempt to portray her before receiving the wisdom of Solomon.
- [36] Devisse, *The Image of the Black*, vol. II, p. 130.
- [37] *Ibid.*, p. 136.
- [38] Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde*, p. 106.
- [39] De Weever, *Sheba's Daughters*, p. xiii.
- [40] Evidence of British contact with black people is provided by J.R.S. Phillips (1998) *The Medieval Expansion of Europe* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988,

- 2nd edn). English entry to the slave trade in 1481 was stopped only after a Portuguese embassy to Edward IV, as discussed in H. Thomas (1997) *The Slave Trade: the history of the Atlantic slave trade 1440-1870*, p. 76 (London: Papermac).
- [41] The tale about the Queen of Sheba's hairy feet can be found in Louis Ginzberg (1956 reprint) *Legends of the Bible*, pp. 560-564 (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, first published 1906). Ginzberg informs that the large-scale compendia of the legends were made in the fourteenth century, one in the south of France, and it seems probable that it is from this compendium the tale came to England via a cultural interchange. My thanks to Dr Jane Stevenson for informing me about this legend.
- [42] Peter Brown (1988) *The Body and Society: men, women, and sexual renunciation in early Christianity*, p. 147 (New York: Columbia University Press) informs how marriage with pagans was severely discouraged. James Brundage (1987) *Law, Sex and Christian Society in Medieval Europe*, p. 196 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press) provides evidence that although frowned upon, miscegenation did take place particularly in the Crusader kingdoms of the Levant and in Spain. This was presumably as a result of the close proximity of different races.
- [43] Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society*, pp. 461-462. Other canonists promoted a less stringent policy: if the *Christian* partner was unaware, however, that his or her lover was non-Christian, punishment might be reduced or dispensed with altogether; William of Pagula as quoted in Brundage, *Law, Sex and Christian Society*, p. 462, note 224.
- [44] Terence Tiller (Trans.) (1963) John Gower, *Confessio Amantis [The Lover's Shrift]*, pp. 70-71 (Harmondsworth: Penguin).
- [45] *Ibid.*, pp. 70-71.
- [46] The lyric can be found in R.T. Davies (Ed.) (1963) *Medieval English Lyrics: a critical anthology*, p. 89 (London: Faber).
- [47] Shulamith Shahar, The Old Body in Medieval Culture, in Sarah Kay & Miri Rubin (Eds) (1994) *Framing Medieval Bodies* (Manchester: Manchester University Press), pp.160-186 (pp. 163-164 and 169).
- [48] In Oxford, Bodleian MS Rawlinson D. 99, Letts, *Mandeville's Travels*, II, p. 467.
- [49] Matthew Adamson (Trans.) (1988) Danielle Jacquart & Claude Thomasset *Sexuality and Medicine in the Middle Ages*, p. 56 (Princeton: Princeton University Press; first published 1985, Presses Universitaires de France).
- [50] Albertus Magnus's teaching in his *Quaestiones super De Animalibus* was known throughout Europe. Joan Cadden (1993) *The Meaning of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages: medicine, science, and culture*, pp. 163-164 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- [51] Rackham, *Pliny: Natural History*, vol. II, Book VII, xv.64-xvi.67, pp. 548-549.
- [52] As quoted in Jacquart & Thomasset, *Sexuality and Medicine*, p. 75.
- [53] The phenomenon of the looks of older women appears in a work called *Les Admirables secrets de magie du grand Albert et du petit Albert* in Jacquart & Thomasset, *Sexuality and Medicine*, p. 75.
- [54] F.N. Robinson (Ed.) (1988 3rd edn) *The Riverside Chaucer*, pp. 89-104 (Oxford: Oxford University Press; first published 1987, Houghton Mifflin).
- [55] *Ibid.*, p. 692. Both Trivet's and Gower's versions can be found in W.F. Bryan & Germaine Dempster (Eds) (1941) *Sources and Analogues of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales*, pp. 165-183 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), relating specifically to the Sultana.
- [56] Glory Dharmaraj has noted how 'The Man of Law's Tale' does not have the tolerance of Islam that one finds in Langland's *Piers Plowman* where Islam is accepted as a monotheistic faith. (1993) Multicultural Subjectivity in Reading Chaucer's 'Man of Law' Tale, *Medieval Feminist Newsletter*, 16, pp. 4-8 (p. 6).
- [57] Jill Mann (1991) *Feminist Readings: Chaucer*, p. 130 (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf).
- [58] Joan Cadden, *Meaning of Sex Difference*, pp. 205-206.
- [59] Pliny and the *Ancrene Riwe* or *Wisse* (Rule for Anchorites) as quoted in Anne Clark (1975) *Beasts and Bawdy*, p. 107 (London: J.M. Dent).
- [60] Joyce Tyldesley (1998) *Hatchepsut: the female pharaoh*, p. 191 (Harmondsworth: Penguin).
- [61] Susan Schibanoff (1996) Worlds Apart: Orientalism, antifeminism and heresy in Chaucer's Man of Law's tale, *Exemplaria*, 8, pp. 56-96 (pp. 85-86).
- [62] Mann, *Feminist Readings*, p. 130.
- [63] Dharmaraj, 'Multicultural Subjectivity', pp. 4 and 6.
- [64] James Kinsley (Ed.) (1979) *The Poems of William Dunbar*, p. 106 (Oxford: Clarendon Press).
- [65] Edwards & Walvin, *Black Personalities*, p. 5.
- [66] *Ibid.*, p. 5.
- [67] Kinsley, *Poems of William Dunbar*, p. 308.
- [68] *Ibid.*, p. 106 and pp. 308-309.
- [69] Although the historians Leslie and Pitscottie, as quoted in Kinsley, suggest that the knight was in fact James IV, Priscilla Bawcutt has queried the reliability of this detail, although conceding that James commissioned and participated in the tournaments. See Priscilla Bawcutt (Ed.) (1996) *William Dunbar: selected poems*, p. 136 (London: Longman).
- [70] Robert F. Fleissner (1980) William Dunbar's Sultry Pre-Shakespearean Dark Lady, *The Upstart Crow*, III, pp. 88-96 (pp. 90-91); also published as (1981) 'La Dama Negra en la Poesia de William Dunbar', *Kanina: Revistas de Artes Y Letras de La Universidad de Costa Rica*, 5, pp. 111-114.
- [71] Bawcutt, *William Dunbar*, p. 379, note 5.

- [72] H. Craig (Ed.) (1916) *The Works of John Metham including the Romance of Amoryus and Cleopes*, EETS OS 132, p. 133 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench & Trübner).
- [73] One of the poem's earliest editors, James Pearson (1860) *The Life and Poems of William Dunbar*, p. 273 (Edinburgh: William P. Nimmo), believes the line very obscure and that 'gangarel' (*sic*) might mean 'wanderer'. W. Mackay Mackenzie (Ed.) (1932) *The Poems of William Dunbar*, p. 212, note 6 (London: Faber & Faber) argues that 'gangarall' means both wanderer and toad, as does Tom Scott (1966) *Dunbar: a critical exposition of the poems*, p. 68 (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd). Mackenzie believes 'graep' to be a scribal error for 'gaep' (gape) (Mackenzie, *The Poems of William Dunbar*, p. 212, note 6), whilst Bawcutt believes the 'gaep' means grasp or touch (*William Dunbar*, p. 137), a reading also taken by Edwards & Walvin, who translate the line 'probably, "like a toad to touch"' (*Black Personalities*, p. 7).
- [74] Richard Barber (1993) *Bestiary: being an English version of the Bodleian Library, Oxford MS. Bodley 764 with all the original miniatures reproduced in facsimile*, p. 7 (Woodbridge: Boydell Press).
- [75] Bawcutt, *William Dunbar*, p. 379, note 6.
- [76] Kinsley, *Poems of William Dunbar*, p. 309, note 11.
- [77] Clarke, *Beasts and Bawdy*, p. 103.
- [78] My thanks to Professor Pamela King for this information.
- [79] The signification of the vagina by a toad appears in Jean-Paul Clébert (1971) *Dictionnaire du symbolisme animal: Bestiaire fabuleux* (Paris: Édition Albin Michel), as quoted in D. Williams (1996) *Deformed Discourse: the function of the monster in mediaeval thought and literature*, p. 311 (Exeter: Exeter University Press).
- [80] Bawcutt, *William Dunbar*, p. 379, note 9.
- [81] Craig, *Works of John Metham*, p. 143.
- [82] Michael Camille, The image and the self: unwriting late medieval bodies, in Kay & Rubin, *Framing Medieval Bodies*, pp. 62-99 (p. 74).
- [83] *Ibid.*, p. 53.

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## Hannah More and the Rhetoric of Educational Reform

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**ABSTRACT** The Evangelical reformer Hannah More hoped to change the educational practices of the British upper classes. In *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education* (1799), *Hints Toward Forming the Character of a Princess* (1805), and *Coelebs in Search of a Wife* (1808), More lays out a program devised primarily for girls, but to some extent also applicable to the education of boys. All these works assert that education should focus relentlessly upon the inculcation of Christian principles and such a proposal was implicitly critical of current practices. In order to promote her program effectively, More had to suggest that it was not incompatible with the most influential eighteenth-century pedagogical theories. This rhetorical strategy was a success in practical terms, but prevented her from achieving coherence as an educational theorist.

Educational practices tend to be deeply entrenched. An educational reformer must tell people whose minds were molded by existing curricula and pedagogical methods that they learned the wrong things in the wrong way. For obvious reasons, such a message is bound to arouse emotional resistance. To overcome this resistance, reformers often try to justify the new in terms of the old, although it is difficult to do this in a thoroughly logical manner. Educational conservatives generally react to innovative proposals by asserting that current arrangements serve students well, but their arguments are often mere rationalizations of a visceral attachment to those arrangements. Not surprisingly, then, the history of education proves to be an amusing saga, which features odd compromises, random vestigial survivals, and disingenuous claims. The 'Culture Wars' of the last fifteen years are, of course, the most widely-publicized recent chapter of this unending saga. In this article, I propose to trace an equally important episode in the history of education, the story of the Evangelical pedagogue,