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SINS OF THE FATHER: RACE AND GENEALOGY IN THE MEDIEVAL IMAGINATION

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA LOS ANGELES

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BY

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ABSTRACT

SINS OF THE FATHER: RACE AND GENEALOGY IN THE MEDIEVAL IMAGINATION

BY ELLEN WILLIAMS

In the following thesis, I use *Roland and Vernagu*, the *Short English Metrical Chronicle*, *Richard Coeur de Lyon*, and *King of Tars*, contextualized by modern medievalisms, 19th and 20th century American medievalism, a brief exploration of law and history in the years surrounding the writing of the Auchinleck manuscript, and contemporary criticism, to examine the mutual pressures of past and present on understandings of one another. All four Middle English poems explore the connection between women's power to disrupt or reimagine genealogy, and its relationship to crusading. Firstly, I explore contemporary medievalisms and the history of misappropriation of Medieval imagery in America. Secondly, I present historical and legal contexts to support my claims that Auchinleck responds to rising xenophobia in late Medieval England. Thirdly, set against critical arguments that the Auchinleck manuscript is an exercise in nation-making, I argue instead, that *Roland and Vernagu*, the *Short English Metrical Chronicle*, *Richard Coeur de Lyon*, and *King of Tars* use disruptions of genealogical conventions to question the power and the moral and spiritual rectitude of the Crusades. Finally, I ask how we can use a better understanding of the functions of race and genealogy in Auchinleck to inform current choices around Medieval representation.

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To the scholars, critics, and professors, such as Cord Whitaker, Geraldine Heng, and Jonathan Hsy, thank you for being pioneers in the field of race studies in the Middle Ages. Your extensive criticism was enlightening and fun to read. With this thesis, I hope to add my own small chapter to the library you have built with your brilliant work.

Table of Contents

List of Abbreviations	5
Introduction: Custom is Tyranny	6
History and Law in the Auchinleck Manuscript	18
Fraught Beginnings in the Short English Metrical Chronicle	27
The Search for Salvation in Richard Coeur de Lyon	34
Predestination and Conversion in Roland and Vernagu	41
Black, White and Red All Over: Violent Consequences of Conversion in King of Tars	47
Conclusion	53
Bibliography	56

List of Illustrations

Fig. 1. St. Maurice dressed as a knight.

Fig. 2. Schema of the Charlemagne Window

Fig. 3. The Spanish crusade cycle from the Charlemagne Window

List of Abbreviations

Roland and Vernagu (RV)

Short English Metrical Chronicle (SEMC)

Richard Coeur de Lyon (RCL)

King of Tars (Tars)

The House Behind the Cedars (Cedars)

Introduction: Custom is Tyranny

In the hours leading up to the insurrection of January 6th, 2021 at the United States Capitol, a prominent advisor to former President Donald Trump, Rudy Giuliani, called for “trial by combat.”¹ When asked about it later he claimed that he was simply “referring to the kind of trial that took place for Tyrion in that very famous documentary about fictitious medieval England,”² which would be *Game of Thrones*.³ If Giuliani thinks *Game of Thrones* is a documentary, then he probably never watched it, but his reference does draw a direct connection between the Capitol insurrection and popular notions of medievalism that promote a very white, very inaccurate, very dangerous view of the past. The fact is, trial by combat did exist in Medieval English literature, but it is not Tyrion fighting for his life against unjust charges, it is racially charged, just like the Capitol insurrection.⁴ The little-read short text, *Roland and Vernagu*

¹ Bill Bradley, “Rudy Giuliani Says ‘Trial By Combat’ Was Reference To ‘Documentary’ ‘Game Of Thrones,’” HuffPost, last modified January 14, 2021,

https://www.huffpost.com/entry/rudy-giuliani-trial-by-combat-game-of-thrones_n_600076b2c5b6ffcab9627499.

² Obviously, Giuliani’s understanding of *Game of Thrones* and Medieval England is shaky at best. To be clear, *GOT* is not a documentary. It is fictitious, and it does not take place in Medieval England. *GOT* takes place in a made up time, loosely associated with the Middle Ages and in a fictitious island called Westeros, that, on a map that may resemble England, but is definitely not.

³ Bradley, “Rudy Giuliani,” HuffPost.

⁴ For more on the Capitol riots see, Sabrina Tavernise and Matthew Rosenberg’s “These are the Rioters Who Stormed the Nation’s Capitol“ or Amy Goodman and Nermeen Shaikh’s interview of Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor “Impeachment Is Late Attempt to Curb Violence & Racism at Heart of Trump Era.”

(*RV*), appearing in the Auchinleck Manuscript, uses trial by combat as a way of exploring who is worthy of salvation through conversion to Christianity as Roland battles the giant Muslim, Vernagu. In *RV*, trial by combat decides who can join the group in power; on January 6th, trial by combat tried to decide who could choose the group in power. It is not that trial by combat didn't exist, at least in the Medieval imagination, it's that we cannot talk about trial by combat in the Middle Ages without talking about its racial implications.

By citing a TV show where all the heroes are white and a combat scene in which honor is on the line, Giuliani creates a version of the past free of racial tension, which by extension, purports to erase racial tensions now. This false idea of a racially homogenous period and glorious past enables white supremacists and far-right politicians to invoke a made-up legacy and use it to give their racist ideas some sort of false historical legitimacy. In order to examine why and how medieval references are so commonly adopted by alt-right groups and how modern fiction has so deeply shaped popular understanding of this idealized past, this thesis examines the construction of history through stories, specifically romances in Auchinleck, and how these narratives stemmed from and amplified racism and xenophobia.

One other recent instance of racialized, warped medievalism lies in the "America First Caucus Policy Platform," principally written by U.S. politician Marjorie Taylor Greene, which claims that America has a history of respect for "Anglo-Saxon political traditions."⁵ The policy platform does not say whether it is the wergilds or ring-giving that Americans allegedly respect, but it does use an antiquated and racial term that is commonly misappropriated by white

⁵ "America First Caucus Policy Platform," Punchbowl News,

<https://punchbowl.news/wp-content/uploads/America-First-Caucus-Policy-Platform-FINAL-2.pdf>.

supremacists. The term “Anglo-Saxon” resurfacing in Greene’s “America First Caucus Policy Platform” solidifies her alliance with the racist alt-right and suggests that her idea of a better America is simply a whiter America. For Mary Rambaran-Olm, the simple use of the term is racist, because “white supremacists engrave it on their weapons of choice.”⁶ You can no longer use “Anglo-Saxon” without calling to mind these white supremacists. The origins of the term are racist, and it is once again racist, but until about 20 years ago, “Anglo-Saxon” was just the word describing the literature, culture, and language of Britain between 700 and 1000 CE. This is not to suggest that ignorance about the origins of the term or its potential to become racially weaponized, exempts earlier scholars from the responsibility to research this. I simply want to point out that there was a long period in which the term “Anglo-Saxon“ was used in a largely benign, though historically unmoored, manner. Now it is deployed by extremist politicians and written on swords wielded in attempts to dismantle democracy, all in an effort to realize a cultural fantasy of glorious, white purity.

⁶ Catherine E. Karkov, Anna Klosowska, and Vincent W.J. van Green Oei, “Disturbance,“ introduction to *Disturbing Times: Medieval Pasts, Reimagined Futures*, ed. Catherine E. Karkov, Anna Klosowska, and Vincent W.J. van Gerven Oei (n.p.: Punctum Books, 2020), 15-16, https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv16zk023.3?refreqid=excelsior%3Af2445897ce1bcff136296b243a09deaa&seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents.

“Anglo-Saxon” is not the only word working to create a racially-charged cultural fantasy. Shokoofeh Rajabzadeh examines how the “Saracen label is a derogatory label,”⁷ and how it works to misrepresent Muslims.⁸ Rajabzadeh writes,

The label is a racist reference to Muslims, and it is Islamophobia at work in its most genius and powerful form. Every time the label is pronounced, Muslims are presumed guilty of fabricated genealogy, of co-opting Christian history, of misrepresenting themselves and their faith, of manipulating those around them.⁹

The label, arising often in the literature I will examine, creates a fabricated other and enemy. Because of the derogatory nature of the word I will not use it outside of direct quotations.

The concept of whiteness as I will use it in this thesis also requires exploration. Cheryl Harris’ claims that “whiteness is simultaneously an aspect of identity and a property interest” and that it “can move from being a passive characteristic as an aspect of identity to an active entity that - like other types of property - is used to fulfill the will and to exercise power.”¹⁰ This definition is particularly important to my thesis because I explore how genealogies are created and disrupted, and these genealogies are also used to pass on property. Additionally, Geraldine Heng identifies four main kinds of race, “religious race, colonial race, cartographic race, and

⁷ Shokoofeh Rajabzadeh, "The depoliticized Saracen and Muslim erasure," in "Critical Race and the Middle Ages," special issue, *Literature Compass* 16, nos. 9-10 (September/October 2019): 2, <https://compass.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/lic3.12548>.

⁸ Rajabzadeh, “Depoliticized,” 5.

⁹ Rajabzadeh, “Depoliticized,” 3.

¹⁰ Cheryl I. Harris, “Whiteness as Property,” *Harvard Law Review* 106, no. 8 (1993): 1734, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1341787>.

epidermal race.”¹¹ This thesis will primarily examine religious, cartographic, and epidermal race. I will examine how they are treated in literature through the exploration of poetic genealogies in the Auchinleck manuscript in conversation with Cord Whitaker and Jonathan Hsy’s scholarship on modern understandings of the Medieval past and how casual medievalists and popular media understand and interpret the Medieval world.

I took my first Medieval literature class because I love fantasy books, most of which take place in vaguely medieval settings. But, Jonathan Hsy points out that they “craft magical and historically distant worlds by means of excluding or marginalizing characters of color within them.”¹² Hsy explores how some white Medieval scholars and dilettante Medievalists create harmful stories of the past, and how Medieval scholars of color can “restory” the past. In Helen Young’s article “Whitewashing the ‘Real’ Middle Ages in Popular Media” she claims that, “the idea that Europe in the Middle Ages was racially homogeneous and “pure” white developed during the eighteenth and nineteenth century.”¹³ This is not to say that Medieval English society was completely peaceful and inclusive, it just was not completely white. Importantly, Hsy notes that, “earnest calls by white medievalists to defend an “abused” Middle Ages can misleadingly send a message to the public that medieval Europe was somehow “innocent” of historical forms

¹¹ Geraldine Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages* (Cambridge University Press, 2018), 38, digital file.

¹² Jonathan Hsy. *Antiracist Medievalisms: From “Yellow Peril” to Black Lives Matter*. New edition ed., Arc Humanities Press, 2021., 6, muse.jhu.edu/book/83922.

¹³ Helen Young, “Whitewashing the ‘Real’ Middle Ages in Popular Media,” in *Whose Middle Ages?*, ed. Andrew Albin, et al., Fordham Series in Medieval Studies (Fordham University Press, 2019), 288, digital file.

of racism, xenophobia, or prejudice in its own right.”¹⁴ Based on that misperception, Medieval imagery has been turned into a cultural weapon, specifically in the American South in the 19th and 20th centuries, when it was used to validate racial purity. As Joshua Davies points out, “there is no way to disentangle the scholarly history of medieval studies from the history of popular representations of the medieval past.”¹⁵ Central to the misappropriation of the Medieval past as a cultural touchpoint in the American south is Sir Walter Scott’s 1819 Romance *Ivanhoe* which some historians credit as an impetus of the American Civil War.¹⁶ Charles W. Chesnutt responds to *Ivanhoe* in his 1900 novel *The House Behind the Cedars* (*Cedars*). *Cedars* is a prime example of ‘restorying’ the past in an effort to build modern conceptions of race in place of past ones. Chesnutt writes, “the influence of Walter Scott was strong upon the old South.”¹⁷ The influence of Scott on the south is not simply a narrative device for Chesnutt to use as a background information for the tragic story of Rena, but literally the physical backdrop of the American South, visible in the prominent Gothic architecture in the American South. Joshua Davies identifies Robert E. Lee’s tomb, The Smithsonian Institution, and the “fortress-like Sugar House in Charleston where enslaved people were tortured and brutalized,”¹⁸ as sites of Gothic

¹⁴ Hsy. *Antiracist Medievalisms*. 7.

¹⁵ Joshua Davies, “Confederate Gothic,” in *Disturbing Times*, ed. Catherine E. Karkov, Anna Klosowska, and Vincent W.J. van Gerven Oei (n.p.: Punctum Books, 2020), 274.

¹⁶ One of the most prolific writers on the subject was Mark Twain. See “*Life on the Mississippi* (n.p.: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1917” for his commentary, or look at the two most relevant chapters published by University of Virginia here: <https://twain.lib.virginia.edu/yankee/cyinlife.html>.

¹⁷ Charles W. Chesnutt, *The House Behind the Cedars* (Penguin Books, 1993), 63, digital file.

¹⁸ “Confederate Gothic,” 252.

architecture “premised on the idea of the supremacy of European heritage.”¹⁹ Both *Ivanhoe* and Gothic architecture in America generate a false “sense that whiteness, too, is somehow double: old as well as new, defined by and defining the past and future.”²⁰ Chesnutt disrupts these constructions of whiteness in *Cedars*.

Chesnutt uses his characters Rena and John’s appearance to identify the ironies of constructed race. Even to John, Rena looks white; “her abundant hair, of a dark and glossy brown, was neatly plaited and coiled above an ivory column that rose straight from a pair of gently sloping shoulders,”²¹ but as Judge Straight says, “custom is stronger than the law,”²² and custom defines Rena as Black. Rena’s race is constructed by custom. Melissa Asher Rauterkus states that here Straight is,

Alluding to the legal technicality that makes John a white man in South Carolina (where race is determined by reputation and social standing) but a black man in North Carolina (where race is defined by fractions of blood), Straight suggests that when it comes to the color line, the cultural fictions we create (as in the one-drop rule) ultimately organize our reality.²³

Rena’s tragic ending is evidence that “the fiction of race can have devastating consequences,”²⁴ proving that custom was not law, “custom was tyranny.”²⁵ And as widely

¹⁹ “Confederate Gothic,” 252.

²⁰ “Confederate Gothic,” 271.

²¹ Chesnutt, *Cedars*, 22.

²² Chesnutt, *Cedars*, 58.

²³ Rauterkus, “Racial Fictions,” 141.

²⁴ Rauterkus, “Racial Fictions,” 141.

²⁵ Chesnutt, *Cedars*, 256.

accepted customs of overrepresentations of whiteness in the Middle Ages still prevail, custom is tyranny.

This fiction of race, of historic whiteness in America, is exactly what Gothic architecture tries so hard to create, and why the whitewashed version of the Medieval past in *Ivanhoe* could so strongly capture its readership. Rauterkus sees *Cedars* as reconfiguring “the Ivanhoe narrative to attack Southern anxieties over blood and miscegenation caused by a nonvisibly black mulatto class endowed with the supposed ability to infiltrate the white race and defile its bloodlines,”²⁶ an anxiety, I might add, that stretches back to the Middle Ages, where it appears in the Auchinleck Manuscript.

The idea of a racially homogenous past pervades modern fiction across many mediums. One common thread is that authors, directors, and game designers all use a desire to adhere to historical accuracy as a way of alleviating themselves of the responsibility of including diversity in their work, while simultaneously including dragons, magic, and monsters, which are, of course, not historically accurate. Neither, might I add, is an all-white cast. One of Young’s most potent claims is: “it is contemporary feelings, not historical facts, that underlie this demand and negative response to the mere idea that people of color might have lived in Europe during the medieval period.”²⁷ Our modern art depicting the Middle Ages may show less diversity than art of the period which depicts “figures with features that can be identified with sub-Saharan

²⁶ Rauterkus, “Racial Fictions,” 132.

²⁷ Helen Young, “Whitewashing the ‘Real’ Middle Ages in Popular Media,” in *Whose Middle Ages?*, ed. Andrew Albin, et al., Fordham Series in Medieval Studies (Fordham University Press, 2019), 286, digital file.

Africans, strongly suggesting that the artists were familiar with people from that region in real life.²⁸ One example of this would be the statue of Saint Maurice in Magdeburg (ca. 1240).



Fig. 1. St. Maurice dressed as a knight. 1240. Statue.

Young goes on to cite more examples of racial diversity in Medieval art,²⁹ concluding that “inclusion of people of color and others whom we now do not recognize as European in medievalist fictions, whatever their medium, is thus not historically inaccurate.”³⁰ One of the major problems with viewing the Middle Ages as an all-white period is that “popular culture shapes what we think we know about history in part because we encounter it long before we

²⁸ Young, “Whitewashing” 287.

²⁹ For more on race in Medieval art read Pamela A. Patton, “Blackness, Whiteness, and the Idea of Race in Medieval European Art,” in *Whose Middle Ages?* Also check out @medievalpoc on Twitter for examples of Medieval art depicting people of color.

³⁰ Young, “Whitewashing” 287.

enter a history classroom, if we ever do.”³¹ These aren’t just poorly written books and poorly cast television shows, they shape every reader and viewer’s ideas about the Middle Ages, including, as I mentioned earlier, our political leaders.

By extension, it isn’t just the race of the characters in the books or TV shows, it is the ways in which the stories are told that is equally powerful in shaping our perceptions of the past and the present. Cord Whitaker argues that the “strict dichotomy between black and white,”³² evident in many texts from the medieval times and into our present day has more than just literary implications. Whitaker identifies that “for the alt-right, the European Middle Ages is a golden age of white racial homogeneity. It is an age to whose mores the movement regularly argues U.S. and European societies ought to return.”³³ This is evident in many of the symbols adapted by Alt-Right groups. But this is truly a fantasy, constructed from metaphors of blackness. Whitaker writes;

It is also a fantasy era organized around the notion of white innocence—from the social innocence of an era in which feudalism amounted to a system of inviolable castes in which everyone knew their place and was happy with it to a prevailing sense of victimhood in which all nonwhites are aggressors and all whites are blameless victims. This age is a fantasy; an entire historical period has been co opted into the mirages of white innocence and black criminality that comprise the mirage of racial difference.³⁴

This idea of “white innocence and black criminality” is evident in Whitaker’s examples of the reactions to predominantly white and black biker rallies;

³¹ Young, “Whitewashing” 294.

³² Cord J. Whitaker, *Black Metaphors: How Modern Racism Emerged from Medieval Race Thinking* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2019), 27, digital file.

³³ Whitaker, *Black Metaphors*, 13.

³⁴ Whitaker, *Black Metaphors*, 13.

It is only imagination that leads from the material reality of biker behavior in North Myrtle Beach and Atlantic Beach to the conclusion that the behaviors of white and black bikers are born of different impulses—to relax, to plunder. It is imagination that leads to the interpretation that white biker behavior signifies differently: white bikers are essentially good, hard-working people who are out to have a good time while black bikers are essentially criminals who have come to wreak havoc on the area.³⁵

Imagination is key to creating these differences between blackness and whiteness. Does this imagination feed off of black and white metaphors, or did medieval metaphors that use blackness and whiteness, in relation to badness and goodness, create this racial imagination? Clear ideas about race are not present in the Middle Ages because as Whitaker says, “the social construct of race” is under “construction.”³⁶ Additionally, the middle ages are vast, spanning nearly 1000 years, and distant, making ideas and theories about the period harder to debunk, but there are sinister forces at play that have resulted in the period becoming an ideal setting for white supremacists and conspiracy theory groups such as Stormfront and Q-Anon, to evoke their ideas of a past dominated by a uniform group of pale-skinned Christians onto.

In order to better understand why the Middle Ages are so commonly misused in this way, I examine four Middle English texts found in the Auchinleck manuscript, *the Short English Metrical Chronicle (SEMC)*, *Richard Coeur de Lyon (RCL)*, *RV* and *King of Tars (Tars)* to explore how genealogies interact with crusades. Set against critical arguments that the Auchinleck manuscript is an exercise in nation-making, I argue that *RCL*, *Tars*, *SEMC*, and *RV* use disruptions of genealogical conventions to question the power and the moral and spiritual rectitude of the Crusades. Both *RCL* and *Tars* depict Catholic figures searching for salvation through crusades, but the narratives stop short of actually promoting them. Repeated descriptions

³⁵ Whitaker, *Black Metaphors*, 17.

³⁶ Whitaker, *Black Metaphors*, 21.

of gory violence prevent the narratives from offering a neat moralizing message about penance, as found in earlier French crusading literature and art such as the Charlemagne Window and *Roman d'Eneas*, which I will also briefly examine. All four Middle English poems explore the connection between women's power to disrupt or reimagine genealogy, and its relationship to crusading. While some parts of these works speak to each other beautifully, they retain many dissonant elements. The Auchinleck manuscript has long resisted holistic readings. At a smaller scale I argue for a common thread of the fear of the foreign, of women, and of foreign women in particular, as they disrupt patrilineal genealogy. The poems respond to increased globalization in the medieval world and cultural crossovers from crusading, and use irony to identify the folly of initiating still more crusades to resolve the genealogical disruptions caused by earlier ones.

History and Law in the Auchinleck Manuscript

Uncertainty surrounds when exactly the Auchinleck Manuscript was written, probably after 1333, and not much is known about by whom it was written, although there is a vast body of scholarly work on the scribes of the manuscript.³⁷ While it is fairly certain that the manuscript was written in London, no one knows who commissioned it or who read it, although,

Scholars have hypothesized that audience variously to be a wealthy London merchant, an entire family associated with a history of crusading, a noblewoman, or a person at the intersection of the growing mercantile/industrial class of London and the royal court, or even some form of civic or collective ownership.³⁸

As Fisher notes, “the book’s heterogeneity and its size make it difficult to speak about it in its entirety,”³⁹ so I am not going to try in such a short excerpt. Instead I’ve chosen four texts that speak to each other in a coherent way through their explorations of forming and fragmenting families and to my argument that this is a response to the effects of global influences that linger long after the crusades are over. Even though the *SEMC* does not center around or mention the crusades as the other three texts do, the sisters floating at sea, settling in a foreign land, creating monstrous children, and ultimately being conquered by Brutus, echo and respond to these same themes in the other texts through their respective interpretations of lineage and genealogy through familial fracturing, demonic procreation, and conquest.

³⁷ For a comprehensive analysis of Medieval scribal authorship in the *Auchinleck* see Matthew Fisher, *Scribal Authorship and the Writing of History in Medieval England* (n.p.: Ohio State University Press, 2012).

³⁸ Matthew Fisher, “Auchinleck Manuscript,” in *The Auchinleck Manuscript*, 1.

³⁹ Fisher, “Auchinleck” 4.

Auchinleck engages in a version of history writing based mainly in fiction. In Matthew Fisher's book *Scribal Authorship and the Writing of History in Medieval England* he writes,

As politics and law became a matter of documentary and textual record, silence was more difficult to marshal as evidence. It is the continuity of the tradition of insular history writing, and its constantly renewed reliance upon its textual precursors, that explains why concerns over the ethnic divisions of the island, the Conquest, and conquest more generally appear so prominently in later history writing.⁴⁰

A modified version of this concept is evident in Auchinleck, which, in its existence, recognizes that silence is not evidence. Instead, Auchinleck uses fiction to create ideas about the past, therefore alleviating itself of the burdens of proof and facts, similar to the modern fictions I explore in the introduction. Even the *SEMC*, a supposed account of the history of the British Isles from Brutus to Edward II, weaves in the fantastic and impossible with rudderless boats, demons, and mythical kings. The manuscript, written sometime after 1331, centers around events long past with stories that never happened, yet it shapes the way in which that past was understood when it was first written, and now with my own reading. *RCL* and *RV* take place during the third and first crusades, respectively, which were about 300 and 200 years prior to the composition of the Auchinleck. The other texts I examine, *Chronicle* and *Tars*, occur long before the life of the author, with the exception of the ending of the *Chronicle*. And as Fisher puts it, "to write about anything older than the recent past is to write about something, by definition, that the author cannot have experienced."⁴¹ What this also means, is that the reader cannot have experienced it suggesting that they are, to some extent, at the mercy of the author. Fiction can hold immense power over conceptions of the past. To say that it does not, would be naive. I argue that the

⁴⁰ Fisher, "Auchinleck," 91.

⁴¹ Fisher, "Auchinleck," 74.

Auchinleck is a set of texts un beholden to facts, but equally bent on constructing a specific interpretation of history, while simultaneously being a product of its time and the xenophobia prevalent in England.

Fisher writes that, “the *Chronicle* offers, for the first time in Middle English historiography, a politically motivated agenda largely dissociated from the divisions of race and the Conquest.”⁴² When Fisher writes, “the divisions of race,” I believe he refers to racial divisions between groups native to the British Isles such as the Welsh, Picts, Scots, and Angles. The obliviousness to divisions between the races of the British Isles actually allows more room for discussion of foreigners with both epidermal and religious racial differences from the white Christians in power in England. In this way the *Chronicle* presents a united front based on epidermal race, creating a backdrop for the other stories that I examine to vilify outsiders. This is a response spurred by fear. Fear of the power of outsiders to disrupt and displace by disrupting genealogy, fueled by both the Norman invasion of 1066, the crusades, and the affair of Isabella and Mortimer.

W. Mark Ormrod admits that “very often, then, the study of immigration in the Middle Ages has to be done indirectly, by inference. For example, analyzing the style of artifacts and architecture and identifying lone words in a language or dialect allow us to spot external influences on a given group of people and to hypothesize the presence of immigrants in their

⁴² Fisher, “Auchinleck,” 96.

midst.”⁴³ While he identifies that “in 1440, the English government decided to impose a new tax levied only on foreign-born people living in the realm,”⁴⁴ there aren’t such “detailed fiscal records”⁴⁵ one hundred years prior when the Auchinleck manuscript was compiled. My thesis does not center on immigration in Medieval England, but rather narratives of genealogical disruption. By examining parts of the manuscript alongside legislation in the surrounding years, I have identified substantial xenophobia in England, fueled by rising immigration.

In 1290, about 40 years before the Auchinleck Manuscript was compiled, England expelled its Jewish population, “and a formal ban on the practice of Judaism continued through the seventeenth century.”⁴⁶ Additionally,

The imaginative literature and drama of the later medieval period show that England remained deeply anti-Semitic. Muslims, usually referred to as “Saracens,” were never excluded; but, like the handful of Jews who remained after 1290, they were only tolerated if they converted to Christianity.⁴⁷

While the romances that I examine in the Auchinleck Manuscript are more explicitly anti-Muslim than anti-Semitic, the expulsion of Jews in 1290 and the anti-Muslim, xenophobic themes in the Auchinleck Manuscript point to a general fear of the non-white and the non-Catholic.

⁴³ W. Mark Ormrod, “How Do We Find Out About Immigrants in Later Medieval England?,” in *Whose Middle Ages?*, ed. Andrew Albin, et al., Fordham Series in Medieval Studies (Fordham University Press, 2019), 72, digital file.

⁴⁴ Ormrod, “Immigrants,” 72.

⁴⁵ Ormrod, “Immigrants,” 72.

⁴⁶ Ormrod, “Immigrants,” 77.

⁴⁷ Ormrod, “Immigrants,” 77.

Then about 20 years after the compilation of the Auchinleck Manuscript in 1352, Edward III updates the statute of treasons;

Whereas diverse Opinions have been before this Time [in what Case Treason shall be said, and in what not;] the King, at the request of the Lords and of the Commons, hath made a Declaration in the Manner as hereafter followeth, this is to say; When a Man doth compass or imagine the Death of our Lord the King, or of our Lady his [Queen] or of their eldest Son and Heir; or if a Man do violate the King's [Companion] or the King's eldest Daughter unmarried, of the Wife the King's eldest Son and Heir...[that] ought to be judged Treason.⁴⁸

This, as Helen Cooper points out, is a direct response to Isabella and Mortimer's earlier affair.⁴⁹

The update to the Statute of Treasons reveals a fear of genealogical disruption by explicitly trying to protect the royal bloodline. This same fear weaves through the four works I examine in the Auchinleck Manuscript.

Marie Turner defines Medieval genealogies not simply as an isolated genre, but “a favored practice for the manipulation and organization of time that undergirds much of the historical writing of the period.”⁵⁰ Previously, critics “excluded overtly narrative historical form” but now we “recognise the influence of genealogy across historical genres, from annals and chronicles – local, regional, national, and universal; pious and secular; Latin and vernacular; in

⁴⁸ 25 Edw. III Stat. 5. C. 2, printed in *Statutes of the Realm* (Vol 1 (London, 1810), 319-20.

⁴⁹ Helen Cooper, “Lancelot, Roger Mortimer and the Date of the Auchinleck Manuscript,” in *Studies in Late Medieval and Early Renaissance Texts in Honour of John Scattergood*, ed. Anne Marie D’Arcy and Alan J. Fletcher (n.p.: Four Courts Press, 2005), 96.

⁵⁰ Marie Turner, “Genealogies,” in *Medieval Historical Writing*, ed. Jennifer Jahner, Emily Steiner, and Elizabeth M. Tyler (n.p.: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 84.

verse and prose – to family narratives, romances, and other historical fictions.”⁵¹ For my thesis, I focus on historical narratives in the Auchinleck manuscript, that look at genealogical disruption to examine the way stories were used to influence a view of the past and warn about the possibility of an unstable future. Marie Turner writes that,

In their simplest documentary form, genealogies unfurl a linear narrative of filiation (X genuit Y, Y genuit Z and so forth), but the medieval obsession with genealogy reflects a broader ideological interest in origins, and historians and literary scholars alike have long identified genealogical literature as a significant site of cultural fantasy, collating concepts such as identity, nobility, lineage, and authority.⁵²

The Auchinleck manuscript engages in exactly this. It is an exercise in “cultural fantasy,” but also, cultural nightmare. Genealogy is a way of proving one’s nobility. Georges Duby writes, “To be noble...[is] to be able to refer to a genealogy.”⁵³ After the Norman invasion of 1066, Turner identifies

post-conquest historical literature [as] characterised by this kind of genealogical anxiety as the new Anglo-Norman ruling class sought to overwrite the discontinuities of 1066 and establish a shared lineage with the Anglo-Saxon past, in a political climate wherein vertical lineage and primogeniture were gaining significance.⁵⁴

Geoffrey’s *Historia* is an effort to sooth this anxiety, “fantasising a lineage for Britain that simultaneously anoints the ancient Britons as an imperial power and eases the anxieties of the new Anglo-Norman aristocratic class.”⁵⁵

⁵¹ Turner, “Genealogies,” 84.

⁵² Turner, “Genealogies,” 85-6.

⁵³ Georges Duby, *The Chivalrous Society*.

⁵⁴ Turner, “Genealogies,” 87.

⁵⁵ Turner, “Genealogies,” 87.

Robert Rouse focuses mainly on how narratives such as *Guy of Warick* and *Bevis of Hampton* create a past that inserts “fictitious Norman ancestors and castles into the Anglo-Saxon past,”⁵⁶ this is to say, Rouse identifies Romances that create politically advantageous pasts. I extend this political use of romance to the *SEMC*, *Richard*, *Tars*, and *RV*. However, they do not seek to create longevity and legitimacy for the Anglo-Norman ruling class, but rather to create fear of genealogical disruption through creating a fear of the foreign and the female.

Rouse writes,

The deployment of this medieval ‘Anglo-Saxonism’ by post Conquest writers takes many forms, but is most often used to provide a sense of the enduring English past, situating laws, land tenures, and family histories within a continuum of English history that seeks to elide the cultural, political, and legislative rupture of 1066.⁵⁷

One technique for the deployment of this “Anglo-Saxonism,” is through romance. He writes that “as much as romance can be seen to represent the world (or history) as different from what it might in fact be, we must also keep in mind the power of the text to inscribe meaning back upon the world that it represents.”⁵⁸ While, “for readers of medieval literature today, the historical romances are clearly fictions...these narratives constituted an important genre within the range of medieval modes of written history.”⁵⁹ In this way, romances “participated in the reconfiguration, by rewriting, of the land and world that they represented.”⁶⁰ Additionally, by

⁵⁶ Robert Rouse, “Chronicle and Romance,” in *Medieval Historical Writing*, ed. Jennifer Jahner, Emily Steiner, and Elizabeth M. Tyler (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 403.

⁵⁷ Rouse, “Chronicle and Romance,” 392.

⁵⁸ Rouse, “Chronicle and Romance,” 402.

⁵⁹ Rouse, “Chronicle and Romance,” 398.

⁶⁰ Rouse, “Chronicle and Romance,” 402.

positioning romance alongside varying genres, manuscripts confuse readers into mistaking romance for more historical narratives:

However, in medieval manuscripts, they are often found enmeshed within a complex and varied textual ecosystem: romances are positioned alongside and amongst religious tracts, saints' Lives, historical narratives, and many other modes of late medieval writing. The compilers of these manuscripts do not seem to have observed a divide between the fictional narratives found in romances and the historical veracity of other forms of historical narrative such as the chronicle. Medieval romances also speak of the past in ways that did not necessarily mark them out as fictions, at least in the way that we understand that term today.⁶¹

Rouse identifies the Auchinleck as one such manuscript; “for the reader of the Auchinleck, there is no codicological distinguishing of biblical history from hagiographic history from romance history: these texts are presented together as narratives of religious and historical importance.”⁶² Rouse identifies Guy of Warick and Bevis of Hampton use of this technique to “inserting fictitious Norman ancestors and castles into the Anglo-Saxon past”⁶³ as a way to soothe “the ongoing tension between the English Crown and the baronial classes, a contest that led to a number of armed conflicts in thirteenth-century English history.”⁶⁴ While these texts might soothe internal conflict, the *SEMC*, *RCL*, *Tars*, and *RV* use the liberties of the medieval romance to create fear among its readers, and reflect the fear of genealogical disruption caused by recent events such as the Isabella and Mortimer affair, which, might be seen as an alternate technique for inspiring nationalism.

⁶¹ Rouse, “Chronicle and Romance,” 397.

⁶² Rouse, “Chronicle and Romance,” 398.

⁶³ Rouse, “Chronicle and Romance,” 403.

⁶⁴ Rouse, “Chronicle and Romance,” 393.

Fraught Beginnings in the Short English Metrical Chronicle

Thorlac Turville-Petre writes that the Auchinleck transforms the “wretched little work”⁶⁵ of the *SEMC* which “gives a history of England from Brutus to the accession of Edward II.”⁶⁶ The version of the *SEMC* appearing in Auchinleck is longer than previous versions as it “is more than doubled to 2,366 lines,”⁶⁷ which emphasizes the importance of the genealogy in the manuscript. The *SEMC* grounds the other stories in the Auchinleck and England itself by establishing connections between characters and a regal lineage from England’s kings, and “though it is usually impossible to be sure that a particular text was revised specifically for this anthology, the cumulative evidence points strongly to the active intervention of an editor conscious of the overall design of the volume“ with regards to the *SEMC*, *Seynte Mergrete*, *RCL*, *Guy of Warwick*, and *On the Seven Deadly Sins*.⁶⁸ Additionally the Auchinleck’s “size, the professionalism of its scribes, [and] its illumination, would have made it a very expensive volume indeed, and it is difficult to imagine that there could have been any kind of steady demand for productions of this sort“ so it was probably “one of a kind, produced to order.”⁶⁹ The poems in Auchinleck are placed alongside one another for a reason. This is a manuscript with a purpose, and while Turville and Heng argue that the works of the Auchinleck manuscript come together as a “handbook of the nation,“ promoting strong English nationalism, but the *SMEC*,

⁶⁵ Thorlac Turville-Petre, *England the Nation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 109.

⁶⁶ Turville-Petre, *England the Nation*, 108.

⁶⁷ Turville-Petre, *England the Nation*, 109.

⁶⁸ Turville-Petre, *England the Nation*, 114.

⁶⁹ Turville-Petre, *England the Nation*, 113.

RCL, and *Tars* are less about creating a nation, and more a fearful response to global influences and matrilineal genealogies.

The *SEMC* blends fiction and fact to create a historical England that serves the purpose of the manuscript it appears in. Helen Cooper compares the fictional Lancelot episode in the *SEMC* to the factual 1327 arrest of Mortimer. She writes,

First, and most simply, it helps to narrow down the dating of the manuscript. The various texts of the *Short Metrical Chronicle* are themselves dated according to how far forward they go, at what point of history they end. The Auchinleck text ends with the deposition of Edward II, and the manuscript is accordingly given a date *post quem* of 1327; its date *ante quem* is generally accepted as 1340. The correlation of its interpolation about the caves of Nottingham Castle with the arrest of Mortimer is however too close to be a coincidence. Although various topographical writers mention the caves, I have not found any written reference to the tunnel before this date.⁷⁰

The first time Cooper recognizes the caves as being revealed and being a focal point of national attention “followed from the arrest of Mortimer in October 1330,”⁷¹ with more “contemporary accounts” citing “either St. Luke’s Day, 18 October, or the Friday following that,”⁷² which corresponds to Geoffrey Baker’s account of Mortimer’s arrest. Being so close to the end of the year, Cooper concludes that “unless the lines were both written and copied within ten weeks of the events they reflect, the manuscript could not have been produced before 1331 at the earliest.”

⁷³ In dating the Auchinleck manuscript, Cooper cites the fictional story of Lancelot and

⁷⁰ Helen Cooper, “Lancelot, Roger Mortimer and the Date of the Auchinleck Manuscript,” in *Studies in Late Medieval and Early Renaissance Texts in Honour of John Scattergood*, ed. Anne Marie D’Arcy and Alan J. Fletcher (n.p.: Four Courts Press, 2005), 95.

⁷¹ Cooper, “Date of the Auchinleck Manuscript” 95.

⁷² Cooper, “Date of the Auchinleck Manuscript” 95.

⁷³ Cooper, “Date of the Auchinleck Manuscript” 95.

Guinevere and the historically factual deposition of Edward II, but this blending of fact and fiction does not simply serve to date the text. Although, as Cooper says that “it is very hard to tell what the man who wrote the interpolation thought about all this, or wanted his readers to think,”⁷⁴ I doubt he wrote the episode of Lancelot and Guinevere with the sole intention of having future readers use it to date his work. Cooper writes that “he does not obviously write with any degree of disapproval, but he would have been unusual if he had approved of its real-life counterpart: there was little love for Mortimer and Isabella at large in England by this date.”⁷⁵ Soon after Auchinleck was composed the Statute of Treasons was updated in 1352 declaring that “to have an affair with the queen was an act of treason.”⁷⁶ The inclusion of the Lancelot and Guinevere episode in the *SEMC*, put in conversation with the current events of the years when Auchinleck was written, suggests a general awareness of a theme of adulterous queens, but when combined with the updated Statute of Treasons in 1352, the *SEMC* seems to express a blossoming fear of a disruption in the royal line. While Guinevere is from the British Isles,⁷⁷ unlike the princess of Tars or Cassodorian, Isabella is not. The fictional, and now non-threatening, story of Lancelot and Guinevere highlights the very real threat of a disrupted genealogy as a result of Isabella and Mortimer’s affair.

⁷⁴ Cooper, "Date of the Auchinleck Manuscript" 96.

⁷⁵ Cooper, "Date of the Auchinleck Manuscript" 98.

⁷⁶ Cooper, "Date of the Auchinleck Manuscript" 96.

⁷⁷ For more complete and nuanced explorations of Guinevere’s Welsh identity and Welsh identity in Medieval England see, Michelle R. Warren, *History on the edge : Excalibur and the borders of Britain, 1100-1300* (n.p.: University of Minnesota Press, 2000) and Jonathan Davis-Secord, "Revising Race in *Lazamon's Brut*," *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 116, no. 2 (2017).

By including the Albina episode at the beginning of *SEMC*, the *SEMC* centers itself around genealogies, and more specifically, the rejection matrilineal disruptions of patrilineal genealogies. The *SEMC* that appears in the Auchinleck is the only version of the poem that includes a prologue or introduction about Albina and her sisters.⁷⁸ What begins as a story of the rejection of male power and assertion of female leadership disintegrates into a moralizing prologue that suggests women are susceptible to corruption, and that leadership and power belongs in the hands of men. Ultimately, the Albina episode of the *SEMC* foretells the idea of genealogical disruption as a central concern, as the episode compounds disruptions on top of one another, culminating in the disintegration of the rule of Albina and her sisters over Albion.

In the beginning of the prologue, Albina tells her sisters that her husband is to her “gret desanour, / Perfor ichil awreken be / Of him when ich mi time se.”⁷⁹ Albina argues that her husband’s tight control over her is not just offensive to her, but offensive to all of them; “to ous al it is gret schame / For we ben al of heye parage / & ycomen of heye linage.”⁸⁰ Albina creates a sense of community between herself and her sisters through this assertion, bringing them together in commiseration. Albina carefully constructs a sense of duty based on the shared bloodlines connecting herself and her sisters, that her youngest sister proceeds to shatter.

Albina lays out the murderous plot for her sisters to all slay their husbands, but the youngest objects; “’Crist’ sche seyde, it forbede / Mi lord ani tresoun do; / Crist nold neuer it wer

⁷⁸ Ewald Zettel, ed., *An Anonymous Short English Metrical Chronicle*, Early English Text Society Original Series 196 (n.p.: Oxford University Press, 1935).

⁷⁹ “The Anonymous Short English Metrical Chronicle,” The Auchinleck Manuscript, last modified July 5, 2003, accessed January 4, 2022, <https://auchinleck.nls.uk/mss/smc.html>. 69-70.

⁸⁰ “SEMC,” 75-78.

so.”⁸¹ This sister rejects the obligations of her blood relationship to her sisters in favor of the bloodless, but sacred, relationship that connects her to her husband, and by extension their future genealogical line. This fragmentation of genealogy then creates the disruption between the father and the daughters;

Ac for þai were of his linage
 & ycomen of heye parage,
 He comaund swiþe a schip to make,
 Þat it wer redi for her sake,
 & his douhtren euerichon
 Swiþe anon þerin to don,
 Wiþouten seyl, wiþouten ore.⁸²

This passage illustrates two major patrilineal disruptions, between the daughters and their husbands, and the daughters and their father. The one, happily married, sister remains behind and can serve as the sole possibility for unified genealogical continuatinity for her father, while the others, though free to procreate wherever their rudderless boat lands, continuing their father’s line, are linguistically severed from their family and lineage. Although the exiled daughters can technically continue their fathers bloodline, in Zrinka Stahuljak’s book, *Bloodless Genealogies of the French Middle Ages*, she identifies the two-fold nature of genealogy writing, “procreation (the biological) and filiation (the linguistic), although not synonymous, are equally necessary to form the genealogical tie.”⁸³ Therefore, the father’s “comaund” to exile his daughters becomes a linguistic severing of the bloodline relating them and an end to the possibility of the extension of

⁸¹ “SEMC,” 112-114.

⁸² “SEMC,” 281-287.

⁸³ Zrinka Stahuljak, *Bloodless Genealogies of the French Middle Ages* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2005), 37.

his genealogy through these daughters. Additionally, the husbands they sought to kill are not prevented from continuing their own lines with other wives, while the sisters' ability to create a lineage is uncertain because of the general uncertainty of their fate on the rudderless boat, becoming another genealogical, familial fracturing between husbands and wives. When Albina suggests the murder of their husbands, it is the husband's ability to reproduce that seems precarious, yet this uncertainty is turned on Albina and her sisters when they are forced into a rudderless boat. What initially seems like an assertion of the importance of the female in a genealogy, becomes a destruction of this notion. The text then seems to try and drag itself back to the earliest themes of female power demonstrated through Albina's possession of the land through name.

When they finally wash ashore, Albina claims the land, naming it "after mi name Albion."⁸⁴ On Albion, this beginning episode of the *SEMC* almost becomes a story of the assertion of female power in genealogy, as Albina and her sisters subvert the structure of marriage and reproduction that they exist in and instead create an exclusively female society in Albion that not only takes away the reproductive capacity of the husbands they left, depriving them of the possibility of a lineage or continued genealogy and ends their father's genealogy, but also creates a society in which genealogy ends. However, once again, the empowered female narrative crumbles, this time as Brutus conquers Albion, killing their offspring, ending their bloodlines and claiming the land for himself.

⁸⁴ "SEMC," 315.

When the “Þe fende of helle”⁸⁵ come to Albion and procreate with the sisters creating “geauntes,”⁸⁶ the narrative shifts from an exploration of female power over genealogy into a warning about the easy corruption of females, and possibly their wombs, creating a space for the legendary Brutus to sweep in, conquer, and create Britain. Brutus’ defeat of the giant demon offspring founded a nation, Britain, on the defeat of a matrilineal genealogy.

In isolation, the narrative might suggest that “conquest is the punishment for sin,”⁸⁷ but the *SEMC*’s situation among the other works of the Auchinleck, such as *RCL*, where conquest, in the form of crusading, becomes so tangled with violence and grotesque imagery that it closely resembles a sin, precludes a neat moralizing message about conquest across the *SEMC* and the manuscript as a whole, but it does display a fear of and subsequent careful defeat of Albina and her sister’s attempts to seize control of their reproductive capacity, and therefore their control over otherwise patrilineal genealogy. *Tars* demonstrates a similar awareness and fear of the powerful influence of mothers on genealogy, through the King of Tars’ Daughter’s disruptive and violent influence over the narrative.

⁸⁵ “SEMC,” 341.

⁸⁶ “SEMC,” 344.

⁸⁷ Matthew Fisher, “Genealogy Rewritten: Inheriting the Legendary in Insular Historiography,” in *Broken Lines: Genealogical Literature in Late-Medieval Britain and France*, ed. Raluca L. Radulescu and Edward Donald Kennedy, 16:138.

The Search for Salvation in Richard Coeur de Lyon

In both *RCL* and *Tars*, genealogical disruption by the mother leads to crusading.

Richard's mother, Cassodorian, is the daughter of Corbaryng, King of Antioch, an ancient city in Greece near Turkey. The poem evokes Cassodorian's epidermal race by making her markedly not English, but shys away from explicitly stating that she is not epidermally white. Additionally, the text indicates that she is not Christian because, "beforn the elevacyoun, / The qwene fel in swoon adon,"⁸⁸ and after this she always leaves mass before "the elevacyoun." Additionally, when King Henry first meets Cassodorian he says, "what hygtest you, my swete wyght."⁸⁹ According to the footnotes of Peter Larkin's edition, "Henry uses wight to denote a living creature," but the word can also mean "an unnatural or monstrous being, a supernatural creature, a demon."⁹⁰ This suggests that Cassodorian is not just foreign and not Christian, but also demonic. When Cassodorian is finally forced to watch "the elevacyoun" she flies out of the roof; "out of the rofe she gan her dyght."⁹¹ If Cassodorian is not literally a demon, she certainly has demonic qualities. Her demonic qualities and her foreigner status indicate a general fear of non-english characters in *RCL*.

Cassodorian's demonic qualities cast shadows over her son, never explicitly passed down to him, yet haunting him constantly. Richard is continually related to a devil; "this is a devyl and

⁸⁸ "Richard Coer de Lyon," TEAMS Middle English Text Series, last modified 2015,

<https://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/larkin-richard-coer-de-lyon>. 189-90.

⁸⁹ "Richard," 172.

⁹⁰ Larkin, "Richard Coer," TEAMS Middle English Text Series.

⁹¹ "Richard," 229.

no man,”⁹² “this is a devyl, and no man,”⁹³ “The Sarezynes, as I yow telle, / Sayden he was a devyl of helle,”⁹⁴ and so on. The poem refers to Richard as the devil no less than 11 times. King Richard is the product of the English royal genealogy, thoroughly reported in *SEMC*, that has been disrupted by Cassodorian, his demonic, foreign mother from the east. However, despite his demonic heritage, and demonic qualities, Richard is still framed as the hero of the story. The text introduces itself as an epic for glorifying “Kyng Rychard, the werryour beste,”⁹⁵ saying,

Lord Jhesu, kyng of glorye,
Whyche grace and vycторыe
Thou sente to Kyng Rychard,
That nevere was founde coward!⁹⁶

Both Geraldine Heng and Thorlac Turville-Petre expand on Richard’s heroism in the text by arguing that the poem creates Richard as a symbol of nationalism by sending him into battle against the the Christians of Cyprus with an axe; “Kynge Rycharde, I understonde, / Or he wente out of Englonde, / Let hym make an axe for the nones.”⁹⁷ Turville-Petre asserts that this image of Richard with an axe “intended for Saracens and deployed by the English king...symbolizes the nationalism that characterizes the poem’s crusading ideal.”⁹⁸ Heng claims that the axe-wielding Richard “unites two opposing military and political lineages, signaling their combination in the

⁹² “Richard,” 500.

⁹³ “Richard,” 1113.

⁹⁴ “Richard,” 2579-80.

⁹⁵ “Richard,” 31.

⁹⁶ “Richard,” 1-4.

⁹⁷ Larkin, “Richard Coer,” TEAMS Middle English Text Series. 2209-11.

⁹⁸ Thorlac Turville-Petre, *England the Nation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 123.

now-English king.”⁹⁹ But, Richard, framed as a hero and uniter of lineages, is also a half-demonic, ultra-violent, grotesque man eater. How can Richard unite Anglo-Saxon and Norman lineage as an English king when his own genealogy is half-demonic?

Richard does not unite military and political lineages. Instead, he corrupts a symbol from the mythic origins of his nation, using it to kill other Christians. Although not clear if Richard is a demon, or if the demonic parts of his mother are even transmissible to him, he behaves in abhorrent, potentially demonic ways, and is constantly referenced as a devil. His mother’s influence turns him into a living manifestation of the fear of cultural mixing, not simply creating a corrupted future, but threatening the mythic past. Additionally, it seems to me as though Richard is hyper-aware of the stain on his genealogy, attempting, but failing, to atone for it through crusade. Richard doesn’t find salvation on his crusade. Instead, he becomes more and more demonic, adopting tendencies that were more typically used to slander Jews and Muslims, like cannibalism.¹⁰⁰ When Richard craves pork, the cook instead,

Takes a Sarezyn, yonge and fat;
In haste that the thef be slayn,
Openyd, and hys hyde of flayn,
And soden ful hastyly,
With powdyr and with spysory,
And with saffron of good colour.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Geraldine Heng, *Empire of Magic* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 101.

¹⁰⁰ Heng, *Empire of Magic*, 64-65. For additional information on and analysis of Richard’s cannibalism see Alan S. Ambrisco, “Cannibalism and Cultural Encounters in Richard Coeur de Lion,” *The Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 29, no. 3 (1999): ProQuest.

¹⁰¹ Larkin, “Richard Coer,” TEAMS Middle English Text Series. 3088-3093.

Heng notes that in the thirteenth century there were “confirmed blood libels against Jewish communities—the calumny that Jews murdered Christians, especially Children, because Christian blood was consumed in Passover rituals—a thinly disguised accusation of vampiric cannibalism.”

¹⁰² Richard isn’t finding Catholic salvation through crusade, he is becoming a demonic medieval caricature of non-Christians, slaying other Christians and consuming Muslim flesh, which could be read as a sort of twisted assimilation through ingestion. The further Richard gets from England, the more time he spends crusading, the more and more apparent his demonic heritage becomes, making it evident that crusade cannot atone for the sin of having a demonic mother.

The failure of crusading to serve as penance for Richard is a rejection of the increased cultural crossover spurred by the crusades. Heng identifies a similar xenophobic fear gripping England, writing, “as England was consolidating as a nation: an alien community whose existence and daily activities were intimately bound up with the economic and social life of the dominant community.”¹⁰³ *RCL* then becomes a condemnation of the exposure and interaction with non-Christians made possible by crusades, and as a result of this, a broad skepticism that any crusade could lead to salvation. There is a threat to national, genealogical stability because of cultural overlap through marriage brought about by crusades in foreign lands.

Connor Wilson argues that “the alignment of warfare with penitential pilgrimage that set the campaigns of the First Crusade apart from previous Holy Wars, including those which involved pilgrimage, such as Mahdia campaign of 1087, as well as the large-scale pilgrimages of

¹⁰² Heng, *Empire of Magic*, 80.

¹⁰³ Heng, *Empire of Magic*, 84.

the eleventh century.”¹⁰⁴ The surety that crusading could grant penance crumbles in both *RCL* and *Tars*. With the destabilization of the belief that crusading could be penitential, “the blunt pronouncement, ‘the pagans are wrong and the Christians are right,’” that was so prominent in literature of the first crusade, such as the *Chanson de Roland*, does not seem so blunt anymore. In fact, it isn’t even really present at all.¹⁰⁵ Neither Richard nor the Princess in *Tars* are clearly morally right characters. Richard deteriorates as a character and the Princess in *Tars* sows violence with her husband’s conversion as the narrative descends into gory chaos immediately after he becomes both Christian and white. The narratives, however, are not just exploring the idea that Christians might not always be right and Pagans might not always be wrong, but instead confronting the consequences of cultural crossover that results from crusading by depicting foreign mothers disrupting the purity of patriarchal genealogy as Richard is the child of a demonic and foreign mother and the Princess converts the Sultan to Christianity, disrupting the religious race of his line. The Princess’ and Cassodorian’s identities as both foreign and female make it impossible to discern whether it is the female genealogical disruption or the foreign genealogical corruption through cultural confluence, or perhaps a combination of both, that creates bloody chaos.

In Zrinka Stahuljak’s book *Bloodless Genealogies of the French Middle Ages*, she asserts that “between the middle of the eleventh century and the end of the twelfth, the aristocratic

¹⁰⁴ Connor Wilson, “Rome, Byzantium, and the Idea of the Holy War,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of the Crusades*, ed. Anthony Bale (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 64.

¹⁰⁵ Marianne Ailes, “The Chason de geste,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of the Crusades*, ed. Anthony Bale (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 26.

family began to conceptualize itself as a line of male descendants extending through time from the first founding ancestor, who originated the line in the mythic past, to the present heir.¹⁰⁶ This not only creates a sort of stable social structure but it also “bestowed nobility on lineage, exalted the line, and legitimized its hold on power and property.”¹⁰⁷ Stahuljak examines the *Roman d’Eneas*¹⁰⁸ which is a “French vernacular “translation“ of Virgil’s *Aeneid*.¹⁰⁹ The *Roman d’Eneas* was “written in the Anglo-Norman court of the Plantagenet king Henry II between 1156 and 1160.”¹¹⁰ The story would have been important for this court because, “for the Anglo-Normans, Troy and Rome not only were the cultures that chronologically preceded them and whole *exemplum* they could follow, but they also gave them historical continuity.”¹¹¹ The *Roman d’Eneas* is a cultural genealogy that the Anglo-Norman court of Henry II can use to present a family history to “bestowed nobility on lineage, [exalt] the line, and [legitimize] its hold on power and property.”¹¹² The *SEMC* functions in a similar way in the Auchinleck. Stahuljak explores specifically French art and literature, and while I want to take into consideration her

¹⁰⁶ Zrinka Stahuljak, *Bloodless Genealogies of the French Middle Ages* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2005), 16.

¹⁰⁷ Stahuljak, *Bloodless Genealogies*, 16.

¹⁰⁸ For more comprehensive analysis of the *Roman d’Eneas* see Raymond J. Cormier, *The Structure of the Roman d’Eneas* (New York: Catholic Classical Association, 1972) and Simon Gaunt, “From Epic to Romance: Gender and Sexuality in the ‘Roman d’Enéas,’” *Romanic Review* 83, no. 1 (January 1, 1992): ProQuest.

¹⁰⁹ Stahuljak, *Bloodless Genealogies*, 17.

¹¹⁰ Stahuljak, *Bloodless Genealogies*, 18.

¹¹¹ Stahuljak, *Bloodless Genealogies*, 18.

¹¹² Stahuljak, *Bloodless Genealogies*, 16.

examinations of the Charlemagne Window and the *Roman d'Eneas*, I am more curious about how her argument can extend to the late Middle English crusading narratives of *RCL*, *Tars*, and *RV*.

Predestination and Conversion in Roland and Vernagu

*The Charlemagne Window*¹¹³ stands in the Chartres Cathedral, built about a century before the Auchinleck manuscript was composed in the 1330s, and depicts Charlemagne's life of crusading. Among his glorious expansion of Christianity lies the reminder of his sinful incest. Panel 22 shows the Mass of St. Giles, and Charlemagne's confession of his incest, which resulted in the birth of Roland. Here, Charlemagne can receive salvation through confession. Roland, not being the one to commit the crime of incest, but rather the product of the sinful genealogical corruption, cannot receive salvation through confession. Rather, Roland must die for the sin he did not commit. Roland's death is subsequently depicted in Panel 21. Charlemagne and Roland's salvation is then reflected in their ability to grant the opportunity of salvation.

Additionally, Panel 22 disrupts Charlamagne's heroic status. It also provides an explanation for Roland's story and ultimate death; "since Roland is an illegitimate offspring of incest, only martyrdom can save him."¹¹⁴ Clark Mains actually argues that switching the 22nd panel, the Mass of St. Giles, and the 16th panel, combat between Roland and King Marsile, would promote the message of "salvation through crusade and Christian victory."¹¹⁵

¹¹³ For more on *the Charlemagne Window* see Mary Jane Schenck, "Taking a Second Look: Roland in the Charlemagne Window at Chartres," *Olifant* 25, no. 1 (2006): <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48603115>. And Duncan Robertson, "Visual Poetics: The Charlemagne Window at Chartres," *Olifant* 6, no. 2 (Winter 1978): <https://www.jstor.org/stable/45297928>.

¹¹⁴ Stahuljak, *Bloodless Genealogies*, 6.

¹¹⁵ Clark Mains, "The Charlemagne Window at Chartres Cathedral: New Considerations on Text and Image," *Medieval Academy of America* 52, no. 4 (October 1977): 823, JSTOR.

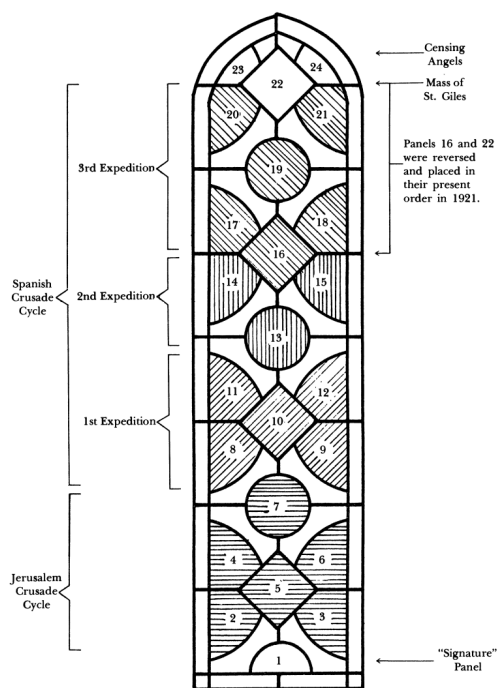


Fig. 2. “Schema of the Charlemagne window with the panels in their present (incorrect) order, indicating the iconographic subdivisions and the restoration.”¹¹⁶

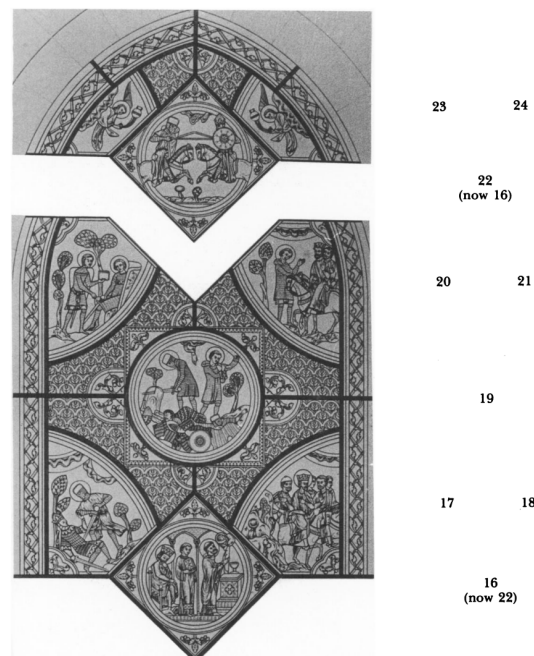


Fig. 3. “The Spanish crusade cycle, third expedition, with the Mass of St. Gilles panel (no. 16) in its original (correct) position. After the line engraving from Lassus.”¹¹⁷

While Stahuljak argues against this because it centers genealogies around blood, I do think Mains argument can be seen in *RCL* and *Tars*, because Richard and the princess both turn to crusading as an attempt at atonement for their sins. Additionally, this falls neatly in line with the

¹¹⁶ Schema of the Charlemagne window with the panels in their present (incorrect) order, indicating the iconographic subdivisions and the restoration., 1977, in *The Charlemagne Window at Chartres Cathedral: New Considerations on Text and Image*, by Clark Mains, 802.

¹¹⁷ The Spanish crusade cycle, third expedition, with the Mass of St. Gilles panel (no. 16) in its original (correct) position. After the line engraving from Lassus., 1977, in *The Charlemagne Window at Chartres Cathedral: New Considerations on Text and Image*, by Clark Mains, 803, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2855375>.

broader Catholic concept of salvation through works. While The Charlemagne Window can display Roland's salvation through martyrdom and Charlemagne's through confession, *RCL* and *Tars* do not have this neat ending. Additionally, the genealogical disruption depicted in the Charlamagne window has no foreign influence as it comes from incest, and is not a matriarchal disruption, which makes *RCL* and *Tars* explicit condemnations of foreign, matriarchal genealogical disruptions.

In *RV*, the ability to grant the opportunity of salvation through conversion to Christianity is a reflection of Charlamagne's sin and Roland's embodiment of that sin. *RV* illustrates Charlemagne's Christ-like ability to convert masses by portraying him with his 12 knights (the 12 peers, "dussepers"), and foreshadows the impossibility of Vernagu's conversion by making his head and heart impenetrable to steel, and by metaphoric extension, Christian doctrine. But, these aren't the reasons that Charlemagne is able to convert masses, and Vernagu is unable to convert himself, they are just images that emphasize these narrative facts. Instead, it is Roland's identity as a living genealogical disruption, an embodiment of sin, that ultimately prevents him from being able to grant Vernagu the possibility of conversion and salvation in life.

RV not only raises questions about who is worthy of conversion to Christianity, but also who is worthy of granting the opportunity to convert. Charlemagne, referred to as Charls in the text, believes in and acts on the power of conversion whereas Roland, because of divine intervention, abandons the possibility of conversion for Vernagu and kills him, even though Vernagu expresses deep interest in the theological pillars of Christianity. As Roland fights Vernagu, he realizes that he cannot penetrate Vernagu's skin with a sword;

When it com to þe neue
 Vernagu bad leue
 To resten of þat fiȝt,

Rouland him trewþe 3af,
So he most bring a staf.¹¹⁸

The impenetrability of Vernagu's skin is later specified as just his torso and upwards; "No man is harder þan y / Fram þe nauel vpward."¹¹⁹ This physical impenetrability of Vernagu's upper half, or his heart and his head, foreshadows the impossibility of his conversion, by suggesting that he could never absorb, or be penetrated by, Christian doctrine. However, Vernagu is not unable to convert to Christianity simply because his head and heart are physically impenetrable. No, the impossibility of his conversion has as much to do with who Vernagu is as it does who Roland is. Roland finds salvation through violent martyrdom, and similarly this is the only salvation he can grant Vernagu. Vernagu might not be worthy of conversion in the eyes of the author, but neither is Roland worthy of granting conversion, or at least the possibility of conversion.

When Charlemagne conquers Pamplona he is able to stage a mass conversion with the help of Archbishop Turpin;¹²⁰

Als a douhti kniȝt
& þurth þe miracle þat was þere
Ten þousand Sarrazins cristned were

¹¹⁸ David Burnley and Alison Wiggins, eds., "Roland and Vernagu," *The Auchinleck Manuscript*, last modified July 5, 2003, https://auchinleck.nls.uk/editorial/refer_site.html. 581-5.

¹¹⁹ "Roland and Vernagu," *The Auchinleck Manuscript*. 660-1.

¹²⁰ "Archbishop Turpin is an important military and ecclesiastical character in the *Song of Roland* and the Middle English Charlemagne romances. In *Otinell, RV*, and the three Otuel romances, Turpin's role is limited to episcopal duties: performing Mass and baptizing converts. In the fifth Otuel-cycle romance, *The Siege of Milan*, Turpin plays a central role." Elizabeth Melick, "Roland and Vernagu," *TEAMS Middle English Text Series*, last modified 2019, <https://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/melick-roland-and-vernagu>.

In þat ich niȝt.¹²¹

Charlemagne does require divine intervention for the mass conversion as it is a “miracle,” but he is dually portrayed as the agent of divine intervention by being portrayed as a Christ figure; “noþing win he it miȝt, / For al his dussepers.”¹²² There is not the same possibility of miracle for Roland and Vernagu even though Roland shows kindness to Vernagu by placing the stone beneath his head,

To him Rouland gan gon
 & tok þe gretest ston
 þat lay in þat place,
 He leyd vnder his heued, ywis,
 For him þouȝt it lay amis,
 To lowe at þat cas.¹²³

This suggests almost kinship between the two, or at least a mutual respect by demonstrating Roland’s desire for Vernagu to be comfortable. This act of kindness also results in Vernagu’s curiosity about Christianity; “& when þat Vernagu / Yherd speke of Ihesu / He asked wat man he was.”¹²⁴ Vernagu’s curiosity about Christianity seems to suggest the possibility of conversion, however, an angel visits Roland saying,

’herd is þi bone,
 Arise Rouland & fiȝt
 ¶ & sched þe schrewes blod
 8100 For he nas neuer gode
 Bi lond no bi se;

¹²¹ “Roland and Vernagu,” The Auchinleck Manuscript. 205-8.

¹²² “Roland and Vernagu,” The Auchinleck Manuscript. 279-80.

¹²³ “Roland and Vernagu,” The Auchinleck Manuscript. 632-7.

¹²⁴ “Roland and Vernagu,” The Auchinleck Manuscript. 677-9.

Bei alle prehours aliue
To Cristen wald him schriue
Gode nold he neuer be.¹²⁵

This vision bars Vernagu from conversion, deeming him unworthy of becoming Christian, and at the same time deeming Roland unworthy of granting Vernagu the possibility of conversion, just as he is denied the possibility of salvation in life and must become a martyr in order to gain salvation because he is a living embodiment of genealogical impurity.

¹²⁵ “Roland and Vernagu,” The Auchinleck Manuscript. 807-14.

Black, White and Red All Over: Violent Consequences of Conversion in *King of Tars*

Tars similarly explores questions of conversion, who can convert, and what it means to convert, through the black hound, the princess, the sultan, and their baby. The daughter of the King of Tars only agrees to marry the Sultan after he slays many of her father's subjects. This slaughter at the beginning of the poem brackets the story with violence. The resulting marriage leads to a series of narratively destabilizing epidermal and religious transformations. We are introduced to the possibility of both epidermal and religious transformation in the princess' dream of hounds;

“Yere hir thought withouten leasing
 Als sche lay in hir swevening
 (That selcouthe was to rede)
 That blac hounde hir was folweing.
 Truth might of Jhesu, Heaven king,
 Spac to hir manhede
 In white clothes als a knight,
 And seyde to hir, “Mi swete wight,
 No tharf thee nothing drede
 Of Ternagaunt no of Mahoun.”¹²⁶

The 'blac hounde' transforms from something menacing into a spokesperson for Jesus and, as this happens, his outermost appearance turns white as the hound is suddenly dressed “in white clothes als a knight.”¹²⁷ Not only is this a foreshadowing of the later conversions, but it introduces the connection between epidermal race and religious race explicitly as the hound

¹²⁶ John H. Chandler, ed., “The King of Tars,” TEAMS Middle English Text Series, last modified 2015, <https://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/chandler-the-king-of-tars>. 442-51.

¹²⁷ “The King of Tars,”. 448.

becomes white and a conduit for the voice of Jesus almost at the same time. It is not clear if Jesus speaks through the hound and then the hound is dressed in white, or if the transformation happens in the other order, which, Cord Whitaker argues, suggests that “religion and biology actually exert pressure on one another mutually.”¹²⁸

The second transformation comes when the princess converts, or pretends to convert to Islam. The princess says, “to Mahoun ichil me take / And Jhesu Crist mi Lord forsake,”¹²⁹ but soon after when “sche was bi herselveon, / To Jhesu sche made hir mon.”¹³⁰ The princess participates in the conversion to Islam, but immediately calls on Jesus to stop her transformation. While she immediately turns to Jesus after she forsakes him, there is no clear indication of the success of her conversion. Geraldine Heng argues that “because the princess’ skin stays white and fair from beginning to end, never vacillating at any time, the romance is able to signal the continuity and stability of her Christian religious identity.”¹³¹ However, Cord Whitaker argues, with regards to the sultan’s conversion, that, “at first glance, the sultan’s conversion appears to cause his skin to turn white,” however, “his skin actually turns white prior to his conversion,”¹³² meaning that whiteness is correlated to, and possibly a precondition of, but not necessarily indicative of Christianity. Because there is no epidermal evidence of the princess’

¹²⁸ Cord J. Whitaker, “Black Metaphors in the King of Tars,” *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 112, no. 2 (April 2013): 172, <https://doi.org/10.5406/jenglgermphil.112.2.0169>.

¹²⁹ “Tars,” 484-5.

¹³⁰ “Tars,” 511-12.

¹³¹ Geraldine Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages* (Cambridge University Press, 2018), 817, digital file.

¹³² Whitaker, “Metaphors” 172.

transformation, does not mean that it could not have occurred. With this uncertainty, *Tars* creates a fear around the Princess's conversion that crusading and cultural crossover does not only result in a Muslim converting to Christianity, but can also result in a Christian conversion to Islam, therefore destabilizing notions of Christian superiority.

The blob baby's transformation into a formed child follows the Princess's conversion, and is arguably the most important transformation of the text because with the baby comes the promise of a new generation, and continued lineage, but the baby comes out, well, a blob. It is inanimate and unpromising as a future generation. There is no indication in the text as to whether the princess's staged conversion or the sultan's nominal Islamic faith caused the baby to be born in such a way, but the demonstrated incompatibility of the pair prevents the continuation of their lineage in any recognizable form of life as the baby appears "ded as the ston."¹³³ However, when the baby is baptized it develops limbs and features; "hou that child ycristned was / With limes al hole and fere."¹³⁴ The baby's transformation into a formed child through conversion to Christianity suggests a necessary alignment with the mother's faith. Stahuljak argues that women "[enable] the paternity of the father."¹³⁵ Because of this, "the woman is excluded from secular genealogies so that the metaphor of patrilineal blood genealogy can be preserved from its inherent bloodlessness."¹³⁶ In order to overcome this exclusion, the princess focuses the genealogy around the religion that the baby will inherit from its parents, as opposed to the race,

¹³³ "Tars," 582.

¹³⁴ "Tars," 701-2.

¹³⁵ Stahuljak, *Bloodless Genealogies*, 14.

¹³⁶ Stahuljak, *Bloodless Genealogies*, 14.

by having the baby baptized. The sultan's gods could not transform the blob into a baby, but christening can, which asserts the power of Christianity in the text.

Once the blob is transformed, the poem states, "feirer child might non be bore – / It no hadde never a lime forlore, / Wele schapen it was, withalle."¹³⁷ Once the baby becomes Christian it also becomes fair, which probably also means white as earlier in the poem the princess is described as, "non feirer woman might ben — / As white as fether of swan,"¹³⁸ therefore connecting fairness to whiteness. By this point in the poem, the princess and her baby are both Christian and white, strengthening the connection between the epidermal and religious race, however, *Tars* complicates the relationship between epidermal and religious race in the last conversion of the poem.

The priest Cleophas baptizes the sultan, converting him to Christianity, but before the sultan is baptized, his skin becomes white;

"He cleped the soudan of Damas

After his owen name.

His hide that blac and lothely was
Al white bicom thurth Godes gras
And clere withouten blame.

...

And when the prest hadde alle yseyd
And haly water on him leyd,
To chaumber thai went ysame."¹³⁹

¹³⁷ "Tars," 775-77.

¹³⁸ "Tars," 11-12.

¹³⁹ "Tars," 919-30.

Heng argues that “the drama of conversion enacted by romance also speaks to an intimate fear generated by the presence of a domestic community of religious aliens in the English homeland, where intimacy meant that a certain blurring of religious identity was inevitable in the contact zone.”¹⁴⁰ Essentially, the visible proof of conversion serves to calm fears of the possibility of unwilling or accidental conversion, but as I mentioned earlier, Cord Whitaker noticed that the sultan’s “skin actually turns white prior to his conversion,”¹⁴¹ suggesting that while the entire process of the conversion is dramatic, it still blurs the lines of “religious identity.”¹⁴² The sultan’s conversion proves that whiteness does not automatically equate to Christianity, which is destabilizing to white Christian identity and to the narrative.

Immediately after the Sultan’s conversion, the narrative descends into chaos. The Sultan declares, “he that wil be cristned nought, / Loke to the death he be brought, / withouten ani duelleing,”¹⁴³ and “hye that wil nought so anon / thai schul be heved erverichon / Bi Him that dyed on tre.”¹⁴⁴ This also happens, though not immediately, after the princesses performed conversion to Islam. Like Richard’s crusade, and Roland’s death, this is another instance of the Catholic need for salvation through works and in this case, the work is a crusade and brutal murder of Muslims. Is the Sultan doing penance for his previous identity as a Muslim or is the Princess’ disruption of patriarchal genealogy so destabilizing that it descends into violence and

¹⁴⁰ Geraldine Heng, *Empire of Magic* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 86.

¹⁴¹ Whitaker, “Black Metaphors,” 172.

¹⁴² Heng, *Empire of Magic*, 86.

¹⁴³ “Tars,” 952-54.

¹⁴⁴ “Tars,” 1036-38.

chaos? Perhaps the narrative suggests that without visible markers for religious race, there will be chaos.

Conclusion

In the enormous, and sometimes dissonant, Auchinleck manuscript, the *SEMC*, *RCL*, *RV*, and *Tars* explore the moral rectitude of the crusades, patrilineal power structures, and capacity for conversion, all in the service of cleansing foreign genealogical impurities. The Albina episode in the *SEMC* portrays female power as a threat to patriarchal order and undermines that power when Brutus conquers the matriarchal society of Albion. Albina's attempts to assert control over her lineage are systematically dismantled by the patriarchal narrative when her father linguistically severs their relationship and sends his daughters out to sea. This careful deconstruction and defeat of Albina and her sisters responds to influence exerted by Cassodorian and the princess of Tars over patrilineal power structures.

Cassodorian seems to transmit her foreignness and demonic tendencies to Richard, causing him to be devil-like, kill Christians, and eat Muslims. The princess of Tars wields enough power to convert both her baby and her husband to Christianity, which results in a narrative descent to chaos. The transmission of Cassodorian's demonic side invokes a fear of foreign women, and the effect that these potentially inherited qualities have on Richard's crusade. This demonstrates a suspicion of the effectiveness of crusade as penance. Richard's failed penitential crusade suggests that he is firstly, predisposed to devilish tendencies because of his mother, but also, that crusade, only serves to expose him to more of the cultural crossover that lead to his own demonic lineage. Like Richard, Roland's own fraught genealogy prevents him from being able to crusade, and grant conversion, as penance. Although Roland is not the child of a foreign mother, in fact quite the opposite, his story still possesses the same foreign

exposure, through crusade, and genealogical disruption through his parent's incest, making it a variation of Richard's. Ultimately, what Richard, and Roland struggle with is the paradox of doing penance for a crime, demonic procreation or incest, that they did not commit. When read together, these four texts make a fearful, xenophobic suggestion that the cultural expansion enabled by crusade, results in a deterioration of a patrilineal genealogical structure through the introduction of foreign female figures. After exploring how genealogy, race, and maternity intersect in the *SEMC*, *RCL*, *RV*, and *Tars*, how does this inform a modern understanding of Medieval England? Just as Cord Whitaker says, "religion and biology actually exert pressure on one another mutually,"¹⁴⁵ so too do the past and present.

Now that I have addressed both modern medievalisms' relationship to race and race in the Auchinleck manuscript, I ask, what sort of responsibility do Amazon, HBO, and Netflix have to portray the Middle Ages in an accurate way when they release TV shows that use the Middle Ages as a setting? Is it even important to be accurate? I mean, accuracy isn't what something like *Wheel of Time* is going for, but to what extent does the TV show have a responsibility to reverse and rectify the overwhelming whiteness of the original book series? Does the color-blind casting method Amazon uses fail to rectify some of the false homogeneity of prior casts, or even the diverse but racially harmful casts of the past? Sure, it is a step, representation is essential, but it risks creating an equally false image of the past, with no racism. Jonathan Hsy writes, "for communities of color and racialized minority groups so often excluded from, and damaged by, predominantly white power structures, embracing medievalism can enable acts of resistance to

¹⁴⁵ Whitaker, "Black Metaphors" 112.

oppression and help to dismantle systems of racial injustice.”¹⁴⁶ Additionally, authors and directors can’t relegate characters of color to the status of plot device, as happens in *the Hunger Games*, *Game of Thrones*, and Netflix’s new *Vikings: Valhalla*. Cord Whitaker argues that “we need studies that analyze the strategic use of black characters to define the goals and enhance the qualities of white characters.”¹⁴⁷ It seems to me similar to the question of equality versus fairness. Maybe foreign character’s only show up in Medieval English literature to have babies, fly through the roof, and be gone, or only to later convert to Christianity. Such stories might be accurate (or usefully inaccurate), but they not fair, and as far as I am concerned, any show or book with a dragon can forgo accuracy in favor of fairness and better representation.

¹⁴⁶ Hsy, “Antiracist Medievalisms” 18.

¹⁴⁷ Whitaker, “Black Metaphors” 112.

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