EXPECTATION VS. EXPERIENCE: ENCOUNTERING THE SARACEN OTHER IN MIDDLE ENGLISH ROMANCE

The representation of the Saracen in medieval literature is an issue that has attracted a great deal of attention from literary scholars. Early interest concentrated upon the representation, or perhaps more correctly the misrepresentation, of Islamic culture within the medieval west. Dorothee Metlitzki's seminal 1977 study *The Matter of Araby in Medieval England* provides a useful summary of the ways in which images of the Saracens were constructed in Middle English. By the time of romances such as *Beues of Hamtoun* and *The Sowdone of Babylone* the Saracen can be seen to have been most often represented in one of four ways: 'the enamored Muslim princess; the converted Saracen; the defeated emir or sultan; and the archetypal Saracen giant.'[1]

In recent years critical attention has increasingly concentrated upon developing an understanding of the function of the Saracen within the process of medieval identity formation. As the antithesis of the Christian West, the image of the Saracen provides a powerful racial, cultural and religious Other during the later Middle Ages. Making use of psychoanalytic theory, scholars such as Jeffrey Jerome Cohen read medieval images of the Saracen as acting to simplify the inherent complexities of individual and national identity.[2] By adhering to the binary paradigm of Christian as good and Saracen as evil, the oppositional model of identity formation produces a

[1] Metlitzki, D. 1977. *The Matter of Araby in Medieval England.* Yale University Press, New Haven: 161. Metlitzki provides a useful discussion and summary of the four stock Saracens: 160 – 197.

[2] Cohen, J.J. 2000. *Of Giants: Sex, Monsters, and the Middle Ages.* Minnesota University Press, Minneapolis: 132 – 3.

construction of identity that, while reductive, allows a clearer and less problematic definition of self and nation.

However, not all representations of the Saracen are as uncomplicated as this paradigm suggests. This paper investigates the construction of the Saracen Other in two romances, the Middle English *Guy of Warwick* and *Beues of Hamtoun*.[1] These two narratives present constructions of the Saracen Other that bear useful comparison, highlighting both the mechanisms of difference and the subjective nature of difference itself. By examining how these romances represent the dissimilarity of East and West I hope to shed some light upon the processes that are involved in their construction of difference.

Dorothee Metlitzki, commenting upon the depiction of the Arab world in *Beues of Hamtoun*, concludes that: '*Sir Beues* tells us what the average Englishman in hall and marketplace knew or imagined about the Saracens.'[2] By traveling into the lands of the East, Beues and similar heroes such as Guy of Warwick are depicted as encountering one of the constituent elements in the process of identity formation – the Other. This experiencing of the racial and religious Other provides for the heroes themselves, and vicariously for their audiences, an important element in the construction of identity. Through the medium of the romance, the cultural process of otherness is given shape in the form of the Saracen world, enabling both the literary hero and the literate audience to 'encounter' the Other.

The cross-cultural experience as represented in the romance of *Guy of Warwick* produces what one might imagine to be an image typical of

[1] This paper deals expressly with the Middle English versions of the *Beues* and *Guy* narratives, not their Anglo-Norman antecedents. As such it represents a synchronic as opposed to a diachronic study of these romances. This approach privileges the concerns of the audience of these texts over those of their 'authors', a key tenet of the reception theory approach to literature. By examining the Middle English versions of these romances as texts in their own right, regardless of their degree of indebtedness to their Anglo-Norman antecedents, we can move closer to an understanding of these texts as they may have been read and understood by their contemporary audiences. Cf. Cohen: 91.

[2] Metlitzki: 120.

medieval Orientalism.[1] In a manner analogous to the historical crusader experience, the Islamic world is characterized by hostile territorial ambition. Making use of traditional romance generic conventions such as heathen Sultans, treacherous stewards, wrongly imprisoned knights and devilish giants, the Saracen Other is constructed through contrasting archetypes of religion, honour and physical appearance.

Guy's first encounter with the Saracen world occurs after he has already established his reputation as a renowned knight. Guy's early career, prompted largely by his desire to win the heart of Felice, the Earl of Warwick's daughter, is spent in tournaments in Normandy, Spain, and Germany, and in numerous wars in Italy and elsewhere on the continent.[2] While at the Emperor Reyner's court in Germany, Guy and his companion Herhaud encounter foreign merchants arrived from the east and bearing momentous news. The merchants tell of the dire need of Ernis, Emperor of Constantinople, who is besieged by a Saracen host led by the Sultan of Coyne. This second-hand report of the Saracen Other provokes the desire to confront it. Equipped by the Emperor with a company of one hundred German knights, the two Englishmen travel to Constantinope and put themselves at Ernis's command. From the very start, this *aventure* has a markedly different tone to those that Guy has undertaken thus far. Guy wishes to aid the Emperor against the Sultan's forces, who *Þat lond destrud & men aqueld, / & cristendom þai han michel afeld* (2853 – 4). Here Guy's motive seems to be one of Christian solidarity, although Herhaud does add the corollary: *y graunt it be / Miche worþschipe it worþ to þe* (2855 – 6).

Once in Constantinople, Guy is recognized by the Emperor as a powerful ally, and is soon thrown into battle against the Sultan's forces. It is here that Guy encounters for the first time the Saracen Other – in the person of the

[1] In this paper I will be referring to the fourteenth-century Middle English version of the *Guy of Warwick* narrative, as found in the Auchinleck MS (MS Advocates 19.2.1). Zupitza, J. 1883 – 91. *Guy of Warwick*. [EETS] Kegan Paul, London.

[2] Felice, a particularly demanding romance *objet d'amour*, repeatedly rejects Guy's advances, compelling him to undertake increasingly dangerous and time-consuming journeys to win her love. It is ironic then, that when she does finally agree to marry Guy, he has reached a stage in his life when his mind has begun to turn to more spiritual matters, and he soon leaves her to pursue a spiritual quest as a pilgrim.

Sultan's nephew, *þe amiral Costdram* (2905). This initial image of a Saracen warrior is presented in surprisingly complimentary terms:

> So strong he is, & of so gret miȝt,
> In world y wene no better kniȝt;
> For þer nis man no kniȝt non
> Þat wiþ wretþe dar loken him on.
> His armes alle avenimed beþ:
> Þat venim is strong so þe deþ:
> In þis world nis man þat he take miȝt
> Þat he ne schuld dye anon riȝt.
> (*Guy of Warwick*, 2907 – 14).

Costdram is a knight of great strength, without peer, upon whom other men fear to look. However, the envenomed nature of Costdram's weapons mark him out as Other, casting doubt upon his honour and differentiating him from Christian knights such as Guy, to whom the use of such weapons is both unknown and unthinkable. Costdram here represents an image of a knightly Other, *unheimlich* in comparison with the normative values of Guy's own Western conception of knighthood. Costdram's role as a *doppelganger* figure in relation to Guy is emphasized by the way in which the battle is structured. Each of Guy's knights are involved in individual combats within the wider melee, pairing off with named opponents – Herhaud slays the King of Turkey (2943), the French knight Tebaud kills Helmadan (2949), while the German Gauter strikes down Redmadan (2955). This initial encounter with the Saracen Other establishes a comparative paradigm for Guy's subsequent experiences.

While Guy and his knights see off this first assault with some ease, the Sultan's host, and the Saracen Other that it represents, is not so easily dealt with. They are soon once more at the gates of the city. After seeing his first sortie beaten off, the Sultan personally leads the next attack, one that leads him into direct conflict with Guy. The Sultan strikes first, after which the following exchange occurs:

> Wiþ gret hete he smot to Gij,
> Opon his helme, sikerly,
> Þat he feld þat o quarter.
> To Gij he seyd a bismer:

‘Y-sestow, lord? bi Apolin,
Þat was a strok of a Sarrazin!’
Gij to þe soudan smot þo,
His helme no was him worþ a slo:
Resares euen forþ þe breyn
Helme & flesse he carf wiþ meyn.
Þan he seyd to him a bismer:
‘Mahoun halp þe litel þer!
Bodi & soule no nouȝt þer-of
No is nouȝt worþ a lekes clof.
Hou so it go of mi wounde,
Of Mahoun þou hast litel help y-founde.
Er þou scorndest me,
Of mi wounde þou madest þi gle:
Leche gode schal ich haue,
Þat mi wounde schal to hele drawe;
Þou hast a croun schauen to þe bon;
Tomorwe þou miȝt sing anon.
Wele þou þouȝtest to ben a prest,
When þou of swiche a bischop order berst!’
Now biginneþ þat gret fiȝt
(*Guy of Warwick*, 3631 – 55)

The Sultan exalts in his blow: *bi Apolin, / Þat was a strok of a Sarrazin!* However, Guy returns the buffet with some interest, slicing through the Sultan’s helmet and across the top of his scalp. Guy points out that Mahoun has been of little help to the Sultan, and interprets this lack of martial aid as a sign of the inferiority of the Saracen religion, which, in Guy’s opinion *is nouȝt worþ a lekes clof.*[1] The Sultan’s lack of fortune with his blow to Guy’s helmet is understood by Guy as representing the weakness of the Saracen faith, while Guy’s all-together more effective blow is given Christian meaning through Guy’s tonsorial taunt: *Þou hast a croun schauen to þe bon; / Tomorwe þou miȝt sing anon. / Wele þou þouȝtest to ben a prest*. Guy’s martial exegesis interprets the difference between the two sword-blows as demonstrating the relative worth of the Christian and Saracen faiths.

[1] Mahoun (Mohammed), along with Apolin and Ternagaunt, is one of the unholy trinity of deities commonly ascribed to Islam during the Middle Ages.

This demonstration of Christianity's superiority undermines the Sultan's belief in his gods, and this leads to a remarkable renunciation of the Saracen triumvirate. After retreating injured from the battle, the Sultan is approached by an *amiral* who reports their battlefield losses. The *amiral* tells him that due to their misfortune, his troops have turned away from their gods: *Our godes ous hateþ, for soþe to sigge* (3678). The Sultan has the idols of their gods brought before him, and publicly berates them:

> Fy, fy,' he seyd, 'on [þe], Apolin!
> Þou schalt haue wel iuel fin,
> & þou, Ternagaunt, also:
> Michel schame schal com ȝou to;
> & þou, Mahoun, her alder lord,
> Þou nart nouȝt worþ a tord!
> (*Guy of Warwick*, 3699 – 704).

He then physically attacks the idols, breaking them to pieces with a stave.[1] This internal crisis of faith corresponds with the breaking of the Saracen lines, and they retreat from Constantinople once more.

Amidst the warfare, Guy also finds time to become embroiled in the subterfuges of the Emperor's steward, Morgadour. After repeated attempts to incriminate Guy in relation to the Emperor's daughter Clarice, the treacherous steward manipulates Guy into volunteering for the near-suicidal task of acting as an envoy to the Sultan.[2] Upon arriving at the Saracen camp, Guy enters the Sultan's pavilion and addresses the sultan with the following speech:

> Þan seyd Gij þe Englisse,
> 'Vnderstond to mi speche:

[1] This is a common motif that is also found in, amongst others, the early-fourteenth-century Middle English *Otuel and Roland*, where the Saracen King Garcy destroys his own idols after his champion Clarel is defeated by Otuel. O'Sullivan, M. 1935. *Otuel and Roland*. [EETS] Oxford University Press, Oxford.

[2] The nature of Constantinople itself, as a liminal space between Orient and Occident, is particularly interesting with regards to the history of East-West contact in the Middle Ages. As the site of cultural hybridity, where cultural norms such as honour are mutable, the city operates as both the object of violent contest and the location of cultural contact.

Þilke lord þat woneþ an heye,
Þat al þing walt fer & neye,
& in þe rode lete him pini,
Al cristen men to saui,
& in þe se made þe sturioun,
So ȝif ȝou alle his malisoun,
& alle þilk þat ich here se,
Þat mis-bileued men be;
& þe at þe first, sir soudan,
Cristes wreche þe come opan!
Yuel fure breninde fast þe opon,
& cleue þi brest doun to þi ton!
For icham Gij ȝe mow wel se,
Yuel mot ȝe alle y-the!
Vnder-stond, treitour, mi resoun:
Haue þou Cristes malisoun,
& alle þilke forþ mitt te,
Þat ich her about þe se.
Þe heye god þat is ful of miyt
Binim ȝou ȝour limes & ȝour siȝt!
Bi me þe sent word þemperour Garioun,
Þat miȝti men haþ in his bandoun,
Þurch wham þou art y-brouȝt to schond,
& hoteþ þe wende out of his lond.
(*Guy of Warwick*, 3889 – 914).

Guy then proposes that the Saracens find themselves a champion to fight him, and that this single combat will determine who shall rule the land.[1] This offer is rebuffed after Sultan discovers the envoy to be none other than Guy, the slayer of the Sultan's nephew Costdram, and the Sultan orders him to be seized and thrown into his dungeon. Guy responds to this by decapitating the Sultan and fleeing the camp, pursed by a host of Saracens.

Guy's first encounter with the Saracen Other constructs a cultural opposition that leaves no room for compromise or co-existence.[2] His speech to the

[1] A proposal that prefigures Guy's most memorable moment – his legendary final combat with the giant Danish champion Colbrond at Winchester.

[2] This is in contrast to a speech made in similar circumstances by Beues of Hamtoun, which will be discussed later in this paper.

Sultan is notable for the uncompromising attitude of religious intolerance towards the Saracens, an attitude that is characteristic of the whole romance. Guy defines himself as one of the *cristen men*, who have God's grace, in opposition to the *mis-bileued* Saracens, highlighting the binary nature of difference in this romance's construction of the Saracen Other.

Guy's second major encounter with the East takes place after he has returned home to England and married his liege's daughter Felice. Once he has won the hand of his lady, Guy comes to the realization that all his great deeds thus far in his life have been for temporal ends. Seized by a spiritual passion, Guy determines to leave his newly won bride and wander the world as a pilgrim doing the Lord's work: *Y schal walk for mi sinne / Barfot bi doun & dale. / Þat ich haue wiþ mi bodi wrouȝt / Wiþ mi bodi it schal be bouȝt, / To bote me of þat bale* (29: 8 – 12).

Guy travels to Jerusalem and Bethlehem, before eventually arriving in Antioch, where he encounters Jonas, the Christian Earl of Durras. Jonas tells him a long tale of misfortune, which has resulted in Jonas being sent to search for Guy in order for him to champion the Saracen king Triamour in a judicial combat.[1] Guy, moved by Jonas's claims that King Triamour will kill his sons if Jonas fails to find Guy, keeps his identity hidden but offers to fight in Guy's stead. The two then set out for Alexandria to face the combat and to save Jonas's sons from the axe.

This judicial combat, against the Sultan's giant champion Amoraunt, highlights two important elements of the Saracen Other: Gigantism and Honour. The first of these, the trope of the Saracen giant, is evident in the initial description of Amoraunt:

> Þan dede he com forþ a Sarrazine,

[1] A long and complicated tale, in which Jonas and his sons defend Jerusalem from the Saracens, but then make the fatal mistake of following them into their own lands where they are captured by the Saracen King Triamour. Sometime later, Triamour's son inadvertently slays the Sultan of Alexandria's son following an argument over a game of chess, which leads to Triamour's accusation by the Sultan and his committal to the judicial duel. Triamour, faced with the prospect of fighting Armoraunt, seeks the advice of his Christian prisoners who inform him of the renown of Guy and Heraud, which leads to the King offering Jonas his freedom if he can find Guy.

Haue he Cristes curs & mine
Wiþ boke & eke wiþ belle.
Out of Egypt he was y-come,
Michel & griselich was þat gome
Wiþ ani god man to duelle.
He is so michel & vnrede,
Of his siȝt a man may drede,
Wiþ tong as y þe telle.
As blac he is as brodes brend:
He semes as it were a fende,
Þat comen were out of helle.
(*Guy of Warwick*, 62: 1 – 12).

The excess of the Saracen Other, previously alluded to in Guy's experiences at Constantinople, is here manifested in the body of the giant Amoraunt. This avatar of bodily excess, the conquering of which is so important to the process of the physical and spiritual maturation of the Romance hero, combines the Other of the Giant with the Other of the Saracen, creating a potent synthesis of these two elements of identity formation.[1] The Saracen Giant embodies all those things that the Romance hero by necessity approaches, but must not become: he is *michel & unrede*, huge and uncontrolled – an image of unrestrained masculine power, which Western heroes such as Guy must seek to control and sublimate within chivalric codes of behavior and honour. This uncontrolled masculinity is given demonic form in the figure of the Saracen Giant, characterized by the blackness of the fiend, the Western archetypal construction of the uncontrolled nature of the African.

Guy's judicial combat with Amoraunt also provides an opportune moment to illustrate a third point of Saracen Otherness – the lack of chivalric honour possessed by the denizens of the East. After a long and fierce period of fighting, the giant Amoraunt is stricken by a great thirst and offers Guy the following bargain:

Ac lete me drink a litel wiȝt

[1] Much has been written on the role of Giants regarding identity formation, most recently and engagingly by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen in his study *Of Giants: Sex, Monsters, and the Middle Ages*.

For þi lordes loue ful of miȝt
Þat þou louest wiþ wille,
& y þe hot bi mi lay,
ȝif þou haue ani þrest to-day,
Þou shalt drink al þi fille.
(*Guy of Warwick*, 114: 7 – 12).

Guy, constrained by the chivalric code of honour, allows his opponent the time to refresh himself, and when Amoraunt has done so, their battle resumes. However, when in turn Guy requires water, Amoraunt reneges on his promise and replaces it with a conditional one: he will allow his opponent to drink only once he has revealed his name to him. Sorely oppressed by both the heat and his thirst, Guy declares his name and requests once more that the giant allow him to drink. Amoraunt, upon discovering that his foe is none other than the hated Guy, again refuses to allow his adversary to slake his thirst, and attacks him in the water when Guy attempts to drink without leave. The untrustworthy nature of the Saracen comes to the fore once more in the unequal exchange of drinks, and Guy's condemnation of the giant seems to characterize all those Saracens with whom he has experience:

'Amoraunt,' þan seyd Gij,
'Þou art ful fals, sikerly,
& ful-filt of tresoun.
No more wil y trust to þe
For no bihest þou hotest me:
Þou art a fals glotoun.'
(*Guy of Warwick*, 130: 7 – 12).

Fals is one of the most damning condemnations used by Guy within the poem. Of the nine occurrences within the poem, eight are used to describe Guy's traitorous enemies, and it is fitting that Amoraunt's double falsehood receives two of these.[1]

Guy of Warwick constructs the Saracen Other in a manner that provides a clear contrast between East and West. This representation is materialized in

[1] The ninth occurrence is reserved for condemnation of the Saracen trinity.

the form of Amoraunt, whose untrustworthy nature is exceeded only by the demonic origin of his grossly oversized body, and who represents a religion and culture that is worthy only of martial resistance and opposition. For Guy, and his audience, the Saracen Other is defined by its binary opposition to the West, and his encounters with this Other merely reinforce and illustrate the difference that is expected.

In contrast to this, *Beues of Hamtoun* presents a more complex image of the Saracen Other that in many ways questions the construction present in *Guy*. In this romance, similar to *Guy* in that it is again ostensibly set in the time of Anglo-Saxon England, Beues is exposed to the East when only a child, and in many ways becomes a type of cultural hybrid figure, lacking the preconceptions regarding the East that Guy exhibits. *Beues* problematizes the three points of difference that I have highlighted in *Guy of Warwick*: religion, honour, and physical appearance.

Beues's initial encounter with the Saracen Other occurs when he is sold by his mother's knights to merchants. He is taken over the sea to Armenia and arrives in the land of King Ermyn. The king, highly impressed by the well-built and beautiful child, asks him his name and story. Beues tells all, and the king, being widowed and with only his fair daughter Josian, offers to marry Beues to his daughter and make him the heir to the kingdom if he will convert to the worship of Apolyn. Beues declines however, due to his love of Christ. Beues's first experience of the Other is constructed in the form of a threatening conversion narrative, where the Christian Beues must withstand temptation and reaffirm his own Christian, and English, identity. However, Beues's Christian faith, once established, is permitted by King Ermyn, implying a degree of religious tolerance foreign to the East as constructed in the *Guy* narrative.

Despite having reaffirmed his faith in Christ, Beues has missed much of the Christian upbringing that constitutes Guy's character – a lack that is illustrated in his first experience of religious conflict. While out riding with the King's men, Beues is told by a Saracen knight that it is Christmas, which men in Beues's country make great bliss in, and that Beues should honour his God as the Saracen honours his own. Despite the Saracen knight's

framing of Christmas in terms of religious tolerance, the reference to the Christian holy day has an opposite effect on Beues:

> Beues to þat Sarasin said:
> 'Of Cristendom ȝit ichaue a-braid,
> Ichaue seie on þis dai riȝt
> Armed mani a gentil kniȝt,
> Torneande riȝt in þe feld
> With helmes briȝt and mani scheld;
> And were ich alse stiþ in plas,
> Ase euer Gii, me fader, was,
> Ich wolde for me lordes loue,
> Þat sit hiȝ in heuene aboue,
> Fiȝte wiþ ȝow euerichon.
> Er þan ich wolde hennes gon!'
> *(Beues of Hamtoun,* 607 – 18).[1]

Beues associates Christmas not with the mass or with religious observance, but rather with the tournaments that he remembers witnessing in his childhood.[2] This martial remembrance stirs the boastful youth to declare that he could defeat all fifty of Ermyn's knights if he had the mind to, for the love of his God. The Saracen takes offense at Beues's boasting, and mocks him in front of the other knights, who look to teach *þe ȝonge cristene hounde* (621) a lesson. Beues fights back and slays all fifty of Ermyn's knights. Beues's first fight is contrived through an opposition in religion, a point that is emphasized by its setting on Christmas day. Beues seeks to compensate for his lack of knowledge about Christianity through a bloody martial baptism. Denied the community of fellow Christians, his performance of the Christian faith is facilitated through the only means he has available to him – violent conflict with the religious Other. What makes this more remarkable is that it follows the Saracen knight's demonstration of religious tolerance: *Anoure þe god, so i schel myn / Boþe Mahoun and*

[1] All quotations are from Kölbing, E. 1894. *The Romance of Sir Beves of Hamtoun*. [EETS] Kegan Paul, London.

[2] The practice of Christmas tournaments is also mentioned in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. 'Þis kyng lay at Camylot vpon Krystmasse… / …þer tournayed tulkes by tymez ful mony, / Justed ful jolilé þise gentyle kniȝtes,' ll. 37, 41 – 42. Tolkien, J. R. R. and E. V. Gordon, 2nd ed. Davis, N. 1967. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Oxford University Press, Oxford: 2.

Apolyn! (605 – 606). It seems that for the audience of the fourteenth-century *Beues*, the only good Saracen is a dead Saracen. However, after this conventional beginning to the construction of the Saracen Other in *Beues*, things become less straightforward.

Beues, exposed from such an early age to religious tolerance from his Saracen hosts, seems willing to contemplate a reciprocal tolerance towards the Saracen religion. However, this tendency is never fully realized and leads to Beues exhibiting what amounts to at times an almost schizophrenic attitude towards the Saracens.

After being made a knight by King Ermyn, and having proved himself by slaying a notorious wild boar, Beues is implicated by the jealous royal chamberlain in a tryst with the King's daughter Josian. Unaware of Ermyn's displeasure, Beues agrees to carry a letter, in the manner of Hamlet, to the king's erstwhile enemy Brademond.[1] On arriving at Brademond's city of Damascus, Beues witnesses a number of Saracens leaving a mosque (*mameri*) after prayers. He is so incensed by this sight that he rushes into the mosque and slays the heathen priest. He then throws the mosque's idols into a nearby fen.[2] After this impulsive act of iconoclasm, Beues enters Brademond's hall and greets him thus:

> 'God, þat made þis world al ronde
> Þe saue, sire king Brademond,
> And ek alle þine fere,
> Þat i se now here,
> And ȝif þat ilche blessing
> Likeþ þe riȝt noþing,
> Mahoun, þat is god þin,
> Teruagaunt & Apolin,
> Þe blessi and diȝte
> Be alle here miȝte!
> *(Beues of Hamtoun,* 1373 – 82).

[1] However, unlike the Prince of Denmark, the naïve Beues declines the opportunity of reading the letter en route, once again exhibiting a misplaced trust in his Saracen hosts.

[2] Beues's iconoclastic act illustrates another common medieval misapprehension regarding Islam, which of course as a religion prohibits the use of images.

Beues exhibits in his speech a religious tolerance that is in conflict with his earlier impulsive actions. He first offers a Christian blessing, but concedes that if Brademond prefers, he may be blessed by his own gods instead. Beues's tolerance of the religious Other, albeit only on an intellectual level, is in stark contrast to the condemnation of the Saracen religion found within the speech that Guy makes in similar circumstances. However, while Beues seems to have come to an intellectual acceptance of the Saracen religious Other, he is still unable to countenance its physical manifestation.

Beues's tolerance also applies to the untrustworthiness of the Saracens. He repeatedly encounters their lack of honour, but much to his own disadvantage, refuses to draw any general conclusions based on this experience. It is not until he has been deceived by King Ermyn, his chamberlain, and King Brademond that he learns to distrust Saracens. After slaying the giant brother of King Grander, Beues enters the giant's castle and makes the giant's lady feed him, but having finally learned the untrustworthiness of the Saracens, he makes her eat and drink a bit of everything first, in order to avoid being poisoned. Beues, having been raised within the East, seems unable to view the actions of the Saracens with the discerning view of an outsider, as Guy does, and is thus condemned to take a much harder route to an understanding of the nature of the Saracen Other.

The third aspect of the Saracen Other, so central to the construction that we find in *Guy*, is that of the giant. In *Beues*, we again find this stereotype undermined in the form of Ascopard, Beues's giant page. Beues first encounters Ascopard after he has absconded with Josian from the court of Mombraunt. The giant has been sent by the sorcerer-king Garcy to reclaim Josian for his master King Ivor. Ascopard is a curious giant, who claims that in his own land he was taunted and bullied by the other giants for being so small: *Eueri man me wolde smite; / Ich was so lite & so meruy, / Eueri man me clepede dweruy* (2524 – 26). Beues duly defeats Ascopard, but spares him his life at the urging of Josian, and instead accepts the giant as his page. After escaping from the east, Josian is baptized by the bishop of Cologne, but Ascopard refuses, claiming that he does not wish to be drowned, and declares that *Icham to meche te be cristine!* (2596). Despite his benign

conduct, Ascopard remains the immutable and unconvertible Other, and in the end proves ultimately untrustworthy by reverting to the service of his original master and abducting Josian.

The characteristics of the Saracen Other operate in a different manner in *Beues of Hamtoun* compared to *Guy of Warwick*. While Saracens do in the end turn out to be perfidious, giants devilish, and the Saracen religion damnable, Beues has great difficulty in identifying these aspects of the East. In comparison to Guy, Beues has not been exposed to the preconceptions that identify these elements of the East, and is forced to discover them for himself. Beues's experience with the Saracen Other is one of discovery, whereas Guy's experience is simply one of expectation and reinforcement.

Beues's status as a cultural hybrid comes into clear focus upon his eventual return to England. Having lived for so long in close contact with the Saracen Other, and with a giant, an Armenian wife, and amazing horse in tow, he attracts trouble and is forced to leave again. Eventually he returns to the East where he becomes the King of the newly Christian kingdom of Mombraunt. Beues's incompatibility with the West marks him out as a hybrid figure, caught between two cultures and two worlds. Despite the narrative's affirmation of the Western image of the Saracen Other, Beues can be seen to only partially share this evaluation. Beues becomes a hybrid figure who has the ability to convert the East, rather then Guy, who can only confront it.

Beues's inability to clearly define himself against the Saracen Other raises a number of problems concerning the nature of difference in these two texts. The Other in *Guy of Warwick* is constructed in terms of simple difference, while in *Beues*, difference and identity can be seen to be much more complex. The following episode in *Beues* illustrates this point nicely. After delivering the treacherous letter, Beues is imprisoned by King Brademond in a pit full of snakes. Here he languishes for some seven years, finally escaping by deceiving the second of his two gaolers by impersonating the first:

> Þo queþ Beues wiþ reuful speche:
> 'For þe loue of sein Mahoun,
> Be þe rop glid bliue adoun

And help, þat þis þef wer ded!'
(*Beues of Hamtoun*, 1624 – 27).

Beues's ruse, if one can call it that, is accomplished merely by asking for aid by '*þe loue of sein Mahoun*', and if this is all that is required from him to masquerade as a Saracen then the difference between Beues and the Other is narrow and complex indeed. One wonders what effect this may have had upon the audience of the text – if the Other is so easily impersonated, does this make it less threatening, and therefore less of a ready target for the purposes of identity formation.

The construction of the Saracen Other in these two romances provides an interesting insight into the way in which fourteenth-century England imagined the East. While *Guy of Warwick* represents the paradigm of simple differentiation between Christian and Saracen that is typical of many medieval texts, *Beues of Hamtoun* presents an all-together more complex situation. Subjected to the acculturation experienced by all intercultural travelers, Beues is caught between the expectations of Western Christian society and the experiences that he undergoes. This becomes problematic for both Beues and his audience when he encounters Saracens who do not conform to the cultural and generic expectations of Middle English romance. It is due to this complex construction of the nature of medieval otherness that *Beues* stands out as a romance of considerable interest to scholars of cultural identity.

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