Doctoral Dissertation Research Proposal

Susanna, Constance, Griselda:
Righteous Women on Trial in Middle English
and European Literatures

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Introduction

The story of a righteous woman who is put on trial—whether literally, as a result of false charges brought against her, or metaphorically, owing to a series of tribulations which include calumny or tests of character—only to prove her virtue in the end was immensely popular in Western Christendom during the Middle Ages. It exists in hundreds of versions: Latin and vernacular, short and long, popular and learned, sacred and secular, fictional and historical. Not least of which are Chaucer’s Man of Law’s and Clerk’s Tales, as well as a host of English romances, exempla, legends, miracles, chronicle passages, and retellings of the biblical narrative of Susanna and the Elders.

This plentiful and diverse corpus has suffered neglect from modern scholarship. While there is no shortage of essays devoted to individual works (especially by Chaucer) and related texts, only a handful of full-length studies deal with the corpus as a whole. Decades after its publication, Margaret Schlauch’s Chaucer’s Constance and Accused Queens (1969 [1927]) is still being quoted as the standard reference book on the subject (e.g., Wills 1995: 41n. 3; Correale 2005: 279n. 8; Findon 2006: 29). Moreover, there has yet to be a study that pays equal attention to the three main branches of the corpus in medieval Europe: Susanna and the Elders, along with later forensic narratives that may be inspired by Daniel 13; Constance and her analogues, many of which are examined by Schlauch and her successors, whereas others are curiously overlooked by this critical tradition; and Griselda, the last tale in Boccaccio’s Decameron, which, following its Latin translation by Petrarch, was retranslated into almost every major European vernacular, though most Chaucerians fail to consider versions that are not directly associated with the Clerk’s Tale.

The present dissertation will address these deficiencies. It will broaden our knowledge of the righteous woman on trial motif by looking at lesser-known texts and provide new tools for the evaluation of canonical works. It will offer a reappraisal of the critical controversies

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1 I refer to this branch of the corpus synecdochically as Constance for the sake of convenience, though her tale is a relatively late addition to a cycle that is usually named after Crescentia from the twelfth-century Kaiserschronik. Similarly, Griselda designates a story type whose extant versions ultimately derive from Decameron X, 10. Standard English forms are used instead of Chaucer’s “Custance” and “Grisilde”/”Grisildis.”
surrounding the *Man of Law's* and *Clerk's Tales*, both aesthetic (for example, is their pathos genuine or ironic?) and political (are they compassionate or disdainful towards women?). It will ground its understanding of the religious, philosophical, and historical significance of these narratives in a wide range of extraliterary sources, which, like their literary counterparts, have not always received due attention from scholars: devotional works, conduct books, patristic writings, letters, sermons, prayers, arts of preaching, Wycliffite and anti-Wycliffite tracts, a bestiary, and even a blood libel. Finally, my dissertation will insist upon the richness and versatility of the tradition in question, nuanced enough to be employed by different authors for very different ends. Any interpretive framework that would do justice to such texts must match these qualities.

**Bibliographical Survey**

As noted above, research into narratives of righteous women on trial is usually conducted according to the parameters set by Margaret Schlauch. Granted, there are those (e.g., Osborn 1998: 41) who dismiss her theory regarding the progression from “primitive” folklore residues of a matriarchal society, embodied in the motifs of attempted incest on the part of a male family member, the evil mother-in-law, and monstrous births, to more “advanced” romance expressions of the patriarchal social order, where allegations of marital infidelity gradually take center stage. However, scholars have been less critical of Schlauch’s choice of materials to suit her claims. This is not quite a case of cherry-picking; indeed, the enormous number of works she reviews is one reason why very few medievalists have undertaken to revise her study. But Schlauch does leave out—or underplay—several texts and sub-branches of the corpus that predate the English romances yet contain false accusations of illicit sexual intercourse (rather than monstrous births and the like). These include twelfth and thirteenth-century chronicle accounts of calumniated queens, a tale by Walter Map, legends of transvestite female saints who are charged with seducing or impregnating a woman, the Hellenistic novel *Callirhoe*, and, most importantly, the story of Susanna and the Elders, which

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¹ Wycliffism or “Lollardy” was a religious reform movement that began in the 1370s, when its founder, Oxford-educated theologian John Wyclif, launched his critique of the Church establishment. Many Wycliffite tenets anticipate later Protestant views, such as the belief that Scripture alone is the source of Christian doctrine (and concomitant effort to make the Bible available in English) or the opposition to ecclesiastical dominion. Though at first winning the support of powerful nobles like John of Gaunt and the Lollard Knights, Wycliffism was soon condemned as a heresy punishable by death.

These gaps are slowly being filled. Before Schlauch, the chronicle material had been reviewed by Francis Child in his introduction to the ballad of “Sir Aldingar” (II: 33-44), as well as by Laura Hibbard (1921); after Schlauch came studies by Paul Christophersen (1952) and Nancy Black (2003: esp. 68-72). Valerie Hotchkiss has investigated the widespread narratives of female transvestitism, among which are the legends relevant to our purpose (1996). Medieval interpretations and reworkings of Susanna have also been studied by a variety of scholars (Kellogg 1960; Miskimin 1969; Garrard 1989; Peck 1991; Zier 1991; Kornbluth 1992; George 1995; Halpern-Ananu 1996; Jeffrey 1996; Boitani 1999 [1997]; Reardon 2000; Tkacz 1999, 2004a, 2004b, 2006; Staley 2007). Classicists like Sophie Trenkner have long ago pointed out the connection between Callirhoe, Susanna, and later works (1958: 61). Nevertheless, these contributions remain marginal to the study of the tradition as a whole. Claude Roussel’s magisterial analysis of La belle Hélène de Constantinople and its analogues reproduces Schlauch’s omissions (1998), as does the list of analogues that introduces Veronica Orazi’s essay (2000: 109-22).

Another problematic inheritance of Schlauch is her undue emphasis on two motifs appearing in some narratives of righteous women on trial: queenship and the flight from incest. While inquiry into these motifs is crucial to the understanding of the stories which contain them, it cannot be the focal point of research into the corpus, simply because not every woman on trial is a queen or even a princess, just as not all of them are subjected to threats of incest. Marijane Osborn argues that “[f]olklorists have named what they perceive as the controlling motif ‘The Calumniated Wife.’ But the calumny itself ... appears to be a medieval variant of an earlier plot in which the incest-threatened woman of royal blood is cast adrift on the sea” (7), which survives in the late antique Clementine Recognitions. Susanna

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2 The relevance of the odes of the odes of the odes of these chronicle stories to the Man of Law’s Tale has been explored by Hamilton 1966 and Horneby 1988: 143-49.
3 For other essays on the relations between saints’ legends and secular romances featuring tried heroines, see Paul 1971; Wogan-Browne 1994; Winstead 1995; Findon 2006. The religious background of these works is studied by Yunick 1960; Weissman 1979; Boddy 1980. A larger perspective is offered by Kolve 1984.
4 There are several interesting parallels between Susanna and the Elders and Callirhoe. Suffice it to say that, like Joachim’s wife, the heroine of Chariton’s novel is at some point coveted by a Babylonian judge. One might also compare distinct episodes in Chariton and the Constantinople analogues, for example the intercepted letters in Callirhoe with the exchanged letters of the Man of Law’s Tale.
5 Osborn is not alone in making this claim. See also Schick 1929; Schlauch 1958 [1941]: 160; McAlindon 1985: 26ff; Archibald 1986; Archibald 2001: 171-73 and 224-22.
and Callirhoe are proof enough that Osborn's "earlier plot" is simply a different story type. From this perspective, Osborn, as well as Elizabeth Archibald (1986; 2001), Black, and likeminded scholars, have been sidetracked to various degrees. Of course, their studies remain valuable in other respects.

But what of Griselda? Admittedly, her inclusion in the present monograph may itself seem like a digression. Griselda is tried though never brought to trial; she is tested by her husband rather than accused. Yet this is precisely the point: her case witnesses the later, more abstract meanings attached to such concepts as "trial" and "ordeal." The shift from a specifically forensic situation to a more general condition of being tried by fate had been anticipated by Callirhoe, whose plot contains both wanderings and court cases. It began to take place in the Middle Ages when Constance-type narratives eclipsed those modeled upon Susanna. Another sub-branch, the wager story best known from Decameron II, 9 and Shakespeare's Cymbeline, though also represented by a Middle English exemplum, combines a false accusation with the testing of one's wife. Griselda crowns the process of abstraction: by removing all traces of the calumny motif, as well as the paraphernalia of adventure tales and fantastic twists of fortune, Boccaccio and his successors focus on the essential virtues of constancy and patience in adversity. Needless to say, these "stages" do not follow each other linearly but form a more complex dialectic that will be dealt with in my dissertation.²

Returning to the bibliographical survey, we find scholars divided between a narrow philological approach—that is, a dual attempt to isolate Griselda from other story types so as to determine its folklore origin (Griffith 1931; Cate 1932; Bettridge and Utley 1971) and then to establish Chaucer's exact reliance on previous renditions (Severs 1972 [1942]; Kellogg 1972; Middleton 1980; Kirkpatrick 1983; Thompson 1996; Goodwin 2003; Farrell 2003)—and a more holistic method that compares the Clerk's Tale with versions that are not immediately related to it, like Christine de Pizan's (Bornstein 1981; Olsen 1990a; Waugh 2000; Evans 2002; Eilis 2003), as well as with later English analogues (Faraci 1988; Lerner 1993; Bronfman 1994; Johnson 1994; Vakás Miyares 1998; Rompato 2007) and other story types (Bishop 1987: 129-34; Armstrong 1990). A number of Continental scholars have further

² Other virtuous heroines, like Virginia from the Physician's Tale or Lucrece from Chaucer's Legend of Good Women and their analogues, could arguably have been admitted into the corpus. However, these tales differ from the narratives I shall examine in two fundamental respects: first, they center on the protagonist's victimhood rather than on her endurance; second, they end tragically, with neither earthy restitution nor the promise of Christian salvation. Nevertheless, such heroines will be taken into account when single works contain their story alongside that of a righteous woman on trial.
expanded our field of reference by attempting to encompass all medieval (and Renaissance) versions of the Griselda story (Morabito 1988; Albanese 1993; Olsen 1990b; Rossi 2000; Nardone and Lamarque 2000). Last but not least, there are comparative studies of the Man of Law's and Clerk's Tales, with or without their respective analogues, in addition to other Chaucerian stories.

Most readings of the Man of Law's Tale touch, however briefly, on Trevet's and Gower's versions. Of those which deal extensively with sources and analogues, some are concerned only with these three works and their interrelations (Block 1953; Nicholson 1991; Frankis 2000; Correale 2005) or examine different texts by the same authors (Allen 1997; Barefield 2003), whereas other studies also include a few Middle English romances, usually Emaré or the King of Tars (Hornstein 1940; Isaacs 1958; Hanks 1983; Cordery 1999; Ashton 2000; Rose 2001; Heng 2003). Generally speaking, the narrow approach seems to be on the wane. More and more scholars are seeking new reference points to enrich their understanding of canonical works, and new light is being shed on once obscure writings. Without sacrificing analytical rigor, there is room to go beyond what Peter Beidler terms "hard analogues" (2006).

Methodology

The main challenge of my dissertation is to navigate a great expanse of literary and extraliterary texts without losing my bearing or drowning in details. This challenge can be met by adhering to a few methodological principles.

First, while recognizing that no medieval vernacular literature developed apart from the mainstream Latin tradition and other vernacular literatures (notably French and later Italian), I shall prefer the Middle Ages to Antiquity, the Insular to the Continental, the English to the Anglo-Latin and Norman, and the narrative or lyric to other kinds of texts wherever enough material is at hand, but I shall not hesitate to supplement my research with different sources when the need for them arises. Thus in the section devoted to Susanna, patristic writings will serve to contextualize Insular references to Daniel 13, and these in turn will provide a framework for the interpretation of Susanna in Middle English culture.

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* Cf. earlier monographs by Laserstein (1926) and Golenistcheff-Koutouzoff (1975 [1933]), the latter being restricted to versions produced in France.

* See references below under Constance and Griselda Analogues (Selected Secondary Sources).

* Insular culture, for the purpose of my dissertation, comprises Middle English, Anglo-Norman, and Anglo-Latin texts.
Similarly, literature written on the Continent—especially by female authors such as Willetrudis, Lucrezia Tornabuoni, and Christine de Pizan—will supplement my reading of works produced in England or translated into Middle English. My discussion of accused queens in chronicles will concentrate on those whose stories exist in Middle English translations, though most of the material will have to be in Latin. Thanks to the abundance of English analogues, the chapters on Constance will not dwell upon Continental versions (except for Boccaccio’s and Christine de Pizan’s); some Anglo-Latin and Norman texts will, however, be mentioned. The first principle is less applicable to Griselda: besides the Clerk’s Tale and “The Nut-Brown Maid” there are only allusions to her story in Middle English literature. In this case, other criteria like interest or relevance can determine how much attention each text should be given.

Second, a logical chapter division will enable me to combine breadth and depth. My argument will fall into three sections according to the different branches of the corpus. Each section, in turn, will be divided into two main chapters. The first will present the critical issues at stake; it will then proceed to chart and analyze the various ways in which these issues are played out in a wide range of texts. The second will be devoted to a selected group of texts, using the parameters established in the first chapter to engage these works on a more complex level. Interim chapters will provide for meaningful transition to sections two and three. A few short appendices may take up topics of interest that do not fit into the main argument line.

Third, my dissertation will confine scholarly polemic to the introduction and the conclusion and, more briefly, to the beginning of each section.

A note on periodization: with the obvious exception of biblical and patristic texts, the unjustly neglected Caliphoe, and some references to Susanna, the material I discuss dates from the twelfth century onwards. The terminus ad quem is somewhat harder to fix, as the motif continued to flourish in England well into the Renaissance and thereafter. I have settled on the year 1505: this allows for the inclusion of both Valentine and Orson, the last Middle English romance of relevance (first printed from Henry Watson’s translation ca. 1503-5), and “The Nut-Brown Maid” (printed ca. 1503), the only known Griselda-type poem from medieval England other than the Clerk’s Tale.

11 The unique copy of Willetrudis’ poem is found in a German manuscript, but its author may have actually been an Anglo-Norman nun (Stevenson 2005: 130).
Synopsis

• Introduction

My introduction will begin, much like this proposal, by presenting the corpus of texts and reviewing the present state of scholarship. I shall then identify two main feminist approaches to narratives of righteous women on trial. While acknowledging that such narratives were nearly always written by men living in a patriarchal society, the "positive" approach insists on the female protagonists' moral agency, their ability to choose the good and to act upon their choices. The "negative" approach views these protagonists as male chauvinist fantasies devoid of moral agency: whether passive victims or impossible ideals, they were created to teach actual women docility and to scourge them for never being docile enough. Though in some cases the latter method is more realistic, in others it risks being a double-edged sword: the more scholars are given to construing women in literature as victims alone, the greater their complicity as readers in making them so. Consequently, when a text is ambiguous in its attitude to female virtue (as most texts are), the "positive" approach should first be exhausted before one attempts the "negative." This claim is given further support by studies published in recent years which prove that, alongside the rife antifeminism of medieval culture, there was an intellectual tradition respectful of women (e.g., Biscoglio 1993; Blamires 1998; Blamires 2006; Classen 2007).

One the main arguments of my dissertation is that narratives belonging to the corpus in question did not provide role models for women alone, but allowed men to identify with their heroines and to be edified by their hardships. Rejected by their society, these heroines had to muster their inner virtue if they were to survive. Many devotional and contemplative works from the Middle Ages, chief among which is Boethius' Consolation of Philosophy, likewise promoted the values of patience and constancy in the face of adverse fortune. Withstanding tribulation was considered a formative experience in the soul's journey to God. The introduction will survey a number of such works in their Middle English versions so as to determine the relevance of women's trial stories to the general culture. I shall argue that an exclusive focus on gender leads to the marginalization of these stories. Just as scholars ought to bear in mind the empowering as well as the demeaning potential of the corpus, so they should be attuned to its particular and universal dimensions.
Finally, drawing on some of the conclusions reached in my MA thesis, I shall defend the validity of tradition as an organizing principle in the study of literature. According to critics like Lee Patterson (1987) and David Aers (1986; 1988; 1992), tradition is a fallacy used by the establishment (whether in the medieval past or in the academic present) to naturalize contingent beliefs and to write out unorthodox voices; only attention to the particular social context and function of texts can debunk “traditional” scholarship and do justice to historically marginalized groups such as women or heretics. This method works best when a specific author, period, movement, historical event, and so forth are the object of research. However, when studying the interrelations of a large body of texts, many of which cannot be localized or fitted into a diachronic scheme of development, while others were translated from works originating in different ages, yet all coexisted in late medieval Europe, one is bound to rely on a concept of tradition. As Alasdair MacIntyre has argued, this concept need not and should not entail a monolithic worldview blind to its own history; rather, “what constitutes a tradition is a conflict of interpretations of that tradition, a conflict which itself has a history susceptible of rival interpretations” (2006 [1977]: 11). Thus my analysis will highlight the varied and often contrasting attitudes displayed by narratives of righteous women on trial; such attitudes, I shall maintain, can be more fully understood with reference to one another. By combining traditional and New Historicist methods where relevant material has come down to us, I shall also look into how the motif functions in concrete situations. Nevertheless, my argument will follow a thematic rather than a strictly chronological order, and historical contextualization will be kept to a minimum in the inductive part of each section.

- Susanna

Thanks to its inclusion in the Book of Daniel and once popular appeal, the story of Susanna and the Elders was interpreted, referred to, and retold in a copious array of medieval texts.

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10 Another problem worked out, or managed, by MacIntyre’s theory of tradition concerns the epistemology of research. Patterson has faulted “conservative” scholars for assuming that the tradition informing a literary work can be recovered simply by collating enough intellectual and historical sources, as though, contrary to fictional narrative and lyric, these sources offered themselves transparently to our understanding (1987: 43-45). Valuable as this critique may be, it also threatens to invalidate all attempts to reconstruct the past, a tight spot which Patterson gets around by claiming that modern-day dissidents can still understand earlier forms of resistance (72-74). This solution is suspect: medieval radicals had no interest in defiance per se (such an argument would have only served their opponents) but in championing what they held as true beliefs against the false beliefs of others. Conversely, if MacIntyre is right in defining tradition as a dynamic phenomenon whose history is created partly by means of its own reinterpretation, one may continue a certain tradition through studying it. The knowledge yielded thereby is not purely objective: yet nor is it a mere reflection of one’s present ideology.
This material—especially patristic writings and literary versions—has been drawing increased attention from scholars (see references above), but the bulk of it remains uncharted. Even cursory allusions to Susanna can teach us much about the reception history of the biblical tale; with some caution they can also be used to shed light on the tradition as a whole.

In the first chapter I shall explore the many roles which the story of Susanna played in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages: to justify the persecution of Jews and heretics, who were equated with the Elders, as well as to rebuke corrupt priests from within the Church; to promote virginity as well as matrimonial loyalty; to champion martyrdom and to pray for divine aid or convalescence. For some authors Susanna exemplifies justice; according to others, she, like the woman taken in adultery, received God’s mercy. Some refer to her beauty; others to her learnedness and piety. Some remember her sigh from Daniel 13:22-23, whereas others recall her cries in verses 24 and 42. Another important aspect of Susanna and the Elders is the debate surrounding its canonicity, which adds a reflexive layer to the story of a woman charged with infidelity. Unfortunately, though Jerome sided with the Jews on this issue, many patristic writers used the Jewish exclusion of Susanna for anti-Semitic purposes. Wherever there is diversity, there will be a mixture of good and bad. All the same, as I have been arguing, criticism of the bad should not make us blind to the good parts of a tradition; appreciation of the good should likewise not obscure the fact that a thin line at times separates them and the bad parts.

The second chapter will focus on two strands of this tradition: (1) the Wycliffite adoption of Susanna and (2) her portrayal as an exemplary woman in late medieval literature. Unjustly persecuted individuals of either sex had long been identified, or identified themselves, with Susanna. An interesting example is the story of Bricstan, a twelfth-century novice at Chatteris Abbey, who was tried for theft and sent to prison, only (so the miracle goes) to have his chains untied by St. Etheldreda. Two out of three Latin accounts of this case mention Susanna; the third alludes to Daniel in the Lions’ Den. Lollards such as William Thorpe made similar use of Daniel 13 and 6, which gained special relevance after the statute De hereticis comburendo (1401) had permitted the burning of the unorthodox. Yet even before the statute was promulgated, Wyclif (who died in 1384) had begun to employ Susanna in order to castigate the mainstream Church, likening it to the Elders—a brilliant act of
subversion, perhaps, but when a tactic has once been used to disparage the Jews, it is liable to do so again.

Since the Pistol of Swete Susan is free of the harsh notes that became a staple of Wycliffite and anti-Wycliffite polemic, I doubt whether this poem is a specifically Lollard production, even if its author had access to a Wycliffite Bible or held Lollard beliefs (pace Jeffrey 1996). It is more profitably read in connection with other works that represent Susanna as a female ideal, from conduct books written by men to literary works composed by women. The remainder of the chapter will be devoted to such texts. I shall try to determine the extent to which women’s retellings of the story depart from patriarchal models, and what place the Pistol occupies on this spectrum.

- Interim Chapter #1: Transvestite Saints and Queens’ Ordeals

Susanna and the Elders probably inspired two sub-branches of the righteous woman on trial motif. Both, like Susanna, center on a forensic situation: in the first, a female saint living as a monk is charged with impregnating or seducing another woman and is brought to court (except for St. Theodora, who is banished without being heard); in the second, a queen accused or suspected of adultery must prove her innocence by means of an ordeal, which takes the form of a torment that leaves her miraculously unscathed or a judicial combat where her midget champion defeats a giant opponent against all odds. Texts of these two sorts occasionally refer to Susanna or are paired together with her story; a fourth-century saint analogous to those whose legends exist in Middle English was even called Susanna (Hotchkiss 1996: 24-25 and 139-40).

In addition to forming a crucial link between Daniel 13 and the Constance branch of the corpus, these narratives are worthy of study because of their appearance in many different legends or chronicles, each version taking a somewhat different view of its protagonist. A comparative reading of these versions will enrich our typology of female representations and literary techniques. By placing the ordeal stories in the context of the queens’ biographies, I shall also identify the different functions of these accounts in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The chapter will end with a discussion of “Sir Aldingar,” a ballad whose subject is drawn from the chronicle material.
• **Constance**

Though occasionally defended by critics, the *Man of Law's Tale* tends to be censured for its allegedly overwrought pathos, implausible chain of events, ineffectual heroine, and backward ideology. Such judgments rarely take into account the relation of this work to other Constance analogues, with the obvious exception of Gower's and Trevet's. A comparative study of all Insular texts in which a righteous woman falls from grace because of a false accusation, or where her trials reach their peak with calumny, will permit a more informed assessment of the structure, characterization, tone, religious significance, and political dimensions of Chaucer's tale, as well as the major romances and stories belonging to this branch of the tradition.

A good point of departure is the first and only pagan text in the West known to contain a calumniated woman of the type we are dealing with: *Callirhoe*. This lovely novel deserves attention on its own right, but for the purpose of my dissertation it will be used as a foil to define the particular concerns woven by medieval Christian writers into the adventure plots inherited from Antiquity (though not directly from Chariton). *Callirhoe* is at once more outspoken than her counterparts in the Middle Ages—when first confronted by her husband Chaereas, who has been led to suspect that she had entertained her admirers in his absence, she replies: "No one has come reveling to my father's house. Perhaps your vestibule is used to revels, and your marriage has hurt your boyfriends [*τοίς ἄνδροις*]" (41)—and less inclined to bearing misfortune with dignity. For her virtue depends more on external factors like her noble lineage than on the inner righteousness of later heroines. Furthermore, despite having a prominent role in the first half of the novel originally named after her,¹ in the second *Callirhoe* becomes increasingly plaintive and insipid, the limelight being given to Chaereas. By contrast, the medieval analogues do not usually pay much attention to the protagonist's husband or fiancé during their separation, though sometimes her offspring take over the action. Another difference between the pagan and Christian specimens of the Constance branch is the degree of supernatural intervention: while a number of pivotal events in *Callirhoe* are ascribed to Fortune, Aphrodite, and other gods, these deities are not personified, nor would the peripeties of the novel have been impossible without them. Later texts commonly relate one or more divine miracles, which heighten the religious tone of the

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¹ For the novel's title, see Goold's introductory notes to the Loeb edition (3-4). Most editors follow the medieval manuscript in naming the work Chaereas and Callirhoe.
narrative yet also diminish the characters’ agency. Finally, Chariton depicts “Orientals” (Goold’s word for ἐφελον) in a more diverse fashion than do later authors; nevertheless, there are surprises to be found in the Middle Ages.

The nature and frequency of the heroine’s utterances, her attitude to the calamities that befall her, the conception of virtue implied by the text, the place she and her family occupy in the plot, the role of the divine, and the portrayal of non-Christians: these will be the focal points of this chapter. They range from Walter Map’s “De rege Portigalensi,” the earliest medieval text to be examined here as well as the one least interested in the accused protagonist, to more complex and rewarding pieces like Octavian, Emaré, Le Bone Florence of Rome, and, of course, tales by Chaucer, Gower, Hoccleve, and others. Yet even the minor versions contribute to our understanding of the tradition as a whole: some are followed by moralizations, which tell us something about its reception history, or contain variations that are not encountered in the major works. Besides works belonging to the second branch, I shall take a brief look at “partial analogues,” which resemble the Constance-type narratives in certain respects only. These include romances of calumniated men, stories with an episode involving false suspicion of the protagonist’s wife, and works that share other motifs with the “true analogues”: ordeals, the flight from incest, interfaith marriage, a fall from grace, and so forth. Inspecting such texts will allow us further to distinguish the unique features of the corpus in question from non-specific features with roots in the general culture.

As previously argued, the criteria of evaluation that critics typically bring to bear on the corpus are imprecise. Granted, neither its aesthetics nor its politics meet contemporary standards; yet the worth of individual texts is more clearly established with reference to the tradition of which they form a part. Drawing on the sensibility afforded by studying this tradition, chapter 2 will conduct a more detailed analysis of the major versions noted above. My focus will be on the significance of the trial plot to each work or collection as a whole and on its function vis-à-vis other plot elements. In Florence of Rome, for example, the protagonist’s fall from grace, which scholars usually consider apart from the war epic that precedes it, actually continues the series of harassments with which she is faced from the very beginning. Her changing ways of coping with these harassments attest to the development of her character. Octavian invites us to pair the righteous yet static calumniated empress with the Saracen Marsabelle, who oscillates between vice and virtue until she eventually converts to
Christianity and marries the heroine's son. The Man of Law's Tale is fraught both with classical, biblical, and scientific learning and with the affective piety of the popular narratives: the tension created by these components has its artificial moments, yet it also enables the narrator to reflect on the positions he adopts, the literary traditions to which he is somewhat reluctantly an heir, and the act of storytelling itself. Gower's version is less "baroque" than Chaucer's, though not without its own subtleties.

- Interim Chapter #2: From Adventure Story to Domestic Drama

While the exact source from which Boccaccio derived Decameron X, 10 is unknown, the scholarly consensus seems to favor a folktale origin (see the bibliographical survey). This hypothesis is plausible, but it disregards the more obvious link between the Griselda branch of the corpus and those examined in the previous sections. In fact, Griselda may well be a deliberate revision of these story types, whether on Boccaccio's part or on the part of its anonymous inventor. This much I have already suggested; the second interim chapter will provide further arguments in corroboration of my theory.

I shall begin by detailing the affinities in theme, structure, and signification between Griselda and the various subdivisions of the Constance and Susanna branches. Next, I shall point out the limitations of the latter groups, which may have created the need for an alternative plot. Whereas Susanna and the Elders is too compact to be developed into a novella, stories of accused women in exile risk becoming diffuse and repetitious; Griselda, by contrast, has the advantage of a graded sequence of tests and clearly defined locations. As part of this investigation, I shall compare the ideals expressed by the devotional works reviewed in the introduction with those informing the fourteenth and fifteenth-century conduct books that came to include Griselda's story, in order to delineate the changing social mores it addresses. To conclude the chapter, I shall study the interaction of Griselda with tales belonging to the other groups as it takes place in the Decameron, the Canterbury Tales, and the City of Ladies.

- Griselda

Griselda is a memorable and endurably popular story—or at least was so until the mid-twentieth century, when the number of adaptations dropped significantly. But it is also a

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4 For a comprehensive bibliography down to the 1980s, see Morabito 1988.
puzzling story. Though conducive to greater economy, the redomestication of the trial story has created its own perplexities. On the one hand, the straightforward action of Griselda’s tale, in addition to the superhuman patience of its heroine, gave rise to allegorical interpretations or representations insisting that she could not literally exist. On the other hand, being "closer to home" facilitated the use of Griselda as a yardstick to rear and judge actual women. There were, of course, mixed cases where she became an ideal that ladies should but do not aspire to. Taking his cue from the envoy to the Clerk’s Tale, as well as from Ecclesiastes 7:29, Lydgate has Chichevache, the legendary cow who feeds on patient wives, bemoan:

I trowe her beo a dere yeere
Of pacient wynmen nowe beos dayes

... For it is more pene thrifty Mayes
But I haue sought frome lande to londe,
But yt oone Gresylde neuer I fonde. ("Bycorne and Chychevache" 92-93 and 96-98)6

Another notable aspect of this branch of the tradition, which distinguishes it from the other two, is the fame of its purported originator, the title being conferred in the Middle Ages to Boccaccio or to his Latin translator Petrarch. With the budding of authorial self-consciousness, it was only natural for medieval writers to meditate, through Griselda, upon their own status as authors.

These oppositions are re-enacted in contemporary criticism of the tale. Scholars often debate whether Griselda is a realistic figure or should be read as one, and what this or that author sought to accomplish by rewriting or alluding to her story. Such questions do not always have definite answers; one can, however, strive for a more accurate perspective. I propose to survey and to categorize most versions of Griselda,16 together with references to her story in Middle English poetry, that fall under the relevant period. The advantage of looking into minor analogues is especially apparent here, since their meaning is often easier to pin down. My analysis will move along three different axes: poetic (is Griselda an allegory, an example, a realistic character, or a historical person?), emotive (what kind of responses does she elicit?), and functional (what purposes does the narrative serve?).

6 "I believe there is a shortage [a year of dearth]; cf. Genesis 41:27 and 30-31] / Of patient women nowadays ...
For it is more than thirty Mayes / That I have sought from land to land / But have yet to find a single Griselda."

16 Exceptions at this stage include Slavic renditions, rare editions, and unpublished manuscripts.
The more problematic works, such as the Clerk's Tale, will be dealt with in the following chapter. Being a poet's poet, or perhaps a critic's poet, Chaucer opens his tale to conflicting readings. As one scholar put it, his "treatment of the Griselda story enhances, rather than softens, its paradoxical elements. To sharpen the paradox, [he] makes what seem ... inconsistent changes to his sources" (Grudin 1989: 79). Thus Walter is both identified with God and portrayed as tempted by the Devil; blind obedience is alternately praised and condemned; and Griselda's virtue is sometimes attributed to heavenly grace, to her lowly upbringing, or to her birth in the distant past and sometimes argued to be impossible. The most one can do is to explore these options and the stakes involved in each, as played out in the various analogues, while exposing the limitations of one-sided views.

- Conclusion

The final chapter may take several directions, though precisely which is difficult to foresee at present. One possibility is to end with a call for less partisan approaches to stories of righteous women on trial. Another is to show the applicability of my interpretive framework to post-medieval works: a modern Griselda, for example, or Cymbeline, which, like the Man of Law's Tale, at once conjures up and distances itself from its predecessors. Lastly, I may go over areas covered by this dissertation that in my opinion require further study.

**Expected Contribution to Research**

My principal contributions to the study of the corpus in question are as follows:

- A definition of its three main branches;
- The analysis of previously ignored or neglected texts and extraliterary sources;
- A new set of reference points for the interpretation and evaluation of canonical works;
- A more comprehensive account of the reception history of Susanna and the Elders in medieval England than has hitherto been undertaken;
- A reassessment of the relevance to the general culture, in the past as well as in the present, of this medieval tradition.

Finally, research into the corpus will broaden our perspective on the variety of attitudes exhibited toward female virtue in the Middle Ages.
Bibliography:

Note: In order to give a clearer picture of the works and passages to be discussed in my dissertation, the following list sometimes disregards the norms of referencing. To save paper, this bibliography is printed in single-spaced rows.

Abbreviations

Items marked with an asterisk are not at my disposal but will be consulted during the course of my research. A dagger sign means that an item can be browsed, though not always downloaded, at the Internet Archive (http://www.archive.org); a double dagger means that it has been scanned by Early English Books Online (http://eebo.chadwyck.com); and two daggers mean that an item is accessible on Gallica (http://gallica.bnf.fr). Editions published by the Medieval Institute in Kalamazoo are available at the TEAMs Middle English Texts site (http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/teams/tmsmenu.htm). Dutch texts which have been printed in *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandse Taal- en Letterkunde* are reproduced by the Digitale Bibliotheek voor de Nederlandse Letteren (http://www.dbln.org/). Nineteenth and early-twentieth-century editions of Wydilf’s writings and those of his followers may be found in the Lollard Society bibliography (http://lollardsociety.org/?page_id=9). For the sake of economy I have not provided full URLs in these cases.


CSEL = Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum

CCCM = Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis

CCSL = Corpus Christianorum Series Latina


EETS = Early English Text Society (OS = Original Series; ES = Extra Series; SS = Supplementary Series)


* The first 50 sermons of *Jacob’s Well* were edited by Arthur Brandeis. Atchley’s dissertation, available on Proquest, includes an edition of the remaining 45 sermons.


MGH = Monumenta Germaniae Historica


RS = Rolls Series (Rerum Britannicarum medii aevi scriptores)


SC = Sources Chrétienues


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**Theoretical Preliminaries**


**Contemplative and Devotional Works (Primary Sources)**

**Note:** See also the devotional works listed under Susanna and the Elders (Primary Sources).


"Twelve Profits of Tribulation." Yrkwri: 45-60 and 389-406.

**Contemplative and Devotional Works (Selected Secondary Sources)**


**Susanna and the Elders (Primary Sources)**

- *Translations and Retellings*


Christine de Pizan. Cité (Susanna ch. 2.37).


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8 Yorkshire Writers includes two Middle English versions of the Latin Tractatus de tribulacione. The first and more popular version (which Horstmann attributes to Richard Rolle) has more recently been edited by Alexandra Barratt.

9 Mooley's article includes two versions of "Susanna" from Petrus Riga's Aurora; an Anglo-Latin poem from the thirteenth century; and another fragment.

10 Likewise available on Proquest.
• Materials for the Reception History of Susanna

Note: See also references noted under Constance Analogues (Primary Sources).

Early Church Fathers


High and Later Medieval Church Fathers


Nicholas of Lyra. 1971 [1492]. Postilla super totam Bibliam. 4 Vols. Minerva: Frankfurt am Main (Susanna II: n. p.).


Medieval Sermons and Arts of Preaching


Jacob’s Well II (Susanna 80 and 475-76).


Encyclopedias, Bestiaries, and Other Reference Books

Alain de Lille. 1855. Liber in distinctionibus dictionum theologicalium. PL 210, cols. 685-1012 (Susanna cols. 742-43 and 846).

Isidore of Seville. 1850. Allegoriae quaedam sacrae Scripturae. PL 83, cols. 97-130 (Susanna col. 116).


Devotional and Instructional Works, Including Monastic Rules


Liturgy, Prayers, Religious Lyrics, and Hymns


21 The original version of this macaronic sermon has not been published.
A Prayse." Yrkw I: 375-77 (Susanna 377).
"Sayne Ierome Spalytre." Yrkw II: 392-408 (Susanna 403).

Saints' Legends and Related Material

The Lyf of Saint Edward Kyng and Confiessour." Caxton GL 323v-33v (Susanna 325v).
Vita beati Edvardi regis et confessoris. LoEC 359-77 (Susanna 366).

Chronicles and Other (Pseudo-)Historical Writings


22 Also in LoEC 387-435 (Susanna 404).
23 Denton transcribes and discusses a manuscript passage that does not appear in standard editions.


Letters and First-Person Narratives


Lollard and Anti-Lollard Authors


*Not the famous abbot of Cluny, but one of his successors.
Romances and Other Long Poems and Prose Works


Later works similar to, and possibly influenced by, Susanna and the Elders

Saints' Legends

St. Eugenia (Together with Sts. Protus and Hyacinth):

1438 GL II: 666-70; AiphT (#318) I: 218-19; Caxton GL 98v and 289v-90v; Caxton VP, ch. 158; ScL II: 124-51.

St. Margaret Pelagia:

1438 GL II: 747-48; Caxton GL 318v-19v.

* The Internet Archive site has volume 3 only.
St. Marina:

Caxton GL 181v-81r; Caxton VP, ch. 43; NHC 258-61.

St. Theodora:

1438 GL I: 457-61; Caxton GL 210r-11r; AlphT (#599) II: 979-99; Jacob's Well I: 101-3.
ScL II: 99-123.

Historical Legends

London: Longman etc. (Emma II: 184-96).
Higden, Ranulph. Polychronicon (Gunnhild VII: 138-39; Emma VII: 160-64).†
Paris, Matthew (?). 1858. La estoire de Seint Aehward le Rei. LoEC 1-358 (Gunnhild 39-40 and 191-95).†


**Ballad**


**Susanna and the Elders (Selected Secondary Sources)**


Constance Analogues (Primary Sources)

True Analogues

Romances, Chronicles, Tales, Exempla, and Miracles

AlphT (#672) II: 447-50.
Boccaccio, Giovanni. Decameron (Zinenva II, 9).
Chaucer, Geoffrey. The Man of Law's Tale. RitCh 87-104 (Reference to Susanna 96).
Christine de Pizan. Cité (Florence of Rome ch. 2-51).
Jacob's Well II: 335-38.

26 This exemplum belongs to the Middle English version of Petrus Alfonsi's Disciplina Clericalis, which Hulme later published in a now hard to find edition.

"Merelaus be Emperor." GR 311-22.


Ancient Novel


• Partial Analogues

Romances, Tales, Plays, and Breton Lays


Boccaccio, Giovanni. Decameron (Gostanza V, 2).


Marie de France. "Fresne." Lais 44-60.


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29 Olif and Landres is, or claims to be, an Old Norse translation of a now lost Middle English romance.

30 A newer edition of this romance, by R. E. Stratton, was published in 1991.
St. Clement the Pope:

1438 GL II: 863-74; AlphT (#147) II: 101-3; Caxton GL 379r-83r.
Jacob's Well I: 123-26; ScL I: 373-402.
SEL (II): 315-33.

St. Eustace:

1438 GL II: 789-98.
“Averyos the Emperour.” GR (#24) 87-93.
Caxton GL 343v-45v; ESEL 393-402.
NHC 262-72; ScL II: 69-98.

St. Julian the Hospitalaller:

1438 GL (I: 141-47); Caxton GL (130r-31v); ESEL (256-60); ScL (I: 464-72); SEL (I: 32-37).

Constance Analogues (Selected Secondary Sources)


**Griselda Analogues (Primary Sources)**

**Prose**

Boccaccio, Giovanni. *Decameron* (X, 10).


Christine de Pizan. *Cité* (Griselda ch. 2.50).


†Die historie vander goeder vrouwen Griseldis, die een spieghel is gheeweest van patientien. 1849. Ed. D. J. van der Meerch. Ghent: Annoot-Braeckman.


Verse


"Griselidis et le marquis de Saluces" (Fragment). GrFr 282-83.


Plays


Chronicles and Historical Compendia


--. Supplementum Chronicarum. SRP 77-79.


Conduct Books


A new edition of this conduct book was published in 2000.


**Griselda Analogues (Selected Secondary Sources)**


*The Griselda story appears only in some fifteen-century manuscripts, but excerpts, descriptions, and variants are given in GrFr 35, 88, 180-81, 189-91, and passim. Griselda did not make her way into the Harley or Caxton translations.*


Constance and Griseldina Analogues (Selected Secondary Sources)

Note: The following studies deal with analogues of both the Man of Law's and Clerk's Tale.


