

**REWRITING
DIFFERENCE:
“SARACENS” IN JOHN
GOWER AND JUAN DE
CUENCA**

*Emily Houlik-Ritchey
Indiana University, Bloomington*

Abstract

In each instance that John Gower uses the term “Saracen” in his *Confessio Amantis* to characterize the enemies of Christendom, Juan de Cuenca’s prose Castilian translation, the *Confisyon del Amante*, employs alternative language—language that predominantly downplays rather than exacerbates scenes of religious conflict. This essay analyzes these divergent representations of difference to argue that such comparative analysis of English and Spanish texts makes legible each writer’s differing investments in narratives of Christianity’s violence and pacifism, its anxieties about its religious neighbors and its belief in its own triumphant ascendancy. Understanding the interpretive nuances of these differences between Gower and Cuenca carries implications for our understanding of the political, historical, and literary transactions between England and Castile and Leon in the late middle ages.

Keywords: Saracen, religious difference, religious conflict, relationship between Christianity and Islam, John Gower, *Confessio Amantis*, Juan de Cuenca, *Confisyon del Amante*.

Political and literary transactions between medieval England and Spain provide a glorious abundance of material for scholarly endeavor, and medievalists seem finally to be awakening to the fact. As early as P.E. Russell’s, *The English Intervention in Spain and Portugal in the Time of Edward III and Richard II* (1955), and as recently as Sylvia Federico’s “Chaucer and the Matter of Spain” (2011), scholars have recognized the importance of Spain, particularly the crowns of Castile, Leon and Portugal, to fourteenth and fifteenth-century English studies. The important voices of R. F. Yeager, María Bullón-Fernández, Manuela Faccon, Antonio Cortijo Ocaña, and Bernardo Santano Moreno have steadily drawn attention to the texts of Castile and Portugal and their relation to English literary and political history, yet each contribution comes capped with an admonition that we not forget the

importance of Spanish/English relations to medieval studies.¹ We seem eternally in need of such reminders. However, the cluster of recent work on this subject points toward swelling interest in, and attention to, English and Spanish transactions of the period.

Likewise, the ethical problems raised by medieval texts' representations of religious difference, particularly with regard to Christian and Jewish injunctions to "love" one's neighbors, increasingly form the focus of theoretical conversations in medieval studies. Some recent examples include the Session Thread, "Neighbors," planned for the Eighteenth Biennial Congress of the New Chaucer Society in Portland (July 2012), and articles such as Kathy Cawsey's, "Disorienting Orientalism: Finding Saracens in Strange Places in Late Medieval English Manuscripts" (2009), which participates in postcolonial approaches to medieval representations of Saracen difference, urging scholars to attend to the surprisingly complex associations between Muslim East and Pagan North in medieval English romance, particularly the romance of Constance as told by Gower and Chaucer. The present essay brings together these two strands of emerging scholarly interest: English/Spanish literary transactions and the ethics of religious difference, to analyze another set of "strange places," where we both do and don't find Saracens. For in John Gower's *Confessio Amantis* Constance's world contains Saracens, while in Juan de Cuenca's Castilian translation, the *Confisyon del amante*, it does not.² I offer here an attempt to assess this fact and understand why it might be so.

¹ These scholars have, in particular, drawn our attention to political, historical and literary transactions between England and Spain relating to John Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, although Bullón-Fernández's (2007) collection of essays (to which Yeager is also a contributor) covers a wider range of interactions between the Iberian Peninsula and England during four medieval centuries. See, in particular, Santano Moreno (1990), Yeager (2004), Cortijo Ocaña (2007), Bullón-Fernández (2007, 2009), and Faccon (2010).

² The transmission history and relationships between Cuenca's Castilian translation, Gower's English text, and the Portuguese translations are complex. Cuenca acknowledges in the headnote of his *Confisyon del amante* that he works from Robert Payn's Portuguese translation. Although none of Payn's copies have survived, another manuscript of the Portuguese translation (Madrid Real Biblioteca MS II-3088) was discovered in 1985 in the Royal Library and has been made accessible to the larger scholarly community by the diligent investigations of Santano Moreno (1990), Cortijo Ocaña (2007), and most recently, Faccon (2010), who has put out a critical edition. This copy of the Portuguese *Confessio* was transcribed by João Barroso at the request of Dom Fernando de Castro "o Moço" (the Younger).

As Bernardo Santano Moreno first noted over two decades ago,³ the Iberian authors and transcribers of Gower's *Confessio*: Robert Payn, João Barroso, and Juan de Cuenca, write "Saracen" out of the romance of Constance and the half-dozen other contexts within the *Confessio* where Gower employs the term.⁴ Why this difference? Why does the Castilian translation of Gower's *Confessio Amantis* refuse to fantasize Muslim difference through the figure of the Saracen?⁵ What ethical discourses regarding difference does John Gower invoke by using such a loaded term? Juan de Cuenca does not approach debates on religion via the fantasy of the "Saracen"; precisely because of this, what do his choices reveal about the shape of Castilian ethical discourses centered on difference? And what, in turn, do his alternatives to "Saracen" teach us about the questions which are of paramount importance to him? Gower identifies his characters as "Saracens" in some half-dozen tales throughout the *Confessio Amantis*. The contexts vary, from the world of romance, to reflections on the morality of the crusades, to Old Testament narratives about Gideon and Solomon. At first glance, Gower seems to deploy this term to exacerbate difference in religious terms. By drawing upon this imaginary category of excess sensuality and violence, he makes the "enemy" more sharply differentiated and emphasizes the threat they pose to the heroes' culture, religion, and bodies. Invoking the Saracen firmly reduces the scope of each

³ Bernardo Santano Moreno observes the intriguing omission of the term "Saracen" in the Castilian text in his comparison study of Gower and Cuenca's texts (1990:99-101). His focus lies on the explanation for this change rather than the analysis of its effect on the narratives, and no other scholar has attended to this difference in the *Confessio*'s Iberian translations. Rather than follow Santano Moreno's lead and attempt to provide a full accounting for the reasons motivating these subtle changes, I look to Gower and Cuenca's texts to see how the absence of the term "Saracen" in the Castilian translation changes the terms of the conversation regarding Christianity's cultural neighbors in the *Confisyon* narratives.

⁴ It is possible, but unlikely, that Barroso translated the *Confessio* from English himself. If we follow Yeager in assuming that Barroso worked from a copy of Payn's translation rather than translated from the English himself (2004:486-87), then we might further assume that the absence of the term "Saracen" which we see in his text accords with Payn's. It seems most likely, therefore, that Cuenca inherits a version of the *Confessio* from which "Saracen" had already been omitted, probably by Robert Payn. My comparison of Cuenca's "alternatives" to Gower's choice of "Saracen" therefore does not assume that Cuenca rejected "Saracen" himself—rather I explore the effect of such changes (whoever was responsible for making them) upon the resulting English and Castilian narratives as they have come down to us, and what these differences might reveal regarding medieval English/Castilian attitudes toward religious difference.

⁵ This question could equally well be asked for the Portuguese translation of the *Confessio*. I limit my focus in this essay to the English and Castilian texts.

conflict to religious difference: Christians and Muslims projected as eternal enemies of one another. So what does it mean that in each instance, Juan de Cuenca's Castilian translation presents us with a different view of our Christian protagonists' enemies?

Gower first uses "Saracen" as part of his characterization of the Souldan's mother in the Romance of Constance from Book II. Gower's description of the Souldaness of Barbarie as a Saracen comes at the climax of her violence during the feast welcoming Constance to Barbarie. The Souldaness greets Constance with violence. It is worth quoting the passage in full to see how Gower dwells upon the blood and focuses our attention on Constance as victim-as-witness to such horror:

This worthi Maiden which was there
 Stod thanne, as who seith, ded for feere,
 To se the feste how that it stod,
 Which al was torned into blod:
 The Dissh forthwith the Coppe and al
 Bebled thei weren overal,
 Sche sih hem deie on every side;
 No wonder thogh sche wepte and cride
 Makende many a wo full mone.
 Whan al was slain bot sche al one,
 This olde fend, this Sarazine,
 Let take anon this Constantine
 With al the good sche thider broghte,
 And hath ordeined, as sche thoghte,
 A naked Schip withoutes tiere,
 In which the good and hire in fiere,
 Vitailed full for yeres fyve,
 Wher that the wynd it wolde dryve,
 Sche putte upon the wawes wilde. (*CA* II.695-713)

The first half of this quotation focuses our attention repeatedly on the blood and the nearly all-encompassing violence, from which Constance alone is spared, but to which she must stand witness –another kind of victimization. Once Gower has indulged in a description of both the horror and Constance's fearful reactions, he switches his attention to the worker of this violence: the Saracen Souldaness. This Saracen's violence is extreme. Paired with "fend" (modern English "fiend"⁶), the word "Sarazine" urges upon us the utter difference between the Souldaness and Constance. This is especially so since the description of the Souldaness culminates with this term: "Sarazine" is the

⁶ Middle English "fend," from the Old English "feond" (enemy), has also acquired its more modern association with demons by the late fourteenth century.

final word about her, and by extension Barbarie's, cultural and religious identity. She emerges, by the end of Gower's description, as a sinister religious enemy, fundamentally opposed to Constance and her faith.

The term "Saracen" functions as a dual marker of the moral depravity and otherness of the Souldaness, and as such participates in the fantasy of Saracen excess regularly legible in medieval romance and chronicle traditions.⁷ The term carried importance across widely divergent linguistic and textual contexts in medieval Europe, from the letters of Peter the Venerable to the European romance and chronicle traditions, where perhaps it finds its home. The fact that the term was employed so widely throughout medieval Europe testifies to the powerful cultural fantasies at work here. An imaginary category of medieval Christian discourse that encompasses Western Christendom's ignorance, fascination, and fear of Islam, the Saracen characters often seem to simplify the complexities of relations across different identities, embodying another against which a coherent and stable Christian community may be consolidated.

Yet medieval representations of Saracens are themselves complex. Medieval Western Christendom's *ambivalence* for the world of Islam and its relationship with Christianity emerges through its multifaceted representations of Saracens. Some Saracens are bestial monsters while others are noble knights. Some have black or blue skin, drink snake's blood, worship idols, and possess magical objects, and others seem, but for their identification as "Saracen," to be no different from Charlemagne's famous Twelve Peers. While most often associated with crusade and Middle Eastern religious difference (Islam), a literary tradition linking Saracens with Northern Europeans can be traced throughout Middle English romance.⁸ The Saracen is therefore a hybrid figure, an amalgam of religious and pagan difference. An ambivalence signaled by the diversity of representations of Saracens in the late Middle Ages clings to any single use of the term. That is, the semantic range of the term is so varied that no particular reference is stable, even when texts describe (or over-describe) the "Saracen" as nefarious, evil, or misguided. Recourse to the Saracen in an effort to simplify identity relations therefore remains shot through with anxiety and instability about the closeness between Christianity and Islam –particularly since Christian discourses identify Islam both as a separate religion as well as a Christian heresy in the Middle Ages.

Gower's identification of the Souldan's mother as a Saracen, on the one hand, perpetuates narratives of extreme difference that satiate an audience's

⁷ For a history of the term's use and the fantasies accruing to it, see the work of John V. Tolan (1996, 2002) and Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (2001).

⁸ For analyses of the roles specifically Northern "Saracens" perform in medieval texts, see Speed (1990) and Cawsey (2009).

appetite for adventure, danger, and justified violence. This narrative sequence appears very straightforward. Its logic runs: the Souldaness is an evil Saracen, therefore the Souldaness must die. Yet while containing details such as the “Saracen” marker that point toward a desire to simplify relations, Gower’s text simultaneously gestures toward a more complex state of affairs. Gower has in fact given us a more nuanced picture of this woman and her relationships both with her son and with Constance, than his identification of her as a Saracen implies. If we return to his introduction of the Souldan’s mother, we hear how her violence and deception are directed not against Constance, but against her own people: her *son* and the people of Barbarie. When the Souldan has promised to convert to Christianity and Constance is on her way to Barbarie to reward his change of faith, the Souldan’s mother begins to plot “prively” against the marriage. She reasons that this union will deprive her of her “joies” in Barbarie, as her “astat schal so be lassed” (CA II.649), and she begins to plot “be sleihte” and to “feigneth” happiness at this marriage (CA II.651, 654). The language of deception, of which “non was war” (CA II.642), runs thick in this passage: “For under that anon she drowh/With false wordes that sche spak/Covine of deth behinde his bak” (CA II.674-76). But curiously, in light of this story and its analogues’ tendency to make so much of *Constance*’s victimization, the mother’s effort to beguile is directed primarily at her *son*, the Souldan: “sche hath compassed/Be sleihte how that sche may beguile/Hire Sone” (CA II.650-52). She deceives and betrays him first and foremost, although the violence of her attack spills over onto many others. The fundamental betrayal here is one of kinship –a theme later echoed by the narrative’s Northumberland sequence. Although Constance represents a threat, the Souldan’s mother does not target her at all –quite the opposite. Her “sodein” rage at the feast (sudden only in the sense of suddenly revealed) targets quite specifically only those who approve of this marriage alliance. She leaves dead “alle tho that hadden be/Or in apert or in prive/Of conseil to the mariage,” (CA II.685-87) Barbarian or Roman. “Hire oghne Sone was noght quit,/Bot deide upon the same plit” (CA II.691-3), we are told, before Gower’s narrative directs us to the blood and gore. Constance constitutes an exception to the Souldaness’s sweeping attack on the opposition – an opposition that she defines around her son.

The description of the bloody feast hijacks our attention away from the Souldaness’s relationship with her son and redirects it, as we have seen, to her victimization of Constance. Gower retreats from the terrifying possibility of betrayal by one’s mother –perhaps the most fundamental betrayal imaginable– by immediately refocusing our attention to the Souldaness’s status as a Saracen and the according threat she represents to Constance. Note again how much of Gower’s narrative leading up to the crucial identification, “This olde fend, this Sarazine,” focuses on the terror of the violence as it overwhelms Constance. As the Souldaness’s actions against her son expand into dire consequences for the

entire guest list at the feast, Gower transforms her into the inscrutable, dangerous enemy of all Christians and revels in a long bloody description of her violence. Such a relational position dominates and subsumes the other, drawing and holding our attention because of the climactic and bloody feast. It is far less surprising to be betrayed by someone of another nation and faith than by one's close relative.

In a similar vein, Gower attributes Constance's survival during the feast to God's will (CA II.693-94). This explanation both denies the Souldaness any capacity to harm Constance and implies that her violent wrath would have extended to include Constance, had this Saracen had her way. This kind of a narrative assumes eternal and extreme Saracen aggression against all Christians. But the rest of Gower's description of the Saracen's actions regarding Constance points toward a more complicated scenario. The violent Souldaness curiously takes extraordinary care of Constance: she seems anxious not to profit from her arrival, packing up all the "good sche [Constance] thider broghte" (CA II.707) into the rudderless boat, and she provides a five-year supply of food (more than enough to cover Constance's three years at sea before washing up on the shore of Northumberland) (CA II.705-13). She does not seem to care where Constance ends up, whether back in Rome or on the shores of some other kingdom. Rather, her primary anxiety resides in getting Constance as far away from herself and Barbarie as possible. These details speak to a genuine desire on the Souldaness' part not to harm Constance directly, and they complicate Gower's portrait of this character.

What effect do these efforts at simplification have upon Gower's narrative of the conversion of England and the triumph of Roman Christianity? Gower establishes Rome and its Christianity as foils to a Saracen Barbarie, redefining the conflict from one of kinship to the inflammatory Christian-Saracen rivalry.⁹ And as Gower redirects our attention towards the Souldaness as a religious enemy of Christendom, he uses the unambiguous parameters of that conflict to justify violent Roman expansion. The Saracen's actions earn Barbarie violent reprisals from Rome, as we discover near the end of Constance's adventures. We hear how the evil Saracen has received her just reward: Constance's father "hath assaied [Barbarie]/Bewerre, and taken such vengeance,/That non of al thilke alliance,/Be whom the tresoun was compassed,/Is from the swerdalyve passed" (CA II.1182-6). The Souldaness's actions justify retributive violence in a kind of "holy war" that pits Rome against Barbarie, in which Christianity triumphs and the evil Saracens are destroyed. Rome's "holy war" to avenge Constance conveniently folds Barbarie into its own territorial control without

⁹ This detail is unique to Gower's English version of the Constance story. Chaucer does not describe his Syrian Sowdaness as a Saracen in *The Man of Law's Tale*.

admitting Roman desire for such an acquisition. Gower's identification of the *Souldaness* as a Saracen denies the aggressive impulses of the Roman Empire, displacing the violence onto the Souldaness. Thus, the Souldaness' violent rejection of Constance through the bloodthirsty actions she takes principally against her own people provides a convenient justification for the violent Roman annexation of Barbarie.¹⁰

Juan de Cuenca's narrative of Costança faithfully follows Gower's in most respects. As in Gower's narrative, the soldán's mother targets her violence against her son, ("conpuiso den-/tro de syvna mala so-/tileσα con *quea* sufijo/enganmase," fol. 86, a, ll. 26-fol. 86 v, b, l. 1), invoking the terrifying spectacle of one's mother as one's worst enemy.¹¹ The bloody feast distracts our attention away from her aggression toward her son to emphasize both the abundance of blood and Costança's petrified terror as she watches her own kinsmen die: "no εσ de/maraujllar que ujeσε/grant dolor veyendo que/todos quantoσ de su tierra/con ella avian venjdo,/eran todos muertos"¹² (fol. 87, b, ll.7-12). But where Gower invokes religious difference and identifies the Souldaness as a Saracen who threatens Constance's body, her political identity, and especially her religion, Cuenca deems the soldán's mother merely, "La/mala vieja"¹³ (fol. 87, b, ll. 13-14). Cuenca's version of the story does not describe the soldán's mother in terminology that plays upon the military, cultural, and religious tensions between Christians and non-Christians. His description of her in this moment in fact downplays the religious differences

¹⁰ The narrative echoes in the Northumberland sequence of the Souldaness's violence and her tactic of setting Constance adrift in a rudderless boat recall Saracen violence from the Barbarie sequence and reemploy it as a vehicle to deny Roman expansionist impulses, this time in Northumberland. The Roman acquisition of Northumberland is less violent, but no less aggressive, I argue, than its acquisition of Barbarie. Chapter Two of my Dissertation, "Intimate Differences: John Gower and Juan de Cuenca" develops this argument.

¹¹ "She composed within herself an evil subtlety by which she should ensnare her son." All quotations of Cuenca's *Confisyon* come from Elena Alvar's edition of the text (1990). I have preserved their textual notation in these quotations in almost all respects. Italicized letters indicate expanded manuscript abbreviations. Letters in brackets indicate editorial corrections and emendations. Citations provided correspond to Alvar's, indicating folio and column. Verso leaves are indicated by a "v" after the folio number while recto leaves are unmarked; "a" and "b" refer to manuscript columns. Alvar's edition indicates line numbers through superscript numbers following the line brake slashes. I have instead given the line numbers in the parenthetical citations that follow each quotation, preceded by the abbreviation "l(l)." Translations are my own.

¹² "It was no wonder that she took great pain from seeing that all the many people of her country that had come with her were all killed."

¹³ "The evil old woman."

between Bervería and Roma. Cuenca does not mark her as an enemy against which a fantasized Christian wholeness (embodied in Constance and Rome) can be consolidated. Instead of using her character to invoke these larger conflicts, Juan de Cuenca's description of her moral depravity limits it to the envious and selfish disposition of one individual woman. At the end of the tale in the Castilian *Confisyon*, when the Roman Emperor seeks retribution against Bervería for its betrayal of his daughter and murder of his citizens, the story does not carry the implications of holy war that the "Saracen" identity of the Souldaness lends the English text.

Yet this shift from religion/race to gender likewise merits further scrutiny, for the ambivalent mixture of aggression and care Cuenca's Souldaness exhibits towards Costança presents us with a woman whose complex series of motives and actions resist the dominant narrative current that emphasizes pure opposition between the violent would-be mother-in-law and the innocent Costança. Her attention to the question of provisions constitutes a qualification of her status as "la mala vieja":

La/mala vieja ordenó vn/nauyo σyn njngún gover-/nalle, et metió a Costan-
/ça en él con todo quanto/aver traxiera conσygo,⁷/mandó luego ponerlo σo-
/bre laσ brauaσ ondaσ/de la mar para que fueσe do/el viento lo lleuaσe, a-
/vnque dentro lo mandó ba/-teçer para cinco annoσ.¹⁴ (fol. 87, b, ll. 13-24)

The "aunque" of the final clause modifies our sense of the cruelty of Costança's fate, set adrift in a rudderless boat, yes, but with enough food to sustain her to wherever the wind should take her. Such is the Castilian *Confisyon*'s final word upon the soldán's mother –she may be an evil woman, but she still takes ambiguous care of Costança, and her villany is not linked to her religion and culture.

Gower's use of "Saracen" in Book III of the *Confessio* directly invokes the crusading associations to which the resolution of Constance's tale alludes. Again, the term invokes a foreign Islamic identity at odds militarily and morally with Christianity. In Book III 'Amans' questions the morality of the crusades after his Confessor has cautioned him against needless manslaughter, and his response turns away from violence against Saracens: "I not hou he it mihte amende,/Which tak tha wei for evere more/The lif that he mai nocht restore" declares Genius (*CA* III.2478-80), to which Amans replies, "Mi fader, understonde it is,/That ye have seid; bot over this/I prei you tell me nay or yee,/To passe over the grete See/To werre and sle the Sarazin,/Is that the lawe?"

¹⁴ "The evil old woman ordered a boat without rudder into which she put Costança with everything she had brought with her, and she ordered that the boat be put out on the rough waves of the sea that the wind might carry it where it would, although she ordered that it be provisioned for five years."

(CA III.2485-90). Amans's question about Saracens appears to be a test case for how far to extend the Confessor's lesson against manslaughter. Is it unlawful to kill even when one is participating in religious crusade against the Saracens in the Holy Land? Debate over this very issue occupied writers during the Middle Ages. Peter the Venerable wrote multiple letters to garner support for the Second Crusade, defending and praising this enterprise against Saracens, while Roger Bacon critiques the Knight's Templar in particular for killing Saracens, advocating instead that Christians ought to teach their faith and convert them through knowledge. The Confessor's sympathies appear to lie on the side of conversion: he cannot find justification or mandate in Christ's teachings even for war against the Saracens, "Sone myn,/To preche and soffre for the feith,/That have I herd the gospel seith;/Bot forto slee, that hierie I noht" (CA III.2490-93).

In the wake of the violence unleashed against Barbarie in the "Tale of Constance," the fact that Gower's Confessor turns away from sanctioning Holy War against the Saracens appears all the more radical. Through this apparent inconsistency the *Confessio* stages medieval debates regarding violence against the Saracen. On the one hand, the romance world through which Constance drifts in her rudderless boat imagines a world in which Christians are defending themselves against Saracens who are always attacking them first. Through this tale Genius indulges in justified defensive violence against Christianity's hallmark enemy aggressor. Outside of such narratives he simultaneously indulges a vision of Christians as peace-loving imitators of Christ, rejecting violence even against the Saracens and so staking claim to a moral high ground.

Book IV continues the debate, as Amans reminds Genius of his own prior argument against religious crusade. One book later sees Genius extolling the virtues of travail for love's sake. This includes, in rather contradictory fashion, participation in violence and war. Amans repeats the Confessor's logic from the previous Book, condemning homicide *even* against Saracens, to excuse his own lack of exertion in matters of chivalric travail:

And forto slen the hethen alle,
I not what good ther mihte falle,
So mochel blod thought her be schad.
This finde I writen, hou Crist bad
That no man other scholde sle.

...

A Sarazin if I sle schal,
I sle the Soule forth withal,
And that was nevere Cristes lore. (CA IV.1659-81)

Amans not only takes literally the Confessor's earlier injunctions against homicide, holding up Christ's teachings of peace and love instead, but also he

repeats Genius's sermon on the sanctity of men's souls. The Confessor earlier declared: "of Soule in special/He [man] is mad lich to the god hiede./So sit it wel to taken hiede/and forto loke on every side,/ Er that thou falle in homicide" (CA III.2522-26). The Confessor's ethical stance in Book III against the crusades includes the implication that even the souls of Saracens are made in the image of God, and therefore sacred. In this fundamental respect, Saracens and Christians are alike in their resemblance to God. But after proposing such intimacy between Christian and Saracen, Gower's text retreats from its implications by giving Genius an alternative message. Amans takes this lesson about Souls seriously but the Confessor will not allow those arguments –arguments he himself expounded in Book III– to be valid here in Book IV. Though Genius does not deny the truth of his pupil's words, he nevertheless informs Amans that the example he used to illustrate his point is invalid and launches into his own exempla in praise of violent knighthood. The assumption of various stances on the question of Christian violence against the Saracen throughout Books II, III, and IV of the *Confessio* by both Genius and Amans places Christianity and Islam in an ambiguous relationship. The intimacy between them troubles Gower's text, resurfacing from Book to Book both in celebration and condemnation of Christian culture's investment in violence.

In contrast, Juan de Cuenca uses terminology and phrasing for figures of religious difference throughout the *Confisyon del amante* that differ markedly from Gower's recourse to "Saracen." In fact, they are almost always moments that, compared to "Saracen," deemphasize religious difference.¹⁵ But the places

¹⁵ As space does not allow me to analyze in detail all of the places in Cuenca's text where Gower employs "Saracen," I offer here a brief summary. Cuenca usually uses language in these contexts that has no associations of religious otherness at all, as we have seen in examples such as, "la mala vieja," to describe the soldán's mother in the romance of Constance. In other places Cuenca phrases himself in ways that avoid adjectives: for example his opening account of the story of the Counsel of Balaam reads: "[S]emejante a/esta materia/fallo escrito en/la Briuja, de cómo el/rey Amalech, que era pa-/gano, quando vido que no/podia defender su tierra/njn lancer fuera della/al pueblo de Yrrael,/por consejo de Balán, to-/mó vna suma de muge-/res muy fermosas, [...]" (fol. 347, b, ll. 17-28) ("Similar to this material I find written in the Bible how King Amalech, who was pagan, when he saw that he could not defend his land nor eject from it the people of Israel, on the advice of Balaam, took a group of beautiful women..."). Cuenca's version begins by describing Amalech as pagan, as does Gower's narrative, but Cuenca avoids using any subsequent adjective to characterize Amalech. Gower, in contrast, gives himself an opportunity to identify Amalech as a Saracen: "And in the bible I finde also/A tale lich unto this thing,/Hou Amalech the paien king,/Whan that he myhte be no weie/Defende his lond and putte aweie/The worthi poeple of Irael,/This Sarazin, as it befell,/Thurgh the conseil of Balaam/A route of faire women nam," (CA VII.4406-14). In other places, Cuenca uses simply "enemigo" ("enemies") where Gower writes "Saracens," or describes a Saracen

where his vocabulary accords most closely to “Saracen” are contexts of religious crusade, and in these instances his term of choice is “infielos” (“infidels”). So when the “Fijo” (Son) questions his Confessor on the lawfulness of crusade against the “infidels” and receives a negative answer, the Castilian text shares the condemnation of violence against non-Christians with Gower’s version, even though it does not use “Saracens”: “Padre mjo, bien en-/tendí todo lo que me a-/véis dicho, mas, allen-/de deoto, vos rruego que/me digaes sy es liçi-/to, segunt ley, de pa-/sar la mar soyntin-/çión de matar e façer/guerra a los ynfielos”¹⁶ (fol. 152v, a, ll. 5-13). Similarly, in the later passage where the “Fijo” reminds his Confessor of this message of non-violence, he uses the term “infidels” where Gower had employed “Sarazins”: “Mas,/en matar quantos ynfielos/ay, non sé qué pro vernya por/tanto esparçimento de san-/gre, por quanto se falla en la/escriptura cómmo Xristo man-/dó que njnguno non mata-/se a otro”¹⁷ (fol. 171v, a, ll. 28-33-fol. 171v, b, ll. 1-2).

From one perspective, “infidel” rather than “Saracen” seems like a minor change that does not greatly affect the meaning of these passages. Both terms evoke religious crusade in the Holy Land against non-Christians, and the alternating positions taken by the “Padre” (Gower’s Genius/Confessor) and “Fijo” (Gower’s Amans) perform the medieval debate on crusading. Yet “Saracen” carries a range of associations from medieval romance that implies a certain kind of narrative about

army as “La/hueoste contraria” (fol. 337v, a, ll. 8-9) (“the contrary host”), both of which we see in his descriptions of the army against which Gideon fights in Book VII of the *Confisyon*. These choices emphasize the conflict between Gideon and his enemies, but do not portray it in religious terms. Finally, the last appearance of “Saracen” in Gower’s *Confessio* comes in Book VII, where Solomon is led into idolatry by his Saracen wives and concubines: “That he the myhti god forsok,/Ayein the lawe whanne he tok/His wyves and hise concubines/Of hem that were Sarazines,/For whiche he dede ydolatrie” (CA VII.4493-97). Juan de Cuenca’s text avoids mention of the women’s specific cultural and religious identity, simply identifying them as “mu-/gereos e barraganas/de fuera de la ley” (fol. 348v, a, ll. 20-22) (“women and concubines from outside the law”). The meaning of “fuera de la ley” is slightly ambiguous. It could serve to repeat the emphasis of “barraganas” (“concubines”), designed to emphasize that these women did not have the status of legal wives. It could also indicate that these women did not share Solomon’s religious beliefs. As this overview makes clear, Juan de Cuenca uses terminology and phrasing for the figures Gower identifies as Saracens that largely avoid the issue of religious difference.

¹⁶ “My Father, I have understood well everything that you have told me, but beyond this, I ask you to tell me if it is alright, according to the law, to cross the sea with the intention of killing and making war on the infidels.”

¹⁷ “But in killing as many infidels as there are, I do not know what will come of such spilling of blood, since I find in scripture how Christ ordered that no one should kill another.”

these non-Christians that "infidel," while denoting non-believer, does not share.¹⁸ "Saracen" evokes the realm of fantasy, of an aggressor against which violence is always permissible because it is always necessary. Beyond religious difference, "Saracens" often embody cultural differences that were both exciting and frightening to many medieval European audiences. While the context of religious crusade is the same in both texts, therefore, the stakes of Gower's question about war against the Saracens remains invested in a conception of one's religious and cultural neighbors that assumes their aggressive stance toward the medieval-Christian self. Genius's refusal to sanction violence even against such an enemy in Book III may be a radical stance, but it still shows us the shape of his assumptions about Christianity's infamous neighbors. Juan de Cuenca's text, in contrast, does not routinely characterize his Christian protagonists' neighbors in terms that invoke religious conflict—in fact his text routinely avoids a context of religious difference in most of the places where Gower employs "Saracen." Almost the only places, in fact, where Cuenca follows the lead presented by Gower's use of "Saracen" and represents religious difference in terms of armed combat are the two specific places where the "Fijo" questions his "Padre" about crusade directly.

This pattern among Juan de Cuenca's alternatives to Gower's Saracens raises intriguing questions: If fantasies of religious aggressors threatening Christianity do not concern Juan de Cuenca, then in what kind of narrative, with what kind of ethical implications, is he invested? What can Juan de Cuenca teach us about Christianity and its relationship with its neighbors precisely because he is not using "Saracen"?

The remaining exception to Cuenca's pattern of downplaying contexts of religious conflict where Gower invokes Saracens appears in the romance of Constance. And so we return to where we began to examine the only other place in Cuenca's *Confisyon del amante* where infidels may be found (instead of "Saracens," as Gower's text would have it): Spain. Two mothers-in-law set Constance adrift in a rudderless boat: first the Souldan's mother ejects her from Barbarie and subsequently Allee's mother, Domilde, manipulates her eviction from Northumberland. After this second rejection, Constance washes up near the castle of "an hethen amirall" of "Spaigne" (CA II.1090, 1089). Although Gower's English verses do not identify him or his people as Saracens, the Latin marginal gloss does.¹⁹ This Theloüs (a "stieward" of the "amirall"), a "fals knyht and a

¹⁸ Martín Alonso's *Diccionario Medieval Español* defines "infiel" as "pagano, gentil" ("pagan, gentile") (1986:1258).

¹⁹ When Constance drifts within sight of the Spanish coast, the Latin marginal gloss summarizes the episode: "Qualiter Nauis Constancie post biennium in partes Hispanie superioris inter Sarazenos iactabatur, a quorum minibus deus ipsam conseruans graciousissime liberauit" (II.1085, margin) ("Constance's ship after two years was thrown towards the region of greater Hispania, among the Saracens, from whose hands the saving

renegat” (CA II.1093), attempts to rape Constance, and God saves her by washing him overboard. When Costança washes up off the “tierra de spanna” in Cuenca’s version of her story, she finds herself “junto con el mu-/ro de vn caſtillo [...] donde/vn [in]fiel era eſtonçeſ al-/mjrante”²⁰ (fol. 92, a, ll. 26-27-fol. 92, b, ll. 1-3). The brackets around “in” in the quotation above indicate an editorial intervention. The manuscript reads “donde/vnfiel era,” which was revised to “donde/vn [in]fiel era” in the 1909 German edition of Cuenca’s *Confisyon* by Hermann Knust and Adolf Hirshfeld (1909). Elena Alvar accepts their revision in her 1990 edition of the text. This revision seems a plausible translation of Gower’s description (“aethen Amirall”). I am intrigued, however, by the manuscript’s “fiel,” which means faithful, loyal. The passage does not make sufficient sense without emendation to satisfy this series of editors, but what sense it does make is considerably different from the emendated text they have passed down to us. Modern editors have, through this emendation, helped to construct Spain as a place of non-Christian believers, perhaps revealing the shape of our own assumptions about medieval romance narratives of Spain. By bringing Cuenca’s translation of this moment back into close accord with the sense of Gower’s original, these editors may in fact have obscured our view of a quite different vision of medieval Spain.

If we accept this revision, we might note that Juan de Cuenca recognizes Spain in Costança’s day (well before the eighth century Muslim invasion) as a place where infidels may be found –it is not a land controlled by Christians. This links Spain suggestively to the Holy Land in terms of religious difference and religious conflict in a way that the choices Juan de Cuenca has made throughout the *Confisyon del amante* tend to deemphasize.²¹ Most of his other choices suggest that he would not associate Castile and Leon with religious difference in violent or crusading terms. The use of “infiel” here would disrupt that pattern. On the other hand, we could read against the editorial grain and interpret “fiel” as an attempt rather to emphasize positive qualities about the almirante’s religious convictions, rather than to emphasize his difference from Christian believers.²²

God himself graciously freed her”). I am indebted to Cindy Rogers and Erin Sweany, who helped me with this translation.

²⁰ “Next to the wall of a castle where an infidel was then Captain/General.” “Almirante” in medieval Castilian has naval connotations but may also signify the leader of an army or commander of a castle or keep, which is the sense I take it to carry here.

²¹ See my dissertation chapter, “Intimate Differences: John Gower and Juan de Cuenca,” for a full analysis of Juan de Cuenca’s representations of Christianity’s religious and cultural neighbors in the *Confisyon del amante*. See also note 12, above.

²² The Portuguese manuscript likewise describes this Almirante as “fiel”: “chegou Junto com o muro dhũu/castello na terra despanha-onde/hũu fiel era entom almyrante” (fol. (51) XLVIJ v, a, ll. 17-18) (“she arrived alongside the wall of a castle in the land of Spain where a

Whether Cuenca or Payn intended such a revision of Gower's conception of Spain, though perhaps impossible to determine with certainty, seems to be a question upon which much turns. If we accept the scholarly reading of the English-language versions of Constance's story, most recently articulated by Cawsey (2009), that English audiences have a stake in the representation and fate of Northumberland, what might Juan de Cuenca's representations of Spain as a place with or without "infielos" both tell us about the conceptions of a fifteenth-century Castilian writer and tell his audience about their own past? And if Costança's Christianity in Cuenca's hands does not perceive itself to be threatened by an eternally aggressive Saracen enemy, how might that change our reading of the triumph of Roman Christendom over both Berueria and Morchonverlande (Gower's Northumberland)²³ at the tale's close?

Juan de Cuenca's alternative descriptions for the figures that Gower deems "Saracens" reveals his stakes in different conversations about others, often outside the context of religious difference altogether. Cuenca does not deploy difference in creed as a short-hand for "evil" figure. He does not contrast Christianity against an aggressive Saracen "other" in order to justify Roman expansion or debate the appropriateness of crusade in the Holy Land. Cuenca seems to be less worried about religious difference –in particular about the intimacies between Christianity and Islam– and more comfortable exploring the ethical treatment of those different from oneself. I am tempted to follow Santano Moreno and attribute this, at least in part, to the longer history of association and contact among different religions in the Iberian Peninsula than in England. He suggests that the systematic substitution of "Saracen" with other terms in Cuenca's *Confisyon* may have been a diplomatic choice to promote *convivencia*²⁴ among the Christian and Muslim communities of the Iberian Peninsula in the Middle Ages. He writes:

faithful one was at that time Almirante"). This quotation is taken from Manuela Faccon's edition in her doctoral dissertation (2007:184). I have maintained Faccon's textual notation, with the exception that line numbers are noted in the final citation rather than within the quotation.

²³ It is not yet clear to me whether "Morchonverlande" refers to Northern England and therefore retains the narrative's focus on the history and fate of Christendom in England, or represents a fictionalized locale. This interpretive question clearly impacts how we read Cuenca and his audience's attitudes toward England, past and present, and its political interests in Castile and Leon during the fourteenth century, notably John of Gaunt's claim to the throne through his marriage to Constance, daughter of Pedro I, and the marriage of their daughter, Catalina, to Enrique III.

²⁴ *Convivencia* means, literally, "living together" and refers to a unique culture of tolerance among Jews, Christians, and Muslims in medieval Spain that was proposed, among other scholars, by María Rosa Menocal (2002).

[E]sta transformación [...] indica claramente que al menos en uno de los traductores existía un deseo de evitar una referencia que pudiera ofender a una de las comunidades que, en la época de la traducción, era muy numerosa en la Península Ibérica, y convivía, casi siempre en armonía, con la comunidad Cristiana.²⁵ (Santano Moreno 1990:101)

In light of scholarly complications to the notion of an untroubled *convivencia* among Jews, Christians, and Muslims in medieval Iberia, we may not find Santano Moreno's explanation fully compelling. Rather than make the easy assumption that living together enables tolerance, I would suggest that the long history of *convivencia*, in all its imperfections, created an environment in which anxieties about one's religious neighbors did not take the same form as in late medieval England.

Many medieval romances steeped in the "Saracen" fantasy that had such a hold on the rest of Europe circulated in Castilian versions, suggesting that this fantasy was recognized and enjoyed in the Iberian Peninsula at least to some extent. Yet the avoidance of the term in the Portuguese and Castilian translations of Gower's *Confessio*, and the small but significant differences in the way Juan de Cuenca imagines these narrative moments leads me to wonder to what extent the extensive multicultural history of the Iberian Peninsula with regular contact between Christians, Jews, and Muslims may have exposed and undercut this Saracen fantasy. England physically absented its figures of religious difference, in particular its Jews, much earlier than did Castile and Leon, and therefore had more limited experience with practitioners of other religions than many Castilian Christians. Tolan reminds us that in Spanish texts we find "the most accurate information on Islam in medieval Europe," (1996:xv).²⁶ We would not want to mistakenly equate familiarity with a Muslim

²⁵ "This transformation clearly indicates the presence of a desire, in at least one of the translators, to avoid a reference that could offend one of the communities that, in the era of translation, was very numerous in the Iberian Peninsula and coexisted, almost always in harmony, with the Christian community."

²⁶ Tolan identifies "Moro" as the Castilian equivalent of "Saracen" (2002:127), yet Josiah Blackmore (2006) distinguishes between the two terms, especially in medieval Portugal. Blackmore's description of the "Moor" as "at once an 'other' and a closer, more intimate presence" that "could be variously othered as a marker of boundaries including 'race,' spirituality, and sexuality" (2006:27) comes much closer to my own reading of the complex figure of the "Saracen" than he allows. But his conclusions may in fact demonstrate that the term "Moro" was preferred in medieval Iberia to "Sarracina." So what of the distinction, if any, between "Saracen" and "Moor"? "Moro" is an ethnic term, as "Saracen" once was, and one that accurately describes some of the waves of Islamic invaders into the Iberian Peninsula during the early Middle Ages—that is, it identifies African Muslims. As such, it is a term invested in a fantasy of its own: a Reconquest narrative. It implies that these Islamic peoples are outsiders who have invaded Christian territory. They are enemy

presence with tolerance and acceptance, nor would we want to exaggerate the extent of the isolation and ignorance of Christian England. Patricia Clare Ingham (2003:62) reminds us to recall "the quite substantial textual evidence concerning the West's awareness of its similarities with Islam", and Cawsey's (2009) recent critique of an orientalizing pattern among scholarship of "*The Man of Law's Tale* (Chaucer's version of the Constance narrative) cautions scholars against over-emphasis of the degree to which English texts produce strict oppositions between Muslim East and Christian West.²⁷ David Hanlon offers a reading of representations of Muslims in Old Spanish literature as "expressions of anxiety on a cultural level about the ambiguous status of the Mudejar, of the Muslim as a subject to be governed within the frontiers of Castile and Leon" (2000:479). Although the Castilian version of "Saracen," "Sarracina," may not have been used extensively, ambivalence for the world of Islam likewise informs the cultural and literary representations of Muslims in medieval Castile and Leon.

John Gower is not alone in celebrating the triumph of Christianity. Fantasies of crusade and conversion dominate medieval Castilian literature and culture, including Cuenca's *Confisyon del amante*. Even in the narratives that we have seen here, where Cuenca's text downplays the religious conflict invoked by Gower, Christianity triumphs: Costança still converts everyone in Morchonverlande and installs her son, Mauriçio as the Emperor of Rome; if the Crusades against "infeles" are wrong it is because Jesus Christ has brought a new covenant of love to mankind. If tolerance of religious difference, rather

aggressors with no legitimate claim to the land they inhabit. These associations indeed dovetail with those of "Saracen." As I understand it, the term "Moro," though clearly invested in fantasies of reconquest, religious faith, bodily difference, and interiority, does not invoke the idolatry, hedonism, sensuality and general excess that attend the fantasy of the Saracen. Pedro de Corral's fifteenth-century *Crónica Sarracina o Crónica del rey don Rodrigo con la destruyçion de España* shows that an equivalent term existed in medieval Castilian, but I have not been able to find it used in any other context than this one romance. As this text chronicles the events leading up to the Moorish invasion of the Iberian Peninsula in 711 and their defeat of King Rodrigo of the Visigoths, the use of "Sarracina" in the title may be deliberately archaic or a choice designed to signify precisely these original Muslim invaders in contrast to any contemporary Muslims living in Spain in the fifteenth century. It may be that this term was largely avoided in most literature of late medieval Castile in favor of choices like "moro," or, in the case of the examples we have seen in Juan de Cuenca's *Confisyon del amante*, "la mala vieja" and "los infeles."

²⁷ Cawsey's critique echoes Ingham's intervention into postcolonial readings of medieval and modern texts. Ingham addresses readings that over-emphasize the oppositional identities portrayed by Chaucer's *Man of Law's Tale*, analyzing instead how it "forcefully engage[s] the slippages in binary categories (whether Muslim/Christian, Pagan/Christian, or East/West) on both cultural and historic grounds" (2003:61).

than religious conflict, receives more emphasis in Cuenca's text than in Gower's, it is still celebrated as proof of Christianity's triumph and primacy. Most tellingly, the omission of the fantasy of the Saracen as a way of conceiving Christianity's relationship with its religious neighbors in the Iberian *Confessio* tradition reveals that placing English and Iberian texts side by side makes legible medieval texts' deep and fraught engagement with ethical questions of difference and representation –urgent questions with which we wrestle just as desperately today.

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How to cite this article:

Houlik-Ritchey, Emily. "Rewriting Difference: 'Saracens' in John Gower and Juan de Cuenca." Eds. Laura Filardo-Llamas, Brian Gastle and Marta Gutiérrez Rodríguez. *Gower in Context(s). Scribal, Linguistic, Literary and Socio-historical Readings* (Special issue of *ES. Revista de Filología Inglesa* 33.1). Valladolid: Publicaciones Universidad de Valladolid, 2012: 171-189.

Author's contact: ehoulik@indiana.edu