

DESIRING THE EAST:
A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF
MIDDLE ENGLISH ROMANCE AND
MODERN POPULAR SHEIKH
ROMANCE

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ABSTRACT

This thesis comparatively examines a selection of twenty-first century sheikh romances and Middle English romances from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries that imagine an erotic relationship occurring between east and west. They do so against a background of conflict, articulated in military confrontation and binary religious and ethnic division. The thesis explores the strategies used to facilitate the cross-cultural relationship across such a gulf of difference and considers what a comparison of medieval and modern romance can reveal about attitudes towards otherness in popular romance.

In Chapter 1, I analyse the construction of the east in each genre, investigating how the homogenisation of the romance east in sheikh romance distances it from the geopolitical reality of those parts of the Middle East seen, by the west, to be 'other'. Chapter 2 examines the articulation of gender identity and the ways in which these romances subvert and reassert binary gender difference to uphold normative heterosexual relations. Chapter 3 considers how ethnic and religious difference is nuanced, in particular through the use of fabric, breaking down the disjunction between east and west. Chapter 4 investigates the way ethnicity, religion and gender affect hierarchies of power in the abduction motif, enabling undesirable aspects of the east to be recast.

The key finding of this thesis is that both romance genres facilitate the cross-cultural erotic relationship by rewriting apparently binary differences of religion and ethnicity to create sameness. While the east is figured differently in Middle English and modern sheikh romance, the strategies they use to facilitate the cross-cultural erotic relationship are similar. The thesis concludes that the constancy of certain attitudes towards the east in both medieval and modern romance reveals a persistence of conservative values in representations of the east in romance.

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AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

All work contained in this thesis is my own and has not been previously published.

INTRODUCTION

Western popular culture has long engaged with the otherness of the east.¹ In the first decade of the twenty-first century, a period of renewed conflict between certain countries in the east and west, popular culture has been particularly concerned with the fantasy and reality of the east, presenting it as locus of religious, racial, cultural, social and political difference.² This thesis is about one consistently popular genre produced in and by the west which imagines an erotic relationship occurring across the gulf of difference between east and west and whose popularity has skyrocketed in the twenty-first century: the sheikh romance.³ The so-called sheikh romance is a love story set in the deserts of North Africa or the Middle East, featuring an erotic relationship between a western heroine and an eastern sheikh or sultan hero.⁴ The genre is unique, in the twenty-first century, in presenting differences between east and west in the context of an erotic relationship. However, the twenty-first century is not the only period in which western romance has imagined an erotic relationship between east and west. Middle English romance, one of the most widely consumed secular genres in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century England, similarly figures cross-cultural relationships occurring between Saracens and Christians, this time occurring against a background of conflict with the echo of the Crusades.⁵

This thesis draws together a selection of Middle English romances and modern sheikh romances to examine their representations of cross-cultural erotic relationships. I explore ways in which romances nuance the apparently binary

¹ I deliberately use the terms ‘east’ and ‘west’ throughout this thesis for reasons I will explain later in this introduction.

² This conflict, generally referred to as the ‘War on Terror’, has involved the USA, the UK as well as other NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation) and non-NATO countries in military action since 2001, mainly in Afghanistan and Iraq.

³ I define an erotic relationship as a physical or emotional relationship between people with overt or subtle sexual significance. The relationship can be real or imagined and is often connected with romantic feelings.

⁴ The sheikh romance occasionally features a heroine who is half or fully-eastern but this is much less common than the western heroine/eastern sheikh model, as this thesis will show.

⁵ Following recent work on representations of the east and its inhabitants in the Middle Ages I use the term ‘Saracen’ to distinguish between the fictional Muslims of romance and real-life medieval Muslims (see Siobhain Bly Calkin, *Saracens and the Making of English Identity: The Auchinleck Manuscript* [New York: Routledge, 2005], p. 2; and Suzanne Conklin Akbari, *Idols in the East: European Representations of Islam and the Orient, 1100-1450* [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009], p. 19, n. 45).

difference between east and west in the articulation of gender and ethnicity, negotiating a way for the cross-cultural relationship to take place. While modern sheikh and Middle English romances are in many ways distinct, this thesis argues that a comparative analysis of these separate, yet related, texts can yield insights into western romance's engagement with questions of east and west, difference and desire. The connection between modern and medieval romance is further underscored by the medievalising of certain aspects of the east in modern sheikh romance which draw on contemporary discourses of the modern Middle East as 'medieval', meaning primitive and brutal.

This thesis is interested in how desire between east and west is figured in the context of difference, in how amorous relationships are negotiated and in what these relationships can achieve. How are these relationships presented? What effect do they have? How do these romances deal with the east as other? The thesis considers what representations of the east in some Middle English romances can reveal about our attitudes towards the east in today's popular romance. In this introduction I review current scholarship on modern popular romance and Middle English romance, and their representations of the east. I outline my source material and the methodological approach of the study, as well as setting out the structure of the thesis.

'Dark [...] But Not Too Dark': Representing Ethnicity in the Romance East

There is a long-standing tradition within western literary culture that constructs the relationship between east and west according to a binary framework of difference. Few studies have been more influential in articulating this relationship than Edward Said, whose *Orientalism* (1978), although it has been critiqued⁶, remains a

⁶ For an outline of such critiques see Bill Ashcroft and Pal Ahlwalia, *Edward Said*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 1999), pp. 67-80. For a feminist critique of *Orientalism* see Reina Lewis, *Gendering Orientalism: Race, Femininity and Representation* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 15-22. Medievalists have also questioned Said's omission of the Middle Ages. Akbari points out that Said devotes little time to medieval texts and that he takes 'the late eighteenth century as a very roughly defined starting point [for] Orientalism' (Said, p. 3, cited in Akbari, 'From Due East to True North: Orientalism and Orientation', Cohen, *The Postcolonial Middle Ages*, p. 19).

foundational text.⁷ Said identifies what he terms ‘Orientalism’; the establishment by the European west of a binary differentiation between east and west, Orient and Occident, founded upon a construction of the east as other, and against which European identity was formed. This distinction is not innocuous for Said, who argues: ‘Orientalism was ultimately a political vision of reality whose structure promoted the difference between the familiar (Europe, the West, “us”) and the strange (the Orient, the East, “them”)’.⁸ Said notes that the articulation of difference inherent in Orientalism posited the east as backwards, degenerate and unequal to the superior west: the east is identified primarily by its ‘strangeness, its difference, its exotic sensuousness’.⁹ The east, according to Said, is a fantasy constructed by and for the west.

One of the main ways in which difference is figured between east and west in this fantasy framework is through ethnicity, which Henry Louis Gates posits as ‘the ultimate trope of difference’.¹⁰ However, while popular romance has, for a long time, been set in ‘other’ locations, such as Africa, the Caribbean and the Middle East, its protagonists tend to be drawn from narrow pools of ethnicity, which reduce such difference; the heroine is invariably a white, western woman and the hero, while not always white or western, is usually repetitively drawn from such specific ethnic backgrounds. The absence of non-white heroes and heroines from Mills & Boon romances was noted by Jay Dixon who wrote in 1999 that ‘there seems to be an in-

⁷ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, 1978 (London: Penguin, 2003). Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, Robert Young and Chandra Talpade Mohanty have, among others, taken Said’s ideas as key reference points for their own subsequent work. See Valerie Kennedy, *Edward Said: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), pp. 111-146 and Ashcroft and Ahlwalia, pp. 149-154 for an outline of Said’s influence.

⁸ Said, p. 43.

⁹ Said, pp. 206, 72.

¹⁰ Henry Louis Gates, Jr. ‘Editor’s Introduction: Writing “Race” and the Difference It Makes’, *Critical Inquiry*, 12.1 (1985): 5. The multiple meanings of terms such as ‘race’ and ‘ethnicity’ have been widely acknowledged by scholars (see, for example, Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay, ed., *Questions of Cultural Identity* [London: Sage, 1996]). Robert Bartlett has outlined the slipperiness of the terms, in particular, the separation of ‘race’ from biological meaning, rejecting the distinction of race/ethnicity along the same lines as the sex/gender distinction, and arguing that the terms can be used interchangeably as they mean the same thing, both in the Middle Ages and the twenty-first century (‘Medieval and Modern Concepts of Race and Ethnicity’, *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 31.1 [2001]: 39-42). In this thesis, I use the term ‘ethnicity’ to designate skin colour as well as traits or behaviours aligned with a familial or cultural background, observable in, for example, religious adherence, customs, dress and language. I consider that identifiers of skin colour, or ‘race’, are subsumed within the term ‘ethnicity’, reflecting the ideologies of the romances themselves. This thesis does not, however, consider ‘ethnicity’ to be a monolithic signifier, and examines how multiple signifiers work together and separately to display ethnic identity in these romances.

built resistance to black heroes both at Mills & Boon offices and among their authors'.¹¹ Hsu-Ming Teo writes, in one of the few articles examining cross-cultural relationships, that 'for the last two hundred years, interracial romances have been rare'.¹² In his article examining interracial relationships in US romance, Guy Mark Foster cites Patricia Hill Collins' articulation of the 'same-race, different gender rule': 'largely unspoken rules that establish societal norms for romantic and sexually intimate bonds [...] in keeping with our culture's heterosexist and racially monogamous norms'.¹³ It is precisely the way that these connections between ethnicity and gender, similarity and otherness are articulated in the sheikh romance that this thesis explores.

Where studies have examined representations of ethnic difference, for example Hsu-Ming Teo and Margaret F. Steig's separate studies of English-authored romances set in India written during British colonial rule, or Stephanie Burley's analysis of symbolic blackness and whiteness in 1990s romance novels published in North America, these have not generally been romances with ethnically diverse protagonists.¹⁴ The heroes in the Indian-set romances are English, like the heroines, and Burley examines romances featuring only white characters. In the 1990s, American presses began to publish romance novels with African-American heroines and some research has been carried out on these romances, welcoming and interrogating representations of non-white heroines.¹⁵ However, these African-

¹¹ Jay Dixon, *The Romance Fiction of Mills and Boon 1909-1990s* (London: UCL Press Ltd, 1999), p. 53. See also Juliet Flesch, *From Australia with Love: A History of Modern Australian Popular Romance Novels* (Fremantle: Curtin University Books, 2004), p. 213.

¹² Hsu-Ming Teo, 'The Romance of White Nations: Imperialism, Popular Culture, and National Histories', *After the Imperial Turn: Thinking with and Through the Nation*, ed. Antoinette M. Burton (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), p. 282.

¹³ Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism* (New York: Routledge, 2004), cited in Guy Mark Foster, 'How Dare a Black Woman Make Love to a White Man! Black Women Romance Novelists and the Taboo of Interracial Desire', Goade, p. 117.

¹⁴ Margaret F. Steig, 'Indian Romances: Tracts for the Times', *Journal of Popular Culture*, 18.4 (1985): 2-15; Hsu-Ming Teo, 'Romancing the Raj: Interracial Relations in Anglo-Indian Romance Novels', *History of Intellectual Culture*, 4.1 (2004): 1-18; Stephanie Burley, 'Shadows and Silhouettes: The Racial Politics of Category Romance', *Paradoxa: Studies in World Literary Genres* 5.13-14 (2000): 324-343.

¹⁵ A dedicated African-American romance imprint, 'Arabesque', emerged in 1994, published by Kensington and which was subsumed into Harlequin Mills & Boon's Kimani Press in 2005. Rita B. Dandridge and Gwendolyn Osborne led early scholarship on these romances: see Rita B. Dandridge, *Black Women's Activism: Reading African American Women's Historical Romances* (New York: Peter Lang, 2004); and Gwendolyn E. Osborne, "'Women Who Look Like Me": Cultural Identity and Reader Responses to African American Romance Novels',

American heroines are still western and, along with non-white heroines in general, rarely feature in non-specialised, mainstream romance series. Ethnic difference, then, seems to have been downplayed in certain genres of popular romance.

Early studies of popular romance were preoccupied with heterosexual gender difference and did not examine representations of ethnic difference, apparently reflecting the paucity of romances with ethnically diverse protagonists.¹⁶ This thesis seeks to redress the balance by bringing together work on gender and ethnic difference, speaking to and moving forward from existing romance criticism. Feminist critics were among the first to examine romance novels and their work was shaped by gender politics; studies tended to veer between condemnation of the genre, and interpreting texts as positive in their portrayal of women and relationships.¹⁷ In 1970, Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch* was scathing in its criticism of romance novels, labelling them 'titillating mush'.¹⁸ Greer had difficulty finding anything positive to say about the genre, even though she acknowledged her own romance reading in her 'fantasy-ridden teens'.¹⁹ Yet, as the study of popular romance grew in the 1980s, critics took a more nuanced view. Tania Modleski's *Loving With A Vengeance: Mass-Produced Fantasies for Women* (1982) used psychoanalytic theory to locate a female resistance encoded within romance novels.²⁰ Modleski argued for the sophistication of romance readers using Wolfgang Iser's theory of 'advance retrospection', whereby the female reader, knowledgeable about the romance formula, can reinterpret the apparently misogynist actions of the hero within the wider context of the happy-ever-after.²¹ Janice Radway's *Reading the Romance* (1984) was the first major reader-centred study of romance and remains the most influential of these early studies.²² Although Radway recognised that patriarchy

Race/Gender/Media: Considering Diversity Across Audiences, Content, and Producers, ed. Rebecca Ann Lind (New York: Pearson, 2004), pp. 61-68.

¹⁶ As Teo argues in one of the few studies to focus on representations of race in popular romance, 'almost all [early] work [on romance fiction] has focused on class, gender, and sexuality debates' ('The Romance of White Nations', p. 279).

¹⁷ Tania Modleski, *Old Wives Tales: Feminist Re-Visions of Film and Other Fictions* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1999), pp. 66-67.

¹⁸ Germaine Greer, *The Female Eunuch*, 1970 (London: Flamingo, 1999), p. 212.

¹⁹ Greer, p. 200.

²⁰ Tania Modleski, *Loving With A Vengeance: Mass-Produced Fantasies for Women* (New York: Routledge, 1982).

²¹ Modleski, *Loving With A Vengeance*, pp. 40-41.

²² Janice A. Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984).

codes romance texts and limits women's successes to the domestic, she also argued for a triumph in the hero's submission to the heroine at the end of the novel.²³ Radway thus reinterpreted a previously submissive gesture and found a resistance within it.²⁴ She also identified the potential for pleasure and escapism in reading romance novels, offering women a release from domestic chores.²⁵ Other examinations of romance texts in the 1980s – Kay Mussell's *Fantasy and Reconciliation* (1984), Rosalind Coward's *Female Desire* (1984), and Carol Thurston's *The Romance Revolution* (1987) – also sought to reveal the more positive aspects of romance reading whilst acknowledging its lingering negative aspects, for example male dominance and patriarchal social relations.²⁶

In the 1990s, critics moved to emphasise what they considered to be the positive aspects of romance novels, almost completely discounting arguments for their limitations, a fact lamented by Modleski in her later work.²⁷ This critical shift was prompted by the increasing intervention of romance authors into the critical field, the most prominent example being Jayne Ann Krentz's *Dangerous Men and Adventurous Women*, published in 1992.²⁸ Krentz argued for romance readers' ability to distinguish fiction from fantasy and suggested that romance texts contain coded information that only an experienced and appreciative reader could understand: 'they celebrate female power, intuition, and a female worldview that affirms life and expresses hope for the future'.²⁹ Dixon, a former Harlequin Mills & Boon employee, also defended the publisher's novels against accusations of formulaism and was keen to indicate examples of progressive storylines occurring throughout the decades of

²³ Radway, p. 78.

²⁴ Radway, pp. 78, 81.

²⁵ Radway, pp. 91-92.

²⁶ Kay Mussell, *Fantasy and Reconciliation: Contemporary Formulas of Women's Romance Fiction* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1984); Rosalind Coward, *Female Desire* (London: Paladin, 1984); Carol Thurston, *The Romance Revolution: Erotic Novels for Women and The Quest for a New Sexual Identity* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987).

²⁷ Modleski, *Old Wives*, p. 77.

²⁸ Jayne Ann Krentz, ed. *Dangerous Men and Adventurous Women: Romance Writers on the Appeal of the Romance* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992). A special issue of the journal *Paradoxa* entitled *Where's Love Gone? Transformations in the Romance Genre* 3.1-2 (1997): 1-303 contained several articles which sought, not always convincingly, to view the romance genre entirely positively. See also Kay Mussell and Johanna Tuñón, ed., *North American Romance Writers* (London: Scarecrow Press, 1999).

²⁹ Krentz, pp. 2, 8.

Harlequin Mills & Boon publishing.³⁰ Dixon even suggests that romance novels promote feminist arguments and ideologies.³¹

The shift amongst feminist critics from contemptuous attitudes towards popular romance to Krentz's 'special pleading' has been considered by Eric Selinger. Selinger argues persuasively in favour of a more balanced scholarship which he finds in the twenty-first century, bemoaning the question which he considers has hemmed in romance criticism: 'are these novels good or bad for their readers?'³² Selinger singles out for particular note Pamela Regis' *A Natural History of the Romance Novel* (2003), which he argues is one of the first studies of romance to treat romance novels as individual, 'aesthetic' objects.³³ Selinger also considers Juliet Flesch's *From Australia With Love* (2004) to be 'the most fully developed exploration of romance from a comparative perspective [...] so far' and notes the progressive 'cultural studies' approach of the essays in the collection edited by Sally Goade, *Empowerment versus Oppression: Twenty First Century Views of Popular Romance Novels* (2007).³⁴

A particular omission in popular romance studies, and one which this thesis seeks to address, has been the lack of engagement with its medieval ancestry: Regis' historical study traces the origin of the American romance novel only as far back as 1740. Barbara Fuchs' *Romance* (2004) is the only existing study of contemporary

³⁰ Dixon, pp. 1-2, 8.

³¹ Dixon, pp. 179-195. Several studies have considered the feminist credentials of popular romance, in particular how its plots and characterisation have changed over the years. See, for example, Ann Rosalind Jones, 'Mills & Boon Meets Feminism', *The Progress of Romance: The Politics of Popular Fiction*, ed. Jean Radford (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986), pp. 195-218; Lynn Coddington, 'Wavering Between Worlds: Feminist Influences in the Romance Genre', *Paradoxa: Studies in World Literary Genres* 3.1-2 (1997): 58-77; and Mary Beth Tegan, 'Becoming Both Poet and Poem: Feminists Repossess the Romance', Goade, pp. 231-263.

³² Eric Selinger, 'Rereading the Romance', *Contemporary Literature*, 48.2 (2007): 311, 319.

³³ Selinger, p. 313; Pamela Regis, *A Natural History of the Romance Novel* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003).

³⁴ Sally, Goade ed., *Empowerment Versus Oppression: Twenty First Century Views of Popular Romance Novels* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007); Selinger, p. 318. The development of popular romance studies as a discipline in the twenty-first century has been encouraged by the founding of the International Association for the Study of Popular Romance (IASPR) in 2007, along with an associated journal, the *Journal of Popular Romance Studies* (JPRS) in 2010 and an annual conference organised by the Association. Much recent academic work on popular romance has been internet-based, with scholars contributing to blogs such as *Teach Me Tonight* and *The Popular Romance Project* as well as the development of online resources relating to the study of popular romance, most notably, the *RomanceWiki*.

romance, as far as I am aware, to refer to its medieval ancestry.³⁵ Interestingly it is in studies of sheikh romance that modern romance has begun to be linked with medieval romance; in addition to this thesis, Teo's forthcoming *Desert Passions* traces the development of the sheikh genre from medieval romance.³⁶ The emergence of a medieval focus within studies of the sheikh romance supports this thesis' contention that a comparative analysis of modern sheikh romances and their medieval counterparts can be fruitful.

Where, then, does the sheikh romance fit into this critical discourse? As I have mentioned, the sheikh romance is unique in imagining an erotic relationship occurring between the Middle East and the west at a time when western post-9/11 popular and critical attitudes towards the region are concerned more with conflict than with sex.³⁷ Critical work which has examined sexual relations between east and west has tended to focus on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century colonialism, as the period perceived to first provide opportunities for cross-cultural intimate contact.³⁸ Within scholarship on romance fiction, I have already noted the lack of representations of ethnic otherness in contemporary novels, which has undoubtedly contributed to the lack of studies examining cross-cultural relationships. Aside from Teo's 2003 historical study of whiteness in popular romance and Foster's 2007 study of erotic relationships between African American women and white men in romance novels published in the USA, studies of cross-cultural sexual relationships have tended to focus on the sheikh romance, as the primary genre featuring such relationships.³⁹ The sheikh romance thus presents an ideal opportunity to examine contemporary representations of such cross-cultural erotic relationships.

³⁵ Barbara Fuchs, *Romance* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

³⁶ Teo, *Desert Passions: Orientalism and Romance Novels* (University of Texas Press, forthcoming 2012).

³⁷ See, for example, John L. Esposito and Ibrahim Kalin, ed. *Islamophobia: The Challenge of Pluralism in the 21st Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Anthony Pagden, *Worlds at War: The 2,500-year Struggle Between East and West* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Beverley Milton-Edwards, *Islam and Politics in the Contemporary World* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004).

³⁸ See, for example, Richard Bernstein, *East, the West, and Sex: A History of Erotic Encounters* (New York: Knopf, 2009), whose consideration of 'Arabian' sexual encounters with the west centres on historical accounts, or *Sexual Encounters in the Middle East* by Derek Hopwood (Reading: Ithaca Press, 1999) which focuses only in its conclusion on contemporary sexual relations between east and west.

³⁹ Foster, pp. 103-128; Teo, 'The Romance of White Nations'.

The sheikh romance ‘is one of the most pervasive fabulae in the romance genre’, whose popularity has grown since E. M. Hull’s foundational *The Sheik* (1919), widely seen as the prototype for the modern sheikh romance.⁴⁰ Although it was not the first romance set in the east, Rachel Anderson contends: ‘it was *The Sheik* which firmly established the convention of a desert passion and sparked off a whole train of sandy romances’.⁴¹ The sheikh hero is, according to Flesch, ‘the earliest and most enduring exotic figure of romance’, making him a persistent and unique figure of ethnic otherness in popular romance.⁴² As Jessica Taylor points out, ‘one of the few occasions where the color line is broken in North American category romance is in the sheikh romance’.⁴³ Yet, aside from Anderson’s brief consideration of the genre in 1974, most research on the sheikh romance has focused on *The Sheik* and its influence on the genre, paying attention to its central themes of gender⁴⁴ and ethnicity,⁴⁵ and considering the romance’s imperial context.⁴⁶

It was only in the second half of the 1990s that research on more recently published sheikh romances began to emerge, a reflection, perhaps, of the increasing numbers of sheikh titles published at this time along with intensified political interest in the Middle East. In 1997, Evelyn Bach’s wide-ranging article ‘Sheik Fantasies’ appeared which outlined many of the central components of the sheikh romance, including the western heroine, the sheikh hero, the desert and abduction.⁴⁷ Abduction is such a

⁴⁰ Julia Bettinoti and Mari-Françoise Truel, ‘Lust and Dust: Desert Fabula in Romances and Media’, *Paradoxa: Studies in World Literary Genres* 3.1-2 (1997), p. 184; E. M. Hull, *The Sheik* (London: E. Nash and Grayson, 1919).

⁴¹ Rachel Anderson, *The Purple Heart Throbs: The Sub-Literature of Love* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1974), p. 189.

⁴² Flesch, p. 213.

⁴³ Jessica Taylor, ‘And You Can Be My Sheikh: Gender, Race, and Orientalism in Contemporary Romance Novels’, *Journal of Popular Culture* 40.6 (2007): 1036.

⁴⁴ See Patricia Raub, ‘Issues of Passion and Power in E. M. Hull’s *The Sheik*’, *Women’s Studies* 21 (1992): 119-128; and Ellen Turner, ‘E. M. Hull and the Valentino Cult: Gender Reversal after *The Sheik*’, *Journal of Gender Studies* 20.2 (2011): 171-182.

⁴⁵ See Susan L. Blake, ‘What “Race” is the Sheik?: Rereading a Desert Romance’, *Doubled Plots: Romance and History*, ed. Susan Strehle and Mary Paniccia Carden (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2003), pp. 67-85; and Elizabeth Gargano, ‘“English Sheikhs” and Arab Stereotypes: E. M. Hull, T. E. Lawrence, and the Imperial Masquerade’, *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 48.2 (2006): 171-186.

⁴⁶ See, in particular, Hilary P. Dannenburg, ‘Nadine Gordimer’s *The Pickup* and the Desert Romance Tradition in Post/Colonial Anglophone Fiction’, *Current Writing: Text and Reception in Southern Africa* 20.1 (2008): 69-88; and Hsu-Ming Teo, ‘Historicizing *The Sheik*: Comparisons of the British Novel and the American Film’, *Journal of Popular Romance Studies* 1.1 (2010): n.p.

⁴⁷ Evelyn Bach, ‘Sheik Fantasies: Orientalism and Feminine Desire in the Desert Romance’, *Hecate* 23.1 (1997): pp. 9-40.

prominent trope of the sheikh romance that two articles have focused exclusively on this aspect of the genre: Anne K. Kaler's 'Conventions of Captivity' (1999) and Emily A. Haddad's 'Bound to Love' (2007).⁴⁸ Bach's article was followed by research by Teo (2003; 2007), Flesch (2004), Taylor (2007) and Amira Jarmakani (2010; 2011), whose work forms the critical basis on which this thesis will build.⁴⁹

The sheikh is ethnically other. He 'wears a heavy cloak and white flowing robes' (prominent signifiers of Arab masculinity) and his characterisation is 'irrevocably rooted in the ways of desert tribal identity'.⁵⁰ Taylor notes how 'words and phrases are repeated continually' to construct the sheikh's identity according to established Orientalist signifiers.⁵¹ Religion is rarely mentioned, suggesting that sheikh romance is at odds with contemporary popular rhetoric about the Middle East, which focuses on it as locus of Muslim extremism, an aspect of these texts I consider in Chapter 1. Nonetheless, according to all other markers of ethnicity, the sheikh appears to be constructed with difference in mind. However, when it comes to skin colour, the sheikh's otherness breaks down; he is 'dark, but not black' according to Taylor, suggesting that at least part of his identity is 'hybrid', as Teo argues.⁵² Teo further suggests that such heroes, who 'sometimes [...] counted as white men, while at other times [...] were intolerable hybrids, [...] constituted a category of brown heroes – neither completely white nor black'.⁵³ Flesch writes: "however exotic [the hero] may be and however fractured his English, [he] is never a full-blood Arab".⁵⁴ From some angles, then, the sheikh might appear to be entirely different, yet from others his sameness is foregrounded. This thesis extends this existing work by focusing on the

⁴⁸ Emily A. Haddad, 'Bound to Love: Captivity in Harlequin Sheikh Novels', Goade, pp. 42-64; Anne K. Kaler, 'Conventions of Captivity in Romance Novels', *Romantic Conventions*, ed. Kaler and Rosemary Johnson-Kurek (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1999), pp. 86-99. Amira Jarmakani also briefly discusses abduction in "'The Sheikh Who Loved Me": Romancing the War on Terror', *Signs* 35.4 (2010): 1004-1006.

⁴⁹ Teo, 'The Romance of White Nations'; Hsu-Ming Teo, 'Orientalism and Mass Market Romance Novels in the Twentieth Century', *Edward Said: The Legacy of a Public Intellectual*, ed. Ned Curthoys and Debjani Ganguly (Carlton Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 2007), pp. 241-262; Jarmakani, "'The Sheikh Who Loved Me": 993-1017; Amira Jarmakani, 'Desiring the Big Bad Blade: Racing the Sheikh in Desert Romances', *American Quarterly* 63.4 (2011): pp. 895-928.

⁵⁰ Taylor, p. 1042; Anderson, p. 189; Jarmakani, p. 1010.

⁵¹ Taylor, p. 1043.

⁵² Taylor, p. 1042; Teo, 'Orientalism and Mass Market Romance', p. 250.

⁵³ Teo, 'The Romance of White Nations', p. 288.

⁵⁴ Flesch, p. 215.

ways in which ethnic otherness is refigured in the sheikh romance's articulation of the central erotic relationship.

Although much research has examined the sheikh's hybridity (especially Jarmakani and Teo's work), no study has yet considered how hybridity might affect the ethnic identity of the heroine. The sheikh romance heroine's white, western ethnic identity is rarely discussed, in contrast to the overt articulation of the sheikh's ethnicity.⁵⁵ Indeed, while sheikh romances do trope on the heroine's pale skin, her paleness is almost always seen through the eyes of the sheikh, thereby functioning primarily to highlight the sheikh's ethnic alterity as opposed to highlighting the heroine's own ethnicity. Furthermore, the heroine's ethnicity is seen to be fixed; while the sheikh's ethnic identity can be nuanced and hybrid, those who have examined the relationship between gender and ethnicity in the figure of the romance heroine have tended to accept her ethnicity as an example of unchanging, monolithic whiteness.⁵⁶ This thesis argues that the western heroine's ethnic identity is not always monolithically represented but can, in certain circumstances, appear as shifting and as hybrid as the sheikh's own. I examine in particular the effect of this hybridity on the cross-cultural relationship.

The word hybridity, according to Robert J. C. Young, 'developed from biological and botanical origins'; scarcely used until the nineteenth century, where it referred to a physiological phenomenon, in the twentieth century 'it has been reactivated to mean a cultural one'.⁵⁷ Whilst fundamentally signifying mixing, the concept of hybridity and its relationship to deeply racist discourses has been widely debated in the field of postcolonial studies over the past few decades.⁵⁸ In this thesis, I use the term hybridity to refer to the mixing of ethnic identifiers, such as dress, skin colour, religion, traditional customs and practices, language and ancestry. Drawing on

⁵⁵ Normative whiteness – the idea that white ethnicity is definitional and that non-white ethnicities are other – has been widely theorised. For an outline of the debates see Richard Dyer, *White* (London: Routledge, 1997). Teo has examined the perpetuation of whiteness in twentieth century romance novels including a brief reference to the sheikh genre ('The Romance of White Nations').

⁵⁶ See Taylor; Teo, 'Orientalism and Mass Market Romance'; 'The Romance of White Nations'; and Bach.

⁵⁷ Robert J. C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 6.

⁵⁸ See, in particular: Young; Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 2004); and Anjali Prabhu, *Hybridity: Limits, Transformations, Prospects* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2007).

existing theoretical work, I aim to examine how hybridity functions in the articulation of a sexual relationship between east and west.

For Middle English romance, too, work has been carried out on how the east is represented as ‘different’. Medievalists have noted that medieval literature and culture construct binary distinctions between east and west and that western depictions of the east in the Middle Ages reveal a similar motivation to define the east as other. One significant distinction between medieval and modern romance is that in Middle English romance religion is the primary signifier of difference, whereas in sheikh romance, as I have said, religion is rarely overtly mentioned. The first study devoted to the representation of the east in medieval romance was Dorothee Metlitzki’s *The Matter of Araby in Medieval Romance* (1977). Metlitzki’s work built on a legacy of research examining the differences between east and west to argue that medieval romance was a genre intensely preoccupied with the east.⁵⁹ Metlitzki’s work was followed by an outpouring of studies in the first decade of the twenty-first century, with no fewer than six full-length monographs examining articulations of the east in medieval European romance.⁶⁰ The renewed interest in representations of the east and its inhabitants in medieval romance at a time of heightened modern interest in the eastern Islamic world is not, as several critics make clear, coincidental.⁶¹ Yet, this thesis is the first study to substantially connect Middle English and modern representations of the east.

All recent research agrees that Middle English romance was committed to representing the east and its inhabitants as other. Geraldine Heng argues that

⁵⁹ Dorothee Metlitzki, *The Matter of Araby in Medieval Romance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), p. 240. Siobhain Bly Calkin positions the start of research on difference between east and west with the work of William Wistar Comfort and C. Meredith Jones in the 1940s (*Saracens*, pp. 2-3). This research continued into the 1960s, with Norman Daniel’s *Islam and the West: The Making of an Image* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1960) and R. W. Southern’s *Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962).

⁶⁰ See Carol F. Heffernan, *The Orient in Chaucer and Medieval Romance* (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 2003); Geraldine Heng, *Empire of Magic: Medieval Romance and the Politics of Cultural Fantasy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003); Calkin, *Saracens*; Akbari, *Idols*. For the romance in France see: Lynn Tarte Ramey, *Christian, Saracen and Genre in Medieval French Literature* (London: Routledge, 2001); Sharon Kinoshita, *Medieval Boundaries: Rethinking Difference in Old French Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006). A number of essays in *Pulp Fictions of Medieval England: Essays in Popular Romance*, ed. Nicola McDonald (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004) take as their focus Middle English romances which represent the east or easterners.

⁶¹ Akbari, *Idols*, p. 1; Heng, pp. 13-14; Ramey, pp. 2-3; Calkin, *Saracens*, p. 10.

‘medieval romance [is] a medium that conduces with exceptional facility to the creation of races, and the production of a prioritising discourse of essential differences among peoples, in the Middle Ages’.⁶² This difference, as I have noted, is based on religious alterity: Heng points out that religion was the operative and foregrounded category of difference in the Middle Ages.⁶³ The eastern world of romance and the Saracen function as signifiers for Islam; Suzanne Conklin Akbari refers to an ‘Islamic Orient’ when describing the east of medieval romance, and Metlitzki labels the eastern spaces of *Bevis of Hampton* as ‘Saracen land’, arguing that what she terms ‘the Middle English Saracen romances [...] are primarily concerned with one basic theme: the war of Christianity against Islam’.⁶⁴ Sharon Kinoshita has suggested that instead of talking about medieval *western* views of the east, it would be more appropriate in the Middle Ages to speak of ‘*Christian* views of Islam’, underscoring the centrality of religion for medieval categorisations.⁶⁵

As for those who inhabit the eastern spaces of romance, the figure of the violent, intolerant, idol-worshipping ‘Saracen’ was widespread as a metaphor for alterity. Siobhain Bly Calkin notes the characterisation of Saracens as animalistic and monstrous.⁶⁶ In the context of French romance, Lynn Tarte Ramey suggests that the Saracen ‘is often (though not always) seen as the complete opposite of the Christian, Western, French self: to say “Saracen” is in essence to say “evil”’.⁶⁷ The common medieval attitude towards the difference between east and west can be encapsulated, as many have pointed out, by a famous line from an earlier French text, the *Chanson de Roland*: ‘pagans are wrong and Christians are right’.⁶⁸

Yet, Saracen difference is not always monolithically marked in romance. Just as the sheikh hero is ‘dark [...] but not too dark’, recent research has argued that the Saracen of medieval romance is often similarly hybridised.⁶⁹ Some romances,

⁶² Heng, p. 7.

⁶³ Heng, pp. 228-229.

⁶⁴ Akbari, *Idols*, p. 1; Metlitzki, pp. 132, 160.

⁶⁵ Akbari, *Idols*, p. 11.

⁶⁶ Calkin, *Saracens*, pp. 107-108.

⁶⁷ Ramey, p. 3.

⁶⁸ ‘païen unt tort e chrestiens unt dreit’, *La Chanson de Roland*, line 1015, cited in Metlitzki, p. 160.

⁶⁹ See Calkin, *Saracens*; Akbari, *Idols*. In her analysis of *La Chanson de Roland*, Kinoshita contends that ‘identical to the Franks in language and custom, the pagans arguably differ from the Franks in religion *and nothing more*’ (“Pagans are wrong and Christians are right”: Alterity,

particularly those featuring relationships between Christians and Saracens, nuance the apparent differences between east and west. Calkin points out that romances sometimes challenge the division between Christian and Saracen, hinting at the constructed and contingent nature of difference even as it is invoked.⁷⁰ Akbari refigures binary distinctions between Christian and Saracen, highlighting movement between these signifiers on a continuum with the monolithic, monstrous Saracen body at one end, and the normative, white European body at the other.⁷¹ In fact, this thesis argues that there are multiple indicators of sameness between east and west in many Middle English romances, suggesting that the binary opposition between Saracen and Christian is not always enforced and can be nuanced to certain effect, including the creation of hybrid characters drawn between east and west, Saracen and Christian. Some work on medieval literature has considered questions of hybridity but, with the exception of work on the Middle English romance *The King of Tars*, there has been no substantial examination of hybridity in medieval romance and its potential effect in the blurring of religious difference.⁷² This thesis draws together work on hybridity and medieval representations of Saracens to consider how articulations of religion function both to facilitate and problematise the sexual relationship between Christian and Saracen in Middle English romance.

Gender in Romance

I have been talking, so far, about difference in terms of religion and ethnicity. Yet, one of the biggest markers of difference in popular romance, both modern and medieval, and yet one which is often overlooked, is gender. Of course, gender identity and ethnic or religious identity do not function separately, and this thesis does not seek to conceal their concomitance. However, this thesis argues that gender and ethnic and religious difference are deployed in distinct, albeit related, ways in

Gender, and Nation in the *Chanson de Roland*, *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 31 [2001]: 83).

⁷⁰ Calkin, *Saracens*, p. 109.

⁷¹ Akbari, *Idols*, p. 160. beauvoir

⁷² While neither discuss Saracens, both Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's *Hybridity, Identity and Monstrosity in Medieval Britain: On Difficult Middles* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006) and Sylvia Huot's *Postcolonial Fictions in the Roman de Perceforest: Cultural Identities and Hybridities* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2007) offer productive readings of medieval hybridity. For studies of hybridity in *The King of Tars* see Chapter 3.

romance to expedite the relationship between east and west. This thesis, then, explores how gender functions within the same framework of difference that delineates religious belief and ethnicity.

Gender difference is key to the popular romance. Romantic fiction of the kind published by Harlequin Mills & Boon is shaped by binary gender differentiation where the hero and heroine enact clearly delineated masculine and feminine roles.⁷³ Judith Butler identifies a ‘masculine/feminine binary’ by which male and female gender roles are constructed.⁷⁴ Such binary gender roles are also evident in medieval romance; Susan Crane argues that ‘the conceptual power of difference strongly characterises [medieval] romances’ depiction of gender’.⁷⁵ Gender difference is also mutually reinforcing. Stevi Jackson argues that gender difference is predicated on the opposition of man and woman, male and female, masculine and feminine, positing: ‘there could be no “women” without the opposing category “men”, and vice versa’.⁷⁶ Chrys Ingraham adds that ‘we even construct biological sex – whether one is male or female – in terms of opposites – “the opposite sex” – setting up the sexes to be completely different and as potentially in conflict with each other’.⁷⁷

Crane thus writes that ‘a recurring set of differences between men and women in romance constructs masculine identity by alienating it from the traits assigned to femininity’: ‘womanly timidity, passivity, and pity confirm the masculinity of bravery, initiative, and severity’.⁷⁸ This binary construction is reliant upon a system whereby sex and gender are relational. Gender is tied to sex in popular romance; ‘the presumption of a binary gender system implicitly retains the belief in a mimetic relation of gender to sex whereby gender mirrors sex or is otherwise restricted by it’.⁷⁹ In the sheikh romance, then, to perform gender (i.e. to be feminine or masculine) is inextricably connected with the performance of sex: being biologically

⁷³ Lynne Pearce and Jackie Stacey, ‘The Heart of the Matter: Feminists Revisit Romance’, *Romance Revisited*, ed. Pearce and Stacey (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1995), p. 19.

⁷⁴ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 7.

⁷⁵ Susan Crane, *Gender and Romance in Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 12-13.

⁷⁶ Stevi Jackson, *Heterosexuality in Question* (London: Sage, 1999), p. 126.

⁷⁷ Chrys Ingraham, ‘Introduction: Thinking Straight’, *Thinking Straight: The Power, the Promise, and the Paradox of Heterosexuality* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 2.

⁷⁸ Crane, *Gender and Romance*, p. 19.

⁷⁹ Butler, p. 6.

male or female. The composite of these signifiers indicates a man (a hero) and a woman (a heroine).

It has been widely argued that gender is a social construct, with varying meanings in different historical periods and cultures.⁸⁰ Thus, what it means to be ‘feminine’ in modern sheikh romance is not necessarily the same as in Middle English romance, although I contend that the binary construction of masculinity and femininity does persist. As Simon Gaunt points out, this means that if gender is a construct, masculinity and femininity can be separated from their analogues of sex and can be performed by men or women.⁸¹ According to Butler, ‘when the constructed status of gender is theorized as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that *man* and *masculine* might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and *woman* and *feminine* a male body as easily as a female one’.⁸²

Butler further posits that gender is performative, constructed and understood through repetitive acts of speech and action. Gender identity is thus ‘performatively constituted by the very “expressions” that are said to be its results’.⁸³ She contends that ‘gender is always a doing’; the gendered body is constituted by its actions, rather than any innate, pre-existing identity.⁸⁴ The possibility that gender can be *mis*performed, according to the binary construction of sex and gender in romance which demands that identities of sex and gender map onto one other, is a source of some anxiety in romance. Crane recognises that medieval ‘romance [...] represents gender contrarily as unstable, open to question, and in danger of collapse’.⁸⁵ This thesis examines how medieval and modern romance uphold what they construct as normative, binary gender identity, while revealing how the performance of a non-normative gender identity can temporarily subvert the romance’s binary model of gender difference.

⁸⁰ Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* was instrumental in establishing the social construction of gender (*The Second Sex*, trans. H.M. Parshley (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1972).

⁸¹ Simon Gaunt, *Gender and Genre in Medieval French Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 12, n. 29.

⁸² Butler, p. 6.

⁸³ Butler, p. 33.

⁸⁴ Butler, p. 33.

⁸⁵ Crane, *Gender and Romance*, pp. 12-13.

Binary configurations of gender in romance are rooted in a system of heterosexuality. According to Butler, ‘the institution of a compulsory and naturalized heterosexuality requires and regulates gender as a binary relation in which the masculine term is differentiated from a feminine term, and this differentiation is accomplished through the practices of heterosexual desire’.⁸⁶ That heterosexual desire creates gender difference is clear for Sheila Jeffries, who argues that ‘the opposite of heterosexual desire is homosexual desire: desire based upon sameness instead of difference’.⁸⁷ Heterosexuality is itself founded upon an oppositional relation to homosexuality: as Jeffries outlines, ‘heterosexual desire requires the construction of gender difference’.⁸⁸ The theorising of heterosexuality as ‘a particular form of practice and relationships, of family structure, and identity’ emerged within feminist scholarship in the late 1970s, its development led over the next few decades by the work of Butler, Jackson, Adrienne Rich, and Ingraham.⁸⁹ The 1990s saw a resurgence of feminist debates on heterosexuality central to which was the interrelationship of gender and sexuality. Jackson suggests that ‘heterosexuality is the key site of intersection between gender and sexuality’.⁹⁰

While romance is often seen as a locus for ideas about heterosexuality and gender – many studies have examined gender difference in romance – few have considered the way heterosexuality works to structure this gender difference. Jackson has examined the reproduction of heterosexual gender inequality in popular romance; Lisa Fletcher’s *Historical Romance Fiction* has as its guiding assumption that historical romance novels represent and use speech acts to ‘produce and reproduce hegemonic ideas about romance, history and heterosexuality’; and Louise Sylvester analyses medieval romance in *Medieval Romance and the Construction of Heterosexuality*, tracing the cultural ideals of heterosexual masculinity and femininity back to the

⁸⁶ Butler, p. 30.

⁸⁷ Sheila Jeffries, ‘Heterosexuality and the Desire for Gender’, Richardson, p. 77.

⁸⁸ Jeffries, p. 77.

⁸⁹ Diane Richardson, ‘Introduction: Heterosexuality and Social Theory’, Richardson, p. 2.

⁹⁰ Jackson, ‘Sexuality, Heterosexuality, and Gender Hierarchy: Getting Our Priorities Straight’, *Thinking Straight: The Power, the Promise, and the Paradox of Heterosexuality*, ed. Chrys Ingraham (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 15, p. 17. For a summary of debates on heterosexuality see pp. 19-22.

medieval period, arguing that medieval romance is the root of modern romance constructions of gender.⁹¹

Popular romance figures heterosexuality as the norm. Jackson points out that ‘it is heterosexual love which dominates cultural representations of romance’.⁹² In her influential 1980 article ‘Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence’, Rich critiques the presumption of heterosexuality as ‘a “sexual preference” for “most women”, either implicitly or explicitly’, pointing out how enforcing heterosexuality on women sustains male power over women.⁹³ Rich positions the ‘ideology of heterosexual romance’ as a tool of compulsory heterosexuality, underscoring the role romance novels can be perceived to play within the enforcement of heteronormativity: what Ingraham describes as ‘the view that institutionalized heterosexuality constitutes the standard for legitimate and prescriptive sociosexual arrangements’.⁹⁴ Heterosexuality is so socially and culturally normative that it is undetectable; Ingraham coined the term ‘heterosexual imaginary’, to describe ‘that way of thinking which conceals the operation of heterosexuality in constructing gender and closes off any critical analysis of heterosexuality as an organizing institution. The effect of this depiction of reality is that heterosexuality circulates as taken for granted, naturally occurring, and unquestioned’.⁹⁵

Popular romance of the kind published by Harlequin Mills & Boon is heteronormative to the extent that it rarely mentions non-heterosexual sexuality. As I argue in Chapter 2, even when romances do allude to homosexuality, this functions to endorse and uphold heterosexuality as natural and inevitable. Nickiane Moody observes that ‘traditionally, Mills and Boon romance has focused on the heterosexual couple to the exclusion of other roles and relationships experienced by women’.⁹⁶

⁹¹ Stevi Jackson, ‘Women and Heterosexual Love: Complicity, Resistance and Change’, *Romance Revisited*, ed. Lynne Pearce and Jackie Stacey (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1995), pp. 49-62; Lisa Fletcher, *Historical Romance Fiction: Heterosexuality and Performativity* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), p. 1; Louise Sylvester, *Medieval Romance and the Construction of Heterosexuality* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

⁹² Stevi Jackson, ‘Women and Heterosexual Love’, p. 49.

⁹³ Adrienne Rich, ‘Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence’, *Signs* 5.4 (1980): 633.

⁹⁴ Rich, p. 645; Chrys Ingraham, ‘The Heterosexual Imaginary: Feminist Sociology and Theories of Gender’, in *Queer Theory / Sociology*, ed. Steven Seidman (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), p. 169.

⁹⁵ Ingraham, ‘The Heterosexual Imaginary’, p. 168.

⁹⁶ Nickiane Moody, ‘Mills and Boon Temptation: Sex and the Single Couple in the 1990s’, *Fatal Attractions: Re-Scripting Romance in Contemporary Literature and Film*, ed. Lynne Pearce and Gina Wisker (London: Pluto Press, 1998), p. 142.

The privileging of the heterosexual relationship limits the gender roles of the romance to those which function within the matrix of heterosexual desire: for the heroine, the roles of bride or mistress, for the hero, those of lover or master. Because they do not disrupt the structures of heterosexuality, popular romance novels cannot break down the oppositional gender roles constructed by heterosexual desire. Similarly, while Butler points to the fluidity which allows gender to be split from its constituent biological part (i.e. men can perform femininity and women masculinity) and which can, according to Joanne Charbonneau and Désirée Cromwell, challenge binary gender identification in romance, the normative heterosexual structure and associated gender roles of wife and husband are ultimately upheld.⁹⁷

Romance novels, therefore, to use Ingraham's terminology, are 'thinking straight': 'thinking in terms of opposites and polarities when none exist and naturalizing social practices and beliefs rather than seeing them as social, political, and economic creations'.⁹⁸ Romances reflect the naturalisation of heterosexuality identified by Rich and Ingraham and reinforce the binary construction of gender bound up with heterosexuality. Thus, as this thesis articulates, while some medieval and modern romances indicate moments of gender destabilisation, where identification becomes slippery and anxious, they ultimately close down this slipperiness, reinforcing the heterosexual gender difference which structures the romance genre.

But, as Jackson points out, heterosexuality is about more than sexuality; 'as an institution, heterosexuality includes nonsexual elements implicated in ordering wider gender relations and ordered by them. [...] It entails who washes the sheets as well as what goes on between them'.⁹⁹ While heterosexual desire in romance forces women and men into the roles of mistress or master, it also draws them into the roles of wife and husband, mother and father: positions based on heterosexual desire but whose function carries meaning beyond sexuality. The gender value system constructed in relation to heterosexuality is hierarchised: some roles are more valuable than others and these are usually masculine roles. Butler thus connects compulsory

⁹⁷ Joanne Charbonneau and Désirée Cromwell, 'Gender and Identity in the Popular Romance', *A Companion to Medieval Popular Romance*, ed. Raluca L. Radulescu and Cory James Rushton (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 2009), pp. 96-110.

⁹⁸ Ingraham, 'Introduction: Thinking Straight', p. 2.

⁹⁹ Jackson, 'Sexuality, Heterosexuality, and Gender Hierarchy', p. 18.

heterosexuality with ‘masculinist domination’.¹⁰⁰ This thesis examines how romance representations of gender are implicated within a wider system of dominance and submission.

Gender difference in romance encourages the emergence of hegemonic masculinity, constructed in response to emphasised femininity, where the alpha male is dominant.¹⁰¹ This thesis argues that patterns of gendered dominance related to exaggerated performances of gender identity are central to the articulation of gender difference in sheikh romance. Jeffries suggests that heterosexual desire is ‘the sexuality of male supremacy’, predicated on a gendered system of power, redefining heterosexual desire as ‘a desire that is organised around eroticised dominance and submission. It emerges from the political system of heterosexuality as the eroticised subordination of women and is seen as natural, as what sex is’.¹⁰² Teresa Ebert argues that romance narratives ‘are crucial sites for the operation of patriarchal ideology’; ‘the hero, as representative of the phallus and patriarchal power, instigates and controls the heroine’s desire, forcing her to recognise and take her place in opposition to his subjectivity – in the place of not-male of the female other’.¹⁰³ In a hegemonic gender structure in which ‘the hero is the unquestioned beneficiary and arbiter of patriarchy [...] the fundamental gender discrepancies in wealth and power necessary to patriarchy are always maintained’.¹⁰⁴ In other words, because the romance heroine’s gender role is defined, according to heterosexual desire, as feminine in opposition to the dominant masculinity of the hero, she will always be subservient within a patriarchal structure which privileges masculine behaviour. Some research on gender in romance has suggested that the declaration of love might prompt a shift in power, giving the heretofore submissive heroine power over the

¹⁰⁰ Butler, p. 141.

¹⁰¹ Connell posits that ‘hegemonic masculinity is constructed in relation to women and to subordinated masculinities’ (R. W. Connell, *Gender and Power: The Society, the Person and Sexual Politics* [Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987], p. 186). Connell points to ‘some kind of fit’ (p. 185) between ‘emphasised femininity’, which is organised to accommodate the interests and desires of men (p. 183) and hegemonic masculinity.

¹⁰² Jeffries, p. 76.

¹⁰³ Teresa L. Ebert, ‘The Romance of Patriarchy: Ideology, Subjectivity, and Postmodern Feminist Cultural Theory’, *Cultural Critique* 10 (1988): 21, 40.

¹⁰⁴ Ebert, p. 43.

hero. However, as Jackson points out, any shift is temporary, for ‘the structural bases of power and inequality in heterosexual relationships remain untouched’.¹⁰⁵

While I have been discussing heterosexuality and heteronormativity in romance more generally, I am aware that such terminology was not current in the Middle Ages. While sexuality did shape medieval people’s lives, this was more about whether they were chaste or sexually active: sexuality was about sex *acts* more than sexual *identity*.¹⁰⁶ Recent work by Karma Lochrie and James A. Schultz has contested the existence of heterosexuality ‘as a norm [...] before the twentieth century’ making it, according to Lochrie, ‘reckless, to say the least, for medievalists to continue to use the crude, ham-fisted concept of heteronormativity to describe medieval sexualities and desires’.¹⁰⁷ Nonetheless, it is possible to see how medieval romance privileges a relationship between a man and a woman whose desire for each other is represented as both natural and inevitable.¹⁰⁸ As Tison Pugh, Michael Calabrese and Marcia Smith Marzec point out, while it is true that heteronormativity did not exist in the Middle Ages in the same way that we understand it in the modern period, codes of normativity in relation to sex did exist.¹⁰⁹

Medieval romance constructs oppositional gender roles for its protagonists which function within a recognisable framework of heterosexual gender difference. Sylvester argues that medieval romances ‘are the mainspring for Western ideas about masculinity and femininity’ delineating ‘how gendered roles should be enacted within heterosexual courtship’.¹¹⁰ Sylvester maintains ‘that what romances offer are

¹⁰⁵ Jackson, ‘Women and Heterosexual Love’, p. 54.

¹⁰⁶ Ruth Mazo Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe: Doing Unto Others* (New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 9.

¹⁰⁷ Karma Lochrie, *Heterosyncrasies: Female Sexuality When Normal Wasn't* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 2005), pp. xiii, xvii; James A. Schultz, ‘Bodies That Don’t Matter: Heterosexuality Before Heterosexuality in Gottfried’s *Tristan*’, *Constructing Medieval Sexuality*, ed. Karma Lochrie, Peggy McCracken and Schultz (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), pp. 91-110; see also James A. Schultz, *Courtly Love, The Love of Courtliness, and the History of Sexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

¹⁰⁸ Sylvia Huot has made this argument for medieval French romance, positing: ‘these [...] texts [...] celebrate the joys of heterosexual love’ meaning that ‘heterosexual desire [...] must be embraced, while homosexual desire [...] must be suppressed’ (Sylvia Huot, *Madness in Medieval French Literature: Identities Found and Lost* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003], p. 135).

¹⁰⁹ Tison Pugh, Michael Calabrese and Marcia Smith Marzec, ‘Introduction: The Myths of Masculinity in Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde*’, *Men and Masculinities in Chaucer’s ‘Troilus and Criseyde’*, ed. Pugh and Smith Marzec (Woodbridge: D.S. Brewer, 2008), p. 5.

¹¹⁰ Sylvester, p. 2.

scripts for heterosexuality that come to form the culturally dominant view'.¹¹¹ While it is important to be careful with terminology, it seems that in medieval romance, while heterosexuality might not have been an organising principle for gender in the same way that it is considered to be for modern sexuality, the medieval gender roles of masculine and feminine were still defined by a social structure in which they were considered oppositional and wielded different levels of power: a structure that resembles the modern institution of heterosexuality.

Thus, gender, in both Middle English and modern popular sheikh romance, functions according to a heterosexual model of difference, emphasising differentiated gender behaviour and upholding a hegemonic system of gender dominance and submission. This is in contrast to ethnic and religious difference, which is able to exist on a continuum, blurring distinctions between east and west. The need for a gendered approach to difference has also been recognised by medievalists¹¹²: very little work has been conducted examining the intersections of religious and gender difference, although existing work has often focused on romance, suggesting that these are texts in which the interplay between religion and gender are foregrounded.¹¹³ I draw together these aspects of gender, ethnicity and religion to consider how such interlinked signifiers work within the same framework to facilitate the erotic relationship between east and west.

This thesis examines in particular how shifting signifiers of gender, ethnicity and religion function together in the motif of abduction, examining how their interaction affects issues of dominance and submission. Abduction is a familiar trope in both Middle English and sheikh romance, yet remains largely unstudied in its medieval context. While abduction, in both medieval and modern romance, is a motif defined by its lack of agency, an examination of the way ethnicity and gender work to simultaneously empower and disempower the romance heroine reveals the ways in which this lack of agency can be nuanced. As Bach indicates, the western heroine

¹¹¹ Sylvester, p. 18.

¹¹² In his follow-up essay to a special issue on race and ethnicity in the Middle Ages, William Chester Jordan calls for more work on 'the relationship between misogyny and ethnic hatreds' ('Why "Race"?', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 31.1 [2001]: 171).

¹¹³ In addition to the studies of east and west in romance earlier identified, see Kathleen Davis, 'Time Behind the Veil: The Media, the Middle Ages, and Orientalism Now', Cohen, *The Postcolonial Middle Ages*, pp. 105-122 and Jacqueline De Weever, *Sheba's Daughters: Whitening and Demonising the Saracen Woman in Medieval French Epic* (New York: Garland, 1998).

‘inasmuch as she enters the narrative with the cultural imperialism of the West at her back [...] occupies a dominant position as a desiring subject partaking in the western discourse of Orientalism’.¹¹⁴ However, when we consider the gender dynamics of the romance, as a woman, the heroine is subject to the dominance of the eastern male. Reina Lewis’ work on female Orientalism sought to uncover women’s participation in imperialism, arguing that while women could access a superior European position in relation to the Orient, because of their gender, this was not the same position as that of the dominant male.¹¹⁵ This thesis seeks to consider more fully how shifting identifiers of gender and ethnic or religious identity can mediate the positionality of freedom or captivity for both the heroine and other women in the romance.

Defining the Romance East

Thus far, I have been using the terms east and west to refer to the oppositional spaces of medieval and modern romance. These terms are, of course, not self-evident and signify very different things in the context of the Middle Ages and the twenty-first century. As Akbari puts it, ‘the medieval notion of the “East” or the “Orient” is very different from modern conceptions’.¹¹⁶ Shifts over the past several hundred years have significantly altered the political and cultural map of the world, making it difficult to find common terms by which to refer to the medieval and modern east: Kinoshita points out that in the early Middle Ages, ‘the national borders we today take for granted were far from inevitable’.¹¹⁷ Furthermore, as I have already outlined, the primary indicator of difference between east and west in the Middle Ages was religion, marked by the perceived binary between Christianity and Islam. While parts of the medieval east were Muslim, there were equally areas of the east, in particular, the Byzantine Empire, which were considered to be Christian, albeit an orthodox Christianity that did not recognise the authority of Rome.¹¹⁸ At the same time, Islam made its way far into what we would now call the west including, most obviously,

¹¹⁴ Bach, p. 12.

¹¹⁵ Lewis, *Gendering Orientalism*.

¹¹⁶ Akbari, *Idols*, p. 3.

¹¹⁷ Kinoshita, p. 3.

¹¹⁸ Rebecca Wilcox has demonstrated how the Middle English romance *Guy of Warwick* represents two ‘east’, one Christian and the other Saracen (‘Romancing the East: Greeks and Saracens in *Guy of Warwick*’, McDonald, pp. 217-240). For more on the theology of Byzantium see Liz James ed., *A Companion to Byzantium* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2010), pp. 151-223.

Spain.¹¹⁹ The medieval binaries of Christian and Muslim, east and west do not, then, map directly onto each other, but engage in a slippage. However, even if representations of east and west are not the same in medieval and modern romance, they are, arguably, prompted by similar motivations to continually demarcate the boundaries of difference, whether that be in terms of geographic, ethnic, or religious difference.

The concomitance of geographic and religious alterity is thus more complex in Middle English romance and resists modern distinctions of a monolithic east and west. It also problematises the easy modern distinction between east and west which is similarly dissociated from geography. The modern west, for example, is ‘a fairly recent mythical construction’ designating a rough consensus of social, political and moral values which are not rooted in geography.¹²⁰ It has been argued that “‘the West’” as mythical construct achieves powerful effects as it gathers varying and contradictory properties around itself”, most obviously the association of modernisation with westernisation.¹²¹ Thus, romance heroines who hail from such geographically distinct locations as North America, Europe and Australia can be homogeneously characterised as western, meaning progressive, modern and ideologically opposed to what is *not* western: the east.¹²² Yet, in the Middle Ages, there was little if any concept of the ‘westerner’ in the same way that the term is used today. In the Middle Ages, instead of a western identity we might, following Kinoshita, more productively speak of a Christian identity, albeit one fractured between Latin and Byzantine Christianity. While the construction of the west in popular romance is a fascinating topic, it is not one with which this thesis substantially engages. The romances I examine do not generally focus on the west, which remains largely assumed and invisible. This is in sharp contrast to their

¹¹⁹ From the eighth through to the end of the fifteenth century, parts of Spain (sometimes quite large parts) were under Islamic jurisdiction (Richard Fletcher, ‘The Early Middle Ages, 700-1250’, *Spain: A History*, ed. Raymond Carr [Oxford: Oxford University Press], p. 63).

¹²⁰ Naoki Sakai and Meaghan Morris, ‘The West’, *New Keywords: A Revised Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, ed. Tony Bennett, Lawrence Grossberg, Meaghan Morris (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), p. 372). The authors note ‘the globalising phrase “the West” came into general use only over the past two centuries as the capital originating in Western Europe came to be seen as omnipresent in colonial domination world-wide’, although they acknowledge that ‘the term is notoriously slippery, and the unity that it affirms has increasingly been challenged in recent decades’ (pp. 372, 373).

¹²¹ Sakai and Morris, p. 374.

¹²² Sakai and Morris posit that ‘the definition of “the West” is dependent upon how “the Rest” is determined’ (p. 373).

overdetermined construction of the east. I thus follow the romances themselves in centring my analysis on representations of the east.

What I examine in this thesis is the construction of a fictional *romance* east. While, as I argue in Chapter 1, some aspects of the romance's eastern world are related to contemporary events, the eastern world of romance does not carry a meaning which is directly comparable to the geography, religion or politics of the real east. In modern romance in particular, the east is vague, homogeneous and, this thesis will reveal, extensively fictionalised. In fact, the Orientalised east 'has always been a symbiotic amalgam of fantasy and observation'.¹²³ Said argues that the Orient is made into 'a general object', created by imagination and symbolism.¹²⁴ As Mary B. Campbell points out, "The East" is a concept separable from any purely geographic area. It is essentially "Elsewhere".¹²⁵ Said's Orient is also geographically vague, extending from 'China to the Mediterranean', suggesting that for Said, the Orient is more an idea, a concept, than anything tangibly related to reality.¹²⁶

In medieval studies, R. W. Southern points to the tenacity of representations of Saracens from the twelfth century onwards, indicating that productions of this time 'belong less to the history of western thought about Islam than to the history of the Western imagination'.¹²⁷ Calkin, indebted to Southern, similarly argues that 'representations of the east produced in the west for western consumption [...] enshrine western ideas of easternness rather than any empirical reality of the east'.¹²⁸ Imagining the east as fantasy allows those who live there to become similarly fantastic; as Jeffrey Jerome Cohen posits, 'there were no real Saracens in the Middle Ages'.¹²⁹ In order to represent the varying signifiers of difference in medieval and modern romance, and to maintain a separation between the actual east and the fantasy geography of these romances, I refer in this thesis to the created eastern world of medieval and modern romance as the 'romance east', which I conceptualise as a space related to but not necessarily mappable onto reality.

¹²³ Bach, p. 14.

¹²⁴ Said, pp. 102, 100-101.

¹²⁵ Mary B. Campbell, *The Witness and the Other World: Exotic European Travel Writing, 400-1600* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), p. 48.

¹²⁶ Said, p. 42.

¹²⁷ Southern, pp. 28-29.

¹²⁸ Calkin, *Saracens*, p. 1.

¹²⁹ Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, 'On Saracen Enjoyment: Some Fantasies of Race in Late Medieval France and England', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 31.1 (2001): 121.

Comparative Research Methods

This thesis is the first full-length study to bring together medieval romance and modern popular romance. Comparatively analysing texts from two distinct historical periods is not without its challenges. On the surface, such a meeting of texts seems paradoxical; aside from the common generic term ‘romance’, medieval and modern romances diverge in content and readership, as well as social, cultural and political context. Yet, links can be drawn between the genres and I contend that the parallel examination of medieval and modern texts can be revealing.¹³⁰ In short, by comparing these two distinct genres, I hope to be able to shed critical light on them both.

All existing studies of texts from the contemporary era and the Middle Ages have been conducted in the field of medieval studies. This is undoubtedly due to the specific linguistic skills required for analysis of texts produced in the Middle Ages: an issue this thesis addresses by translating citations from medieval texts into modern English. This research was prompted by the emergence of a more theorised medievalism in the late 1990s, led by the work of Kathleen Biddick and Carolyn Dinshaw, although this comparative research is distinct from medievalism, as I will show.¹³¹ Such studies brought together medieval and modern texts in the context of queer theory, for example: Allen Frantzen’s *Before the Closet: Same-Sex Love from Beowulf to Angels in America* (1998), which considered same-sex acts in the early Middle Ages alongside *Angels in America*, a 2003 TV mini-series, based on the 1993 play of the same name, about the AIDS crisis in the mid-1980s; and Dinshaw’s *Getting Medieval* (1999), which collided research on sexuality in the late Middle Ages with an analysis of Quentin Tarantino’s *Pulp Fiction*.¹³² Yet, of these two studies Dinshaw’s is the only one to bring into contact cultural texts from the Middle Ages and modernity in her analysis of Tarantino’s *Pulp Fiction*, and then this forms

¹³⁰ Eileen A. Joy and Myra J. Seaman, editors of the foremost collection of studies comparatively analysing medieval and modern cultural texts, argue that such comparative research can indicate both historical particularities and persistent ‘mentalities and social conditions’ (‘Through a Glass, Darkly: Medieval Cultural Studies at the End of History’, *Cultural Studies of the Modern Middle Ages*, ed. Joy et. al, [Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007], pp. 6-7).

¹³¹ See Kathleen Biddick, *The Shock of Medievalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998); Carolyn Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999).

¹³² Allen Frantzen, *Before the Closet: Same-Sex Love from Beowulf to Angels in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval*.

only the coda to a work that otherwise focuses on medieval literature.¹³³ In the field of romance scholarship, only two studies have compared medieval texts with modern romance, or medieval romance with modern texts: Rosalynn Voaden compares modern romance fiction with medieval women's visionary writings in 'The Language of Love'; and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne examines virginity in medieval and modern texts, including romance, in 'Virginity Always Comes Twice'.¹³⁴

The only extended comparative study of medieval and modern literature is Eileen Joy et. al.'s *Cultural Studies of the Modern Middle Ages* (2007) which considers 'connections between medieval texts and contemporary reality TV programs' and addresses 'contemporary political crises from the perspective of medieval history, or literature, or both'.¹³⁵ The editors of this collection state: '[we] are [...] interested in rethinking, from the long perspective of a postmodern medieval studies, the radically different and preposterous present'.¹³⁶ This, then, is a study deeply rooted, as the editors indicate, in the concerns of the present as expressed through film, television, and politics. Following this example, while I draw new conclusions about medieval texts, the main argument of this thesis considers what, if anything, medieval romance can tell us about the cultural, social and political contexts of today's romances.

The field of postcolonial medieval studies, that emerged in the first decade of the twenty-first century, is an area which has also engaged in comparative analysis between medieval and modern texts. Several contributors to Cohen's *The Postcolonial Middle Ages* (2000) comparatively examine medieval and modern texts, including Kathleen Biddick's examination of Dante's *Vita Nuova* (1292-1294) alongside contemporary Turkish author Orhan Pamuk's *The New Life* (1997), 'a meditation', according to Biddick, on Dante's work.¹³⁷ The authors of essays in a subsequent collection, *Postcolonial Moves: Medieval Through Modern* (2003)

¹³³ *Pulp Fiction*, dir. Quentin Tarantino, Miramax (1994).

¹³⁴ Rosalynn Voaden, 'The Language of Love: Medieval Erotic Vision and Modern Romance Fiction', *Romance Revisited*, ed. Lynne Pearce and Jackie Stacey (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1995), pp. 78-88; Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, 'Virginity Always Comes Twice: Virginity and Profession, Virginity and Romance', *Maistresse of my Wit: Medieval Women, Modern Scholars*, ed. Louise D'Arcens and Juanita Feros Ruys (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004), pp.335-369. See also Wogan-Browne, *Saints' Lives and Women's Literary Culture c.1150-1300* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

¹³⁵ Joy and Seaman, pp. 12, 14.

¹³⁶ Joy and Seaman, p. 7.

¹³⁷ Kathleen Biddick, 'Coming Out of Exile: Dante on the Orient Express', Cohen, *The Postcolonial Middle Ages*, p. 41.

similarly compare medieval and modern sources, for example, Patricia Clare Ingham analyses Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* alongside Chaucer's *The Man of Law's Tale*.¹³⁸

These studies have also noted the relationship between the postcolonial and temporality.¹³⁹ In his introduction to *The Postcolonial Middle Ages*, Cohen centres his approach on questions of temporality and periodisation, arguing for a 'temporal interlacement' between medieval and modern.¹⁴⁰ Ingham and Michelle R. Warren propose a similar approach, arguing for 'a reconceptualisation of colonial temporality such that postcolonial studies can enter into new kinds of historical dialogue', specifically, a dialogue with the medieval.¹⁴¹ Ananya Jahanara Kabir and Deanne Williams also seek to twin the intellectual imperatives of postcolonial studies and medieval studies, arguing 'as postcolonial scholars have sought to dismantle the notions of modernity upon which colonialism was predicated, medievalists have, in turn, challenged the binaries of medieval and modern (or early modern) that bracket off the Middle Ages, and keep it as exotic and foreign [...] as any Orientalist fantasy'.¹⁴² It is clear, then, that "'time" has in fact been one of the most frequent paradigms for extending postcolonial studies beyond its initial domains', breaking down barriers between times in order to bring temporally disparate texts into contact.¹⁴³

A postcolonial approach, which antagonises temporality and periodisation, is thus a rich arena in which to consider questions of contemporary research across time periods as well as those of ethnic or religious difference. I do not, therefore, consider it to be coincidental that many comparative studies in recent years have engaged with

¹³⁸ Patricia Clare Ingham, 'Contrapuntal Histories', *Postcolonial Moves: Medieval Through Modern*, pp. 47-70.

¹³⁹ For a critical summary of these studies see Bruce W. Holsinger 'Medieval Studies, Postcolonial Studies, and the Genealogies of Critique', *Speculum* 77 (2002): 1195-227.

¹⁴⁰ Cohen, 'Introduction: Midcolonial', Cohen, *The Postcolonial Middle Ages*, p. 5. For a discussion of periodisation and medieval studies, see Kathleen Davis, *Periodization and Sovereignty: How Ideas of Feudalism and Secularisation Govern the Politics of Time* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008).

¹⁴¹ Patricia Clare Ingham and Michelle R. Warren, 'Introduction: Postcolonial Modernity and the Rest of History', *Postcolonial Moves: Medieval through Modern*, ed. Ingham and Warren (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 1.

¹⁴² Ananya Jahanara Kabir and Deane Williams, 'Introduction: A Return to Wonder', *Postcolonial Approaches to the European Middle Ages: Translating Cultures*, ed. Kabir and Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 1-2.

¹⁴³ Ingham and Warren, p. 11.

postcolonial theory, or have referred to the renewed neo-medieval Orientalist rhetoric of the twenty-first century west. These are crucial points of connection between the east and west, the twenty-first century and the Middle Ages: moments which engage productively with those questions of time raised by comparative research. This thesis draws together strands from medieval and modern cultural studies, postcolonial studies and medievalism studies to contribute to research in this area.

Medievalism, the evocation of the medieval in modern culture, has often been used as a way into comparative, cross-period research. For example, Dinshaw uses the phrase ‘getting medieval’ from the film *Pulp Fiction* for the title of her study, and Myra J. Seaman and John Green examine modern representations of King Arthur in *Cultural Studies of the Modern Middle Ages*.¹⁴⁴ While comparative research is distinct from medievalism, there is, clearly, a provocative relationship between them and one which this thesis considers. Where my research differs from some previous studies is that it focuses not on modern texts which are self-consciously medievalising, such as Seaman and Green’s Arthurian medievalism, but examines texts within which a more insidious medieval is concealed.

Consequently, a unique focus of this thesis is on the use of the medieval in modern sheikh romance: an almost entirely unexplored aspect of these novels.¹⁴⁵ As I have mentioned, sheikh romance often constructs its east as ‘medieval’, meaning backwards, or barbaric. The labelling of old-fashioned and repressive values as medieval is not new, as Fred Robinson indicated in 1984.¹⁴⁶ However, the association of the medieval with the east has received renewed vigour in the past decade, notably in western political rhetoric. This is a discourse which has been considered by some medievalists, notably Kathleen Davis and Bruce Holsinger.¹⁴⁷ This study is the first to consider how sheikh romances engage with this discourse of

¹⁴⁴ Myra J. Seaman and John Green, ‘Sacrificing Fiction and the Quest for the Real King Arthur’, *Cultural Studies of the Modern Middle Ages*, ed. Eileen A. Joy, et al. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 135-154. See also John Ganim, *Medievalism and Orientalism: Three Essays on Literature, Architecture and Cultural Identity* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

¹⁴⁵ Bach observed that the heroine often derides the hero’s culture as ‘backward and medieval’ (p. 11) and is quoted by Taylor (p. 1033). However, neither Bach nor Taylor extend their discussion.

¹⁴⁶ See Fred C. Robinson, ‘Medieval, the Middle Ages’, *Speculum* 59.4 (1984): 745-756.

¹⁴⁷ Davis, ‘Time Behind the Veil’. For an excellent outline of the use of the term medieval in US politics following 9/11 see Bruce W. Holsinger, *Neomedievalism, Neoconservatism, and the War on Terror* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2007).

the east as medieval, drawing on existing work to consider its function and meaning in terms of the relationship between east and west. Furthermore, the comparative approach of the thesis allows for a fruitful consideration of the motivations for constructing the contemporary east as past.

Saracens and Sheikhs: Selecting Sources

Both Middle English and modern romance are popular genres. In late medieval England, romance was the ‘most popular secular genre’, with ‘more than one hundred romances [...] extant’: romances survive in almost every European language.¹⁴⁸ These romances were written in the vernacular, making possible ‘a much wider dissemination for the stories’.¹⁴⁹ The majority were composed in verse, and were characterised by stock characters, motifs, and storylines, including reference to Saracens and to the east which occur with surprising regularity.¹⁵⁰ Using J. Burke Severs’ *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English 1050-1500*, I identified 42 Middle English verse romances that referred to Saracens or the east, albeit in widely varying ways.¹⁵¹ So as well as being the most popular secular genre in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century England, Middle English verse romance also frequently refers to Saracens and to relationships between Christians and Saracens.

¹⁴⁸ See Roberta L. Krueger, Introduction, *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance*, ed. Krueger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 1; Nicola McDonald, ‘A Polemical Introduction’, *Pulp Fictions of Medieval England: Essays in Popular Romance* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), p. 1. Hudson estimates that ‘around 120 Middle English romances have come down to us’ (Harriet E. Hudson, ‘Toward A Theory of Popular Literature: The Case of the Middle English Romances’, *Journal of Popular Culture* 23.3 [1989]: 35).

¹⁴⁹ Helen Cooper, *The English Romance in Time: Transforming Motifs from Geoffrey of Monmouth to the Death of Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 12.

¹⁵⁰ Cooper notes that ‘verse remained the medium for romance in England until [...] the mid-fifteenth century, and the equation of the genre with verse was decisively broken only [...] at the end of the 1460s’ (p. 33). For more on the genre of medieval romance see Ad Putter and Jane Gilbert ed., *The Spirit of Medieval English Popular Romance* (Harlow: Longman, 2000).

¹⁵¹ J. Burke Severs, ed., *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English 1050-1500*, vol. 1 (New Haven, CN: Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1967). See Appendix 2 for a full list. Other useful sources for locating Middle English romances are: Gisela Guddat-Figge, *A Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Middle English Romances* (Munich: Fink, 1976) and Gerald Bordman, *Motif-Index of the English Metrical Romances* (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedekatemia, 1963). The *Database of Middle English Romance* produced in 2012 by the University of York is a further useful source for locating information about Middle English romances (<http://middleenglishromance.org.uk>).

Erotic encounters between Christians and Saracens are present in fourteen Middle English verse romances, although the relationship forms a significant part of the plot in only four of these: *Bevis of Hampton*, *Floris and Blancheflur*, *Octavian* and *The King of Tars*.¹⁵² Within scholarly work on representations of the east in Middle English romance, there has been a particular focus on *Bevis of Hampton*, *The King of Tars* and *Floris and Blancheflur*. These three romances feature prominently in my own research, and I draw on this previous work to make a connection between these romances and the fourth romance I have identified, *Octavian*, which has not, so far, been widely considered in the context of scholarly work on the east.

Furthermore, these four romances are extant in more manuscripts than all other verse romances featuring erotic relationships between Saracens and Christians, suggesting that these were particularly popular in the Middle Ages. *Bevis of Hampton* survives in eight manuscripts, *Floris and Blancheflur* in four, and *The King of Tars* and *Octavian* in three each.¹⁵³ These four texts also share manuscript contexts (see Table 1). Three of the romances, *Floris and Blancheflur*, *Bevis of Hampton* and *The King of Tars* are contained in the so-called Auchinleck manuscript (Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, MS Advocates 19.2.1), *Bevis of Hampton* and *Octavian* are both in Cambridge, Cambridge University Library, MS Ff. 2.38, and London, British Library, MS Egerton 2862 contains *Bevis of Hampton* and *Floris and Blancheflur*. These four romances, then, which foreground cross-cultural erotic relationships, were popular in the period, and share a manuscript context, form a coherent and rich source base for the analysis of this thesis.

To ease understanding of the Middle English texts I provide all citations in modern English. As I noted above, almost all comparative research of medieval and modern texts has been carried out by medievalists, a fact due, perhaps, to the specific linguistic skills required for reading medieval texts. In translating Middle English into modern English while still providing the original text, this thesis aims to widen the consideration of Middle English romance beyond the discipline of medieval studies by removing these potential language barriers.

¹⁵² For other Middle English verse romances containing erotic relationships between Christians and Saracens see Appendix 2.

¹⁵³ See Appendix 2 for numbers of extant manuscripts for other romances containing Saracens.

Table 1: Manuscript Distribution of the Main Four Middle English Romances Featuring Erotic Relationships Between Christians and Saracens

MS (date ascending)	Romance Title	<i>Octavian</i>	<i>King of Tars</i>	<i>Bevis of Hampton</i>	<i>Floris and Blancheflur</i>
London, British Library, MS Cotton Vitellius D.3 (c.1275)					X
Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, MS Advocates 19.2.1 (Auchinleck) (c.1330)			X	X	X
London, British Library, MS Egerton 2862 (olim Sutherland/ Trentham) (1375-1400)				X	X
Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Eng. poet.a.1 (Vernon) (c.1390)			X		
London, British Library, MS Additional 22283 (Simeon) (late 1300s)			X		
Cambridge, University Library, MS Gg. 4.27 (c.1410-1430)					X
Lincoln, Cathedral Library, MS 91 (Thornton) (c.1430-1440)		X			
London, British Library, MS Cotton Caligula A.2 (1446-1460)		X			
Cambridge, Gonville and Caius College, MS 175/96 (1450-1475)				X	
Naples, Royal Library, MS 13.B.29 (1450s)				X	
Manchester, Chetham's Library, MS 8009 (1450-1500)				X	
Cambridge, Trinity College, MS O.2.13 (c.1450-1500)				X	
Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Eng. Poet. d.208 (1478-1480)				X	
Cambridge, Cambridge University Library, MS Ff. 2.38 (late 1400s-early 1500s)		X		X	

Source: the author. Manuscript information is drawn from Severs and Gudat-Figge.

Moving into modern articulations of romance, popular romance remains popular today. According to Harlequin Mills & Boon, the most prolific romance publisher, one of their romance novels is sold in Britain every 3 seconds.¹⁵⁴ I considered several ways to distil my contemporary sheikh romance source sample into a manageable, coherent group. I decided to focus on the romances published by Harlequin Mills & Boon.

As the genre's biggest publisher, Harlequin Mills & Boon titles are arguably amongst the most widely read romances in the world: the company estimates that they sell 130 million books globally every year.¹⁵⁵ In addition to focusing on a single publisher, I also decided to focus my research on titles published in Britain.¹⁵⁶ My reasons for this were threefold; first, given my parallel consideration of Middle English texts which were also produced in England (albeit a drastically different one) it made sense to draw my modern romance sources from a parallel English or British space. Second, by focusing on romance novels drawn from a nationally-specific cultural context, I will be able to explore some aspects of British cultural understandings of the eastern world. Third, while many romance titles, including sheikh romances published in Britain, are also published abroad, they are often produced with different cover images or are reproduced in varying series. Focusing on one country's romance publications means that I can focus on publications within a single series.

However, even limiting my focus to a single publisher's output in one country did not significantly narrow the number of potential texts on which to focus: Mills &

¹⁵⁴ 'Interesting Facts', *Mills & Boon*, 10 Feb 2010 <<http://www.millsandboon.co.uk/facts.asp>>.

¹⁵⁵ 'Interesting Facts'. The UK-based publishing company Mills & Boon was set up in 1908, but did not focus exclusively on romance publishing until the 1930s. In 1971 the company was bought by the Canadian company Harlequin Enterprises (established in 1949), who had held the licence for publishing Mills & Boon titles in North America since 1957. The global publishing company is today referred to as Harlequin Mills & Boon, although it is more commonly called 'Harlequin' in North America, and 'Mills & Boon' in the UK and Australia. For clarity, when I refer to the publisher's output in North America I use the term 'Harlequin', where I refer to the UK I use the term 'Mills & Boon'. By extension, when I wish to designate the global company I use 'Harlequin Mills & Boon'. For more on the publishing company see Dixon; Joseph McAleer, *Passion's Fortune: The Story of Mills and Boon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

¹⁵⁶ Many romance titles published in Britain are also published elsewhere, especially in North America and in Australia. While this thesis focuses on Britain and does not propose to draw conclusions in this thesis about cultures beyond Britain, it recognises that the romance novels themselves refer to certain discourses as western. This term is, of course, much more widely applicable than just Britain, encompassing the dominant ideology that links Britain, the USA, Canada and Australia in attitude, while recognising differences within that discourse.

Boon publish approximately 70 titles per month in Britain including more than 50 brand-new series titles.¹⁵⁷ Mills & Boon romances are published bi-monthly in low-cost paperback form: they have become disposable items, as anyone who has seen the large number of titles for sale second-hand can attest. Furthermore, the transitory, serial nature of Mills & Boon publishing means that most readers will purchase and read titles soon after they are released. Thus romances published in a series (so-called category romances) quickly become unavailable for purchase and unless they are republished as a single title (a romance published independently of an established series), or as part of an omnibus collection (a group of novels republished in a single volume) their 'shelf-life' remains short.¹⁵⁸

Inevitably, therefore, academic scholarship on category romance has relied mainly on arbitrary source selection, choosing romances for study in the same way a reader might by selecting from novels available for purchase at that particular time. Generalisation from such selection has been critiqued and academic focus has shifted to single titles not published as part of a series; this is the method used by Regis in *A History of the Romance Novel*.¹⁵⁹ However, this approach is also problematic in that it ignores category romance: the genre within which most sheikh romances are published. While not necessarily solving these issues, this thesis addresses them by adopting a measured approach, which is transparent about its category selections, analysing them individually, moving away from generalisations, but which also recognises the links between romances.

The volume of publication, combined with widespread academic disdain for romance novels, has meant that there has been no historical interest in cataloguing Mills &

¹⁵⁷ 'Interesting Facts'.

¹⁵⁸ Mills & Boon publish romance novels in a variety of forms, of which category romance is the most numerous. The company regularly republishes romance titles; novels which were originally published as part of a particular series might reappear in a different series in another country, as part of an omnibus collection, or as a single title. For example, Violet Winspear's *Blue Jasmine*, a sheikh romance, was first published in the UK's Mills & Boon *Romance* series in December 1969. It was then published by Harlequin as part of their *Romance* series in May 1970. It was republished in 1977 as a Mills & Boon *Best Seller* and has been republished by a variety of publishers in several languages, including a graphic novel version published by 'Harlequin Comics' in 2004.

¹⁵⁹ Selinger critiques such generalising academic practices, as do several articles in *Where's Love Gone? Transformations in the Romance Genre*.

Boon novels.¹⁶⁰ There is, in effect, no record of the ‘full works’ of Mills & Boon, making searching for a definitive sample all the more challenging.¹⁶¹ I therefore used a combination of sources to collate as complete a list as possible of sheikh romances published by Mills & Boon in Britain.¹⁶² I examined lists from websites (more useful for post-1990 titles) and collated search information from libraries, particularly the British Library, the National Library of Scotland and the Browne Popular Culture Library in Bowling Green, Ohio.

Through this multi-source method, I collated a sizeable list of 300 original Mills & Boon sheikh or desert¹⁶³ titles published between 1909 and 2009.¹⁶⁴ These were published across several different series and have steadily increased in number.¹⁶⁵ The number of desert and sheikh romances published by Harlequin Mills & Boon in Britain has steadily grown, with romances published in every decade except the 1940s. Seven sheikh or desert romances were published by Mills & Boon from 1908-1929, five were published in the 1930s, seven in the 1950s, sixteen in the 1960s, and forty-five in the 1970s. There was a slight dip in the 1980s and 1990s, with only thirty-two original sheikh or desert romances published in each decade. However, from 2000-2009, sheikh and desert romances became much more popular, with 157 original sheikh or desert novels published: more than the sum of all previous

¹⁶⁰ Even Legal Deposit libraries do not have full listings of Mills & Boon romances, indicating the culturally selective nature of repository choices. Some online tools do exist and have proved helpful to this study. The most useful of these online sources were *Fictiondb* <<http://www.fictiondb.com/>>; *Fantastic Fiction* <<http://www.fantasticfiction.co.uk/>>; *Sheikhs and Desert Love* <<http://sheikhs-and-desert-love.com/>>. The *RomanceWiki* was also of use.

¹⁶¹ Mills & Boon itself does not store historical publication details (Andrew Clark, ‘Re: Query about past Mills and Boon/Harlequin publications’, e-mail to the author, 18 Aug 2009).

¹⁶² See Appendix 3.

¹⁶³ I will define ‘desert’ romance in a moment.

¹⁶⁴ This count excludes Silhouette titles, republished novels and omnibus collections. While Silhouette was purchased by Harlequin Mills & Boon in 1984, titles continued to be published under the Silhouette imprint and were only subsumed into Harlequin Mills & Boon branding in 2011 (Richard Curtis, ‘Silhouette Fades as Harlequin Rebrands’, *e-reads*, 15 Oct 2010, 18 May 2012 <<http://ereads.com/2010/10/silhouette-fades-as-harlequin-rebrands.html>>). For more on the purchase of Silhouette and the history of Mills & Boon in general see Dixon, especially pp. 23-24.

¹⁶⁵ These include Mills & Boon *Modern Romance*; Mills & Boon *Special Edition*; Mills & Boon *Desire*; Mills & Boon *Intrigue*; Mills & Boon *Tender Romance*; Mills & Boon *Romance*; Mills & Boon *Medical*; Mills & Boon *Presents*; Mills & Boon *Enchanted*; Mills & Boon *Masquerade*; Mills & Boon *Historical*.

years.¹⁶⁶ Even providing for increasing publishing output in general, the rise in the number of published titles is significant.

My examination of the history of sheikh romance publishing reveals that the genre has undergone substantial changes.¹⁶⁷ The first Mills & Boon novel to feature an erotic relationship between a sheikh and western heroine was Louise Gerard's *A Sultan's Slave* (1921), which was set in Egypt and whose sheikh hero is really an Englishman in disguise.¹⁶⁸ A notable feature of early sheikh romances was that sheikh heroes were western men posing as sheikhs: pseudo-sheikhs. Gerard's novel was followed by *Desert Quest* by Elizabeth Milton in 1930, Maureen Heeley's *Flame of the Desert* in 1934, and *Circles in the Sand* by Marjorie Moore in 1935, all of which featured pseudo-sheikhs.¹⁶⁹ The pseudo-sheikh was the norm in sheikh romance publishing until the 1970s, when sheikhs with some eastern ethnic heritage became predominant. The hero of Violet Winspear's *Tawny Sands* (1970), Don Raul, is heir to a North African oasis through his grandmother: the Spanish hero of *Bride of the Rif* (1972) has an ancestral link to North Africa; and Violet Winspear's *Palace of the Pomegranate* (1974) features a hero with a Persian father and an English mother.¹⁷⁰ While the pseudo-sheikh was all but obsolete by the 1990s, the sheikh hero whose ethnicity is drawn from a mix of east and west remains common; while a number of sheikhs in romances published from the 1990s onwards are fully ethnically eastern, they are made palatably western in other ways (education, dress, language).

Besides the pseudo-sheikh, some early romances were set in the east but featured two western protagonists, neither of whom poses as eastern. Because these romances do

¹⁶⁶ It is unfortunately not possible to indicate what proportion these 157 sheikh romances represent of the total output of Mills & Boon romance publishing in this period due to the lack of a recorded publishing history.

¹⁶⁷ In the first few decades of business, Mills & Boon published a number of non-fiction titles of which a number focused on aspects of the 'east'. Winifred Graham wrote an account of the life of Ancient Egyptian Pharaoh Cleopatra (*Needlewoman* [London: Mills & Boon, 1911]) and in the same year E. L. Butcher wrote an account of her experiences in Egypt in the last two decades of the nineteenth century (*Egypt As We Knew It* [London: Mills & Boon, 1911]).

¹⁶⁸ Louise Gerard, *A Sultan's Slave* (London: Mills & Boon, 1921).

¹⁶⁹ Elizabeth Milton, *Desert Quest* (London: Mills & Boon, 1930); Maureen Heeley, *Flame of the Desert* (London: Mills & Boon, 1934); Marjorie Moore, *Circles in the Sand* (London: Mills & Boon, 1935).

¹⁷⁰ Violet Winspear, *Tawny Sands* (London: Mills & Boon, 1970); Margaret Rome, *Bride of the Rif* (London: Mills & Boon, 1972); Violet Winspear, *Palace of the Pomegranate* (London: Mills & Boon, 1974).

not feature sheikh or pseudo-sheikh heroes, they might more accurately be referred to as ‘desert’ romances. A number of Mills & Boon desert romances predate *A Sultan’s Slave*. E. S. Stevens’ *The Veil: A Romance of Tunisia* (1909) can be claimed as Mills & Boon’s first desert romance.¹⁷¹ This was followed by three more desert romance titles in the 1910s: E. S. Stevens’ *The Earthen Drum* (1911), a collection of short romantic stories emulating the format of the 1001 Nights; Ida Wylie’s *The Red Mirage* (1913) set in the deserts of Algeria; and E. S. Stevens’ *Sarah Eden* (1914), much of which takes place in Jerusalem and the Holy Land.¹⁷² Desert romances made up the majority of Mills & Boon titles set in the east until the 1980s.

While desert romances are distinct from sheikh and pseudo-sheikh romances, they tend to become blurred into the same group as sheikh and pseudo-sheikh romances in scholarship and in the way they are marketed. The covers and titles of desert romances do not differ from those of sheikh romances; Elizabeth Milton’s *Desert Quest*, a sheikh romance, has a similar title to a desert romance, Jean Herbert’s *Desert Locust*, and the covers of Winspear’s *Palace of the Pomegranate* (1974), a sheikh romance, and Dorothy Cork’s *Gate of the Golden Gazelle* (1975), a desert romance, both feature similar markers of the east (see Figures 1 and 2).¹⁷³ The cover of Winspear’s novel reveals a typically Middle Eastern cityscape behind the couple, and Cork’s cover evokes its North African setting by placing the couple amongst stereotypically eastern hanging lamps: both feature similarly dark-haired heroes wearing western clothing. Romances which take place in the east, then, are marketed similarly, even if their protagonists differ.

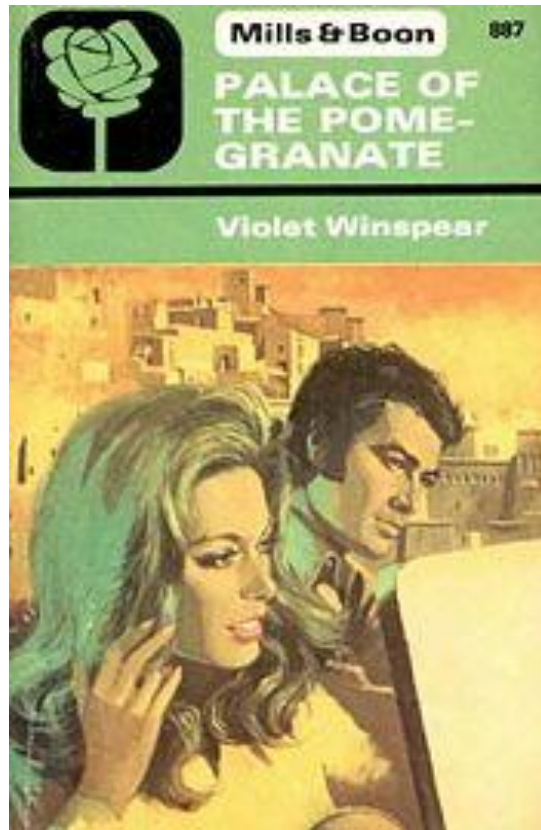
In addition to being similarly marketed, desert and sheikh romances have been treated correspondingly by scholars. Romances featuring a relationship between a sheikh hero and western heroine are either ‘desert romances’ (Anderson; Jarmakani; Elizabeth Gargano; Fleisch; Ellen Turner; Hilary P. Dannenberg; Julia Bettinoti and Mari-Françoise Truel; Bach; Billie Melman), or ‘sheikh romance[s]’ (Taylor).

¹⁷¹ E. S. Stevens, *The Veil: A Romance of Tunisia* (London: Mills & Boon, 1909).

¹⁷² E. S. Stevens, *The Earthen Drum* (London: Mills & Boon, 1911); Ida Wylie, *The Red Mirage* (London: Mills & Boon, 1913); E. S. Stevens, *Sarah Eden* (London: Mills & Boon, 1914).

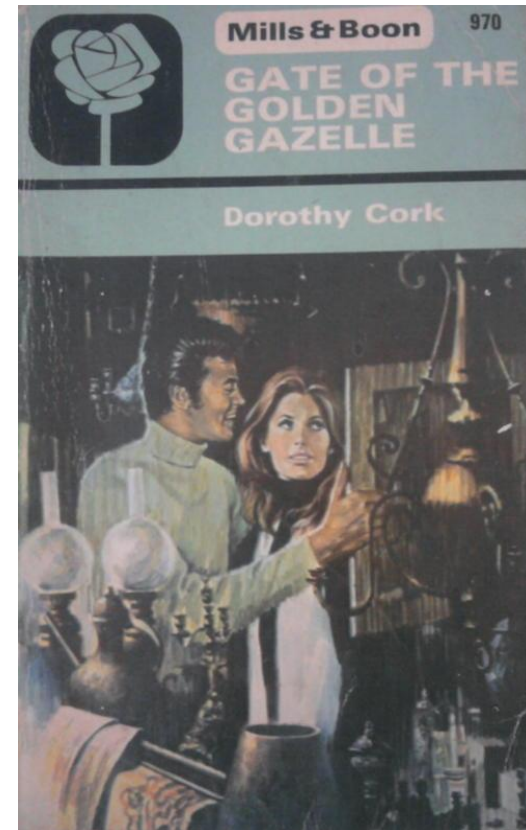
¹⁷³ Jean Herbert, *Desert Locust* (London: Mills & Boon, 1951).

Figure 1: Cover of Violet Winspear's *Palace of the Pomegranate* (1974)



Source: Harlequin Mills & Boon

Figure 2: Cover of Dorothy Cork's *Gate of the Golden Gazelle* (1975)



Source: Harlequin Mills & Boon

Teo conflates the two terms, referring to romances in which ‘a Western woman [...] reluctantly falls in love with an Arab sheikh’ as “‘desert’ or “‘sheikh” romances’.¹⁷⁴ The place within romance publishing of desert romances with western protagonists has thus been obfuscated. My use of terminology in this thesis seeks to clarify the heretofore elided distinctions between desert and sheikh romances.

While desert romances have been popular in the past, they are now almost completely outnumbered by sheikh romances: only two desert romances were published by Mills & Boon from 2000-2009. Similarly, few pseudo-sheikhs appear in recent titles. While it is important to acknowledge the place of pseudo-sheikh and desert romances in the history of the genre, they have been superseded by the contemporary popularity of the sheikh romance. Thus, although I consider desert and pseudo-sheikh romances as part of the publishing history of the genre, and number them as part of Mills & Boon’s output in the genre, the focus of this thesis is on sheikh romances.

A significant shift which occurred in sheikh romances of the 1980s was geographic as novels began to be set in fictional locations instead of real places. Almost every sheikh romance published since the mid-1990s has been set in a created nation. This geographic shift forms the focus of analysis in Chapter 1. The titles also began to shift in the mid-1990s as their language was drawn from a more limited vocabulary. Later titles repetitively deployed a prototypical format which identified the text as a sheikh romance by using markers such as ‘desert’, ‘sultan’, or ‘sheik(h)’, and provided clues as to the content through titular keywords which often related to the heroine, for example ‘sold’, ‘bartered’, ‘possessed’, ‘stolen’, ‘virgin’. This title style became the norm for most sheikh romances published from the mid-1990s until the end of the 2010s, although many earlier romances also used thematic keywords, such as ‘sand’, ‘palm(s)’, and ‘veil(s)’.¹⁷⁵

Yet, this focus on a single genre of sheikh romance, published in a single country by a single publisher, still presented a large number of texts which, as I have outlined,

¹⁷⁴ Teo, ‘Orientalism and Mass-Market Romance’, p. 241.

¹⁷⁵ Since the end of 2010, Mills & Boon have started to move away from formulaic title conventions. Thus, some sheikh romance titles published in 2011 and 2012 have titles which do not always include the signifiers ‘sheikh’, ‘desert’ or ‘sultan’, for example: Abby Green, *Secrets of the Oasis* (March 2011); Lucy Monroe, *For Duty’s Sake* (June 2011); Maisey Yates, *Hajar’s Hidden Legacy* (January 2012).

vary in content and marketing from decade to decade. Yet, more sheikh romances were published from 2000-2009 than in any other decade of Mills & Boon publishing history. In light of this significant increase, I decided to focus on sheikh romances published in the first ten years of the twenty-first century. This is also the period which has produced the most recent sheikh criticism and during which renewed conflict has emerged between some countries in the western world and certain nations in the Middle East. Focusing on romances published over a ten-year period also allows for a comprehensive view of popular sheikh romance published during that time.

Although sheikh titles have appeared in other series over the last ten years, the majority of recently published sheikh titles in Britain have been part of Mills & Boon's flagship series *Modern Romance*, which began in 2000 and which accounts for 28% of current sales in Britain.¹⁷⁶ From the beginning of the *Modern Romance* series in July 2000 until December 2009, Mills & Boon published fifty-seven original sheikh titles in the *Modern Romance* series.¹⁷⁷ This amounts to roughly 36% of all Mills & Boon's sheikh publications since 2000. Whilst this focus on the *Modern Romance* series might seem limited given my indication of the range of series which publish sheikh romances, focusing on a single series offers coherence to my study, allowing for an in-depth analysis of each text, thereby challenging the concept of easy homogeneity which has long haunted the field of romance studies.

From the fifty-seven texts I selected nine novels: *The Arabian Mistress* by Lynne Graham (2001); *The Sultan's Bought Bride* by Jane Porter (2004); *Possessed by the Sheikh* by Penny Jordan (2005); *The Sultan's Virgin Bride* by Sarah Morgan (2006); *The Sheikh's Disobedient Bride* by Jane Porter (2006); *The Sheikh's Ransomed Bride* by Annie West (2007); *At the Sheikh's Bidding* by Chantelle Shaw (2008); *The Sheikh's Convenient Virgin* by Trish Morey (2008); and *The Desert King's*

¹⁷⁶ Jenny Hutton, 'Re: Query about sheikh Modern Romance', e-mail to the author, 5 Jan 2010.

¹⁷⁷ I have discounted titles which were not released as part of the numbered *Modern Romance* series: two *Modern Romance Heat* titles – Kate Hardy's *Surrender to the Playboy Sheikh* (Richmond: Harlequin Mills & Boon, 2009) and Susan Stephens' *Sheikh Boss, Hot Desert Nights* (Richmond: Harlequin Mills & Boon, 2009) – one title from the mini-series *The Royal House of Niroli* – Penny Jordan's *A Royal Bride at the Sheikh's Command* (Richmond: Harlequin Mills & Boon, 2008) – as well as three titles from the mini-series *The Royal House of Karedes*: Sharon Kendrick, *The Sheikh's Virgin Stable-Girl* (Richmond: Harlequin Mills & Boon, 2009), Kate Hewitt, *The Sheikh's Forbidden Virgin* (Richmond: Harlequin Mills & Boon, 2009) and Carol Marinelli, *The Desert King's Housekeeper Bride* (Richmond: Harlequin Mills & Boon, 2009).

Bejewelled Bride by Sabrina Philips (2009). Each of these novels illustrates a particular aspect of my overarching argument: the construction of the east; gender and ethnic identity; and the abduction motif. Alongside my focus on these titles, I will occasionally refer to other sheikh titles, reflecting the practice of those who read category romance, but the focus of the study is on these nine core texts.

Outline of the Thesis

This thesis considers a selection of medieval romances and modern sheikh romances to explore how an erotic relationship can be figured between east and west in the context of an east usually represented, in popular fiction, as other, defined in terms of ethnic or religious difference. I begin, in Chapter 1, by looking at how the romance east is defined. While this chapter ranges widely across all the identified sources in its exploration of the constructed east, it is anchored in a discussion of the medieval romance *Bevis of Hampton* and the sheikh romances *The Sultan's Bought Bride* and *The Desert King's Bejewelled Bride*. Focusing on geography and temporality, the chapter draws on work by Said and others to consider the Orientalist construction of a fictional east within these romances, paying particular attention to oscillations between vagueness and precision in descriptions of the romance east. The chapter considers the effect of a homogeneous, artificial east on the binary difference between east and west, arguing that the homogenisation of the romance east in sheikh romances works in the interests of the emerging erotic relationship by nuancing difference. This is contrasted with an examination of the Middle English romance *Bevis of Hampton*, where instead of moving towards homogenisation and artificiality, the use of geography indicates realism, potentially functioning as travelogue. The chapter argues that the play between reality and fantasy is central to the construction of the romance east in all of these romances, both medieval and modern.

Chapters 2 and 3 form a two-part examination of gender and ethnicity within the framework articulated in Chapter 1. Chapter 2 examines how gender identity is constructed in the romances. This chapter continues to focus on *Bevis of Hampton*, which it analyses alongside *Floris and Blancheflur*, as well as the sheikh romances *The Arabian Mistress*, *The Sultan's Virgin Bride* and *At the Sheikh's Bidding*. Drawing on critical work on gender and sexuality, in particular Butler's idea of

performativity, this chapter examines ways in which romance gender roles are constructed according to a framework of heterosexual difference, and how the romances work to subvert and reassert binary gender difference. The sustaining of binary, heterosexual difference in the gender roles of the hero and heroine allows for an approximation of sameness in their ethnicity. Thus, Chapter 3 turns to consider ethnic difference, suggesting ways in which these romances break down the distances between east and west through hybridisation. Centring the analysis on *The King of Tars*, *Possessed by the Sheikh* and *The Sheikh's Convenient Virgin*, this chapter investigates how ethnic identity can be performed, in particular through fabric, offering an illusion of ethnic sameness. The chapter also considers how this performance causes anxieties about miscegenation and examines how they are resolved. The analysis is concerned with the way individual sameness functions within a wider framework of binary difference between east and west.

Chapter 4 brings together discussions from Chapters 2 and 3 to analyse the effect of this shift from difference to sameness in an enduring motif of romance: abduction. Focusing on the articulation of the abduction/captivity trope in the Middle English romance *Octavian* and the sheikh romances *The Sheikh's Disobedient Bride* and *The Sheikh's Ransomed Bride*, the chapter analyses how this enduring motif both subverts and endorses imperialism. The chapter argues for a gendered focus on imperialism in modern sheikh romance, using articulations of the abduction motif in *Octavian* to indicate how the same motif can be both liberating and confining, dependent on the ethnic and gender positionality of east and west. The chapter considers how this layered attitude towards difference in sheikh romances continues to perpetuate Orientalist attitudes towards the east: attitudes which were already evident in Middle English romance.

Overall, this thesis argues for a move from otherness to sameness in the nuancing of the binary framework of difference between east and west. While the romances of each period display a binary framework of religious or ethnic alterity, a relationship between east and west can be imagined as previous differences are reordered into similarities. The move towards sameness, which facilitates the cross-cultural relationship, is achieved in different ways in each genre, but the fundamental impetus towards similarity rather than difference is consistent in both medieval and modern romance. I now move, in Chapter 1, to a consideration of the space of the romance

east, outlining how its construction as homogeneous fantasy works to elide difference and lay the groundwork for the emergence of a more substantial sameness.

CHAPTER 1: SETTING THE SCENE: THE ROMANCE EAST

With the stringed instruments plucking, drums and tambourines beating, Nic stepped onto the gangway and halfway across, colourful confetti streamed down. It wasn't paper confetti, the bits of orange and red and pink were flower petals and the sweet scented petals drifted onto her covered head and shoulders.

It was like entering a dream world – the music, the colors, the hint of spice in the air. Nic had the strongest sensation that this new world would soon dazzle her with its exotic secrets.¹

The modern romance east is a fantasy. Designed to 'dazzle' the reader, the east of sheikh novels works as exotic synaesthesia, blending sensations of sound, sight and smell and persistently deploying stock Orientalist motifs, for example the 'stringed instruments' and the 'hint of spice in the air', in order to construct an other world. So homogeneous is this fantasy east that the setting created here in *Bought* can be taken as representative of the romance east in every sheikh romance; indeed, as this chapter will show, certain elements of the romance east have remained constant since the sheikh romances of the early twentieth century. Even the location of the romance east seems to be similarly fantastic, geographically indistinct and indefinable. However, a closer examination reveals that while its customs and culture might be drawn from clichéd fantasy, the geography of the romance east is often described in paradoxical detail, suggesting a more complex relationship between fantasy and reality in these romances.

This first chapter seeks to set the scene, exploring how the romance east is constructed as a place of paradoxical fantasy and reality. The chapter asks: where is the romance east? How is it defined and what role does it play in framing the relationship between east and west? How do medieval and modern romances differ in the way they deal with the otherness of the east? To begin, I examine the geographical construction of the romance east over the past hundred years of Mills & Boon romance publishing, considering its relation to the geopolitical reality of the east. I focus on two romances in particular, *Bought* – the story of an arranged marriage between a North African sheikh and a European princess – and *The Desert King's Bejewelled Bride* – an erotic reunion between a British heroine and Middle Eastern sheikh – to explore more closely the play between reality and fiction in the

¹ Jane Porter, *The Sultan's Bought Bride* (Richmond: Harlequin Mills & Boon, 2004), pp. 11-12. Hereafter referred to as *Bought*.

construction of the romance east.² Next, I investigate the ‘medieval’ aspects of sheikh romances more closely, examining how sheikh romances label their romance east as ‘medieval’ and the ways this relates to contemporary political and media rhetoric. In the second part of the chapter, I consider the geography of medieval romance, focusing on the Middle English romance *Bevis of Hampton*. I compare the geographical scope of different versions of the romance, following Metlitzski and Heng in challenging the contention that the geography of medieval romance is rooted in fantasy. I examine how the geography of *Bevis of Hampton* relates to contemporary geographical knowledge and how it exploits the symbolism of its geography to shape the characterisation and themes of the romance. The chapter ends with a consideration of the differences and parallels in the use of geography in all three romances, asking what this might reveal about the articulation of difference in the romance east.

‘A Very Different Place’: Locating the Romance East

The exotic geographical settings of romances have been widely taken as fantasy, imaginary locations, bearing only passing resemblance to real places. Consequently, scholarship has only briefly addressed the geographical locations of sheikh romances, generally labelling them as ‘indefinable, hovering anywhere between the Spanish Sahara and the Caspian Sea’.³ Today’s desert kingdoms are invariably fictional although explicitly named. They are vaguely located, and share common defining features, such as a prominent desert, a palace, and a sense of wealth and luxury. In fact, many of the fictional nations could be entirely interchangeable. For example, *Bejewelled* is set in Qwasir, described as being in the Middle East, yet its romance east is remarkably similar to that of the nation Baraka in *Bought*, which the novel locates on the coast of North Africa, ‘protected by the massive dunes of the Sahara’.⁴ While in reality there are vast differences between the Middle East and

² Sabrina Philips, *The Desert King’s Bejewelled Bride* (Richmond: Harlequin Mills & Boon, 2009). Hereafter referred to as *Bejewelled*. For full plot summaries of *Bought* and *Bejewelled* see Appendix 1.

³ Anderson, p. 180.

⁴ *Bought*, p. 10.

North Africa, these romances blur the distinction, creating a single homogeneous east.

The customs and artefacts which define the romance east are similarly homogenised. As Jarmakani argues, ‘romances use a mix of ethnic and religious markers that tend to get racialised and conflated as “Arabian”’.⁵ Novels frequently mix cultural terminology. Sue Swift’s *In the Sheikh’s Arms* is set in North Africa, near Morocco, yet instead of referring to the traditional ‘large square headcloth of wool, silk, or a silk cotton mix and held in place by a circlet of heavy twisted black cord of silk thread (*aqal*)’ as a *keffiyah*, which is the common term used for this item in North Africa, in this romance it is called a ‘gutra’, which is the Arabian term for the item.⁶ Similarly, locations geographically situated in the Arabian Gulf often feature Moorish architecture, which is more commonly associated with North Africa, for example the ‘minarets and Moorish arches’ of the fictional Middle Eastern nation Al Ankhara in *The Sheikh’s Wayward Wife*.⁷ This slippage indicates just how fluid and at the same time homogeneous the romance east is; it does not matter where it is, as long as the stock elements which sustain it (desert, palace, dress) are present.

But if it does not matter where the romance east is, then why would authors describe its geography at all? All of the sheikh romances I examined explicitly give their fictional setting a seemingly ‘eastern’ name, and locate it in the Arabian Peninsula, often around the Persian Gulf, or in North Africa, usually providing extensive detail of the fictional nation. We are told in *Bejewelled* that Qwasir, as well as being in the Middle East, has an east coast and historical trading links with the Mediterranean. In *Bought*, Baraka has an extensive colonial history and its physical geography is outlined as the heroine, Nicolette, examines a map of the country detailing ‘the various geographical points of interest – the mountain ranges, the river, the great deserts’.⁸

⁵ Jarmakani, “The Sheik Who Loved Me”, p. 996.

⁶ Yedida Kalfon Stillman, *Arab Dress: A Short History, from the Dawn of Islam to Modern Times*, ed. Norman A. Stillman, 2nd ed. (Leiden: Brill, 2003), p. 171; Sue Swift, *In the Sheikh’s Arms* (Richmond: Harlequin Mills & Boon, 2006).

⁷ Miles Danby, *Moorish Style* (London: Phaidon, 1995); Sandra Marton, *The Sheikh’s Wayward Wife* (Richmond: Harlequin Mills & Boon, 2008), p. 10.

⁸ *Bought*, p. 51.

Taylor notes that the fictional geography of contemporary sheikh romance is often accompanied by maps, ‘locating the imaginary country in real geographical space’ and Melman observes the ‘obsessive attention to scenic actuality’ in the genre.⁹ Some sheikh novels even construct their romance east in relation to other fictional spaces. For example, in *Bejewelled* we are told that Qwasir borders another country named Lan, and Kim Lawrence’s *Desert Prince, Defiant Virgin* features two neighbouring countries, Zarhat and Zabrania.¹⁰ References can extend outside of single novels: Jordan sets four of her romances in the Persian Gulf kingdom of Zuran and two in neighbouring country Dhurahn.¹¹ Sharon Kendrick’s Kharastan, the nation in *The Desert King’s Virgin Bride*, shares a border with Maraban, a country near the Caspian Sea featured in Kendrick’s *Surrender to the Sheikh*, and Porter’s created North African country Baraka features in *Bought, The Sheikh’s Virgin* and *The Sheikh’s Disobedient Bride*.¹² I have mapped this romance east as precisely as possible in Figures 3 and 4, according to geographic indicators in the novels, to show how meticulously fictional nations are located and to indicate the relationship between them.¹³

The fictional east is not always as distant as its fantasy construction suggests. In *Bejewelled*, characters travel to Qwasir on direct scheduled flights from London Gatwick and Paris, indicating the relative proximity and accessibility of the country from Western Europe. Not only is Qwasir geographically close, but it is also politically allied with the west.

⁹ Taylor, p. 1038; Billie Melman, *Women and the Popular Imagination in the Twenties: Flappers and Nymphs* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988), p. 97.

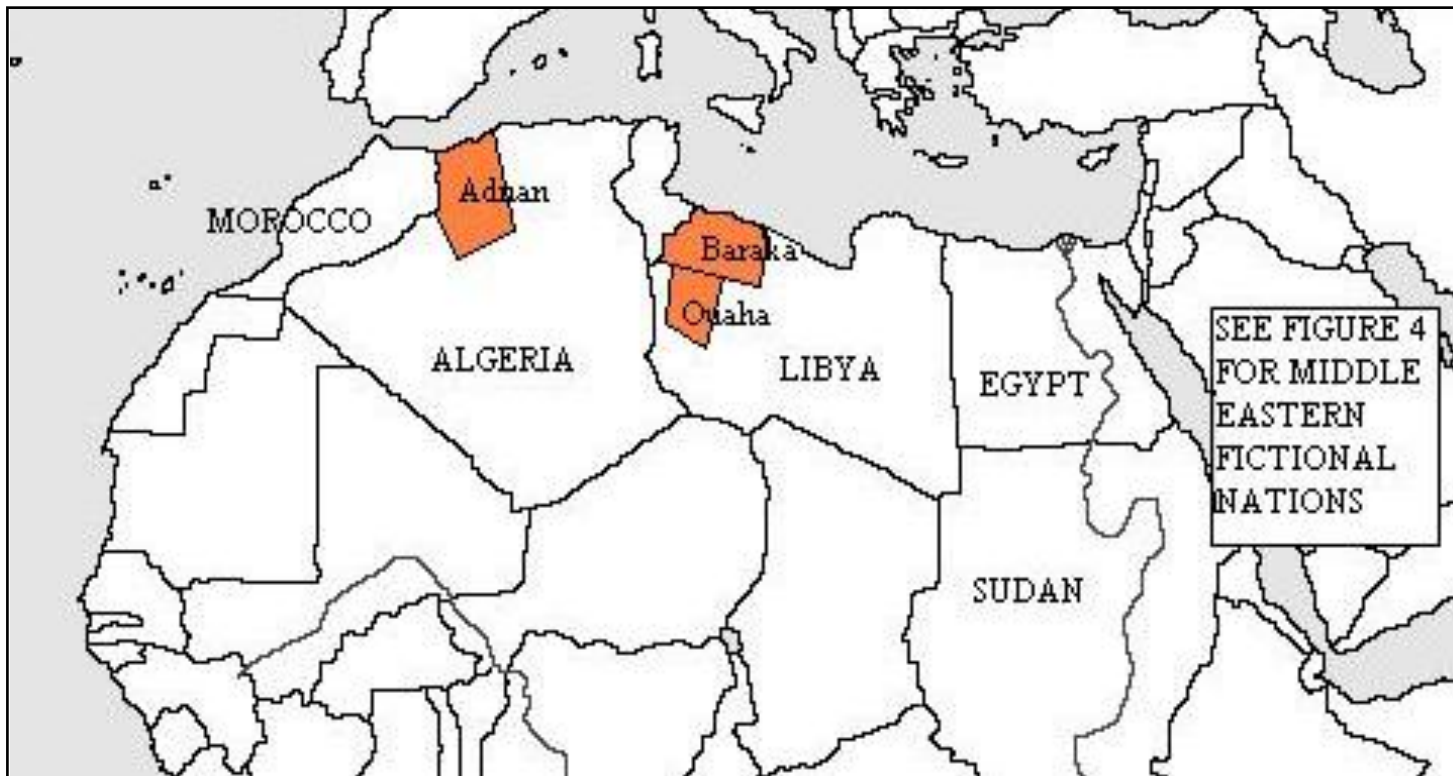
¹⁰ Kim Lawrence, *Desert Prince, Defiant Virgin* (Richmond: Harlequin Mills & Boon, 2008).

¹¹ The novels set in Zuran are: *The Sheikh’s Virgin Bride* (Richmond: Harlequin Mills & Boon, 2003); *One Night with the Sheikh* (Richmond: Harlequin Mills & Boon, 2003); *Possessed by the Sheikh* (Richmond: Harlequin Mills & Boon, 2005); and *Prince of the Desert* (Richmond: Harlequin Mills & Boon, 2006). Those set in Dhurahn are: *Taken by the Sheikh* (Richmond: Harlequin Mills & Boon, 2007); *The Sheikh’s Blackmailed Mistress* (Richmond: Harlequin Mills & Boon, 2008).

¹² Sharon Kendrick, *The Desert King’s Virgin Bride* (Richmond: Harlequin Mills & Boon, 2007); Sharon Kendrick, *Surrender to the Sheikh* (Richmond: Harlequin Mills & Boon, 2001); Jane Porter, *The Sheikh’s Virgin* (Richmond: Harlequin Mills & Boon, 2005); Jane Porter, *The Sheikh’s Disobedient Bride* (Richmond: Harlequin Mills & Boon, 2006).

¹³ For details connecting each mapped nation with the sheikh novel in which it features see Appendix 4.

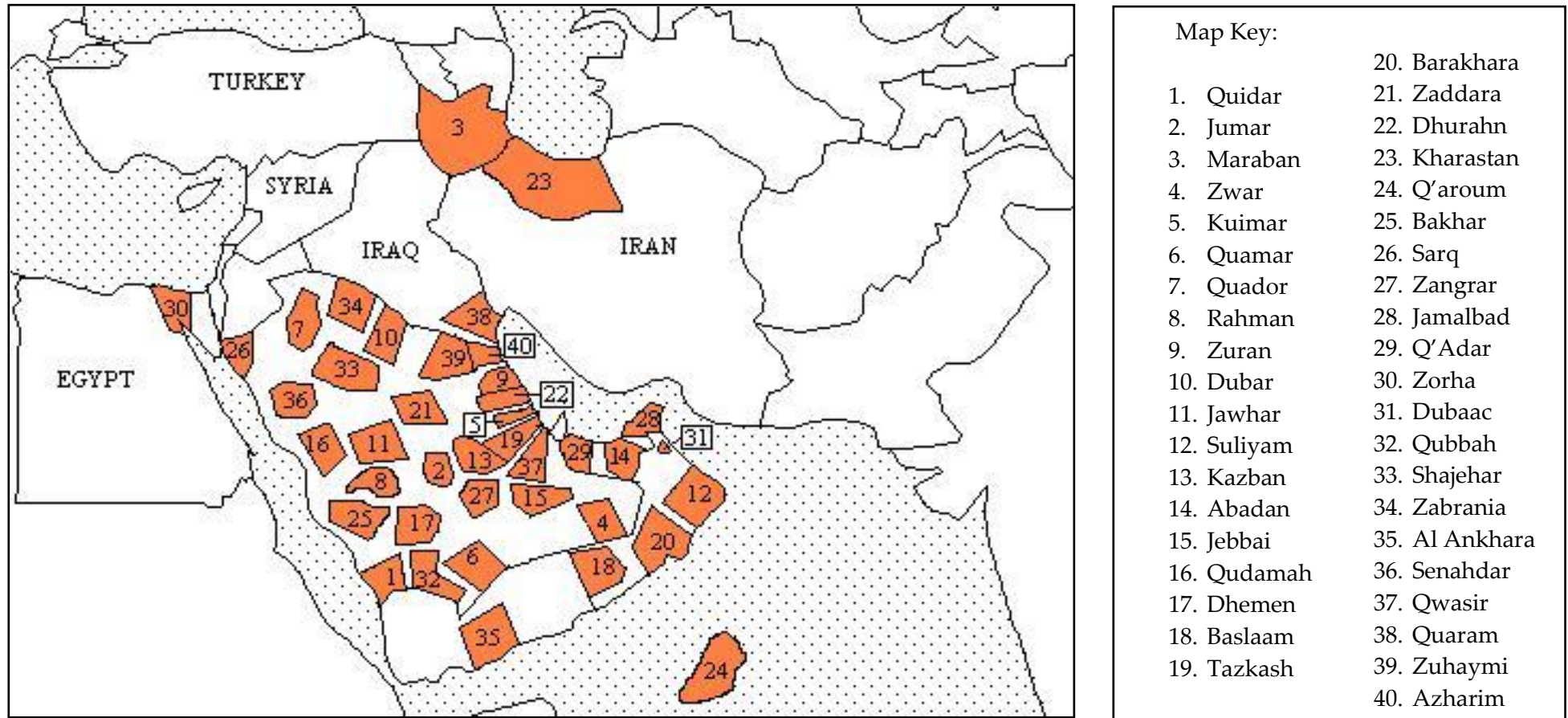
Figure 3: Map of Fictional Desert Nations in Mills & Boon *Modern Romance* Sheikh Novels¹⁴



Source: the author

¹⁴ The only fictional nation not represented is Biryal, kingdom of Kate Hewitt's *The Sheikh's Love-Child* which is located in the Indian Ocean, a 'fourteen-hour flight' from England (Kate Hewitt, *The Sheikh's Love-Child* [Richmond: Harlequin Mills & Boon, 2009], p. 92).

Figure 4: Detail Map Showing Middle Eastern Fictional Desert Nations in Mills & Boon *Modern Romance* Sheikh Novels



Source: the author

Relations between Qwasir and the western world are cordial; Kaliq negotiates international trading treaties with the fictional island of Montéz, located just off the French coast, where Kaliq's family have had a holiday home for many years. This romance east is, then, in the modern world of business and air travel, relatively close to the heroine's western world. Anderson contends that the desert setting of romances became less 'remote and exotic' as mass media and tourism made the desert more accessible, and it appears that these *Modern Romance* titles are continuing the trend, even if their romance east is fictional.¹⁵

The detail and proximity of the romance east reveal two important characteristics. First, because it is described in such detail, the romance east gains a sense of realism. Some have even suggested that this blending of fantasy and reality functions to make the story more believable. Bach argues that detailed 'observation feeds and validates the fantasy while [the] fantasy inspires "authentication" through observation and research', meaning that locations are meticulously detailed in order to imbue the novel with a sense of factual research.¹⁶ That this factual research is openly fictionalised does not seem to matter to readers or authors – in fact Radway, in her study of romance readers, noted an assumption 'that the world that serves as the backdrop for these stories is exactly congruent with [the readers'] own'.¹⁷ Second, the specific location in most romances of the romance east in the Arabian Peninsula and its characterisation as a locus of wealth, business and tourism indicates that far from being a purely fictional construction, the romance east is, to a certain extent, drawing on the reality of parts of the Middle East. In order to fully explore this point, I now move to examine the geographic settings of sheikh romances published by Mills & Boon over the past century.

The romance east has not always been fictionalised. When Mills & Boon first started publishing sheikh romances, in the first half of the twentieth century, they were usually set in real locations, such as Algiers, Egypt, Yemen and Tunisia. It was only in the 1980s that the settings of sheikh romances started to become fictionalised:

¹⁵ Anderson, p. 191.

¹⁶ Bach, p. 14.

¹⁷ Radway, pp. 109-110. Although Radway does not mention that her surveyed readers read any sheikh romances, she does explicitly mention their reading of romances set in exotic locations, including: Bertrice Small's *Adora* (London: Fontana, 1980), set in the Ottoman Empire; Margaret Bode's *Jasmine Splendor* (New York: Pocket Books, 1981), set in eighteenth-century Istanbul; and Jocelyn Wilde's *Bride of the Baja* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1980) set in Mexico.

Anne Mather's *Sandstorm* (1980) was the first Mills & Boon sheikh romance to do so, locating itself in the fictional town Xanthia in the country Arabein.¹⁸ The shift from reality to fiction in the setting of the romance east was also mirrored by a geographical shift from North Africa to the Middle East. Most sheikh romances published before the 1980s were set in European colonies or ex-colonies in North Africa: Gerard's *A Sultan's Slave* takes place in Egypt, as do Moore's *Circles in the Sand* and Milton's *Desert Quest*, while Winspear's *Tawny Sands* and Rome's *Bride of the Rif* are set in Morocco.

But, following the shift to fictional settings during the 1980s, the romance nation was more likely to be located in the Middle East; only six of the fifty-seven *Modern Romance* sheikh novels explicitly located their fictional nations outside the Middle East.¹⁹ Given the extent to which sheikh romances blur cultural differences, it could be argued that this shift is not significant: the romance east remains largely the same even as its geography changes. However, I would like to suggest that the shifting geography of the romance east *is* significant in what it reveals about the link between Mills & Boon romance and contemporary attitudes towards the east. I contend that the move from a factual North Africa to a fictional Middle East was not arbitrary, but reflected wider political changes in the west's relation to these countries.

The settings of early sheikh romances were not neutral; locations such as Morocco, Egypt and Yemen loomed large in contemporary political debate as European colonies or ex-colonies. For example, Heeley's *Flame of the Desert*, set in Cairo, was published before June 1934, at a time when the appointment of Sir Giles Lampson earlier that year as British High Commissioner for Egypt and the Sudan had again raised public awareness of the tensions between Egypt and its former colonial ruler. Although Egypt had declared its independence in 1922, limitations placed on the

¹⁸ Anne Mather, *Sandstorm* (Richmond: Mills & Boon, 1980). It is worth noting that whilst this is the first Mills & Boon sheikh romance to be set in an entirely fictitious location, some non-Mills & Boon sheikh novels had done this earlier. See, for example, Maggie Davis' *The Sheik* (New York: Fawcett Crest Books, 1977) set in fictional Rahsmani.

¹⁹ These are Porter's *Bought* and *The Sheikh's Virgin*, both set in Baraka, North Africa; Porter's *The Sheikh's Disobedient Bride* set in Baraka and neighbouring Ouaha; Swift's *In the Sheikh's Arms* set in Adnan, 'in north Africa, near Morocco' (p. 34); Emma Darcy's *Traded to the Sheikh* (Richmond: Harlequin Mills & Boon, 2006) which is one of the few titles set in a real location in Zanzibar, a semi-autonomous region of Tanzania, East Africa; and Hewitt's *The Sheikh's Love-Child* set on the island of Biryal in the Indian Ocean.

declaration by Britain formed the ‘basis for often-bitter Anglo-Egyptian relations for another thirty years’.²⁰

At the forefront of tensions in 1934 were calls for reforms to the mixed courts, a judiciary system with both European and Egyptian judges introduced in 1875, which the British government had used to put pressure on the Egyptian government. Thirteen articles in British newspaper *The Times* highlighted confrontations between European and Egyptian judges in the mixed courts in the first six months of 1934.²¹ Yet even though 1934 was a year of diplomatic tension, it was also a boom year for tourism; the 37th Annual Meeting of Egyptian hotels noted an increase in British tourists visiting Egypt and almost 100 advertisements for tours to Egypt were printed in *The Times* from January to June 1934.²² It is fair to assume that Mills & Boon romances set in Egypt published around this time drew on the dual discourses of tension and tourism which ensured continual public interest in Egypt.

Another colony, South Yemen, although not in North Africa, remained a British Crown colony until 1967 and was the setting for Jane Arbor’s *Desert Nurse*, published in Britain in March 1964.²³ The romance is set in the fictional town of Taroued, situated to the east of the real city of Aden, part of the British Colony of Aden.²⁴ In the late 1950s and early 1960s, tensions between Britain and Yemen were increasing and this was discussed widely in the British media, a fact noted by Sir Bernard Reilly, Governor of Aden from 1937-1940:

Aden has been much in the news in the year 1958 and public interest has been roused by the growing importance of the Colony and by the troubles that have beset it [...] The publicity and attention which the affairs of Aden now

²⁰ M. W. Daly, ‘The British Occupation, 1882–1922’, *Modern Egypt, from 1517 to the End of the Twentieth Century*, ed. Daly (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 250.

²¹ F. Robert Hunter, ‘Egypt under the successors of Muhammad ‘Ali’, *Modern Egypt, from 1517 to the End of the Twentieth Century*, ed. M. W. Daly (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 194.

²² ‘The Egyptian Hotels: Increased Number Of British Tourists: The Question Of Holding Meetings In Cairo’, *The Times*, 17 Jul 1934.

²³ Jane Arbor, *Desert Nurse* (Richmond: Harlequin Mills & Boon, 1964).

²⁴ For more on the history of Aden and Yemen see R. J. Gavin, *Aden under British Rule, 1839-1967* (London: Hurst, 1975) and Paul Dresch, *A History of Modern Yemen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

receive have led to a demand for more knowledge and understanding of what sort of place it is.²⁵

In September 1962, the military overthrew the imamate and established the Yemen Arab Republic, which the British government refused to accept, instead deciding in February 1963 to support the Imam.²⁶ Some contemporary knowledge of Aden amongst readers of *Desert Nurse* can be assumed, given that this conflict was widely discussed in the British media around the time of the romance's publication. Eighty news articles on Aden were published by *The Times* newspaper between 1 January and 31 March 1964, many of which focused on the aftermath of a grenade attack at Aden airport on 10 December 1963, which had plunged the protectorate into a state of emergency.²⁷ British popular interests, as represented by romance novels, are here clearly aligned with political colonial interests. Though Mills & Boon romances do not usually explicitly deal with real-life politics, the decision to set *Desert Nurse* in Yemen at a time of political upheaval is, I argue, revealing of the way these romances exploit contemporary awareness of their settings.

The New Middle East: The Rise of the United Arab Emirates

The confluence of sheikh romance setting and contemporary geopolitics could reasonably be assumed to have ended with the advent of fictional settings in the 1980s. However, a closer examination of later sheikh romances reveals that even though the romance east is fictional, it is actually modelled on the specific geography of western-friendly nations in the Middle East, specifically the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

In 1971, the Gulf nations of Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman, Umm al-Quwain, Ras al-Khaimah and Fujairah joined together to form the UAE. Uniquely amongst their Gulf neighbours, the UAE have invested large amounts of money in tourism

²⁵ Lt.-Colonel Sir Bernard Reilly, Foreword, *Aden*, by Sir Tom Hickenbotham (London: Constable and Company Ltd., 1958), p. ix.

²⁶ Leigh Douglas, 'The Free Yemeni Movement: 1935-1962', *Contemporary Yemen: Politics and Historical Background*, ed. B. R. Pridham (London: Croom Helm, 1984), p. 43; Helen Lackner, 'The Rise of the National Liberation Front as a Political Organisation', *Contemporary Yemen: Politics and Historical Background*, pp. 50-51.

²⁷ See, for example, 'Two Wounded By Shots In Aden Assassination Bid: Former Cabinet Minister Unharmed', *The Times*, 4 Jan 1964; 'More British M.P.S Visit Aden', *The Times*, 13 Jan 1964; 'For Trial On Aden Bomb Charge', *The Times*, 28 Feb 1964.

development, particularly in Dubai. Since Dubai opened an international airport and allowed aircraft to use it as a hub in the 1960s the UAE has become one of the most directly accessible destinations in the Middle East. Today, Dubai has become known as a place of almost excessive luxury, where wealth can build the tallest building in the world (the Burj Khalifa), claim the world's first unofficial seven-star hotel (the Burj al Arab), as well as an underwater hotel, shopping centres, and theme parks.

The unimaginable wealth represented by projects such as the Burj al Arab provides the perfect model for the fantasy wealth of sheikh romances. In addition, the geography of the romance east aligns it with the UAE; as evident from Figures 3 and 4, fictional romance nations are positioned as extended Emirates in a seemingly limitless Arabian Peninsula. One author even constructs her own fictional version of the UAE, calling the neighbouring countries the 'Nations'.²⁸ The fictional geography of these romances seems, therefore, to reflect contemporary tourist interest and western political alignments in the Middle East.

Furthermore, I consider that the international position of Dubai lends itself profitably to the homogeneity of the romance east. One of the main reasons that Dubai has been used so extensively as a model for the constructed east of Mills & Boon romance is that Dubai can itself be understood as a construction. Dubai has an international reputation for artificiality which, according to Waleed Hazburn, sustains 'demand for artificial and simulated experiences of place', noting:

rather than building an industry on natural environments or locations and monuments of historical significance, [...] in Dubai 'nature tourism' takes the form of a theme park attraction, while downhill ski slopes provide a 'winter snow' experience embedded within a massive indoor shopping mall. Even many of the emirate's outdoor attractions are constructed, such as its skyscraper skyline and artificial islands.²⁹

Projects like The World, an artificially constructed archipelago made up of hundreds of islands representing a map of the world which can only be seen through satellite images, indicate how much Dubai's international appeal is based upon its constructed image. As Mattias Jumeno argues:

²⁸ The 'Nations' feature in Sandra Marton's *The Sheikh's Defiant Bride* (Richmond: Harlequin Mills & Boon, 2008) (Dubaac), *The Sheikh's Wayward Wife* (Al Ankhara) and *The Sheikh's Rebellious Mistress* (Richmond: Harlequin Mills & Boon, 2008) (Senahdar).

²⁹ Waleed Hazburn, *Beaches, Ruins, Resorts: The Politics of Tourism in the Arab World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), p. 218.

the islands are not meant to be gazed at from a geographically proximate vantage point. Instead, as replicated images of an aerial viewpoint, they can be visualised and seen from the other side of the world, or any other place, thus intermixing the real and the virtual [...] Even though the islands are real places, [...] reality does not have primacy over their virtual existence.³⁰

Instead of being encouraged to look at Dubai's existing natural features, we are directed to artificially constructed islands and invented traditions.³¹ Hazburn concurs, positing that Dubai 'leaves many observers with the impression that [it] is an artificial city with no history or culture, where imported enclave spaces of modernity intrude into, cover over, or push to the margins the remnants of an authentic identity and indigenous population'.³² This leads to an uncoupling of a sense of identity from place, a homogenisation of identities, backgrounds, and affiliations.³³ This is precisely the kind of blurring that occurs in sheikh romance; signifiers of the romance east are homogenised to form a familiar, fantasy space.

Thus, the homogeneity of Dubai's geography is mirrored in the romance east; by highlighting its particular constructedness, Dubai fictionalises itself in the same way that the romance east does. But just because the east is a fantasy does not mean it cannot be believable. Bach posits that imaginary locations, although fictional, can be represented as entirely real, arguing: 'this can only happen because the fantasy of the Arabic East is seamlessly meshed with the "truth" of it; because the existing stereotypes of Arabs, deserts and romance formulae are sufficiently unshakeable to allow them to shift, intact, in and out of the known universe'.³⁴ It is in places like Dubai, which draw on these existing stereotypes, that the lack of distinction between artificiality and reality can be sustained. In other words, because our understanding of contemporary Dubai is so deeply rooted in artifice, the constructed romance east of Mills & Boon seems, by comparison, realistic. The ability of Dubai to mix artificiality and reality is the reason, I argue, that it works so well as a model for the romance east: it is itself a form of constructed romance east.

³⁰ Mattias Jumeo, "'Let's build a palm island!': Playfulness in Complex Times', ed. Mimi Sheller and John Urry, *Tourism Mobilities: Places to Play, Places in Play* (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 182-183.

³¹ Camel racing has been introduced as a 'tradition' in the UAE: see Sulayman Khalaf, 'Poetics and Politics of Newly Invented Traditions in the Gulf: Camel Racing in the United Arab Emirates', *Ethnology*, 39.3 (2000): 243-261.

³² Hazburn, p. 222.

³³ Ahmed Kanna, 'The State Philosophical', *Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Review* 16.2 (2005): 59-73; see also Hazburn, p. 223.

³⁴ Bach, p. 15.

A Very English Place: Britain and Dubai

The choice of Dubai as the model for the romance east is not just to do with its artifice. There has long been a British presence in the Middle East, in the Gulf area in particular, and investment and tourism continue to forge a strong connection between the UAE and the western world, in particular Britain. So while Dubai is not a British colony or ex-colony, as the settings of older sheikh romances were, I argue that the decision to model the romance east on it cannot be divorced from patterns of western involvement in the Middle East, indicating a lingering British political and diplomatic influence in these popular romance novels.

In the eighteenth century, the British were particularly concerned with the area now known as the UAE, due to its strategic position on the British trade route to India.³⁵ In 1853, the sheikhs of Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah and Ajman signed the Perpetual Maritime Truce, designed to halt all hostilities at sea. The nations who had signed the Truce (Bahrain also signed in 1861) became known as the Trucial States, who extended British influence in the Gulf at the end of the nineteenth century by signing exclusive agreements with Britain in 1892. This included a non-alienation bond preventing the lease, sale or ceding of any part of their territory to a power other than Britain. These agreements were followed in 1913 and 1922 with the awarding of oil concessions: no oil concession was to be granted except to a company appointed by the British government. Thus, as Rosemarie Said Zahlan notes, 'by the end of World War I, the Gulf had become, to all intents and purposes, a British lake'.³⁶ Britain was also active in other parts of the Gulf: in addition to the British Crown Colony of Aden, Oman and Kuwait were under British authority until 1970 and 1961 respectively.

The British continue to maintain a significant presence in the UAE, in particular Dubai, including through tourism. Tourism statistics for Dubai, by far the most popular tourist destination in the UAE, indicate that there have been consistently more British hotel guests in Dubai from 2000-2009 – the period of study – than from any other country in the world (see Table 2).

³⁵ Rosemarie Said Zahlan, *The Making of the Modern Gulf States: Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Oman*, 2nd ed. (Reading: Ithaca, 1998), p. 12.

³⁶ Zahlan, pp. 14-19.

Table 2: Dubai Hotel Establishment Guests by Nationality, 2000-2009 (number of guests)

Total Hotel Establishment Guests By Nationality 2000-2009										
Nationality	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Europe (excl. CIS/Baltic)	697,288	751,585	945,075	966,834	1,307,300	1,518,071	1,622,343	1,773,236	1,985,341	1,858,854
UK	301,461	348,477	447,006	458,451	605,240	681,469	687,138	752,381	854,601	714,877
Germany	130,688	148,570	171,140	156,682	236,324	264,298	252,977	255,657	274,610	283,319
North America	108,979	115,715	192,650	186,036	210,959	326,219	388,150	472,148	585,474	508,479
USA	86,087	84,697	104,056	136,934	156,334	260,413	313,004	385,720	462,125	395,390
Australasia & the Pacific	34,921	46,372	67,801	78,444	103,850	147,615	187,546	211,428	243,081	189,092
Australia	27,838	38,511	59,700	67,627	84,035	122,323	144,996	169,192	195,988	150,011
Arabian Gulf (AGCC)	1,423,396	1,515,665	1,947,535	1,945,157	1,867,739	2,103,172	1,959,711	1,960,089	1,860,194	2,291,016
UAE	x	x	388,832	396,101	327,035	327,131	321,077	385,821	436,578	770,614
Saudi Arabia	339,179	406,695	454,502	454,736	487,122	647,984	511,286	446,598	360,560	414,482
Africa	148,289	198,246	283,407	276,683	278,401	332,632	395,372	426,485	462,913	447,126

Source: the author. Table data is drawn from Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing, ‘Total Hotel Establishment Guests by Nationality 1999-2007’ <<http://www.dubaitourism.ae/Portals/0/Statistics%5CHotelStatistics/A006%201999-2007%20Dubai%20Hotel%20Establishment%20Guests%20by%20Nationality.pdf>>, accessed 14 Jul 2010 and Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing, ‘Dubai Total Hotel Establishment Guests by Nationality’ <http://www.dubaitourism.ae/sites/default/files/hotelstat/2002-2011_Dubai_Hotel_Establishment_Guests_by_Nationality.pdf>, accessed 13 Apr 2012. There is no data available for guests from the UAE in 2000 or 2001.

British guests have only been outnumbered twice: by Saudi Arabian guests in 2000-2002, and following an overall reduction in western visitors due to the economic downturn, by domestic stays in 2009. Even countries with larger populations and similar economic, social and educational conditions as Britain have much lower levels of tourism to Dubai: Germany has the second highest number of hotel guests in Dubai, and a population of some twenty million more than Britain, but its figures are significantly lower than those of British tourist arrivals. The British also spent more: in 2009, Visa card holders from Britain spent the equivalent of \$401.8M in Dubai: a million more than visitors from the second-biggest source market, the USA, who spent \$301.9M in the same year.³⁷ Furthermore, in a country where non-citizens account for 80% of the population, there is a large British expatriate community in Dubai of some 55,000 people, whose consumption patterns often overlap with those of tourists.³⁸

The UK has substantial business interests in the UAE, which is Britain's largest export market in the Middle East and North Africa.³⁹ Bilateral trade reached £2.52 billion in the first six months of 2008 and 72% of Britain's exports to the UAE went to Dubai.⁴⁰ The UAE itself has a persistent presence outside of the Gulf as many UAE-based companies have invested in British industries: Dubai International Capital, a holding company owned by the ruling family of Dubai, has invested in Travelodge, a British hotel chain and owns a one-third stake in the London Eye; and Istithmar, the investment arm of Dubai has purchased significant amounts of high-profile property in the UK, including The Adelphi and the Metropole Hotel as well as the QE2. The UAE has also invested heavily in British sports: the Abu Dhabi United Group purchased Manchester City football club in 2008 and Arsenal football team's stadium in London bears the name of its sponsor: UAE owned Emirates airline.⁴¹

³⁷ Visa, 'Tourism Outlook UAE', Jul 2011, 13 Apr 2012 <http://corporate.visa.com/_media/visa-tourism-outlook-uae.pdf>.

³⁸ Hazburn, p. 208; for expatriate statistics, see BBC News, "Brits Abroad", www.news.bbc.co.uk, 19 Jul 2010

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/spl/hi/in_depth/brits_abroad/html/mid_east.stm>.

³⁹ UK Trade and Investment, 'United Arab Emirates', www.ukti.org.uk, 13 Apr 2012 <<http://www.ukti.gov.uk/export/countries/asiapacific/middleeast/unitedarabemirates.html>>.

⁴⁰ 'UAE investments in UK', gulfnews.com 4 Aug 2009, 9 Jul 2012 <<http://gulfnews.com/business/features/uae-investments-in-uk-1.534169>>.

⁴¹ Mike Adamson, 'Manchester City Agree Takeover Deal with Abu Dhabi Group', [Guardian.co.uk](http://www.guardian.co.uk), 1 Sep 2008, 14 Jul 2010 <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/football/2008/sep/01/manchestercity.premierleague>>; 'Arsenal Announce Deal with Emirates', [Arsenal.com](http://www.arsenal.com), 5 Oct 2004, 14 Jul 2010

These investments ensure that the international profile of the UAE, particularly in the leisure industry, remains high, especially in Britain.⁴² So while Dubai might seem like a neutral location on which to base the romance east, it is clearly a place whose interests are still closely bound up with the west, in particular, Britain.

It seems that Britain has had a particular influence on sheikh romance publishing itself. The sheikh romance was originally a British phenomenon, exemplified by British author Hull's *The Sheik*. Mills & Boon is a highly self-referential publisher and authors in genre fiction often pay tribute to previous authors and their works, as subsequent authors have echoed Hull's story in their own works, for example Winspear's *Blue Jasmine* and Morey's *The Sheikh's Convenient Virgin*, indicating the authority of her work.⁴³ All sheikh novels published by Mills & Boon were written by British authors until American Sandra Marton's *Rapture in the Sands* in 1985. Even of the fifty-seven sheikh romances published in the *Modern Romance* series, thirty-two were written by British authors, compared with seventeen written by American authors and eight by Australian authors (one of whom emigrated from Britain to Australia). If we consider the nationalities of the heroines of these novels, thirty-two heroines are British (one is British and Barakan), fifteen are American (three are American and Arabian), eight are Australian and two have other invented European nationalities. Thus, British heroines and British authors constitute the majority in *Modern Romance* sheikh texts. So just as Mills & Boon's earlier romance settings in British colonies were not neutral, so the shift to a fictional, yet clearly recognisable UAE is not neutral either, as the extensive and longstanding association of the UAE and Britain attests. Whilst the romance east might be imaginary, it is an imagination rooted in a real British history in the Gulf, reflected in the dominance of British authors and characters.

The decision to model the romance east on Dubai is revealing of the kind of Middle East imagined for these romances. Dubai is a place whose popular reputation is primarily based upon tourism and business which caters to western, in particular

<<http://www.arsenal.com/155/unhoused-import-pages/latest-stadium-news/arsenal-announce-deal-with-emirates>>.

⁴² See Hazburn, p. 211.

⁴³ Clive Bloom, *Bestsellers: Popular Fiction Since 1900* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p. 17; Trish Morey, *The Sheikh's Convenient Virgin* (Richmond: Harlequin Mills & Boon, 2008).

British, tastes, and where politics is effectively side-lined: the dominant international discourse on Dubai is one of luxury and leisure. These romances thus deliberately avoid the ‘political’ Middle East, by which I mean those parts of the Middle East regarded negatively in western political rhetoric, for example Iran or Afghanistan, choosing to align their fictional nations with the most western-friendly and politically innocuous parts of the region.

But of course, even as this action seems to dodge politics, the decision to model the romance east on the UAE is deeply political: to avoid politics is *itself* a political choice. It reveals awareness, on a cultural level, of the geopolitics of the region – where there is conflict and where there is not – and changes over time. The engagement of these romances with geopolitics is, clearly, covert. They do not engage overtly with the politics of the region in the way that other artefacts of popular culture do, for example the BBC television drama *Occupation*, first aired in June 2009, or films such as *The Mark of Cain* (2007) and *In The Loop* (2009), all of which explicitly deal with the politics surrounding British involvement in contemporary conflict in the Middle East.⁴⁴ Yet in their retention of a relationship between the romance east and the contemporary geopolitics of the Middle East, these romances demonstrate a continued awareness of political discourses about the region.

A ‘Medieval’ Romance East: Shaky Temporality

But it is not just by modelling the romance east on Dubai that these romances reveal an awareness of contemporary political rhetoric about the Middle East. They also allude to the discourse which labels aspects of the Middle East to be ‘medieval’. As I have mentioned, the modern sheikh romance frequently refers to its constructed east as ‘medieval’, connecting sheikh romance with an Orientalist rhetoric which defines the Middle East in terms of political dictatorship, terrorism and misogyny. Modern romance novels might not seem like a locus for these politicised ideas, as they generally avoid any explicit discussion of contemporary politics, but they are preoccupied with the east as ‘medieval’, although their deployment of the discourse differs somewhat from contemporary rhetoric, as I now discuss. I outline three main

⁴⁴ *Occupation*, dir. Nick Murphy, BBC, 16-18 Jun 2009; *The Mark of Cain*, dir. Marc Munden, Film4 Productions, 2007; *In The Loop*, dir. Armando Iannucci, Optimum Releasing, 2009.

ways in which sheikh romances nuance current discourse on the ‘medieval’ east: through the elision of religion; the use of fictional geography; and eroticisation. I argue that sheikh romances construct the ‘medieval’ Middle East as something paradoxically appealing and abhorrent, attempting to distance the romance east from the ‘medieval’ reality of the Middle East.

The labelling of the east as ‘medieval’ is evident in contemporary newsprint, documentary and popular culture. The connection of ‘medieval’ repression with Islam and the contemporary Middle East has a substantial history, as indicated by a 2000 article in British newspaper *The Guardian* which argued that ‘the Taliban [are] medieval [...], uncompromising [... and] often barbarous’.⁴⁵ While the discourse was already in evidence before the events of 11 September 2001 (9/11), the construction of the Middle East as ‘medieval’ has received renewed vigour in the past decade, most famously in George Bush’s speech given in response to the terrorist attacks, in which he analogised the ‘war on terrorism’ as a ‘crusade’.⁴⁶ While the rhetoric marking aspects of the Middle East as ‘medieval’ since 9/11 has been most pronounced in the USA, it is also evident in contemporary British media and politics. A newspaper article in 2001 described Afghanistan as a ‘pathetic place of [...] medieval wretchedness’ and in 2002 David Blunkett, then British Home Secretary, wrote:

The al-Qaida and their Taliban sponsors were motivated by doctrines that reject democratic norms, human rights, and the whole moral basis upon which our society has evolved in recent centuries. In that sense, *it was an attack on modernity itself*, reflected in the *medieval repression* to which Afghanistan was subjected under Taliban rule.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Luke Harding, ‘Bin Laden: The Question Facing the Next US President’, *Guardian.co.uk*, 13 Nov 2000, 23 May 2012

<<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2000/nov/13/worlddispatch.lukeharding?INTCMP=SRC>>. Kathleen Davis has written about a 1996 US documentary in which the treatment of women in Afghanistan is signified as medieval (‘Time Behind the Veil’). For analysis of this medieval rhetoric in the USA see Holsinger, *Neomedievalism, Neoconservatism, and the War on Terror*.

⁴⁶ President George W. Bush, ‘Remarks by the President Upon Arrival: The South Lawn’, *The White House: President George W. Bush*, 16 Sept 2001, 23 May 2012 <<http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010916-2.html>>.

⁴⁷ Jonathan Steele, ‘No Easy Conquest’, *Guardian.co.uk*, 14 Sept 2001, 23 May 2012 <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2001/sep/14/afghanistan.jonathansteele?INTCMP=SRCH>>; David Blunkett, ‘Integration With Diversity: Globalisation and the Renewal of Democracy and Civil Society’, *Reclaiming Britishness*, ed. Phoebe Griffith and Mark Leonard (London: The Foreign Policy Centre, 2002), p. 67, my emphasis.

Blunkett's remarks are revealing of the underlying implications of this discourse. What he terms 'medieval' here is religion, specifically radical Islam. This is a religion commonly associated with certain parts of the Middle East, as Jarmakani illustrates in her articulation of the Arab/Muslim/Middle Eastern sheikh character, and for many in the west it is specifically the religious aspects of the region, represented in practices of veiling, legal customs and the treatment of women, which are seen as 'medieval'.⁴⁸ Furthermore, the meaning of 'medieval' is clearly given, here, as something distinctly un-modern: '*an attack on modernity itself*'. Repeated references to modernity in the speeches of Tony Blair from this period show how this idea of 'medieval' is predicated on a temporal opposition between east and west; Blair said that conflict in the Middle East 'is about modernisation, within Islam and outside of it'.⁴⁹ This is a discourse which continues to be used by politicians: in March 2012, David Cameron referred to the situation in the Syrian city of Homs as 'a scene of medieval barbarity'.⁵⁰ The 'medieval' Middle East, as understood here, is not historical but, as the association of 'medieval' with 'barbarity' and 'repression' reveal, ideological.

Sheikh romance defines and uses the medieval in multiple ways. First, the real medieval historical period (c.500-c.1500) is used to shape the desert nation's architecture, landscape and history. In many sheikh romances, the romance nation has 'medieval' architecture. There are medieval citadels, medieval towns, a tent like a 'medieval pavilion' and a palace which appears to be 'a medieval jail'.⁵¹ In *The Sheikh's English Bride*, the 'palace [...] dated back to the fourteenth century' and the elaborate 'grand dining room' in *Duty Desire and the Desert King* has a 'dais [...] raised above the room, just the way it might have been in a medieval castle'.⁵² An

⁴⁸ Jarmakani argues that the sheikh's 'characterization mimics the conflation and confusion of ethnic (Arab), religious (Muslim), and geographic (Middle Eastern) markers' ('Desiring the Big Bad Blade', p. 897).

⁴⁹ Tony Blair, 'Full text of Blair's speech: Prime minister's address to the Lord Mayor's Banquet', *Guardian.co.uk*, 11 Nov 2002, 12 Jun 2012

<<http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2002/nov/11/labour.iraq>>.

⁵⁰ 'David Cameron warns Syria of "day of reckoning"', *BBC News*, 2 Mar 2012, 12 Jun 2012
<<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-17231301>>.

⁵¹ Annie West, *The Sheikh's Ransomed Bride* (Richmond: Harlequin Mills & Boon, 2007), p. 46; Susan Stephens, *Bedded by the Desert King* (Richmond: Harlequin Mills & Boon, 2006), p. 16; Hewitt, *The Sheikh's Love-Child*, p. 20.

⁵² Sharon Kendrick, *The Sheikh's English Bride* (Richmond: Harlequin Mills & Boon, 2007), p. 90; Jane Porter, *Duty Desire and the Desert King* (Richmond: Harlequin Mills & Boon, 2009) p. 104.

imagined medieval history is evoked in *Bought*. Aside from a few references to the Sahara desert and the Atlantic Ocean, all geographical descriptions of Baraka are related to its colonial past, describing the modern country through its history. Malik is first introduced standing ‘on the ancient harbor wall constructed nearly seven hundred years ago, in the shade of a sixteenth century Portuguese fortress’, aligning the modern hero with the late medieval history of his nation.⁵³ The international standing of Baraka is defined not, as in *Bejewelled*, by international trade or celebrity, but by its historical importance as part of the Almohad dynasty of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries ‘when Baraka was part of the territory that included Morocco, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria and part of Spain’.⁵⁴ Here, the medieval history of Baraka looms large to characterise its present.

Most references to the medieval in sheikh romance, however, refer not to the historical medieval period but to an ahistorical cultural definition of ‘medieval’, which corresponds to media and political representations of parts of the Middle East. In sheikh romance, the cultural construction of ‘medieval’ is evident in representations of ‘medieval laws and customs’ which particularly emphasise gender injustice.⁵⁵ One heroine is sold in marriage to the sheikh to secure mining rights, her father bartering ‘like some medieval tyrant’ with the sheikh’s family.⁵⁶ Another states that ‘going back to [the sheikh’s country] was like a time-travel into the dark ages. It was still feudal even barbaric, in its customs, particularly with regards to women’.⁵⁷ Women are judged as ‘they used to do in medieval times’ and there is a ‘warped sense of medieval family honour’.⁵⁸ In *Bejewelled* the heroine angrily labels the hero ‘a relic from the Dark Ages’, considering the ‘high regard in which he held a woman’s virginity’ to be ‘barbaric chauvinism’.⁵⁹ The specific labelling of Middle Eastern attitudes towards women as ‘medieval’ is, as I have outlined, common in western politics and media, with the denial of education for girls, honour killings and

⁵³ *Bought*, p. 9.

⁵⁴ *Bought*, p. 65.

⁵⁵ Lynne Graham, *The Desert Sheikh’s Captive Wife* (Richmond: Harlequin Mills & Boon, 2007), p. 131.

⁵⁶ Lucy Monroe, *The Sheikh’s Bartered Bride* (Richmond: Harlequin Mills & Boon, 2004), p. 170.

⁵⁷ Jane Porter, *The Sheikh’s Wife* (Richmond: Harlequin Mills & Boon, 2001), p. 58.

⁵⁸ Sharon Kendrick, *The Sheikh’s Unwilling Wife* (Richmond: Harlequin Mills & Boon, 2007), p. 75; Lawrence, *Desert Prince, Defiant Virgin*, p. 148.

⁵⁹ *Bejewelled*, pp. 142, 109.

a lack of social mobility at the forefront of this western discourse.⁶⁰ Sheikh romances thus draw on a wider public and political discourse of the Middle East as ‘medieval’.

Yet, crucially, although these romances echo contemporary rhetoric about the ‘medieval’ Middle East, they do not replicate its emphasis on religion. While politicians and the media have connected ‘medieval’ attitudes, particularly towards women, with tenets of contemporary Islamic belief, sheikh romances obfuscate this association. This action is part of a wider elision of Islam in sheikh romance.

Jarmakani notes that ‘overt naming of religion is quite rare because [...] it borders too closely to what mainstream readers understand to be the uncomfortable realities of Islam’, like veiling or the oppression of women.⁶¹ Most sheikhs are lapsed Muslims, who drink alcohol, eat pork, conduct casual sexual relationships, and take an active part in Christian rituals.⁶² The hero of *An Arabian Marriage* is himself the leader of a Christian dynasty.⁶³ Even when apparent intolerance is located amongst secondary characters, it is rarely explicitly referred to as stemming from Islamic belief. Instead, ‘medieval’ attitudes are labelled as aspects of ethnicity or secular culture rather than customs rooted in Islam.

In *Bought*, Malik arranges the date of his and Nicolette’s wedding according to ‘the religious and cultural calendar’, although it is made clear he himself is not religious.⁶⁴ Malik also refers to *hshuma* when considering his cousin Fatima’s reputation. *Hshuma*, an Arabic term used most widely in Morocco, approximates the English ‘shame’, but also denotes ‘modesty’ and ‘politeness’.⁶⁵ The term is used to signal transgressions of moral norms defined by Islamic society.⁶⁶ While *hshuma*

⁶⁰ In a June 2012 article on Afghanistan, for example, Emily Dyer mentions the ‘brutal, medieval restrictions on women’s freedoms’ (‘The “war on women” Being Waged in Afghanistan’, *The Telegraph*, 26 Jun 2012, 28 Jun 2012 <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/afghanistan/9356291/The-war-on-women-being-waged-in-Afghanistan.html>>).

⁶¹ Jarmakani, ‘Desiring the Big Bad Blade’, p. 916.

⁶² In *Duty, Desire and the Desert King* the children of the sheikh and western heroine are baptised by ‘a priest [flown in] from London’ (p. 185) and the hero of *In the Sheikh’s Arms* is a ‘fallen Muslim’ who ‘[does] not believe in very much’ (p. 60).

⁶³ The sheikh’s nation of Quamar was ‘founded [...] as a Christian dynasty’ by their ‘honoured ancestor, Kareem I’ (Lynne Graham, *An Arabian Marriage* [Richmond: Harlequin Mills & Boon, 2002], p. 7).

⁶⁴ *Bought*, p. 18.

⁶⁵ Donna Lee Bowen and Evelyn A. Early, ‘Glossary’, *Everyday Life in the Muslim Middle East*, ed. Bower and Early, 2nd ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), p. 379.

⁶⁶ Ixy Noever, ‘Women’s Choices: Norms, Legal Pluralism and Social Control among the Ayt Hdiddu of Central Morocco’, *Shattering Tradition: Custom, Law and the Individual in the*

does not exclusively denote sexual transgressions or women's behaviour in particular, the term is regularly applied to women's behaviour and it is with women that the concept of *hshuma* is most widely associated in the western imagination.⁶⁷ Certainly, Porter, the author of *Bought*, has used the term in several other sheikh titles to refer to women's sexual behaviour, including *The Sheikh's Virgin* and *Duty, Desire and the Desert King*. Yet, even though *Bought* refers to a 'religious' calendar and to *hshuma*, Islam itself is never mentioned. Furthermore, Nicolette and Malik are married in a 'glorious fairytale cathedral' on her native Mediterranean island in a service including 'prayers' and a 'cathedral choir': this is clearly not a romance concerned with adherence to Muslim ceremonies.⁶⁸

The effect, here, is that traditions and concepts, which might more usually be attributed to religious ideologies, are more abstractly connected with the ethnic culture of the sheikh's nation. As Jarmakani argues, references to religion in sheikh romance are 'covert', 'coded through [...] tropes of ethnicity or region'.⁶⁹ In *The Sheikh's Virgin*, part of which takes place in Baraka, the association of *hshuma* with ethnic culture, rather than specifically religious culture, is made clear. *Hshuma* is explained as a concept which 'didn't exist in the West' and which is explicitly a Barakan 'cultur[al]' tradition.⁷⁰ Given that Baraka is never referred to as a Muslim country but rather one consisting of a blend of ethnic groups, including 'Berber, Boudin, Arab, [and] African', it is clear that customs and traditions which might more usually be connected with Islam are instead coded as nationally specific ethnic or cultural practices.⁷¹ Thus, while western political and media rhetoric conflates, as Jarmakani posits, ethnicity, religion, and geopolitical territory in its representation of the contemporary Middle East as 'medieval', sheikh romance eliminates religion, conflating only ethnicity and geography in its articulation of a 'medieval' Middle East.

Muslim Mediterranean, ed. Walter Dostal and Wolfgang Kraus (London: I. B. Tauris, 2005), p. 191.

⁶⁷ Carla Makhlouf Obermeyer, 'Sexuality in Morocco: Changing Context and Contested Domain', *Culture, Health & Sexuality: An International Journal for Research, Intervention and Care* 2.3 (2000): 243.

⁶⁸ *Bought*, pp. 166, 167.

⁶⁹ Jarmakani, 'Desiring the Big Bad Blade', pp. 906, 910.

⁷⁰ Porter, *The Sheikh's Virgin*, pp. 95, 96.

⁷¹ *Bought*, p. 120.

Of course, even as they elide religion, there is an implicit religious element to these romances. Readers familiar with contemporary discourses of Islamophobia will no doubt re-connect the vague, secularised customs of sheikh romances with their Islamic origins. However, by positioning the root of concepts such as *hshuma* and religious calendars in ethnic rather than religious tradition, these romances manage to disconnect the ‘medieval’ customs of the sheikh romance, rooted in ethnicity and geography, from those represented in western political discourse, where ethnicity and geography are inextricably conflated with religion. In this way, the ‘medieval’ discourse of sheikh romance is separated from that of western media. Furthermore, the effect of this elision of religion is that apparently ‘medieval’ customs are distanced from the binary intolerance of religion, suggesting that they might be more easily changed. Removing religion thus provides opportunities for the heroine to solve the ‘medieval’ problems of the east, as I will discuss.

In addition to the elision of Islam, these sheikh novels further blur the connection between the romance east and the apparently ‘medieval’ reality of the Middle East through their fictional geography. While the sheikh nation may still be described as ‘medieval’, it is not necessarily the *same* ‘medieval’ as that of the Middle East in the news. I would like to suggest that by removing their ‘medieval’ attitudes from the context of the real Middle East and situating them in the fictional space of the romance east, these sheikh romances can effectively sidestep the negative associations of the ‘medieval’ east: this is clearly still a ‘medieval’ attitude, but it is not necessarily the same ‘medieval’ attitude assumed to inhere in the real Middle East. Furthermore, the modelling of fictional sheikh nations on the hypermodern and western-friendly nations of the UAE, notably Dubai, works to nuance this discourse as these are not the places usually described as ‘medieval’ in the contemporary discourse about the modern Middle East, but locations whose international reputation, I have argued, is largely leisure-filled and touristic. By using Dubai as a model for the romance east, sheikh novels sidestep the politicised connotations of the Middle East. Dubai thus provides the requisite apolitical exoticism, while circumventing the restrictions associated with the ‘medieval’ Middle East of places like Iran, Iraq and Saudi Arabia which are associated with Islamic extremism.

The final way that sheikh romance deals with its 'medieval' romance east is through the erotic. The 'medieval' Middle East, according to contemporary western media, is utterly undesirable. Yet in sheikh romances, the 'medieval' can be either muted by the erotic exoticism of the romance east or, in some cases, the 'medieval' itself can be figured as desirable. In *Bought*, Malik's desert fortress is a place of 'semidark corridors, candles lit in high wall sconces', 'the soft flickering yellow light reminding Nicolette of a medieval castle and yet the blue paint, and the gold and black mosaics were exotic instead of frightening'.⁷² Here, the expected association of 'medieval' is with fear, but either through the presence of the sexy sheikh leading her, or the sensual Baraka, such an effect is subdued.

Many accusations of being medieval are directed at the sheikh himself. One heroine rails: 'you described me as your woman as though I was a possession! It's medieval!' and the heroine of *The Sheikh's Wife* considers: 'what kind of man handcuffs a woman? A medieval man'.⁷³ Yet, despite his 'medieval' attitude, heroines still desire the hero. In *The Sheikh's Wife* the heroine knows that 'he could seduce her at the drop of [a] hat' and 'she responded to him' as 'something inside her stirred, hunger, awareness'.⁷⁴ A similar desire for the sheikh's 'medieval' attitude can be seen in *The Sheikh's Ransomed Bride* as the heroine finds the sheikh's assumption of 'a medieval view of a woman's role' appealing 'to some tiny, primitive part of her subconscious'.⁷⁵ Is it possible that by desiring the 'medieval' hero, the heroine similarly desires his medieval attitude? It certainly appears so in *The Arabian Mistress*, where the heroine observes: 'virginity appeared to be a major issue on all fronts as far as he was concerned. It was medieval but there was something terribly, strangely, crazily sweet about his equally barbaric solution to this lack he believed she had'.⁷⁶ Here, the heroine is welcoming the hero's 'medieval' attitude while simultaneously rejecting its barbarism.⁷⁷ Through the eroticising of the romance east and the sheikh hero, the 'medieval' can actually be imagined as erotic and desirable.

⁷² *Bought*, p. 125.

⁷³ Graham, *The Desert Sheikh's Captive Wife*, p. 107; Porter, *The Sheikh's Wife*, p. 96.

⁷⁴ Porter, *The Sheikh's Wife*, p. 26.

⁷⁵ West, *The Sheikh's Ransomed Bride*, p. 128.

⁷⁶ Lynne Graham, *The Arabian Mistress* (Richmond: Harlequin Mills & Boon, 2001), p. 93.

⁷⁷ Virginity is particularly connected with the 'medieval' in sheikh romance; I discuss the implications of this in Chapter 2.

Yet, labelling eastern nations as ‘medieval’ is not the preserve of the west in sheikh romance. Malik’s cousin Fatima defends women’s rights in Baraka by exclaiming, ‘we are not barbaric like some countries’, referring to another perhaps *more* ‘medieval’ east.⁷⁸ This reiterates the distance of the ‘medieval’ east from Baraka: a country which is perhaps not so ‘medieval’ after all. Sheikh romances also exploit a discourse of modernisation, positioning the western heroine as the harbinger of progress to the desert nation. As I suggested earlier, the subsuming of ‘medieval’ attitudes into ethnic culture rather than religion means that such apparent problems are more likely to be solvable. In *Bejewelled* the heroine accuses the hero of being ‘a relic from the Dark Ages’ when he announces that he expects her to give up her modelling career after their marriage. By the end of the novel the hero admits: ‘I was wrong to make the assumptions and the demands that I did’, relinquishing his ‘medieval’ ideals.⁷⁹ But the heroine replies: ‘I don’t want to carry on modelling. But I do want to work, yes. Let me help with the new school [...], build others just the same’.⁸⁰ So even though she initially rejected the sheikh’s expectation that she would give up her career as ‘from the Dark Ages’, the heroine *does* in fact give up her job, replacing it with a scheme of modernisation and development, thus resolving the sheikh’s ‘medieval’ demands, as well as beginning, through development, to modernise the ‘medieval’ nation.

Similarly in *Bought* the heroine protests against the ‘disgustingly barbaric arranged marriage thing’, and argues passionately in favour of ‘the women living in Baraka who might be in desperate need of a helping hand’.⁸¹ She later sets out her plans to encourage girls to stay in education and have a choice to marry or not. Development is defined according to the interests of the western heroine and, consequently, western reader, hence the focus on women’s rights. What is primarily labelled as ‘medieval’ in these romances, and therefore able to be modernised, are gender issues affecting women. In the romantic resolution of the story, some of the ‘medieval’ attitudes can apparently be resolved through the heroine’s scheme of modernisation.

⁷⁸ *Bought*, p. 77.

⁷⁹ *Bejewelled*, pp. 142, 183.

⁸⁰ *Bejewelled*, p. 183.

⁸¹ *Bought*, p. 76.

Yet this resolution is not without its tensions: heroines are figured as vehicles of the western world and of imperialism. By advocating education and women's rights, heroines bring about modernity, whilst simultaneously reinforcing the 'medievalness' of the desert nation: the fact that it needed modernising in the first place. So whilst the sheikh's 'medieval' ideas about the heroine's career may have been resolved by the end of the novel, by placing plans for modernisation in the future, these romances underscore the 'medieval' present of the east. By agreeing upon action for modernisation, these romances offer a solution to the 'medieval' suffering of eastern women.⁸² In sum, in removing reference to Islam, creating a fictional geography, and erotically engaging with the 'medieval', these sheikh romances offer a solution for the 'medieval' treatment of women and nuance their own use of the discourse, which is constructed both in relation and in resistance to contemporary rhetoric about the 'medieval' Middle East. In this way, these romances engage with contemporary rhetoric about the medieval Middle East, indicating how these romances deal with politics even when political discourse is rarely mentioned.

I have argued that the romance east is familiar and homogeneous, common to all sheikh romances. The individual differences inherent in the real east are subsumed and conflated into a single east. Modelled on the western-friendly and well-known Dubai, the romance east is a place where the negative aspects of the Middle East, for example the 'medieval' treatment of women, can be either solved, sidestepped or modified. The romance east is politically aligned with the west, especially Britain, and is accessible, with direct access and contact. These sheikh romances exploit existing political discourses in their articulation of geography and their use of 'medieval' to distinguish their romance east from this reality. The sheikh romance east is thus both distanced from the otherness of Middle Eastern politics and is presented as a familiar, singular place. But the modern sheikh romance is not the only place where the romance east straddles reality and fantasy. Medieval romance also constructs its romance east using an amalgam of factual and fictional geography, and *Bevis of Hampton* is a romance particularly concerned with geography and its symbolic meanings. I move now to consider how geography functions in the Middle English romance *Bevis of Hampton* and examine what it can reveal, by contrast, about modern romance.

⁸² I examine further the positionality of eastern women in relation to the heroine in Chapter 4.

Bevis of Hampton: Geography and Journeys

Bevis of Hampton makes particular use of geography.⁸³ The story of a young English knight exiled from England and raised by Saracens in Armenia (Ermony), *Bevis* is fundamentally concerned with places, their populations and religions, and routes and methods of travel to and between them.⁸⁴ Just as changes in the geography of modern sheikh romances reveal a closer relationship with reality than might have been expected, in the second part of this chapter I argue that the unique geographical obsession of *Bevis* indicates a similar attention to contemporary geographic realities: a level of sophistication with which medieval romance has generally not been credited. Furthermore, the geographic focus of *Bevis* infuses the narrative beyond simple scene-setting, functioning as a fundamental part of the romance's characterisation.

As Heng explains, the geography of medieval romance has, like that of modern sheikh romance, generally been assumed to function as little more than a fantasy backdrop for more important narrative events.⁸⁵ While several recent studies have addressed the use of geography in medieval literature, the number of studies focusing on Middle English romance remains small.⁸⁶ Smaller still is the number of studies

⁸³ Hereafter referred to as *Bevis*. For a full plot summary see Appendix 1.

⁸⁴ Many have considered the problems associated with terminology related to geography such as 'nation', 'national', in a medieval context, when the terms have accrued so much post-medieval meaning. Palmira Brummett, for example, claims that "'nation" with its modern implications of affiliation by state or by citizenship, seems [...] problematic [,] imposing as it does a shared identity upon those [...] for whom language, expatriate status, class, monastic brotherhood, professional activity, or kin might well have served as better markers of identity' (Palmira Brummett [ed.], 'Introduction: Genre, Witness, and Time in the "Book" of Travels', *The 'Book' of Travels: Genre, Ethnology, and Pilgrimage, 1250-1700* [Leiden, Brill, 2009], pp. 1-35). Similarly Joep Leerssen argues: 'medieval Europe was aware of distinctions between languages and regions, and these were often couched in the nomenclature of "nations". The nation was not, however, a rigorously thought-out concept' (*National Thought in Europe: A Cultural History* [Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006], p. 26). In order to make these distinctions clear, I use terminology such as 'place', 'location', or 'site' that I consider more appropriate for the kind of semi-fictionalised, semi-specific geography of *Bevis*. While nations in modern sheikh romance might well be fictional, they are understood within a modern geography where places are usually well-defined as nations. In the Middle Ages, on the other hand, borders and national identities were not always as clearly delineated and my terminology seeks to reflect that.

⁸⁵ Heng, p. 10.

⁸⁶ Two of the most important recent interventions into the field of literary geography are Kathryn L. Lynch, ed., *Chaucer's Cultural Geography* (London: Routledge, 2002) and Sylvia Tomasch and Sealy Gilles, ed., *Text and Territory* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998). For geography in Middle English romance see Cooper, especially pp. 45-105; Jennifer R. Goodman, *Chivalry and Exploration, 1298-1630* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1998); Heng, especially pp. 239-305; Metlitzki; Patricia Price, 'Integrating Time and Space: The Literary Geography of *Patience*, *Cleanness*, *The Siege of Jerusalem*, and *St. Erkenwald*', *Medieval*

focusing on the geography of *Bevis*, which is surprising given both the geographic focus of the romance and its popularity in the Middle Ages.⁸⁷ *Bevis* is one of the most popular and enduring of all Middle English romances; extant in eight manuscripts, the romance was widely translated and disseminated throughout Europe well beyond the medieval period.⁸⁸ The immediate source for the Middle English *Bevis* is the Anglo-Norman *Boeve* whose composition Judith Weiss dates to the last decade of the twelfth century, around 130 years before the earliest extant Middle English version of the romance.⁸⁹ My analysis focuses on the earliest surviving version of *Bevis* in the Auchinleck MS, an important manuscript dating from around 1330 which contains a significant number of romances.⁹⁰ This version of *Bevis*, I will argue, uses geography more extensively than any other version (see Table 3).

Perspectives 11 (1996): 234-250; and Robert Rouse, 'Walking (Between) the Lines: Romance as Itinerary/Map', *Medieval Romance, Medieval Contexts* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2011), pp. 135-147.

⁸⁷ See Metlitzki; Carolyn Collette and Vincent J. DiMarco, 'The Matter of Armenia in the Age of Chaucer', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 23 (2001): pp. 317-358; and Calkin, *Saracens*. Recent work on *Bevis* has considered its relationship with emerging English 'nationalism', a subject not unrelated, I argue, to its geographic focus. Two good examples are Kofi Campbell, 'Nation-building Colonialist-style in *Bevis of Hampton*', *Exemplaria* 18.1 (2006): pp. 205-232; and Robert Rouse, 'For King and Country? The Tension between National and Regional Identities in *Sir Bevis of Hampton*', *Fellows and Djordjevic*, pp. 114-126.

⁸⁸ Jennifer Fellows remarks: 'no other Middle English romance remained in print in its late medieval form, substantially unchanged, as long as *Bevis* did' (*Bevis: A Textual Survey* Fellows and Djordjevic, p. 101). For more on *Bevis* after the medieval period see: Jennifer Fellows, '*Bevis Redivivus: The Printed Editions of Sir Bevis of Hampton*', *Romance Reading on the Book: Essays on Medieval Narrative Presented to Maldwyn Mills*, ed. Fellows and Maldwyn Mills, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1996), pp. 251-268. *Bevis* is extant in eight manuscripts: Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, MS Advocates 19.2.1 (Auchinleck); London, British Library, MS Egerton 2862 (olim Sutherland/Trentham); Naples, Biblioteca Nazionale, MS XIII.B.29; Manchester, Chetham's Library, MS 8009; Cambridge, Cambridge University Library, MS Ff.2.38; Cambridge, Gonville and Caius College, MS 175/96; Cambridge, Trinity College, MS O.2.13 (fragment of 245 lines); Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Eng. Poet. D.208 (fragment containing approximately 200 lines). For a comprehensive list of extant manuscript and print versions of *Bevis* to 1711 see Fellows, '*Bevis: A Textual Survey*', pp. 104-113.

⁸⁹ Judith Weiss, 'The Date of the Anglo-Norman *Boeve de Haumtone*', *Medium Aevum* 55 (1986): pp. 237-241. For the relationship between *Boeve* and the Middle English *Bevis* see Ivana Djordjevic, 'From *Boeve* to *Bevis*: The Translator at Work', *Fellows and Djordjevic*, pp. 67-79.

⁹⁰ Unless otherwise indicated, all references for the Middle English *Bevis* are from the Auchinleck version and are taken from Ronald B. Herzman, Graham Drake, and Eve Salisbury, ed., *Four Romances of England* (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1999).

Table 3: Survey of Number of Place Names in the Most Complete Extant Middle English Versions of Bevis

Manuscript	Date	Number of Places Cited	State of Survival
Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, MS Advocates 19.2.1 (Auchinleck) (folio: 176e-201r)	c.1330	63	One leaf missing after fol.188, otherwise complete.
London, British Library, MS Egerton 2862 (olim Sutherland/Trentham) (folio: 45r-96v)	1375-1400	46	Missing final leaf.
Naples, Biblioteca Nazionale, MS XIII.B.29 (folio: pp. 23-79)	1450s	41	Complete.
Cambridge, Gonville and Caius College, MS 175/96 (folio: pp. 131-56)	1450-1475	18	Incomplete, around one-third surviving.
Manchester, Chetham's Library, MS 8009 (folio: 122r-190v)	1470-1480	39	Complete.
Cambridge, University Library, MS Ff.2.38 (folio: 102v-134r)	Late fifteenth / early sixteenth century	34	Complete.

Source: the author. My figures are drawn from original research based on Eugen Kölbing, ed., *The Romance of Sir Beues of Hamtoun*, Early English Text Society E.S. 156 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1885). I have not included counts for the two very fragmentary surviving versions of the romance. Manuscript information is drawn from Fellows, 'Bevis: A Textual Survey', pp. 104-113.

The geographic focus of *Bevis* is immediately apparent in the number of places mentioned in the romance. While *Boeve* also had a wide geographic span, a fact Weiss noted in her modern English translation of the Anglo-Norman romance, there was a significant augmentation in the number of places mentioned when the romance was translated into the vernacular: *Boeve* mentions 43 different places, whereas in *Bevis* this number increased to 63.⁹¹ The range of *Bevis*' geography is vast, encompassing locations in Europe, Asia and Africa, including Jerusalem, Rome, Cologne, London, Armenia, Damascus, Babylon and India, as well as the fictionalised spaces of Rifoun, Mombraunt, Dabilent and Aumberforce.

A significant addition in the translation from *Boeve* is two major interpolations identified by Weiss, the first of which describes Bevis fighting a dragon in Germany, and the second a fight in the streets of London.⁹² These interpolations significantly extend the geographic range of the romance to include minute details of London and a more expansive description of western Europe in the trajectory of the dragon Bevis defeats. The augmentation of geographical detail in *Bevis* is most evident when directly comparing it with *Boeve*.

For example, when describing a pilgrimage trajectory the list of places mentioned is relatively modest in *Boeve*: 'I have been in Nubia and in Carthage and in Esclavia and at the Dry Tree, in Barbary and in Macedonia, throughout heathen lands'.⁹³

Compare this with the equivalent passage in *Bevis*:

Sir, I have come from Jerusalem
From Nazareth and from Bethlehem,
The castle of Emmaus and Sinai;
India, Europe, and Asia,
Egypt, Greece, and Cairo,
Tarsus, Sicily and Saxony,
In Frisia, in Sidon and in Tyre,

⁹¹ Weiss plots a map outlining Boeve's journeys in *Boeve De Hauttone and Gui De Warewic: Two Anglo-Norman Romances* (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2008), p. xiv. For a full list of the places in the Middle English versions of *Bevis* and *Boeve* see Appendix 5.

⁹² Judith Weiss, 'The Major Interpolations in *Sir Beues of Hamtoun*', *Medium Aevum* 48 (1979): 71-76.

⁹³ 'jeo ai esté a Nubie / e en Cartage e en Esclavie / e a l'Arbre Sek e en Barbarie / e a Macedoyne, par tut en Paenie' (1519-1522). All references to *Boeve* are from Albert Stimming, ed., *Der Anglonormannische Boeve de Hauttone* (Halle, 1899). All modern English translations are from Weiss, *Two Anglo-Norman Romances*, this citation, p. 54.

In Africa and in many territories.⁹⁴

While *Boeve* mentions seven places, including the generic location ‘heathen lands’, *Bevis* extends the list of places to eighteen, including all three continents, Europe, Asia and Africa. Metlitzki suggests this passage reveals the geographical shift from ‘the traditional territory of Alexander the Great and [...] the western realm of Saracen power in Africa’ in *Boeve*, to ‘the territory of the Crusades, the Saracen East’ in *Bevis*.⁹⁵ So not only is geography in *Bevis* more expansive, it is also a noticeably *different* geography from that of *Boeve*. Admittedly lists of places are not rare in medieval romance; Metlitzki notes that ‘the enumeration of [...] places and countries [Bevis] claims to have visited is typical of a wide range of medieval romance in the age of the Crusades’.⁹⁶ Yet the change in geographical information from *Boeve* to *Bevis* is not merely quantitative, but also qualitative; the addition of locations in the Auchinleck *Bevis* not only widens the geographical scope of the romance but, I want to suggest, imbues the romance with a geographical specificity, as routes are described in more detail, and journey times and methods of travel are expanded. This level of detail serves, as it does in sheikh romance, to make the romance’s geography more realistic, a characteristic not usually associated with medieval romance. I argue that *Bevis* creates realism in three ways: first, by giving details of routes and journey times; second, by outlining methods of travel; and third, by referring in detail to real places.

Travellers, in *Bevis*, seem to follow established routes. Bevis ‘rode forth / On his way towards Armenia / Through France and through Normandy’.⁹⁷ When travelling to Jerusalem ‘forth he travelled by the river’⁹⁸, which Metlitzki argues is ‘evidently the Jordan’; and as part of the dragon fighting episode added in *Bevis* one dragon flies ‘through Tuscany and Lombardy, / Through Provence, without delay, / Into the land of Cologne’.⁹⁹ That characters follow particular routes is made clear when the giant

⁹⁴ ‘Sire, ich come fro Jurisalem / Fro Nazareth and fro Bedlem, / Emauns castel and Synaie; / Ynde, Erop, and Asie, / Egippte, Grese, and Babiloine, / Tars, Sesile and Sesaoine, / In Fris, in Sodeine and in Tire, / In Aufrik and in mani empire’ (2261-2268).

⁹⁵ Metlitzki, pp. 130-131.

⁹⁶ Metlitzki, p. 131.

⁹⁷ ‘rit forthward / In is wei til Ermonie / Thourgh Fraunce and thourgh Normondie’ (3616-3618).

⁹⁸ ‘forth a wente be the strem’ (1959).

⁹⁹ Metlitzki, p. 131; ‘thourgh Toskan and Lombardie, / Thourgh Province, withouten ensoine, / Into the londe of Coloyne’ (2656-2658).

Ascopard is able to intercept Bevis and Josian because ‘he knew [...] which road they would take’, suggesting that certain routes are regularly used.¹⁰⁰

Bevis also offers information about journey times, giving a sense both of how long it takes to travel and providing information about the passing of time in the romance. Whilst some awareness of time is evident in *Boeve*, it is much expanded in *Bevis*. Bevis appears to travel constantly and quickly: he rides for ‘so long’ and ‘quickly’, sails ‘without delay’; and when he travels to London he arrives ‘within a short time’.¹⁰¹ The passing of time is also noted: Bevis lived with Ermin in Armenia for ‘two years’; ‘the battle [with the boar] / lasted for a long time / Until it was time for evensong’; and when battling with Yvor, they fought ‘from the first division of the day (6-9am)’ until ‘at high noon’, Yvor struck Bevis.¹⁰² Repetition is also part of the temporality of *Bevis*. Bevis’ myriad journeys from Cologne to Southampton are repeatedly outlined in the text, highlighting both the frequency of travel and, by their recurrence in the plot, indicating the time and effort required for travel. Temporal aspects of travel are highlighted even when they appear to have no function in the plot. When Bevis visits Jerusalem, the text reads:

One day towards evening
He took his leave from the patriarch;
Early in the morning, when it was light
Forth he went on his way’.¹⁰³

Boeve, in contrast, simply reads: ‘he [...] made his way towards Jerusalem’.¹⁰⁴

Bevis measures the distances between places, either in the amount of time it takes to travel between them, or in miles. Cooper suggests that ‘the conversion of space into time provided a functional and accessible approximation’ of distance for English travellers in the Middle Ages and I argue that this is reflected in the way travel is described in *Bevis*.¹⁰⁵ For example, Dabilent is at ‘a distance of four [days] journey’

¹⁰⁰ ‘wiste [...] whiche wei hii wolde take’ (3588-3589).

¹⁰¹ ‘so longe’ (1789); ‘hastely’ (4577); ‘withouten ensoine’ (2569); ‘with inne a lite stounde’ (3489).

¹⁰² ‘yer and other’ (577); ‘the bataile [with the boar] gan leste long / Til the time of evesong’ (797-798); ‘fram prime til underne gan to ringe’ (4168); ‘at high midday’ (4173).

¹⁰³ ‘On a dai aghenes the eve / Of the patriarke he tok is leve; / Erliche amorwe, whan it was dai, / Forth a wente in is wai’ (1971-1974).

¹⁰⁴ ‘enver Jerusalem ad son chemin torné’ (1346); Weiss, p. 51.

¹⁰⁵ Cooper, p. 68.

from Mombraunt¹⁰⁶; when Josian is kidnapped by Ascopard, she transforms her appearance after ‘they had ridden on their way / But five miles into that region’; and when Bevis returns to England he camps ‘a mile outside of Southampton’.¹⁰⁷ All this extra detail of distance is absent from *Boeve*, indicating the extra temporal information included in *Bevis*.

J. B. Harley and David Woodward have noted that several medieval travel instructions took the form of itineraries, arguing that the itinerary form seems to have been better understood in medieval Europe than some other kinds of cartography.¹⁰⁸ Robert Rouse concurs, positing that ‘the itinerary form was the preeminent mode for the dissemination of geographical knowledge in the medieval period’.¹⁰⁹ Helen Cooper and Rouse both connect romance with this form of travel: ‘a sequence of places through which you had to pass to get where you wanted to go’.¹¹⁰ Extrapolating from Cooper and Rouse, neither of whom focuses on *Bevis*, I contend that this linear form of travel is clearly exemplified in *Bevis*, suggesting the author’s familiarity with the practices of medieval travel writing.

Methods of journeying are also described in much more detail in *Bevis*. When Yvor takes Josian to Mombraunt after their arranged marriage, there is a description of their methods of travel:

Each knight went to his steed
Men prepared carts and packhorses,
Knights and squires mounted on horseback,
And Josian, very carefully
Thither was taken in her carriage.¹¹¹

This passage offers significantly more information than *Boeve* which reads: ‘one day Yvori and his men mounted their horses, with Josiane amongst them, weeping

¹⁰⁶ ‘hennes four [days] journé’ (2228).

¹⁰⁷ ‘thai nadde ride in here way / Boute fif mile of that contray’ (3685-3686); ‘a mile out of South Hamtone’ (2956).

¹⁰⁸ P. D. A. Harvey, ‘Local and Regional Cartography in Medieval Europe’, *The History of Cartography: Cartography in Pre-Historic, Ancient, and Medieval Europe and the Mediterranean*, ed. J. B. Harley and David Woodward (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 495.

¹⁰⁹ Rouse, ‘Walking (Between) the Lines’, p. 139.

¹¹⁰ Cooper, p. 68.

¹¹¹ ‘Ech knight wente to is stede, / Men graithede cartes and somers, / Knightes to horse and squires, / And Josian with meche care / Theder was brought in hire chare’ (1486-1490).

bitterly, and took the road straight to Munbraunt'.¹¹² The extra detail in *Bevis* is related not to places, but to methods of travel: 'steeds' and 'carts', 'packhorses' and a 'carriage' – this is much more specific than the description in *Boeve*. Elsewhere in *Bevis*, Josian travels on a palfray (a riding horse), a detail entirely absent from *Boeve*.

Additional information about methods of travel given in *Bevis* is also evident when comparing descriptions of sailing in the two versions. In one passage, *Bevis* reads:

And hoisting the sails very hastily
They sailed forth, fair and well,
So that they came without delay
To the harbour of Cologne.¹¹³

Boeve, on the other hand, simply states: 'after sailing over the sea, Boeve of Hampton arrived in Christendom, at the city of Cologne'.¹¹⁴ Elsewhere in *Bevis*, Saber travels to find Josian:

On board ship they went straight away
And journeyed over the Mediterranean;
They had good wind and weather.
When they arrived on land
Speedily they proceeded.¹¹⁵

The corresponding passage in *Boeve* reads: '[Sabaoth] covered the ground in distant lands, and never stopped till he reached St Gilles'.¹¹⁶ In these two quotations from *Bevis*, a simple account of moving from one location to another has been enhanced by adding details of the voyage. In the first, the act of drawing up the sail 'very hastily' alludes to the frustrating practicalities which slow journeys down. The addition of 'fair and well' implies an easy voyage, whilst simultaneously suggesting the possibility that it could have been a bad voyage. They also arrive at the 'harbour' of Cologne – a more specific arrival point than in *Boeve*. The second quotation adds the means of voyage (ship), the route by which they travelled (via the Mediterranean

¹¹² 'Un jour mounta Yvori e sa gent, / Josiane o eus mult fortment plurant, / e le chemin tindrent tut dreit a Munbraunc' (1008-1010); Weiss, p. 43.

¹¹³ 'And drowen up saile al so snel / And sailede forth faire and wel, / That hii come withouten ensoine / To the haven of Coloine' (2567-2570).

¹¹⁴ 'Kant Boves de Hampton fu outre mer siglé, / il ariva en la cristienté; / ceo fu a Colonie la cite' (1893-1895); Weiss, *Two Anglo-Norman Romances*, p. 61. While *Boeve* might contain less specific geographical detail, it does here flag up religious ideology in a way that is absent from *Bevis* by positioning Cologne specifically as 'Christendom'.

¹¹⁵ 'To schip thai wente anon right / And pasede over the Grikische se; / Gode winde and weder hadden he. / Whan thai come to the londe, / Faste thai gonne' (3858-3862).

¹¹⁶ 'passe la terre par ample pais, / jeskes a Sen Gile unc ne prist finz' (2746-2747); Weiss, p. 76.

Sea), the weather conditions on the voyage and reveals that this is a journey undertaken using multiple modes of transportation – the travellers are forced to cover some of the distance on foot, a detail that *Boeve* does not include.

The final way in which *Bevis* creates a sense of realness through augmented detail is through the London interpolation. Towards the end of the romance, goaded by the King of England's steward, Bevis is forced into a fierce battle in the City of London, during which many civilians are killed and which results in the marriage of the King's daughter to Bevis' son as a means of achieving peace. *Bevis* mentions a total of eleven places associated with London geography, more than any other Middle English version. These are: 'London' (Londen, line 4289); 'Putney' (Potenhithe, 4290); 'river Thames' (Temse flode, 4294); 'Westminster' (Westmenster, 4295); 'Tower street' (Tour street, 4320); 'Cheapside' (Chepe, 4328); 'Goose lane' (Godes lane, 4397)¹¹⁷; 'London gate' (Londegate, 4492); 'church of St Mary le Bow' (Bowe, 4495)¹¹⁸; 'the London stone' (Londen ston, 4495)¹¹⁹; and 'Leadenhall' (the ledene halle, 4534).¹²⁰ Many of these locations are concentrated around Cheapside and form

¹¹⁷ Modern editions of *Bevis* usually correct 'Godes lane' to read 'Goose lane', echoing other Middle English versions of the romance (see Appendix 5). Weiss argues that the description of 'Godes lane' in *Bevis* highlights that the lane was 'narw ywrought [narrowly constructed]' (4411), suggesting that it corresponds to 'Goose lane', which Weiss describes as 'a narrow winding alley that used to run behind St Mary le Bow from Cordwainer Street [Bow lane] to Cheapside' ('Interpolations', p. 73). Lobel similarly documents a 'Gosselane', an alley which she locates behind St Mary le Bow (*The City of London From Prehistoric Times to c.1520*, ed. Mary D. Lobel, vol. 3. of *British Atlas of Historic Towns* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990], p. 75). However, Henry Harben, in his *Dictionary of London* mentions a 'Gutter lane' located 'north out of Cheapside', not far from the other Cheapside locations in *Bevis*. He notes spelling variants including; 'Goderunelane' (1278-1279); 'Goderes lane' (1284-1285); 'Godrunes lane' (1285); 'Godrenelane' (1291); 'Godrun lane' (1293-1294); 'Goderon lane' (1303-1304); 'Goderonne Lane' (1323); and 'Gudrunlane' (1322-1323) which, whilst not identical to *Bevis*' 'Godes lane', are similar enough to suggest a possible correlation (Harben, 'Gutter Lane', *Dictionary of (the City of) London, 1910*, 27 Oct 2010 <<http://www.motco.com/harben/2570.htm>>). While the narrowness of Goose lane suggests that this is a more likely location, it is possible that Gutter lane was not always as wide as it once was and that *Bevis*' 'Godes lane' refers to Gutter lane. 'Godes lane' may, of course, be a location of which we have no surviving record.

¹¹⁸ A parish church built in 1080 (see 'St Mary-le-Bow: A History', *St Mary-le-Bow Church*, 10 Sept 2010 <<http://www.stmarylebow.co.uk/#/1080-to-the-present/4535876441>>).

¹¹⁹ The 'London stone' is a marker allegedly used to measure distances from London, referred to in maps as early as 1198 (see 'The London Stone', *h2g2: The Unconventional Guide to Life, the Universe and Everything*, 23 Dec 2002, 10 Sept 2010 <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/dna/h2g2/A863309>>).

¹²⁰ Herzman et. al. note the Middle English Dictionary's citation of *Ledyhall* as a specific place name, noting that it is also referred to as Laurence Hall. I argue that 'the ledene hall' in *Bevis* refers to 'Leadenhall' of which Harben writes: 'before this property came into the hands of the Mayor and Commonalty and was converted into a market it had formed a considerable estate in

a realistic trajectory.¹²¹ The inclusion of ‘Londen ston’ in the list of London locations is particularly relevant here in its association with measuring distance. Henry Harben notes: ‘the stone is frequently alluded to in London records to mark the situation of adjacent houses and property’ and has been referred to as ‘a “Milliarium” or milestone, from which the British high-roads radiated and from which the distances on them were reckoned, similar to the one in the forum at Rome’.¹²² It is highly appropriate, for a romance so concerned with routes, places and the distances between them, to refer to a landmark whose function is to measure distance.

This level of realistic detail is highly unusual for Middle English romance, leading Weiss to suggest a writer or patron with first-hand knowledge of the city.¹²³ Rouse suggests that this passage indicates an anxiety about foreign influence in London and hence in the political decision-making of England, and Weiss contends that the episode may be reminiscent of an actual historical confrontation between King Henry III and Simon de Montfort and considers the addition of the fight in London to be in the spirit of patriotic sentiment.¹²⁴ If, however, as Weiss argues, the inclusion of

private ownership, and was for some years in the possession of the Nevill family, although it seems probable that the hall may have been leased to the City authorities from an early period. The earliest mention of it seems to be in 1296, when it is referred to in a will as ‘La Ledenehalle’.
[...] In 1315, [...] it was in possession of Dame Margaret de Neuill (Harben, ‘Leadenhall’, *Dictionary of (the City of) London, 1910*, 27 Oct 2010
<<http://www.motco.com/harben/3178.htm>>).

¹²¹ In the vicinity of these places is a street today known as Bevis Marks. Just north of Leadenhall street and east of Cheapside, Bevis Marks has been variantly known as ‘Bewesmarkes’ (1407) ‘Bevys Marke (1450); ‘Bevesmarkes’ (1513); ‘Bevers-market’ (1630); and ‘Beavis Markes’ (1677) (Harben, ‘Bevis Marks’, *Dictionary of (the City of) London, 1910*, 27 Oct 2010
<<http://www.motco.com/harben/563.htm>>). It has been claimed that the street was named after the Abbots of Bury, Buries Markes, corruptly ‘Bevis Markes’, yet the similarity to ‘Bevis’, not to mention the geographical proximity to the battle in the romance, is suggestive (see John Stow, *A Survey of London* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1908], cited in Harben). Indeed, J. B. Fleming posits that ‘Bevis certainly left his marks about the neighbourhood of Bevis Marks, and the name seems much more likely to have been derived from him than from the Abbots of Bury’ (J. B. Fleming, ‘Note on Bevis Marks’, *Notes and Queries* 11 [1897]: 258). W. F. Prideaux, writing in response to Fleming claims that as early as 1405 Bevis Marks was known under its current name, arguing that if the street is not named after Bevis, that it owes its name to a family with a similar patronymic (‘Note on Bevis Marks’, *Notes and Queries* 11 [1897]: 386). Fellows, drawing on Fleming’s and Prideaux’s arguments, posits that this street, ‘in London EC3, is supposedly the site of Bevis’ battle against the mass citizenry of London’ (Jennifer Fellows, ‘Sir Bevis of Hampton in Popular Tradition’, *Proceedings of the Hampshire Field Club and Archaeological Society* 42 [1986]: 144).

¹²² Harben, ‘London Stone’, *Dictionary of (the City of) London, 1910*, 27 Oct 2010
<<http://www.motco.com/harben/3357.htm>>.

¹²³ Weiss, ‘Interpolations’, p. 73. For a brief examination of the specific English locations in *Bevis* and their potential association with real locations see Ralph Hanna, *London Literature, 1300-1380* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 133-135.

¹²⁴ Rouse, ‘For King and Country’, p. 124; Weiss, ‘Interpolations’, pp. 74-75.

extra English geography makes the poem more concerned with England, then how are we to explain the attention paid to other geographical spaces such as Greece, Nubia, Africa and India? The addition of the London battle does indicate a thorough knowledge of London, and the description of the city is much more detailed than any other place in *Bevis*. Yet, contrary to Weiss, I argue that the increase in places, as well as the greater specificity of routes, distances, time and modes of transport, indicate a generally increased awareness of and interest in travelling and world geography, as opposed to a heightened interest in any one particular location.

In sum, I argue that *Bevis* uses this focus on routes, specific historical places and journey details to create a sense of ‘realness’. Jennifer Goodman has compared the mixture of real and fictional locations in medieval romance with ‘magic realism’, suggesting that the conflation of real and imaginary places offers the illusion of a real journey.¹²⁵ I contend that the extra detail in *Bevis* has a similar effect. As I outlined earlier in my discussion of Mills & Boon geography, extrapolating from Bach, the inclusion of detailed geographic information both sustains the fantasy of the east while creating a sense of authenticity and verisimilitude. Sheikh romances do this by including elaborate descriptions of places which are specifically geographically situated in relation to the western world (e.g. direct flights from London to the desert kingdom) as well as to other fictional locations in the romance east.

I consider that the increase of geographic detail in *Bevis*, in descriptions of routes, journey times and methods of travel, works in a similar way to Mills & Boon romance: using meticulous detail to reinforce the ‘realness’ of its world. Roland Barthes calls this kind of superfluous detail ‘a kind of narrative *luxury*’, a verisimilitude which produces the ‘*reality effect*’.¹²⁶ It is not usual to talk of Middle English romance being realistic: conventionally, romances have been assumed to favour fantasy geography. *Bevis*, then, seems to be unique in its use of geography. Viewing the representation of geography in *Bevis* alongside that of the modern sheikh romance east, it is clear that while they use it to very different effect, both exploit a realness in their use of geography: a realism which has not generally been assumed to inhere in romance, either medieval or modern.

¹²⁵ Goodman, pp. 49, 58.

¹²⁶ Roland Barthes, *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Richard Howard (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), pp. 141, 148.

‘I Come From [...] Many Territories’: The Locus and Effect of Geography in *Bevis of Hampton*

I have so far outlined the ways in which *Bevis* augments its geographic detail by referring to an increased number of locations, as well as describing routes, journey times, and methods of travel. But where does this increase in geographical knowledge come from? What is the effect of this new emphasis on geography and travel? In his examination of geography in the romance *Guy of Warwick*, Rouse argues ‘geography is not just about charting the physical places of the world, but rather it is a discourse about the significations that these places carry’.¹²⁷ To what extent does *Bevis* exploit the symbolism of specific places in its articulation of geography?

By the time *Bevis* appeared in Middle English, increasing numbers of pilgrims, growing trade and continuing calls to crusade meant that more information about geography was available in England from a wide range of sources. While a lack of surviving documentation makes drawing concrete conclusions difficult, I would like to tentatively suggest that widening public information about pilgrimage, trade and crusade might be behind the increased geographical detail in *Bevis* and to consider what this might reveal about *Bevis*’ engagement with the contemporary world. It is possible that the author of *Bevis* was drawing on contemporary knowledge when adding geographic references in the romance; there is certainly evidence that additional locations might correlate with certain geographic and political interests of the early fourteenth century. I also explore the possibility, extending research by Goodman and Rouse on geography and Middle English romance, that *Bevis* could itself have provided a source of geographic information, however fantastic its romance east might be.

The geography of both *Boeve* and *Bevis* broadly corresponds to the longstanding divisions of the so-called T-O map, which divided the globe into three parts corresponding to the known continents of Africa, Europe and Asia.¹²⁸ In their understanding of the globe, then, *Bevis* and *Boeve* do not differ. However, when examining their geography in detail, it becomes clear that *Bevis*’ geography differs

¹²⁷ Rouse, ‘Walking (Between) the Lines’, p. 141.

¹²⁸ Evelyn Edson, *Mapping Time and Space: How Medieval Mapmakers Viewed Their World* (London: The British Library, 1997), pp. 4-5.

greatly from that of *Boeve*; of the 63 places mentioned in *Bevis* only 17 are carried over from *Boeve*, meaning that 46 of the given locations in *Bevis* are new (see Figure 5). So where did this new geographic information come from? While two of the most popular travel narratives of the Middle Ages, John Mandeville's *Travels* and Marco Polo's *Book*, did not appear in England until later in the fourteenth century, a large amount of new geographic information became available in England from the thirteenth century onwards.¹²⁹

Encyclopaedias containing sections on geography were popular throughout the Middle Ages; Scott D. Westrem notes that 'most encyclopedic compendia written during the Middle Ages include sections specifically dedicated to geographical matter'.¹³⁰ Isidore of Seville's *De Natura Rerum*, written in the seventh century, discussed geography alongside meteorology, and his *Etymologiae* greatly expanded his earlier geographic work.¹³¹ Isidore was influential; Westrem argues that he was the most important writer about geography in the Middle Ages in terms of readership, with approximately a thousand manuscripts of *Etymologiae* surviving today.¹³²

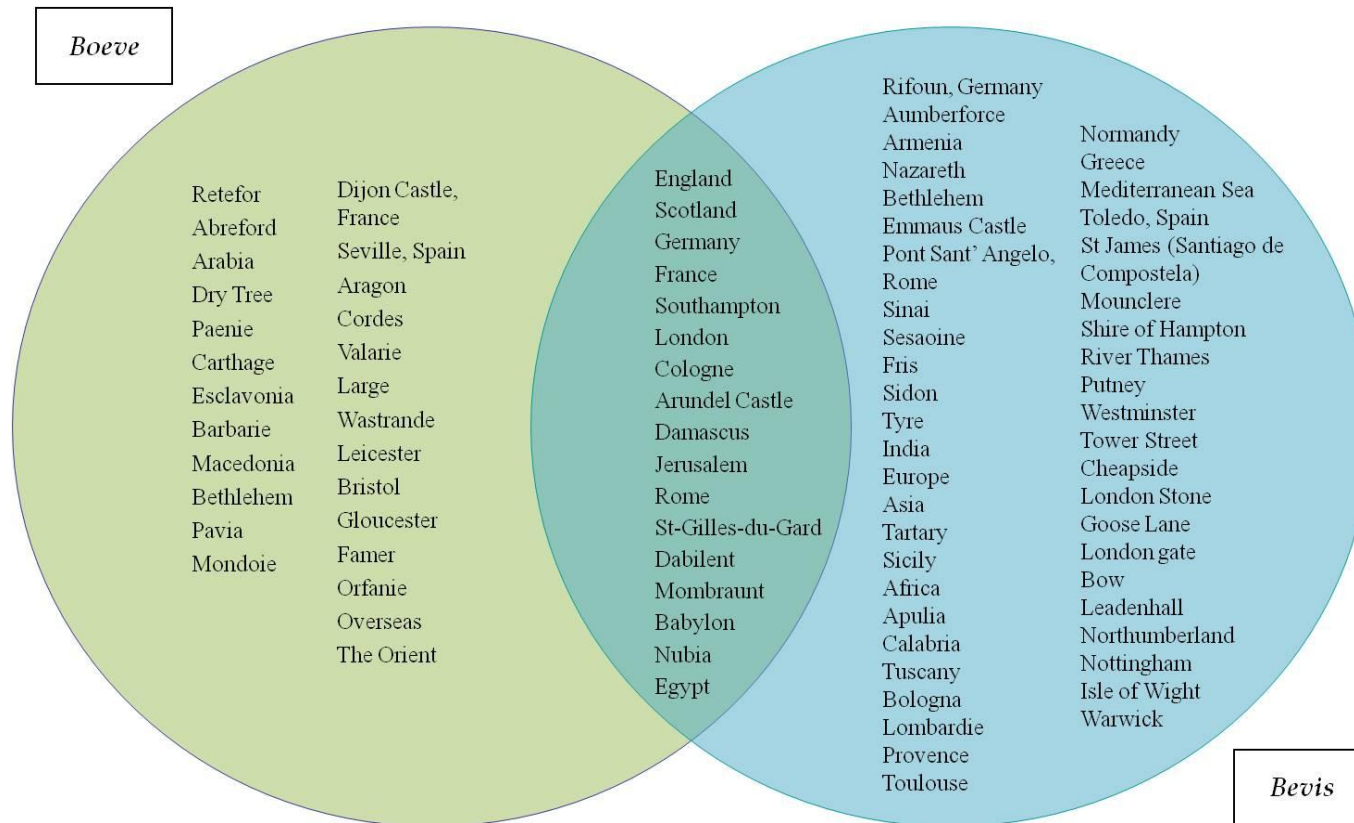
¹²⁹ Mandeville's *Travels*, generally taken to be a fictional account, was written sometime in the 1350s and 'within about fifty years [...] was circulating widely on both sides of the English Channel in a total of eight languages' (Iain Macleod Higgins, *Writing East: The 'Travels' of Sir John Mandeville* [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997], p. 6). Polo's *Book* circulated in England in Latin from the mid-fourteenth century (Suzanne M. Yeager, 'The World Translated: Marco Polo's *Le Devisement dou Monde*, *The Book of John Mandeville* and Their Medieval Audiences', *Marco Polo and the Encounter of East and West*, ed. Suzanne Conklin Akbari and Amilcare Iannucci [Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008], pp. 158-159). Both narratives survive in numerous manuscripts, although Mandeville's *Travels* was much more popular in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries; 80 manuscripts of Polo's *Book* survive from this period, while Mandeville has at least 275 records from the same period (Charles W. Connell, 'Marco Polo', Friedman and Figg, p. 374). While it is possible that the author of *Bevis* had seen a copy of Polo's *Book*, the lack of correlation of place names between them – they share only five common places – suggests that it was not a significant source. By contrast, *Bevis* and Mandeville's *Travels* have 23 common locations. While Mandeville was clearly not a source for *Bevis*, this correlation suggests that both narratives are drawing on similar geographic knowledge which was current in England in the first half of the fourteenth century.

¹³⁰ Scott D. Westrem, 'Geography in Medieval Europe', Friedman and Figg, p. 215.

¹³¹ See Edson, *Mapping Time and Space*, pp. 37-50.

¹³² Westrem, 'Geography in Medieval Europe', p. 219.

Figure 5: Distribution of Places in *Boeve* and *Bevis of Hampton*



Source: the author. Place name information drawn from Weiss, *Two Anglo-Norman Romances*, pp. 251-254, and Herzman et. al.

Other early medieval works on geography were Hrabanus Maurus' *De universo*, a ninth-century work which offered an account of the world based on Isidore's work, and Honorius Augustodunensis' *Imago Mundi*, 'a compendium of geographical, astronomical, calendrical, and historical information' written in the first half of the twelfth century and which circulated widely.¹³³

Yet, while these early works continued to be popular throughout the Middle Ages, a number of additional reference works appeared in the thirteenth century on which much of the geographic knowledge of the later Middle Ages was based.¹³⁴ Gervase of Tilbury's *Otia Imperialia* (1211), which contained a description of the inhabited world, was much read in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and it has been suggested that he was the creator of the Ebstorf map, drawn in the thirteenth century.¹³⁵ Bartholomeus Anglicus' *De Proprietatibus Rerum* (1245) was among the most popular encyclopaedias of the thirteenth century detailing, among other subjects, the geography of the world and was certainly well known in England.¹³⁶ Akbari has even suggested that this encyclopaedia could have influenced the representation of Saracens in romance, noting that the section devoted to geography was so popular that it circulated as a separate volume.¹³⁷

There was a particular concentration of geographical work around the middle of the thirteenth century. As well as Bartholomeus' work, there also emerged Vincent of Beauvais' *Speculum Maius* (1244-1260), of which the first part, the *Naturale*, discussed aspects of the physical world; John of Plano Carpini's *Ystoria Mongolorum* (1247), an ethnographic study based on his trip to the Mongol Empire

¹³³ Akbari, 'From Due East to True North', p. 21; Michael W. Twomey, 'Honorius Augustodunensis', Friedman and Figg, p. 259. Twomey argues that Augustodunensis' work was the 'geographical and historical resource of choice until the appearance of the larger, more comprehensive work of Bartholomaeus Anglicus in the later thirteenth century' (p. 259).

¹³⁴ Margaret Wade Labarge, *Medieval Travellers: The Rich and the Restless* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1982), p. 2.

¹³⁵ Jerzy Strzelczyk argues that 'Gervase's description of eastern Europe is the most accurate, credible, and modern one in a period before that of Bartholomaeus Anglicus' ('Gervase of Tilbury', Friedman and Figg, p. 228. That Gervase was the creator of the Ebstorf map is an argument which has been put forward by several scholars; see Peter Barber, 'Medieval Maps of the World', *The Hereford World Map: Medieval World Maps and Their Context*, ed. P. D. A. Harvey (London: The British Library, 2006), pp. 23-24.

¹³⁶ Gerald. E. Se Boyar, 'Bartholomeus Anglicus and His Encyclopaedia', *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 19.2 (1920): 177.

¹³⁷ Akbari, *Idols*, pp. 161-162. Juris G. Lidaka posits that Bartholomeus' work contains 'one of the larger geographical sections found in any medieval encyclopaedia' ('Bartholomeus Anglicus', Friedman and Figg, p. 48).

as papal envoy in 1246-1247, which Vincent incorporated into his *Speculum Maius*, although John's book circulated widely itself; the Italian Brunetto Latini's *Li Livres dou Trésor* (1265), an encyclopaedic work in French which contained geographical information; and Roger Bacon's *Opus Maius*, a copy of which was sent to the Pope upon completion in 1267.¹³⁸ Evelyn Edson has noted the extent to which these authors referred to and reproduced each other's work, revealing the standardisation of geographical knowledge at the time.¹³⁹ All these texts, then, contributed to the geographic knowledge circulating in medieval England and could account for some of the changes in *Bevis*.

A particular feature of thirteenth- and early fourteenth-century English geographic output was maps; Kathy Lavezzo argues that the maps created in England at this time were more numerous and of better quality than anywhere else in Europe.¹⁴⁰ Several of the most significant surviving medieval maps came from England, for example: the 1265 Psalter map, possibly created in London; the Duchy of Cornwall map, thought to have been drawn around 1290 by an artist attached to the court of Edward I; and the famous Hereford map, the largest surviving medieval map, created by Richard of Holdingham around 1300.¹⁴¹

One of the most significant English map producers was Matthew Paris, who produced, among other cartographic works, several itineraries from London to Apulia in Southern Italy and three maps of Palestine.¹⁴² While the maps are similar, they are not identical, leading Suzanne Lewis to suggest that 'Matthew's contribution to medieval cartography extends far beyond the copying and preservation of older maps now lost, and that his geographical illustrations may be regarded in large part as original conceptions and inventions'.¹⁴³ Two aspects of Matthew's works are of particular interest for *Bevis*. First, the content of the maps overlaps with *Bevis*:

¹³⁸ Gregory G. Guzman, 'Vincent of Beauvais', Friedman and Figg, p. 633; Gregory G. Guzman, 'John of Plano Carpini', Friedman and Figg, p. 307; Spurgeon Baldwin, 'Brunetto Latini', Friedman and Figg, p. 78; David Woodward, 'Roger Bacon on Geography and Cartography', *Roger Bacon and the Sciences: Commemorative Essays*, ed. Jeremiah Hackett (Leiden: Brill, 1997), pp. 199-222.

¹³⁹ Edson, *The World Map*, p. 94.

¹⁴⁰ Kathy Lavezzo, *Angels on the Edge of the World: Geography, Literature, and English Community 1000-1534* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), p. 46.

¹⁴¹ Barber, pp. 21, 27.

¹⁴² Suzanne Lewis, *The Art of Matthew Paris in the Chronica Majora* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1987), p. 321.

¹⁴³ Lewis, pp. 321-322.

outlining an imagined pilgrimage to the Holy Land via Apulia, Matthew's maps mention many of the cities and holy sites which occur in *Bevis*, including London, the shrine of St Giles, Rome, Armenia and Jerusalem.¹⁴⁴

Second, the format of the itinerary map, which Lewis refers to as a “strip-map” on which the major stops on the route from England to South Italy are laid out in vertical columns [...] read from the lower left corner from bottom to top’, outlines the distance between places in terms of time: ‘the distance from one place to another is usually indicated as a day’s journey (*journee*) on a connecting vertical line’.¹⁴⁵ This idea of representing travel according to distance and time echoes the approach towards travel I argue is present in *Bevis*. While there is no evidence that the author of *Bevis* was familiar with Matthew’s maps, these parallels might, I suggest, provide clues as to the how the use of geography in *Bevis* reflects contemporary English geographic interests.

Maps held multiple functions in the Middle Ages. Many maps, such as the Hereford *mappamundi*, were exegetical, conflating real geography with religious symbolism and carried an overtly Christian meaning.¹⁴⁶ However, for David B. Leshock, ‘a map was an educational tool, not simply art nor iconography, although it could serve as a work of beauty or devotion’.¹⁴⁷ Catherine Delano-Smith and Roger J. P. Kain similarly argue that while ‘the vast majority of maps made before 1400 [...] came from a monastic or cathedral community’ and therefore demonstrated an exegetical influence, ‘their function was by no means necessarily directly related to religion or to learning’, noting that some maps ‘were clearly connected with practical matters’.¹⁴⁸ Matthew’s maps of Britain, the Holy Land, and the route from London to Apulia can be classed among these more ‘practical’ maps.

The maps produced in England in the thirteenth and early fourteenth century thus reflect the blending of symbolic and practical information in the geographical understanding of the late Middle Ages. The combination of these different sources

¹⁴⁴ For a detailed description of the itinerary maps see Lewis, pp. 321-364.

¹⁴⁵ Lewis, p. 323.

¹⁴⁶ Edson, *The World Map*, pp. 14-15.

¹⁴⁷ David B. Leshock, ‘Religious Geography: Designating Jews and Muslims as Foreigners in Medieval England’, *Meeting the Foreign in the Middle Ages*, ed. Albrecht Classen (New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 207.

¹⁴⁸ Catherine Delano-Smith and Roger J. P. Kain, *English Maps: A History* (London: The British Library, 1999), p. 31.

indicates the current of geographical knowledge in late medieval England, revealing a greater awareness of geographic diversity and sensitivity to symbolism than ever before. Furthermore, the particular symbolism of this augmentation in *Bevis* reflected specific discourses of travel which were significant in early fourteenth-century England: pilgrimage, trade and crusade.¹⁴⁹ The extra geographical information in *Bevis* is thus not arbitrary, but can be traced to these three discourses.

There was a great increase in the number of English people undertaking pilgrimages in the eleventh century, which continued throughout the Middle Ages.¹⁵⁰ While the majority of pilgrimages were made locally within England, some pilgrims ventured further afield to one of the three major shrines of the Middle Ages: Jerusalem, Rome and St James at Santiago de Compostela.¹⁵¹ Information on their trips was filtered back into England, for example in Matthew Paris' itinerary maps, and the Middle English *The Stations of Rome*, detailing a route between Rome's churches, which was in circulation by the late thirteenth century.¹⁵² Even after the loss of Christian territories on the mainland, when travel to the Holy Land became more difficult, continued interest in visits to the region was evident in England throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.¹⁵³ It is possible that the widening of geographic knowledge in *Bevis* could have been gleaned from contemporary pilgrimage accounts: Lavezzo has argued for a widespread dissemination of knowledge about the Holy Land and pilgrimage routes to it that reached most segments of the population.¹⁵⁴

The textual evidence certainly suggests that pilgrimage is an important part of *Bevis*' geography. *Bevis* mentions all three of the major pilgrimage sites, Jerusalem, Rome and Santiago de Compostela (which was added in *Bevis*), as well as further secondary but significant sites, such as: Cologne; the shrine of St Giles in St-Gilles-

¹⁴⁹ These are precisely the discourses Heffernan connects with romance (pp. 1-22).

¹⁵⁰ Diana Webb, *Medieval European Pilgrimage, c.700-c.1500* (Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2002), p. 17.

¹⁵¹ Diana Webb, *Pilgrimage in Medieval England* (London: Hambledon and London, 2000), p. xii.

¹⁵² Christian K. Zacher, 'Travel and Geographical Writings', *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English, 1050-1500*, ed. A. E. Hartung, vol. 7 (New Haven: Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1986), pp. 2238-2239.

¹⁵³ Colin Morris, 'Pilgrimage to Jerusalem in the Late Middle Ages', *Pilgrimage: The English Experience from Becket to Bunyan*, ed. Morris and Peter Roberts (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 143.

¹⁵⁴ Kathy Lavezzo, *Angels*, p. 304.

du-Gard, Provence; Sinai, seat of the monastery of St Catherine; and Emmaus castle which Metlitzki argues a pilgrim to the Holy Land would have visited as a matter of course.¹⁵⁵ Cologne was both on a pilgrimage route and a pilgrimage site itself: its situation on the Rhine ‘undoubtedly contributed to its political, economic and ecclesiastical prominence’ and ‘lavishly endowed with saints, it became a major pilgrimage centre, especially after the supposed acquisition of the relics of the Three Magi in 1164’.¹⁵⁶ While several of the 17 places common to *Boeve* and *Bevis* are pilgrimage sites or on pilgrimage routes, many of the additional places in *Bevis* are also linked with pilgrimage, suggesting an increased attention to the practice in the Middle English romance.

The addition of the shrine of St James at Santiago de Compostela might be due to the fact that its popularity grew enormously in the years following 1100; D. W. Lomax notes that English pilgrims from all social classes were visiting the shrine from the beginning of the twelfth century.¹⁵⁷ There is evidence to suggest that pilgrimage to Santiago was popular with English pilgrims during the Middle Ages. Thousands of English pilgrims to Santiago are mentioned in safe-conducts, letters of protection, rosters and other documentation.¹⁵⁸ Santiago’s growing popularity could be attributed to the fact that pilgrimage to the Holy Land became much more difficult in the years following the fall of Acre in 1291 and Santiago was more easily accessible for English pilgrims.¹⁵⁹ Trips to Santiago do seem to have been more popular than trips to both the Holy Land and Rome; Diana Webb notes that between the mid-thirteenth century and the beginning of the fifteenth century, there were 99 records of English pilgrimage to Santiago, compared with sixteen for the Holy Land and only

¹⁵⁵ Metlitzki, pp. 132, 135. The tomb of St Giles in an abbey in St-Gilles-du-Gard became a popular stop on the pilgrim Way of St James. Interestingly, many of the places common to both the Anglo-Norman *Boeve* and Middle English *Bevis*, are associated with pilgrimage suggesting the enduring cultural popularity of these locations (see Figure 5).

¹⁵⁶ Webb, *Medieval European Pilgrimage*, p. 115. The Three Magi, more commonly known as The Shrine of the Three Kings, is a reliquary purporting to contain the bones of the biblical magi, or three wise men, located in Cologne Cathedral.

¹⁵⁷ Webb, *Medieval European Pilgrimage*, p. 13; D. W. Lomax, ‘The First English Pilgrims to Santiago de Compostela’, *Studies in Medieval History Presented to R. H. C. Davis*, ed. Henry Mary-Harting and R. I. Moore (London: The Hambledon Press, 1985), pp. 166-167.

¹⁵⁸ Lomax, p. 165.

¹⁵⁹ Morris, pp. 141-142.

eleven for Rome.¹⁶⁰ Whatever the reason behind the inclusion of Santiago, *Bevis* now contained reference to all three major medieval shrines.

One of the most notable additions in *Bevis* is the attention paid to routes by which people went on pilgrimage. When a pregnant Josian and Bevis travel from Southampton to Ermony they ride ‘through France and through Normandy’, a common trajectory that pilgrims travelling to any of the holy sites, Santiago, Rome or the Holy Land might have taken.¹⁶¹ Similarly, when posing as a palmer, Bevis states that he has travelled through ‘Frisia’, a region extending from the north coast of the Netherlands to the east coast of Denmark. Frisia lay on a known route from England to Cologne and indeed when Bevis sails from Cologne with Josian following his defeat of Miles it is likely that he would have travelled north along the Rhine out to the North Sea in Frisia (near modern-day Rotterdam) and thence to Southampton.¹⁶² The romance seems to reflect contemporary knowledge of this route.

Bevis also reveals information about routes further from England. After the thirteenth century, most pilgrims travelling from north-western Europe overland to Rome tended to travel not along the Via Francigena, but on the Via Emilia, which took them through Florence, a city possessing various shrines of local and regional importance and Bologna, which is a new reference added in *Bevis*. From Rome, many pilgrims continued their journey south to depart for the Holy Land from Apulian ports.¹⁶³ In *Bevis*, the trajectory to Rome is presented in reverse in the dragon interpolation, where two kings are transformed into dragons (2623-2624), one of which Bevis fights in Germany (2727-2890). Although the two dragons are hardly emblems of Christianity they are both, somewhat paradoxically, associated with European pilgrimage routes and sites.

The warring kings hail from Calabria and Apulia, from where many pilgrims left for the Holy Land, as evidenced in Matthew Paris’s maps, suggesting this route was well-known in England. One dragon resides under ‘St Peters of Rome’s bridge’ (now the Pont Sant’Angelo) in Rome, so-called because pilgrims would cross it on their

¹⁶⁰ Webb, *Pilgrimage in Medieval England*, p. 186.

¹⁶¹ ‘through Fraunce and thourgh Normondie’ (3618); Lomax, pp. 165-176.

¹⁶² Webb, *Medieval European Pilgrimage*, pp. 115-116, 134.

¹⁶³ Webb, *Medieval European Pilgrimage*, p. 118.

way to St Peter's Basilica; indeed the narrator exhorts his audience to verify his account of the dragons by asking 'pilgrims who have been there [...] how it is with that dragon'.¹⁶⁴ The second dragon's flight north follows, in reverse, the main routes pilgrims took from north-western Europe to Italy, 'through Tuscany and Lombardy / Through Provence, without delay / Into the land of Cologne'.¹⁶⁵ The brief detour into Provence echoes journeys to the shrine of St Giles, which was a major attraction in St-Gilles-du-Gard. It seems that the author of *Bevis* is aware of current pilgrimage routes and adapts the romance's geography according to the routes used at the time, as well as reflecting the growth in popularity of pilgrimage in early fourteenth-century England by increasing the number of references to pilgrimage routes and locations.

Yet pilgrims were not the only travellers on these routes. Webb has argued for a relationship between pilgrims and other travellers, claiming that merchants, pilgrims and crusaders operated on the same routes.¹⁶⁶ *Bevis*' life is bound up with mercantilism from the very beginning indicating how concerned this romance is with trade and commerce. Indeed, many fourteenth-century trade routes are evident in *Bevis*. The course *Bevis* takes from Cologne to Southampton is the same one by which goods were transported.¹⁶⁷ Weiss points out that 'there were lucrative trade links between North Germany and England, and Cologne, the largest city in Germany, was situated at the crossing of two important trade routes'.¹⁶⁸ *Bevis* himself is 'traded' at Southampton, where 'ships [...] from heathen lands and diverse places' gather in great number.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁴ 'Seinte Peter is brige of Rome' (2642); '[...] pilgrimes that ther hath be [...] of that dragoun how it is' (2652, 2654).

¹⁶⁵ 'thourgh Toskan and Lombardie / Thourgh Province, withouten ensoine / Into the londe of Coloyne' (2656-2658).

¹⁶⁶ Webb, *Medieval European Pilgrimage*, p. 114.

¹⁶⁷ Medieval traders travelling overland followed natural routes marked by river courses: the Rhine was a major overland route north from the Alps (Henri Pirenne, *Medieval Cities: Their Origins and the Revival of Trade*, trans. Frank D. Halsey [Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1956], p. 66).

¹⁶⁸ Judith Weiss, 'Emperors and Antichrists: Reflections of Empire in Insular Narrative, 1130-1250', *The Matter of Identity in Medieval Romance*, ed. Phillipa Hardman (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2002), p. 100. For the development of trade routes in the early fourteenth century see Jean Favier, *Gold & Spices: The Rise of Commerce in the Middle Ages*, trans. Caroline Higgitt (London: Holmes and Meier, 1998), especially pp. 8-52.

¹⁶⁹ 'schipes [...] of hethenesse and of fele londe' (503-504).

The merchants to whom Bevis is sold sail ‘to heathen lands’, indicating a relatively easy sea crossing direct from Southampton to a port in Armenia (the journey is over within two lines); Metlitzki argues that ships sailing from the western Mediterranean would have landed at either Ayas or Tarsus in Cilician Armenia.¹⁷⁰ Lynn Jones posits that Ayas ‘was the main trading port of the eastern Mediterranean’ and had become increasingly prominent throughout the Middle Ages.¹⁷¹ In fact, after the fall of Acre in 1291, ‘western traders were increasingly drawn to Ayas’ which ‘was once more [...] the only important Christian port on the mainland of the Levant’.¹⁷² Fiction seems to imitate life in this instance: Southampton was one of the principal ports of call for merchants sailing to the Mediterranean in the early fourteenth century.¹⁷³

Several places mentioned in *Bevis* are symbolic of commerce. London was becoming more important as a mercantile centre in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries with the establishment of permanent outposts in the city to make trading easier for merchants based in the Mediterranean.¹⁷⁴ Pamela Nightingale notes that ‘the general expansion of London’s trade [was] reflected in the development of new quays [...] and] in the growth of the population.’¹⁷⁵ It was, along with Southampton, one of the busiest ports in southern England, exporting on average over 10,000 sacks of wool each year from 1300-1330.¹⁷⁶ Partly as a result of increasing trade, the early years of the fourteenth century heralded a boom in London’s economy, including increased demand for luxury goods which were primarily sold in Cheapside.¹⁷⁷

Nightingale, citing Keene, points out that:

a comprehensive study of the population, buildings, and rents of Cheapside has concluded that the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries were the

¹⁷⁰ ‘toward painim’ (514); Metlitzki, p. 127.

¹⁷¹ Lynn Jones, ‘Armenia’, Friedman and Figg, p. 32.

¹⁷² A. T. Luttrell, ‘The Hospitallers’ Interventions in Cilician Armenia: 1291-1375’, *The Cilician Kingdom of Armenia*, ed. Ed. T. S. R. Boase (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1978), p. 118; Boase, ‘The History of the Kingdom’, *The Cilician Kingdom of Armenia*, ed. Boase (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1978), p. 28.

¹⁷³ E. M. Carus-Wilson and Olive Coleman, *England’s Export Trade 1275-1547* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1963), p. 13.

¹⁷⁴ Steven A. Epstein, *An Economic and Social History of Later Medieval Europe, 1000-1500* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 83.

¹⁷⁵ Pamela Nightingale, *A Medieval Mercantile Community: The Grocers’ Company & the Politics & Trade of London, 1000-1485* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), p. 81.

¹⁷⁶ See Carus-Wilson and Coleman, pp. 40-44. A sack of wool was approximately 364lb of shorn wool: the wool of some 260 sheep (see p. 13).

¹⁷⁷ Pamela Nightingale, ‘The Growth of London in the Medieval English Economy’, *Progress and Problems in Medieval England: Essays in Honour of Edward Miller*, ed. John Hatcher, Edward Miller and R. H. Britnell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 94-96.

period when the demand for shops and the density of population in that area were greater than at any other time before the beginning of the seventeenth century.¹⁷⁸

This is precisely the area of London in which Bevis is attacked; the streets of mercantile Cheapside are an appropriate destination for the boy who was himself traded at age seven. The presence of a treacherous Lombard in the city further establishes a link between *Bevis*, London and commerce.¹⁷⁹ The London interpolation has long puzzled readers of this romance; perhaps viewing the presence of London in the context of Bevis' mercantile preoccupations permits a way for the London scene to fit more harmoniously with the rest of the romance as well as suggesting plausibility for a mercantile audience for the romance.¹⁸⁰ The London detail in *Bevis* would also seem to support the argument for the production of the Auchinleck manuscript in the city.

Moving further south, the inclusion, unique to *Bevis*, of the Mediterranean Sea has a clear relevance in that most trade from England to the countries of the eastern Mediterranean that did not proceed via the Rhine would have passed by sea, as Bevis himself does. In the first decades of the fourteenth century massive shipments of wool began to leave England on Italian ships to be transported throughout the countries of the Mediterranean, eventually arriving in the ports of Greece, Acre, Damascus, and Tripoli.¹⁸¹ In the fourteenth century, following papal decrees against European trade with the Mamluks, intermediary Christian ports such as Tarsus

¹⁷⁸ D. J. Keene, 'A New Study of London Before the Great Fire', *Urban History Year-Book* (1984): 19-20, cited in Nightingale, *A Medieval Mercantile Community*, p. 81.

¹⁷⁹ Derek Pearsall notes that 'the Lombard merchants of Lucca [...] were the object of much hostility' ('Strangers in Late-Fourteenth-Century London', *The Stranger in Medieval Society*, ed. F. R. P. Akehurst and Stephanie Cain Van D'Elden [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997], p. 53).

¹⁸⁰ Indeed, Rouse, writing about *Guy of Warwick*, contends that 'one of the implications of this reading of [romance] geography [...] is a reminder of the increasing connection between the mercantile classes and the reading of romance that we encounter in late-medieval England. [...] Representative of the type of romance that was becoming the reading matter of the expanding gentry and mercantile classes, the narrative can be seen as being increasingly subject to new modes of reading' ('Walking [Between] the Lines', pp. 146-147).

¹⁸¹ Eliyahu Ashtor, 'L'Exportation des Textiles Occidentaux dans le Proche Orient Musulman au Bas Moyen Age (1370-1517)', *East-West Trade in the Medieval Mediterranean*, ed. Ashtor and Benjamin Z. Kedar (London: Variorum Reprints, 1986), pp. 341-349; E. B. Fryde, *Studies in Medieval Trade and Finance* (London: Hambledon, 1983), p. 295.

became vital for continuing trade in the Mediterranean.¹⁸² *Bevis* refers to several prominent places on eastern Mediterranean trade routes, including Tarsus, Sidon, Tyre and Greece. In Armenia, *Bevis*'s offer to a messenger of a mantle of 'silk from Toulouse' may not have been incongruous; there is evidence to suggest that French cloth from Toulouse had been exported to the Holy Land in the fourteenth century.¹⁸³ The romance also refers to trade locations further afield: *Bevis* adds a reference to India, 'the great spice source and entrepôt', from which, in the fourteenth century, spices came overland to European traders.¹⁸⁴ For example, sugar was first imported from India, and was used extensively in fourteenth-century English cooking.¹⁸⁵ Many locations in *Bevis*, then, have a relationship with English trade in the early fourteenth century.

Just as pilgrims and merchants shared routes and geographies, so too did their trajectories towards the Holy Land overlap with those of crusaders. By the time *Bevis* appeared, it seemed as though the Crusades were over: 'with Acre's fall and the loss of Outremer's last remaining strongholds, Latin Christendom's political and military presence on the mainland Levant came to a definitive end'.¹⁸⁶ Yet this loss prompted a flurry of renewed calls to crusade, putting the reclamation of the Holy Land once again at the forefront of European thought. As Edson puts it:

to modern historians the fall of Acre has served as a date for the 'end of the crusades', but to contemporaries this was not at all clear. The crusading movement had always been episodic, with gains and losses and periods of inactivity. Over the next half-century there was considerable planning and preaching for another crusade, which seemed forever imminent.¹⁸⁷

Almost thirty treatises for recovery of the Holy Land were written between the pontificate of Nicholas IV (1288-92) and the start of the Hundred Years War (1337), revealing a western Europe still very much concerned, if perhaps more ideologically

¹⁸² See Eliyahu Ashtor, 'Observations on Venetian Trade in the Levant in the XIVth Century', *East-West Trade in the Medieval Mediterranean* ed. Ashtor and Benjamin Z. Kedar (London: Variorum, 1986), p. 534.

¹⁸³ 'Tuli selk' (1558); Ashtor, 'L'Exportation', pp. 328-329.

¹⁸⁴ Paul Freedman, *Out of the East: Spices and the Medieval Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), pp. 2, 171-172.

¹⁸⁵ Freedman, pp. 12, 27.

¹⁸⁶ Thomas Asbridge, *The Crusades: The War for the Holy Land* (London: Simon and Schuster, 2010), p. 657.

¹⁸⁷ Evelyn Edson, 'Reviving the Crusade: Saundi's schemes and Vesconte's maps', *Eastward Bound: Travel and Travellers, 1050-1550*, ed. Rosamund Allen (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), p. 132.

than realistically, with regaining the Holy Land.¹⁸⁸ I would like to argue that a crusading rhetoric is evident in *Bevis*' use of geography.

Crusading feeling was running particularly high in England during this period. The papacy imposed mandatory taxes on English churches to raise funds for new crusades in 1312 and 1333 and both Edward I (reigned 1272-1307), who had travelled to the Holy Land in 1271-1272, and his son Edward II (reigned 1307-1327) took the cross.¹⁸⁹ While Edward III did not take the cross, he agreed to take part in Philip VI of France's planned crusade to the Holy Land, only backing out when events in Scotland precluded his involvement. Furthermore, some contemporary crusading treatises may have appeared in England. Pierre Dubois, a French propagandist, wrote a proposal for reclaiming the Holy Land in 1306 entitled *De recuperatione Terre Sancte*, the first part of which was addressed to Edward I of England although, as Leopold points out, 'there is no indication that he ever received a copy'.¹⁹⁰ Hayton (also known as Hetoum) of Gorigos, a leading member of the Armenian royal family, wrote a crusade proposal in 1307 at the request of Pope Clement V, *Flor des estoires de la terre d'orient*, emphasising the potential role of Armenia in a future crusade, as well as offering an extensive outline of the political history and geography of the east.¹⁹¹ Around fifty copies of Hayton's proposal survive and his work was well-known in the period, suggesting that it would likely have been known in England.¹⁹² One of the best-known recovery proposals of this period, Marino Sanudo's *Liber secretorum fidelium crucis*, was presented to Pope John XII in September 1321 which, as well as outlining a detailed blockade of Egypt, also provided a lengthy history of the Holy Land with an account of its geography accompanied by several maps.¹⁹³ Nineteen extant manuscripts of Sanudo's work survive, and he sent a copy of his writing to Edward II of England.¹⁹⁴

¹⁸⁸ Anthony Leopold, *How to Recover the Holy Land: The Crusade Proposals of the Late Thirteenth and Early Fourteenth Centuries* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), p. 8.

¹⁸⁹ Christopher Tyerman, *England and the Crusades 1095-1588* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 229; Christopher Tyerman, *God's War: A New History of the Crusades* (London: Allen Lane, 2006), pp. 643-644.

¹⁹⁰ Leopold, p. 31.

¹⁹¹ Leopold, pp. 44-45, 30.

¹⁹² Leopold, p. 46.

¹⁹³ Leopold, pp. 39-40.

¹⁹⁴ Leopold, p. 46; C. J. Tyerman, 'Marino Sanudo Torsello and the Lost Crusade: Lobbying in the Fourteenth Century', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 32 (1982): 65.

There is strong evidence that this crusading momentum affected *Bevis*. Thorlac Turville-Petre has identified many references to crusade in the Auchinleck manuscript, arguing that the call for a crusade ‘runs right through the manuscript, appearing in a variety of guises’.¹⁹⁵ In *Bevis*, the hero and his son Guy convert Armenia to Christianity ‘by force of arms’, echoing the ethos of the Crusades, suggesting an interest in events in the Holy Land.¹⁹⁶ Although no mention is made of Acre, the romance does mention both Tyre and Sidon, cities which fell in the few months following the sacking of Acre and which had been prominent Christian bases on the coast.¹⁹⁷

Bevis also refers to Sicily. While Sicily might indeed have been peaceful in 1330, its very recent upheaval could not have been far from the minds of *Bevis*’ author or audience. Sicily was beset by crusades throughout the thirteenth century, most significantly in conflicts called for by the Pope and his allies against the rulers of Sicily in 1239-1268 and 1282-1302.¹⁹⁸ This was a struggle in which the English royal family had been caught up. In the mid-1250s Henry III, Edward I’s father, had become deeply involved in Pope Alexander IV’s attempts to wrest control of Sicily.¹⁹⁹ For much of the thirteenth century, then, Sicily was a site of conflict. It is thus somewhat ironic that its inclusion in *Bevis* is based upon its peacetime status; after listing a fictional (and expansive) pilgrimage trajectory which includes Sicily, *Bevis* summarises: ‘and all is peaceful wherever I have been’.²⁰⁰ Goodman argues that writers of romance displayed an acute sense of where the ‘action’ was, doing their best to thrust characters into the hottest spots.²⁰¹ It may be that for the author of *Bevis* these places which had recently been in conflict provided the ‘hot spots’ required. This close memory of recent events reveals, I suggest, why a new reference to Sicily was added in the translation from *Boeve*.

¹⁹⁵ Thorlac Turville-Petre, *England the Nation: Language, Literature, and National Identity, 1290-1340* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p. 121.

¹⁹⁶ ‘with dent of sword’ (4019).

¹⁹⁷ Asbridge, p. 822.

¹⁹⁸ Tyerman, *God’s War*, p. 895.

¹⁹⁹ Tyerman, *England and the Crusades*, p. 88.

²⁰⁰ ‘ac al is pes thar ichave went’ (2269).

²⁰¹ Goodman, p. 61.

It is also possible that *Bevis* might have functioned as crusade propaganda itself by connecting discourses of nationalism with crusading.²⁰² *Bevis* is a text concerned with nationalism; several studies have identified the Auchinleck manuscript as deeply concerned with questions of ‘Englishness’. Turville-Petre even labels it ‘a handbook of the nation’.²⁰³ Weiss argues that the interpolations in *Bevis* were made in the spirit of ‘patriotic sentiment’ and Kofi Campbell suggests that the romance is concerned with educating people to become better Englishmen.²⁰⁴ So not only is *Bevis* a romance with an awareness of crusading geography, as I have shown, but it is also inflected with discourses of national identity. Campbell has connected what he reads as *Bevis*’ ‘Englishness’ with Christianity, arguing that ‘when Bevis acts, he is acting as a Christian *and* an Englishman’, recognising that Bevis’ battles against Saracens are motivated by *both* a religious and a nationalist impulse and linking their actions.²⁰⁵ The actions Bevis takes as an English, Christian knight echo the actions of the crusaders; Campbell argues that *Bevis* is ‘heavily informed by certain forms of colonialism (invasion, land grabs, religious conversion)’.²⁰⁶ So as a romance which connects Englishness with Christianity, *Bevis* could have itself functioned as persuasive, imaginative, popular crusade propaganda.

Finally, there is evidence that the author of *Bevis* might have been aware of a particular crusade proposal of the early fourteenth century: Hayton’s *Flor des estoires de la terre d’orient*. Hayton’s work argued that a new crusade army should establish themselves at Tarsus in Armenia.²⁰⁷ Anthony Leopold argues that there were many strategic reasons why an Armenian base would not have been suitable for a crusading force, not least because of repeated attacks by both the Mongols and

²⁰² That Middle English romance is concerned with the Crusades is clear; Jesus Montaña has argued that the romance ‘*Sir Gowther* fits within the literary history of crusade literature, constituting an example of both propaganda regarding the Muslim East and a vision of Christendom overcoming its non-Christian neighbours’ (‘*Sir Gowther*: Imagining Race in Late Medieval England’, *Meeting the Foreign in the Middle Ages*, ed. Albrecht Classen [New York: Routledge, 2002], p. 118).

²⁰³ Turville-Petre, p. 112.

²⁰⁴ Weiss, ‘Interpolations’, p. 75; Kofi Campbell, p. 213.

²⁰⁵ Kofi Campbell, p. 212.

²⁰⁶ Kofi Campbell, p. 223. Joshua Prawer has also suggested that the actions of crusaders can be read as a form of colonialism (‘The Roots of Medieval Colonialism’, *The Meeting of Two Worlds. Cultural Exchange Between East and West during the Period of the Crusades*, ed. Vladimir P. Goss [Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1986], pp. 23-38).

²⁰⁷ Leopold, p. 154.

Mamluks, including the sacking of the western city of Hromkla in 1292.²⁰⁸ Yet this did not seem to prevent *Bevis* from adding Tarsus as a location visited by the fictional pilgrim. As I have already mentioned, Tarsus was an important place with links to western Europe through pilgrimage, trade and crusade. Indeed, Cilician Armenia was characterised by expansive commerce in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.²⁰⁹ In his study of trade routes in the Mediterranean from the fourteenth to the sixteenth century, John Pryor outlined a maritime trunk route from Alexandria along the entire eastern coast of the Mediterranean which passed directly through Tarsus.²¹⁰ Tarsus was also prominent in the history of Armenia; on 6 January 1198 Leo I was crowned King of the newly created kingdom of Armenia in Tarsus cathedral in the presence of western European legates.²¹¹ Its inclusion is thus a prominent and timely addition, which fits with the romance's use of trade and crusade geography more generally. However, the specific references to Armenia in Hayton's work are more substantially reflected in the addition of Armenian geography to *Bevis*.

One of the major changes in *Bevis* is the shift in the place to which Bevis is exiled as a child. In *Boeve*, the young hero is exiled to Egypt. However, in *Bevis*, the place of exile is a Saracen Armenia: 'Ermony'.²¹² The wider geographic shift that Metlitzki

²⁰⁸ Leopold, p. 155.

²⁰⁹ Richard G. Hovannisian and Simon Payaslian, 'Armenian Cilicia', *Cilician Armenia*, ed. Hovannisian and Payaslian (Costa Mesa, CA; Mazda, 2008), p. 2.

²¹⁰ John H. Pryor, *Geography, Technology, and War: Studies in the Maritime History of the Mediterranean, 649-1571* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988). Pryor's routes have since been re-evaluated by Renard Gluzman in 'Between Venice and the Levant: Re-Evaluating Maritime Routes from the Fourteenth to the Sixteenth Century', *Mariner's Mirror* 96.3 (2010): 264-294. Gluzman provides details of a commercial ship travelling eastward from Constantinople to Jaffa which stopped en route at Tarsus in 1370, just five years before the fall of Cilician Armenia (Joel Raba, 'Arkhimandrit Agrefenī', *Russian Travel Accounts of Palestine*, ed. Raba (Jerusalem, 1986), pp. 73-91, cited in Gluzman, p. 276).

²¹¹ T. S. R. Boase, 'The History of the Kingdom', *The Cilician Kingdom of Armenia*, ed. Boase (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1978), p. 19.

²¹² *Bevis* is not the only Middle English romance to feature a Saracen Armenia: in *Sir Tryamour* the Christian hero fights against the King's son of Armenia; some of the fighting against Saracens in *The Romauns of Partenay* occurs in Cyprus and Armenia; in *Generydes* the Saracen King of 'Ermony' fights against Christians; and in *King Alisaunder* Armenia is full of 'heathens [heþes]' (*Sir Tryamour* in Harriet Hudson, ed., *Four Middle English Romances*, 2nd ed. (Kalamazoo MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2006); Walter W. Skeat, ed. *The Romans of Partenay* (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co, 1866); Frederick J. Furnivall, ed., *Generydes* [New York: B. Franklin, 1865]; G. V. Smithers, ed., *King Alisaunder*, Early English Text Society O.S. 227 [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952], 3452). The romance *The King of Tars* is an example of a romance which shifted *from* Armenian geography. In analogues to the romance, the hero is the King of Tars and the heroine the Princess of Armenia (in the Middle English romance he is the Sultan of Damascus and she is the Princess of Tars). It has been

noted from a geography centred on Saracen Africa in *Boeve* to one which takes the Holy Land as its focus in *Bevis* has already been noted, and would go some way towards explaining the use of Armenia instead of Egypt. Yet this does not explain why *Bevis* would make Armenia, which in 1330 was a Christian (albeit not Latin Christian) country, into a Saracen nation. A number of scholars have considered this shift and the relationship between *Bevis*' Ermony and contemporary Armenia, although only Carolyn Collette and Vincent J. DiMarco's 2001 article considers the subject at any length.²¹³ Extrapolating from the arguments put forward by these critics, I suggest that the shift to Ermony in *Bevis* occurs in response to contemporary events, indicating that medieval romance geography is responsive to changes in the real world.

Armenia existed as two distinct entities in the Middle Ages: Greater Armenia, situated to the east of the Byzantine Empire between the Black sea and the Caspian sea bordering the Caucasian mountains to the north, which fell entirely under Muslim Seljuk control in 1071, and Cilician Armenia, located on the north-eastern corner of the Mediterranean.²¹⁴ Cilician Armenia flourished in the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries: 'an age of expansive commerce and culture in a bustling cosmopolitan atmosphere'.²¹⁵ The textual evidence in *Bevis* points towards Ermony being coincident with Cilician Armenia. Ermony can be reached by boat from Southampton, appears to be approximately 'two days' journey from Damascus, is within riding distance of Jerusalem, and is potentially a fast day's travel due south from Mombraunt: Saber flees Mombraunt in the direction of Ermony after reclaiming the stolen Arondel, pursued by 'three thousand' Saracens.²¹⁶ Scholars tend to agree that what would have been understood by *Bevis*' reference to Ermony was likely to have been Cilician Armenia.

Metlitzki offers two reasons for this. First, she argues that *Bevis*' kidnap by Saracen 'merchants' and subsequent sea voyage suggests a commercial route and that 'it was

suggested that this shift may reflect contemporary historical events (see Lillian Herlands Hornstein, 'The Historical Background of the King of Tars', *Speculum* 16.4 [1941]: 404-14) or that it is a more ahistorical retelling of Armenian history (see Collette and DiMarco, pp. 327-8).

²¹³ See Metlitzki; Calkin, *Saracens*; and Collette and DiMarco.

²¹⁴ Simon Payaslian, *The History of Armenia: From the Origins to the Present* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 77.

²¹⁵ A. E. Redgate, *The Armenians* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), p. 257; Hovannisian and Payaslian, p. 2.

²¹⁶ 'twei dawes' (1293); 'thre thosend' (4081).

Lesser [Cilician] Armenia that lay at the heart of the sea and caravan routes of medieval warfare and trade'.²¹⁷ Second, Metlitzki points to contemporary political realities, whereby England and Armenia sought an alliance against encroaching Muslim powers; she cites as evidence the flight to the west of the Armenian prince, Hayton, whose propagandist history of the Tartars, *Haithoni Armeni Historia Orientalis*, became well-known in western Europe.²¹⁸ This is the same Hayton who composed a crusade proposal for the pope in 1307 which may well have been known in England at the time. Metlitzki argues that it was Cilician Armenia, 'that fired the imagination of the Western public as a bridge between Christians and Saracens'.²¹⁹ Collette and DiMarco concur that Greater Armenia did 'not play a significant role on the world stage of the fourteenth century' but that Cilician Armenia, with its proximity to the Holy Land and position on trade routes 'looms large in western European consciousness throughout the later Middle Ages'.²²⁰

The crowning of Leo I at the end of the twelfth century heralded a golden era for Cilician Armenia. Over the following decades, Cilician Armenia 'reached international status, becoming a kingdom whose alliance was courted even by the Pope and the Holy Roman Emperor'.²²¹ However, while this might have been the case in the thirteenth century, by the turn of the fourteenth century, when *Bevis* was written, things were markedly different. In the late thirteenth century, repeated assaults from the Seljuks to the north and Mamluks to the south meant that Cilician Armenia's earlier prosperity evaporated and, in combination with weakening leadership and internal dissension, set the kingdom on an interminable decline.²²² By 1321 it was considered by some that Armenia had been almost obliterated by the Mamluks; the kingdom finally fell in 1375.²²³

The crisis in Armenia was one felt in England. The fact that Cilician Armenia was the last outpost of Christianity in the Near East following the fall of Acre made it all the more prominent in the minds of western Europeans; appeals by the rulers of

²¹⁷ Metlitzki, p. 129.

²¹⁸ Metlitzki, p. 130.

²¹⁹ Metlitzki, p. 129.

²²⁰ Collette and DiMarco, p. 319.

²²¹ David Marshall Lang, *Armenia, Cradle of Civilization* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1978), p. 202.

²²² Christopher J. Walker, *Armenia: The Survival of a Nation* (London: Croom Helm, 1980), p. 33; Lang, pp. 206-208.

²²³ Colette and DiMarco, pp. 322-323.

Armenia for help appear to have been the dominant western European discourse on Armenia. The Armenian royal family had cultivated trade and diplomatic relations with western Europe throughout the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries in hopes of securing alliances against invasion, including the arranged marriages of Armenian royalty and nobility with the western European Lusignan rulers of Cyprus and the Latin rulers of Antioch.²²⁴ It has been argued that an early fourteenth-century plot to overthrow the Lusignan ruler of Cyprus was a first attempt to unite the two Christian kingdoms and provide a strong bulwark against Muslim ambitions.²²⁵ In 1260 Pope Alexander IV had urged Prince Edward of England to defend the Armenian kingdom and in 1298 Pope Boniface VIII exhorted England to send a subsidy to the king of Armenia.²²⁶ A visit to the English court in 1392/3 by the last king of Cilician Armenia, Leo V, suggests the persistence of Armenian appeals to western Europe throughout the fourteenth century.²²⁷ It thus seems that Armenia and its political state would have been widely known in England at the time the Middle English *Bevis* first appeared.

So is *Bevis*' creation of a Saracen Armenia a reflection of its contemporary struggles against Saracen attacks? Medieval romance has not generally been considered a genre which is responsive to contemporary events, yet as Collette and DiMarco argue, the presence of Armenia in English literature of this period suggests a much closer connection to and awareness of the politics and strategic importance of countries such as Armenia in the eastern Mediterranean.²²⁸ Collette and DiMarco suggest two contrasting reasons for the treatment of Armenia in *Bevis*. First, that it anticipates the threat posed to the region, acknowledging an awareness of politics, and second, that by making Armenia pagan the *Bevis* author sacrifices history to the conventions of the conversion narrative, suggesting that politics are irrelevant.²²⁹ Building on the conclusions of Collette and DiMarco, I would like to suggest that the way *Bevis* deals with Armenia draws on an awareness of its contemporary political

²²⁴ Hovannisian and Payaslian, p. 2; Claude Mutafin, 'The Brilliant Diplomacy of Cilician Armenia', *Cilician Armenia*, ed. Richard G. Hovannisian and Simon Payaslian (Costa Mesa: Mazda, 2008), pp. 101-104.

²²⁵ Mutafin, p. 109.

²²⁶ Collette and DiMarco, p. 321.

²²⁷ Leo died in Paris in 1393; see Angus Donal Stewart, *The Armenian Kingdom and the Mamluks: War and Diplomacy During the Reigns of Het'um II (1289-1307)* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), p. 186.

²²⁸ Collette and DiMarco, pp. 357-358.

²²⁹ Collette and DiMarco, p. 325.

situation. I argue that the threats posed to Ermony and its princess, Josian, of invasion, forced marriage and loss of sovereignty, mirror the various threats posed to contemporary Armenia from the Mamluks, Seljuk Turks and Mongols. By defending Ermony, and expanding its borders by uniting it with Mombraunt, in the same way Armenia itself attempted to unite with Latin powers in the east, *Bevis* rewrites the history of Armenia, textually fulfilling the promise of a new crusade which, in reality, was never to appear. *Bevis* thus forms a fantasy fulfilment of exactly the kind of crusade proposal which was in circulation at the time.

It is also possible, as Rouse, Cooper, and Goodman have suggested, that romance itself could have functioned as a source of geographic information. While travel became more widely available and, consequently, travel narratives more numerous, it was still a select few who actually travelled. For the majority of the medieval population, ‘geographical knowledge was limited to that which they had experienced themselves, or that narrated in stories they had read or heard’.²³⁰ Cooper notes the general paucity of geographic knowledge amongst the medieval populace due to the practical limitations on personal travel.²³¹ Rouse and Cooper both suggest, although Rouse does so more forcefully, that romance could itself function as a source of geographic information. He argues:

If the audience’s geographical imagination is composed of the narratives that they have encountered, then each new romance that they read, each new story that they hear, adds to this accretive and palimpsestic model of geographical knowledge. In this way romance not only articulates the world of its audience, but also actively participates in its construction in a vicariously experiential manner.²³²

In arguing for a link between romance and factual travel narratives, Goodman states that romances colour readers’ perceptions of their own and others’ travels.²³³

The potential influence of romance geography can be seen more concretely. The use of romance geography in the travel narrative Mandeville’s *Travels* has been well documented, and it is possible that *Bevis* itself provided a source of information for

²³⁰ Rouse, ‘Walking (Between) the Lines’, p. 137.

²³¹ Cooper, p. 68.

²³² Rouse, ‘Walking (Between) the Lines’, p. 139.

²³³ Goodman, p. 47.

this work.²³⁴ While the romance's audience might not have travelled to the places mentioned in *Bevis*, their names often carried a significance that the romance exploits. For example, Jerusalem carried symbolic meaning drawn from biblical accounts and Rouse argues it is likely that other medieval places carried stereotypical connotations of a kind that would be familiar to a modern audience: Rouse points to the treacherous Lombard in *Bevis*' London as an example of this stereotyping.²³⁵ While romance was not at the forefront of medieval geographic development, it is possible that romance functioned as a kind of 'armchair travel' for many medieval people. Incidentally, this has, for many years, been an argument put forward for the function of geography in modern romance.²³⁶

Yet, I suggest that the use of geography in *Bevis* has a deeper effect, working to destabilise the English identity of Bevis himself. This is particularly marked in the inclusion of Armenian geography. Glenn Burger has noted that the 'Cilician Armenian diasporic community [were] precariously situated on the borders of European Christian, Islamic Egyptian, and Islamic Mongol Empires'.²³⁷ Cilician Armenia was a liminal community whose very existence and identity as Armenian was under threat. This liminality is evident in descriptions of Ermony in *Bevis*, where the kingdom occupies a hybrid religious identity somewhere between Saracen and Christian. The place is initially, to all intents and purposes, described as typically Saracen: the merchants who kidnap Bevis set sail to 'heathen lands'; the king exhorts 'Mohammed' and tries to persuade Bevis to convert; and Ermin's daughter Josian, who 'knew nothing of Christian doctrine' is quickly set up as a love interest for Bevis: a well-established trope of medieval romance.²³⁸ Yet, very quickly, this ostensibly Saracen space becomes more unusual. For example, although Bevis declines Ermin's offer of conversion to Islam, the king 'loved him all the more', even knighting him and furnishing him with a horse, armour and a sword.²³⁹

²³⁴ The correlation of 23 place names between Mandeville's *Travels* and *Bevis* supports this theory.

²³⁵ Rouse, 'Walking (Between) the Lines', p. 138.

²³⁶ One of Radway's respondents, Ann, cites 'armchair travelling' as a main reason for her romance reading and Radway further observes that 'several of the other Smithton readers echoed Ann's interest in geography and her belief that romances are a good substitute for the travelling she would like to do but cannot afford' (p. 110).

²³⁷ Glenn Burger, 'Cilician Armenian Métissage and Hetoum's *La Fleur Des Histoires De La Terre D'Orient*', Cohen, *The Postcolonial Middle Ages*, p. 72.

²³⁸ 'Mahoun' (531); 'of Cristene lawe she kouthe naught' (526).

²³⁹ 'him lovede wel the more' (569).

Furthermore, there is a familiarity with the basic tenets of Christianity in the kingdom; Ermony's Saracen knights know more about Christianity than Bevis, as they inform him it is 'the first day of Yuletide'.²⁴⁰ Ermony seems to occupy a hybrid position between Christian and Saracen and, I will argue, the symbolic instability of Armenia works both to establish and to reinforce Bevis's own identity as similarly unstable and hybrid.

Bevis is not a typical English knight. Raised by Saracens and married to a Saracen princess, the complexity of his identity has been well-documented.²⁴¹ One of the main concerns of this romance and subsequent critical scholarship is the extent to which Bevis is an English hero. For Weiss, the geographic focus of the romance, particularly the inclusion of London geography, serves to 'stamp [...] the ineradicable basic Englishness of its hero firmly on our minds'.²⁴² Yet Weiss also notes that 'it is ironic that Beves in his old age, instead of being received with honour in his own country, find his hardest battle amongst his own compatriots'.²⁴³ In contrast to another Auchinleck hero, Guy of Warwick, who is clearly set up as an exemplary English knight, Bevis' heroic identity is altogether more ambiguous.²⁴⁴ Rouse suggests that Bevis is not a straightforward English hero, given his Saracen upbringing.²⁴⁵ Bevis' confused identity articulates anxieties about cultural hybridity: the fear that his Christian English identity might be dangerously similar to that of the Saracens.²⁴⁶ In the romance, Bevis occupies a hybrid position between typical English hero and foreign prince. He eventually settles abroad and both his sons are raised in the east, betraying their non-Englishness by riding into London to save their father on an Arabian horse and a camel.²⁴⁷ Although Bevis, on the whole, maintains his identity as his father's heir throughout, eventually regaining his lands, the romance poses some interesting challenges to his English hero identity.

²⁴⁰ 'the ferste dai of Youl' (601).

²⁴¹ See, in particular, Rouse, 'For King and Country?'; Siohain Bly Calkin, 'Defining Christian Knighthood in a Saracen World: Changing Depictions of the Protagonist in *Sir Bevis of Hampton*', Fellows and Djordjevic, pp. 127-144.

²⁴² Weiss, 'Interpolations', p. 75.

²⁴³ Weiss, 'Interpolations', p. 74.

²⁴⁴ Much work has identified the 'Englishness' of Guy of Warwick. Of particular significance are: Turville-Petre, especially pp. 114-120; and Calkin, *Saracens*.

²⁴⁵ Rouse, 'For King and Country'.

²⁴⁶ Robert Rouse, 'For King and Country', pp. 116-117, 119.

²⁴⁷ 'rabit' (4475); 'dromedary' (4481).

It seems to me that there is more at stake in the use of geography in *Bevis* than simply amplifying our protagonist's status as a national hero. Bevis does not belong anywhere. Constantly travelling, as Collette points out, he is defined by his movement between geographical locations; the romance is not interested in him when he is in one place, but insists that he keep moving.²⁴⁸ This echoes the fate of the displaced Armenians, imaginatively presaging the travels of the Armenian king to the English court to plead for help in 1392/3: Bevis too has to travel to the Isle of Wight in order to get help to reclaim his inheritance. Bevis' constant movements often mean that his friends and family have to travel, either with him, or to follow or find him. The incessant travelling throughout the romance means that Bevis is never truly comfortable either in the land of his birth, England, or the east, where he is obliged either to fight or convert.²⁴⁹

Each time Bevis returns to England he becomes an unwelcome enemy, forced into fight or flight. It seems, in contrast to Weiss' argument, that the London interpolation does not underline the 'ineradicable basic Englishness' of Bevis: he is here the enemy of London and, consequently, England. Forced to stay in an inn, leave his wife elsewhere in the city, be joined by his sons riding exotic animals, Bevis most certainly does not belong here. The romance's reference to the 'Londen ston' proves significant if we consider its connotations in light of Bevis' character; associating the incessant traveller, Bevis, with a geographical marker of journeying and distance may, I argue, serve to underscore his nomadic lifestyle and estrangement from London and, consequently, the England of his birth. The anxiety which is inherent in Bevis' cultural hybridity is thus both modelled on and reflected in the symbolism of geography, in particular Armenia, in this romance.

Conclusion

I began this chapter with a passage from *Bought*, which described the modern romance east as a dazzling, exotic, fantasy world. While the geography of individual nations is described in so much detail that I was able to plot their locations on a map,

²⁴⁸ Carolyn Collette, 'Bevis of Hampton: Politics and Film', Centre for Medieval Studies, University of York, Jan 2010.

²⁴⁹ This unease has been noted by Robert Rouse: see, 'For King and Country', p. 121.

the general impetus in these romances is towards fiction. The romance east is a homogeneous world, which conflates ethnic and cultural signifiers to create a space which is both specific to the individual romance, and general, in that aside from their names, these fictional desert nations could be interchangeable.

However, examining sheikh romances more closely, it becomes clear that even as it is homogenised, the romance east is constructed with an awareness of contemporary geopolitics. In contrast to later novels, sheikh romances published before the 1980s did not have fictional settings, but were located in real places, such as Morocco and Egypt, which were connected with European imperialist politics. While the shift from reality to fiction which occurred in the 1980s appeared to remove the reality of geopolitics from these romances, descriptions of the geography and culture of the romance east in later novels reveal that they are actually modelled on the contemporary reality of Dubai. Dubai has a reputation for artificiality suggesting, I argue, that the homogeneity of Dubai's culture is exploited in the homogenisation of the romance east. Thus, even as sheikh romances draw on real geography, it is a geography which is already, to a large extent, a fantasy.

The international reputation of Dubai, in contrast to much of the contemporary Middle East, is of leisure and business: it seems politically innocuous. However, Dubai does have specific business and political links with the west, in particular, Britain, revealing that the choice to use Dubai as a model for the romance east was not politically innocuous either. Furthermore, by using western-friendly Dubai as the model for the romance east, these novels reveal their awareness of the political realities of the Middle East, as they rework their geography in order to avoid its more negative politics. Moreover, the way that some sheikh romances deal with contemporary western discourses of the 'medieval' Middle East is revealing of their deliberate attempts to distance themselves and their romance east from these politics.

Sheikh romances use several techniques to nuance this rhetoric and to distinguish their own articulations of the 'medieval' east from those in the contemporary media. For a start, the geographical shift in these romances means that their apparently 'medieval' customs are not part of the same culture usually associated with those parts of the Middle East considered to be 'medieval', i.e. Iraq, Iran or Saudi Arabia. Eroticising the 'medieval' discourse also serves to nuance its effect, presenting

medieval attitudes as desirable in addition to being abhorrent. Finally, these sheikh romances deny the religious overtones of this discourse. While, in media and political rhetoric, the Middle East is ‘medieval’ because it is Islamic, these sheikh romances do not refer overtly to Islam. Instead, they subsume customs and attitudes more commonly attributed to Islam into traditions of culture or ethnicity. What is usually interpreted as binary difference between east and west in political rhetoric is here converted into more malleable and acceptable tropes which, as this chapter pointed out, are homogenised and familiarised. Thus, the romance east is distanced and dissociated from the real ‘medieval’ east.

Bevis too is deeply responsive to the currents of geographic and political knowledge in early fourteenth-century England. But in contrast to sheikh romance, *Bevis* does not homogenise the east, but rather exploits the specificity of place to imbue the romance with symbolic meaning drawn from contemporary knowledge. *Bevis* mentions an astonishing 63 different places, both real and fictional. Routes, journey times and distances, and methods of travel are described, and the romance contains an unusually detailed description of the city of London. Not only does the augmentation of place names suggest a growth in geographic knowledge and interest amongst the audience of romance, but the additional detail of routes, journey times and modes of transport as well as the inclusion of real places such as London work to create a sense of realism.

Bevis presents its audience with a realistic romance world, certain aspects of which map onto contemporary geography and reflect the main travel and political concerns of the time. Geographical references added in *Bevis* seem to correlate with contemporary knowledge about places. I observed in this chapter the shift which occurs from *Boeve* to *Bevis* from ‘the traditional territory of Alexander the Great and [...] the western realm of Saracen power in Africa’ in *Boeve* to ‘the territory of the Crusades, the Saracen East’ in *Bevis*: this is a move from fantasy geography into a realm of historical relevance.²⁵⁰ This shift is indicative of the realism effect in *Bevis*, in that its geography changes, similar to the geography of sheikh romance, according to contemporary concerns. Those locations added in the Middle English romance are based around the three main discourses of medieval travel: pilgrimage, trade, and

²⁵⁰ Metlitzki, pp. 130-131.

crusade. *Bevis*, then, exploits the symbolism inherent in the geographical knowledge of early fourteenth-century England, constructing the romance around these geographical reference points.

This romance, then, is reactive to changes in geographic and political knowledge. Goodman argues that ‘the chivalric narratives of the later Middle Ages [...] should be recognised as a too often neglected resource for understanding attitudes to travel, travellers’ tales, and the conduct of Europeans abroad’.²⁵¹ The study of *Bevis* is useful precisely because it tells us what kinds of geographies were prominent in popular consciousness and can help to track changes: for example, the shift from Egypt to Armenia. Furthermore I argue, extrapolating from Goodman and Rouse, that *Bevis* could itself have functioned as a source of geographic information, contributing to the same discourse from which it draws its own geography.

Geography even has an effect on *Bevis* himself. *Bevis* travels incessantly, repeatedly encounters dangers on the road and, it seems, does not really belong anywhere, suggesting that the emphasis on travel and geography in this romance works to affect the characterisation of the romance’s protagonist. Geography thus functions at a deeper level than narrative, affecting the character of the hero. *Bevis* here lays the suggestive groundwork for the possibility that the romance east can affect characterisation, an aspect of modern and medieval romances I examine further in Chapters 2 and 3.

The sheikh romance east, in contrast to the geographical spaces of *Bevis*, is a place where otherness is nuanced. It is in this way that modern sheikh romances create an environment in which a cross-cultural relationship might occur; aware of but distanced from contemporary geopolitics, the romance east is detailed, yet homogeneous, specific, and yet general. The sheikh romance east highlights sameness, dissociating itself from the perceived alterity of the rest of the Middle East and offering an alternative space, in which such an erotic relationship between east and west could be imagined. I turn, now, in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3, to examine more closely the role gender and ethnicity play in facilitating the cross-cultural relationship within this romance east.

²⁵¹ Goodman, p. 46.

CHAPTER 2: ‘FOR YOU ARE A MAN AND SHE IS A MAID’: GENDER AND DIFFERENCE IN EAST AND WEST

In the Introduction, I briefly outlined the ways romance represents difference through gender and ethnicity. The following two chapters explore the binaries by which gender and ethnicity are constructed, examining the relationship between them and looking at how they reinforce difference whilst simultaneously suggesting the possibility for sameness. This chapter focuses on gender, asking: how is gender deployed within the framework of difference between east and west? What models of masculinity and femininity are associated with the east and the west and to what extent are these sustained or subverted by the romance narrative? What can an examination of gender in medieval romance reveal about the use of gender in modern sheikh romance?

The chapter is in two parts. I consider first the sheikh hero, a hypermasculine, alpha male whose heterosexual gender identity is, I argue, inextricably, yet occasionally anxiously, bound up with his eastern surroundings. In order to draw out fully how the east impacts upon a hypermasculine male identity, I then turn to the Middle English romance *Floris and Blancheflur*, the story of a relationship between a Saracen man, Floris, and a Christian woman, Blancheflur, which demonstrates two contrasting models of eastern masculinity. Examining how these masculinities are constructed in and by the romance east, I draw on Butler’s theory of gender performativity to explore the effect of deviant gender performance on binary heterosexual gender relations. In the second part of the chapter I turn to the figure of the heroine. I analyse the sheikh romances *The Arabian Mistress* – in which the heroine, Faye, agrees to become the hero, Tariq’s, mistress in order to liberate her brother from prison – *The Sultan’s Virgin Bride* – the story of a sheikh, Tariq, who marries Farrah in order to secure her shares in her father’s oil company – and *At the Sheikh’s Bidding* – in which a child heir is removed to a desert kingdom by the hero Zahir along with his British nanny Erin – considering the performance of hyperfemininity by the western heroine.¹ Isolating virginity as a particularly prominent aspect of this

¹ Graham, *The Arabian Mistress*, hereafter referred to as *Arabian*; Saran Morgan, *The Sultan’s Virgin Bride* (Richmond: Harlequin Mills & Boon, 2006), hereafter referred to as *Sultan’s Virgin*; Chantelle Shaw, *At the Sheikh’s Bidding* (Richmond: Harlequin Mills & Boon, 2008), hereafter

hyperfemininity I move, finally, to draw together representations of gender difference in relation to hegemonic constructions of power, laying the groundwork for an analysis of ethnic difference in Chapter 3.

‘A Truly Magnificent Specimen’: Masculinity and the East

Previous studies of masculinity have not extensively considered the construction of heterosexual eastern masculinity. Within such scholarship, a focus on non-white men emerged only in the mid-to late 1980s.² These studies tended to examine black masculinity, and representations of eastern masculinity have tended to study eastern homosexuality or Orientalist constructions of effeminate masculinity.³ As I noted in the Introduction, Orientalist rhetoric has long promoted a vision of an effeminate east, associating eastern men ‘with the supposedly “female” qualities of irrationality, emotionality, and childlikeness’.⁴ For Said, the Orient is associated with ‘feminine penetrability’: a passive, feminine space into which active, masculine, imperial power penetrates.⁵ This view of the east is persuasive and persistent, and has been extensively considered by theorists of Orientalism and the east, for example Mrinalini Sinha’s study of the ‘effeminate Bengali’ in the nineteenth century.⁶ Yet, it has been argued that Mills & Boon sheikh romances challenge the idea of an effeminate east by creating a hypermasculine sheikh hero, ‘destabilising’, as Bach contends, ‘perceptions of the Orient as the west’s feminised other’.⁷ Taylor posits: ‘the Orient in the sheikh romances is a masculine Orient’.⁸

referred to as *Bidding*. For full plot summaries of the romances discussed in this chapter see Appendix 1.

² Victoria Robinson, ‘Heterosexuality and Masculinity: Theorising Male Power or the Male Wounded Psyche?’, *Theorising Heterosexuality: Telling it Straight*, ed. Diane Richardson (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1996), p. 122.

³ Consider, for example, Harry Stecopoulos and Michael Uebel, ed., *Race and the Subject of Masculinities* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997) in which only one chapter discusses non-black masculinity (Yvonne Tasker, ‘Fists of Fury: Discourses of Race and Masculinity in the Martial Arts Cinema’, pp. 315-336).

⁴ Gargano, p. 177.

⁵ Said, p. 206.

⁶ Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: The ‘manly Englishman’ and the ‘effeminate Bengali’ in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995).

⁷ Bach, p. 12.

⁸ Taylor, p. 1042.

For Taylor, sheikh romances invert the expected effeminacy of Orientalism by inventing a hypermasculine sheikh hero, and depicting western men as his less masculine foils.⁹ The construction of western men as ‘gallant, passionless [and] insular’ is in complete contrast to the violent, aggressive sexuality of the sheikh.¹⁰ Gargano points out the contrast between the feminised Englishman Aubrey and the hypermasculine sheikh Ahmed in *The Sheik*.¹¹ The fact that the western heroine does not usually have a male partner in the west (or certainly not one who can compete with the sheikh hero) indicates how the focalisation of hypermasculinity is in the east; in a romance world order of hegemonic masculinity defined by heterosexual conquest, the eastern male stands above his western brothers.

The sheikh is an alpha male. ‘Brutal’, ‘hard-edged’, ‘dominant, aggressive, [...] rough-hewn, mythic’, ‘ruthless, tough, even cruel’, the alpha hero is the ultimate ‘man as warrior’: ubiquitous, monolithic, enduring.¹² As Sarah S. G. Frantz puts it, ‘the hero represents patriarchal power in all its glory by being the richest, or the strongest, or the most beautiful, or the most emotionally distant man the heroine has ever known’.¹³ The sheikh hero seems little changed since *The Sheik*; he is ‘tall and broad-shouldered, wears a heavy cloak and white flowing robes, and he has hard cruel eyes’.¹⁴ Bach argues: ‘like all [...] heroes the sheik is powerful, domineering, arrogant, immensely wealthy and endowed with rugged good looks’.¹⁵ Patricia Raub even suggests that *The Sheik* formed the prototype for all subsequent characterisations in popular romance, with a young, beautiful, and sexually inexperienced heroine, and a tall, dark, and cruelly handsome hero.¹⁶ While the alpha

⁹ Taylor, p. 1047.

¹⁰ Bach, p. 18.

¹¹ Gargano, p. 176.

¹² Modleski, *Loving With A Vengeance*, p. 31; Jayne Ann Krentz, ‘Trying to Tame the Romance: Critics and Correctness’, Krentz, p. 107; Doreen Owens Malek, ‘Mad, Bad, and Dangerous to Know: The Hero as Challenge’, Krentz, pp. 74-75; Robyn Donald, ‘Mean, Moody, and Magnificent: The Hero in Romance Literature’, Krentz, p. 82; Suzanne Simmons Guntrum, ‘Happily Ever After: The Ending as Beginning’, Krentz, p. 152.

¹³ Sarah S. G. Frantz, “‘Expressing’ Herself: The Romance Novel and the Feminine Will to Power”, *Scorned Literature: Essays on the History and Criticism of Popular Mass-Produced Fiction in America*, ed. Lydia Cushman Schurman and Deidre Johnson (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2002), p. 18. For an interesting argument on the relationship between the formation of the alpha male and evolutionary psychology, see Heather Schell, ‘The Love Life of a Fact’, *How Well Do Facts Travel? The Dissemination of Reliable Knowledge*, ed. Peter Howlett and Mary S. Morgan (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 429-454.

¹⁴ Anderson, p. 189.

¹⁵ Bach, p. 28.

¹⁶ Raub, p. 124.

is not the only form of romance hero today, he is one of the most persistent elements of romance novels in recent years.

The sheikh is sexy. A large part of the alpha hero's characterisation rests on his sexuality, drawing on mythologies of uncontrollable male sexuality, perpetuating, according to Modleski, 'ideological confusion about male sexuality and male violence'.¹⁷ As Taylor points out, the sheikh hero's masculinity is 'desiring and desirable'.¹⁸ The eroticisation of the sheikh was so significant in the aftermath of the book and film *The Sheik* that, according to Raub, 'the word "sheik" entered the American language, to become a slang expression referring to a man with sex appeal'.¹⁹ The sheikh's sex appeal is emphasised by repeated references to his multiple previous sexual partners and experience. The hero of *Bidding* has met 'countless other women [...] throughout his life', 'up until recently [had] kept mistresses', and has 'a healthy sex drive'.²⁰ In *Arabian*, Tariq is 'faster than a jump jet with women!' and the heroine of *Sultan's Virgin* muses, 'it was said that there was nothing that Tariq al-Sharma didn't know about women. That he was a skilful lover. The best'.²¹

In almost every sexual encounter, sheikh heroes initiate sexual activity, often taking heroines by surprise. In *Sultan's Virgin* Tariq's 'movement was swift and smooth and came without warning' and in *Bidding*, 'Zahir's dark head swooped'.²² Heroes do not take no for an answer; Zahir ignores Erin's 'desperate plea' of 'don't you dare touch me' and when Farrah begs Tariq to 'let me go-' he interrupts 'no way-'.²³ Male loss of control is cited as a reason for commencing sexual activity and as a justification for its violent nature. Before sleeping together for the first time in *Sultan's Virgin*, Tariq tells Farrah that 'I was getting to the point where I would have done almost anything in order to win the right to undress you', and swiftly slashes her 'priceless white silk' dress from her as 'where you're concerned, I don't do "slow"'.²⁴ Similarly, in *Bidding*, after Erin orgasms, Zahir 'couldn't wait [...]. He

¹⁷ Modleski, *Loving With A Vengeance*, p. 35.

¹⁸ Taylor, p. 1043.

¹⁹ Raub, p. 120.

²⁰ *Bidding*, pp. 68, 79, 80.

²¹ *Arabian*, p. 50; *Sultan's Virgin*, p. 25.

²² *Sultan's Virgin*, p. 72; *Bidding*, p. 91.

²³ *Bidding*, p. 63; *Sultan's Virgin*, p. 168.

²⁴ *Sultan's Virgin*, pp. 122, 123.

had lost all sense of time and place – driven by a primitive urgency for sexual release'.²⁵

Sexual violence is deeply embedded in this model of alpha masculinity. Whilst most critics agree that the representation of rape and sexual violence was largely abandoned in romance by the 1980s, sexual violence persists in some novels, particularly historical romances and those with foreign heroes, in particular, sheikh romances. Julia T. Wood notes that 'the meaning and acceptability of violence are sculpted by cultural contexts' and Flesch argues that 'the [sheikh] romance' is the 'one type of contemporary romance [as opposed to historical romance] where the hero frequently abuses the heroine'.²⁶ The most prominent aspect of sexual activity in sheikh romances is the use of force. 'Hard' and 'forbidding', 'fierce' and 'brutal', heroes use 'punishing force' and exhibit 'barely controlled savagery': in short, they are 'dangerous'.²⁷ The first kiss between Erin and Zahir in *Bidding* is described as 'savage', with Zahir 'forcing her slender neck back as he captured her mouth in a kiss that sought to dominate and subjugate her to his will'. Erin protests – 'no!' – but:

[Her] cry of protest was lost beneath the punishing force of Zahir's lips as he ground them against hers. [...] His arms felt like steel bands holding her fast, and when he forced his tongue between her lips she moaned and tried to turn her head to evade his ruthless assault.²⁸

Erin calls Zahir a 'brute' for leaving 'faint bruises on her pale skin' after 'he took her with an almost brutal force'.²⁹ The masculinity of the sheikh hero is sexualised, violent and dominant, constructed according to heterosexual gender relations, which position men as dominant and women as passive.

Yet, alpha masculinity is not unique to the sheikh; there is a clear similarity in the models of masculinity exemplified in the sheikh romances and other novels. Recent guidelines provided by Mills & Boon for hero characterisation in the *Modern Romance* series indicate that the sheikh is not so distinct from other alpha heroes. Mills & Boon suggest that he should be 'commanding: he's always in control and

²⁵ *Bidding*, p. 97.

²⁶ Julia T. Wood, 'The Normalisation of Violence in Heterosexual Romantic Relationships: Women's Narratives of Love and Violence', *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* 18.2 (2001): 241; Flesch, p. 184.

²⁷ *Arabian*, p. 20; *Bidding*, pp. 37, 59, 163, 184; *Sultan's Virgin*, p. 52.

²⁸ *Bidding*, p. 37.

²⁹ *Bidding*, p. 133.

calling the shots’, ‘demanding: [...] he wants it done, and he wants it done *now!*’, ‘self-assured: he believes in himself and the reach of his influence, totally’, and ‘passionate: [...] he uses his charm and power to get what he wants’.³⁰ According to Mills & Boon, ‘the success of Modern Romance proves that many women still fantasise about strong men’.³¹ But the sheikh hero, I would like to argue, is more than simply a generic alpha hero transplanted into the desert. I consider that certain elements of the romance east are used to eroticise the sheikh in a specifically eastern way. There are three main ways, I contend, in which the sheikh’s masculinity is specifically constructed in relation to the east: the use of the harem motif; the exploitation of a specific animalistic description; and the connection of the sheikh with the culture and landscape of the romance east.

The harem is a persistent motif in the modern sheikh romance, representing both the erotic east and, by extension, the sexual acquisitiveness of the eastern ruler. Today’s sheikh heroes no longer have active harems which are positioned as part of the past.³² This does not, however, prevent the harem being deployed as a symbolic feature of the sheikh’s masculinity. In *Arabian*, Tariq proposes to lodge Faye in his palace’s ‘harem quarters’ and even after he ‘gritted’: ‘I do not have a harem’, it is still used by the heroine to describe the treatment of women and eastern approaches to sex.³³ When Tariq sends Faye from the desert back to the palace she equates his actions with those of previous rulers who had used harems: ‘the harem might have been abolished but she could not help thinking of his father who had sent for a concubine whenever he’d felt like one. After only one night, she was to be dispatched back to the palace’.³⁴ The connotation of the harem is also used to describe the sheikh’s attitude towards sex with the heroine; in *Bidding*, the heroine vows that ‘she would not allow him to treat her like a favourite from his harem, that she would not be available for sex whenever it suited him’.³⁵ The harem, then, seems to symbolise a certain eastern-inflected, dominant male sexuality.

³⁰ Mills & Boon, ‘Heroes’, 5 Jan 2010.

³¹ Mills & Boon, ‘Living and Loving with the Alpha Male!’ 5 Jan 2010.

³² See Taylor, p. 1041.

³³ *Arabian*, pp. 35, 90.

³⁴ *Arabian*, pp. 117-118.

³⁵ *Bidding*, p. 157.

The sheikh is further connected with the east as he is described in relation to eastern animals, most often birds of prey or big cats.³⁶ In *Arabian*, the hawk is the emblem of Tariq's family, and he has 'spectacular lion gold eyes' with which he regularly 'surveyed [the heroine] with the predatory gaze of a hawk', 'indolent as a sleek jungle cat'.³⁷ Similarly, in *Bidding*, Zahir prowled 'the room, silent and menacing as a panther stalking its prey', while in *Sultan's Virgin* Tariq appeared 'like a jungle cat lying in wait for its prey'.³⁸ Describing the alpha hero in this way is not unusual; Heather Schell has argued that cultural fictions have embraced an understanding of masculinity prompted by evolutionary psychology that linked male genes with animal genes 'which carry the atavistic behavioural impulses of our remote ancestors'.³⁹ But connecting sheikhs with specific animals is a way to imbue their hypermasculinity with 'eastern-ness'.

The sheikh's title fundamentally connects him with the east: in *Bidding* and *Sultan's Virgin* the hero is a 'desert prince' and in *Arabian* Tariq is a 'desert warrior'.⁴⁰ Repetitive title-dropping – 'Prince Tariq Shazad ibn Zachir, paramount sheikh and ruler'; 'Sultan Tariq bin Omar al-Sharma'; 'Prince Zahir bin Khalid al Muntassir' – not only indicates status, but consistently highlights the heroes' positions as representatives of their nations.⁴¹ Sheikhs are linked with the country's past via their ancestry; Tariq is part of 'a desert people' and in *Bejewelled* Kalik is 'a proud descendent of the A'zam tribe who had first civilised Qwasir': his character and control are 'in his blood, as [they] had been in his ancestors' for thousands of years'.⁴²

Kalik is also connected with the landscape and its sensual appeal, as 'the exotic smell of him and the desert [were] almost inseparable'.⁴³ In *Arabian*, Faye dries her face on the hero's *keffiyeh* and 'could smell the evocative scent of him on the cloth.

³⁶ This motif has been discussed by Jarmakani, pp. 1006-1011; Flesch, p. 213; and Bach who writes: 'the sheikh is, almost without exception, described at some point in terms of a bird of prey' (p. 29).

³⁷ *Arabian*, pp. 48, 36, 19.

³⁸ *Bidding*, p. 32; *Sultan's Virgin*, p. 12.

³⁹ Schell, 'The Big Bad Wolf: Masculinity and Genetics in Popular Culture', *Literature and Medicine* 26.1 (2007): 109.

⁴⁰ *Bidding*, pp. 126; *Sultan's Virgin*, p. 15; *Arabian*, p. 9.

⁴¹ *Arabian*, p. 5; *Sultan's Virgin*, p. 7; *Bidding*, p. 7.

⁴² *Arabian*, p. 78; *Bejewelled*, pp. 47, 68.

⁴³ *Bejewelled*, p. 90.

Sandalwood and just *him*'.⁴⁴ In *Bidding*, the sheikh's character is compared with the setting – 'Zahir was as harsh and unforgiving as the desert' – and in *Sultan's Virgin* the sheikh and the desert are explicitly connected in a discourse of desire, as the heroine contemplates 'the red gold dunes' which are 'a place designed for fantasy and dreaming, as was the man standing facing her'.⁴⁵ As Dannenberg argues: 'the desert is the metaphor of the man and the lover for which the heroine [...] longs'.⁴⁶ For Anderson, "'the desert" and "the east" are synonymous'.⁴⁷ In these sheikh romances it is clear that the desert and the east are often synonymous with the sheikh. So while the sheikh shares much of his hypermasculinity with other alpha heroes, certain elements of his gender identity reveal how he exhibits a uniquely *eastern* hypermasculinity which disrupts Orientalist ideas of the east and the eastern male as feminine.

Yet sheikh romances do refer to the stereotype of effeminate eastern masculinity in descriptions of eastern clothing. The wearing of traditional eastern clothing is a large part of the sensual appeal of the sheikh hero. Jarmakani quotes from a website post that one aspect of 'What Makes a Sheikh Romance so *Hot*?' is 'when the sheikh makes a change from wearing Western style clothing to the traditional robes of his country'.⁴⁸ In *Bidding*, this appeal is evident:

She had been unable to disguise her shock when Zahir had swept into her sitting room an hour after their last confrontation, no longer wearing western clothes but dressed in traditional white Arab robes. He looked—spectacular. There was no other way to describe him. He was exotic and mysterious and *supremely masculine*, and she found herself fantasising about the muscular, olive-skinned body concealed beneath the thin cotton garment.⁴⁹

The particular appeal of 'traditional white Arab robes' here is that they make the sheikh not only look 'exotic' and 'mysterious', but '*supremely masculine*', indicating how rather than making him effeminate, as might be expected, eastern clothing masculinises the sheikh, contributing to his masculine alpha identity. Yet, while eastern clothing forms a central part of the erotic attraction of the hypermasculine

⁴⁴ *Arabian*, p. 72.

⁴⁵ *Bidding*, p. 133; *Sultan's Virgin*, p. 51.

⁴⁶ Dannenberg, p. 74.

⁴⁷ Anderson, p. 181.

⁴⁸ Jarmakani, "'The Sheikh Who Loved Me'", p. 1010.

⁴⁹ *Bidding*, p. 73, my emphasis.

sheikh, it can also carry connotations of effeminacy which potentially undermine his erotic appeal, prompting a crisis of masculinity.

Drawing on Orientalist constructions of eastern masculinity, several studies of the sheikh romance in the 1920s and 1930s, a significant source for today's sheikh romances, observed an anxiety about feminisation associated with eastern clothing. Melman contends that due to the “sheik mania” following the release of the film version of *The Sheik*, ‘newspapers in Britain and America pontificated that the emergence and spread of the stereotype of the Eastern lover was a threat to the ideals of Western manhood’.⁵⁰ This threat was located specifically in the growth in popularity of sheikh inspired clothing and jewellery. Much of the association of eastern costume and effeminacy was centred on Rudolph Valentino, whose ‘bejewelled, overly stylised and elaborat[e] costume[s] [...] proved too great a challenge to conventional views on masculinity’.⁵¹ Such an association was also located in the figure of Lawrence of Arabia, for whom dressing as an eastern man provided an opportunity, according to Gargano, for the expression of suppressed homoerotic impulses; ‘ironically, while [...] Lawrence sought in Arab culture a chance to express suppressed homoerotic impulses, [his] “Arab” disguise transformed [him] into [an] icon [...] of heterosexual masculinity for women like [...] E. M. Hull’.⁵² This, then, exposes the potential anxiety inherent in the sheikh's desert dress: the idea that it might subvert the heterosexual gender roles on which the sheikh's hypermasculinity is predicated. Turner argues that Hull, in presenting a hypermasculine sheikh hero, was ‘endeavouring to undo the paradox of the effeminate but simultaneously masculine hero’, suggesting that there was an acknowledged anxiety surrounding sheikh masculinity.⁵³

This gender anxiety pervades modern sheikh romances, whose heroes are regularly constructed with echoes of Valentino in mind. The hero of *The Sheikh's Wife* ‘seemed perfect [...] like Valentino from the old movies’ and the heroine of *Sold to the Sheikh* recounts the fantasy of ‘Rudolph Valentino, sweeping the fair lady off to

⁵⁰ Melman, p. 91.

⁵¹ Turner, p. 173. For an examination of the ‘cultural cross-dressing’ of Lawrence of Arabia and Rudolph Valentino see Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (London: Penguin, 1992), pp. 304-311.

⁵² Gargano, p. 174.

⁵³ Turner, p. 180.

his desert lair to have his wicked way with her’, noting ‘that scenario has turned countless Western women on no end over the years’.⁵⁴ The potentially feminising effect of the east is located in its clothing, expressed in the idea that eastern robes can conceal or obscure heteronormative masculinity. In *Sultan’s Virgin* ‘[Tariq] was dressed in traditional robes, but they failed to conceal the athletic power of his physique or the width of his shoulders’.⁵⁵ The romance here acknowledges that the sheikh’s robes might act to conceal his strength or size: in other words, his masculinity. Some sheikh romances explicitly deny the feminising effect of eastern clothing. One heroine observes: ‘like her, he wore a long, loose robe. But, far from making him look effeminate, the outfit somehow accentuated the width of his shoulders, the whipcord strength of his body, his innate masculinity’.⁵⁶ The hero here wears the same clothing as the heroine but, instead of making him appear more feminine, it instead serves to enhance the hero’s ‘innate masculinity’. Another heroine questions, ‘how could a man look so very masculine and appealing in something that could be mistaken for full-length robe or dress? Yet, he did. The typical Arabic lounging garment accentuated Hakim’s maleness rather than detracting from it’.⁵⁷ The hero’s masculinity seems to be defined in resistance to the potential feminising effect of the clothing: instead of making him look feminine, clothing actually works to make him appear *more* masculine, inverting our expectations. Some sheikh romances, then, confront stereotypes of feminising eastern dress and its effect on eastern masculinity, rewriting the Orientalist signification of traditional dress to enhance the alpha hero’s hypermasculinity.

So, the sheikh hero is hypermasculine both *because of* and *despite* his eastern identity. While the east can heighten masculinity, for example by using the harem as a symbol for alpha sexuality, it can also question it, through feminising eastern dress. A particularly explicit example of the way in which elements of the east can both construct and disrupt the formation of masculinity is evident in the Middle English romance *Floris and Blancheflur*, in which two distinct forms of Saracen masculinity are constructed.⁵⁸ I will consider how these forms of masculinity relate to each other

⁵⁴ Porter, *The Sheikh’s Wife*, p. 113; Miranda Lee, *Sold to the Sheikh* (Richmond: Harlequin Mills & Boon, 2004), p. 110.

⁵⁵ *Sultan’s Virgin*, p. 52.

⁵⁶ Annie West, *For the Sheikh’s Pleasure* (Richmond: Harlequin Mills & Boon, 2007), p. 109.

⁵⁷ Monroe, *The Sheikh’s Bartered Bride*, p. 113.

⁵⁸ Hereafter referred to as *Floris*.

and what this medieval romance might tell us about eastern masculinity in modern sheikh romance.

‘Made [Into] a Eunuch’: Subverting Masculinity in *Floris and Blancheflur*

There has been a growth of interest in medieval masculinity in recent years and some studies have examined romance masculinity.⁵⁹ In romance, as in life, men had to fulfil certain public roles which defined their masculinity; being a knight, being a husband, being a father, being a priest. Medieval masculinity, then, was performative. Heroes of medieval romance were usually celebrated for their vigour and military might.⁶⁰ Tania Colwell notes that ‘typically, medieval romances depict brave, handsome knights in search of adventure and, often, a wife and property’ while Cohen argues that ‘the hero represents a kind of hypermasculinity, an exaggerated and perhaps idealized version of maleness’.⁶¹ But what, then, of a romance like *Floris and Blancheflur*, where the hero does not display knightly masculinity? Charbonneau and Cromwell note some ‘exceptions to male hypermasculinity’ in romance including ‘the feminised Launfal’, hero of another Middle English romance. They argue: ‘[romance] is not a genre of simple-minded adherence to a chivalric *ethos*, but rather one that allows slipperiness and an intense

⁵⁹ The first study to focus on medieval masculinity was Clare A. Lees, Thelma S. Fenster, and Jo Ann McNamara ed., *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994). Notable studies on romance masculinity include Cohen’s essay on the romance *Sir Gowther* (‘Gowther Among the Dogs: Becoming Inhuman c.1400’, Cohen and Wheeler, pp. 219-244) and Ad Putter’s examination of cross-dressing knights in chivalric romance (‘Transvestite Knights in Medieval Life and Literature’, Cohen and Wheeler, pp. 279-302). Also significant for the study of masculinity in romance are Gaunt and Crane, *Gender and Romance*. Some work has been carried out on non-Christian masculinity: see, in particular, Steven F. Kruger, ‘Becoming Christian, Become Male?’, Cohen and Wheeler, pp. 21-42; and Louise Mirrer, ‘Representing “Other” Men: Muslims, Jews, and Masculine Ideals in Medieval Castilian Epic and Ballad’, Lees, Fenster and McNamara, pp. 169-186.

⁶⁰ Rachel Dressler, ‘Steel Corpse: Imagining the Knight in Death’, *Conflicted Identities and Multiple Masculinities: Men in the Medieval West*, ed. Jacqueline Murray (London: Garland, 1999), pp. 154-155.

⁶¹ Tania Colwell, ‘Medieval Masculinities: Transgressions and Transformations’, *Our Medieval Heritage: Essays in Honour of John Tillotson for his 60th Birthday*, ed. Linda Rasmussen, Valerie Spear and Diane Tillotson (Cardiff: Merton Priory Press, 2002), p. 137; Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and the members of Interscripta, *Medieval Masculinities: Heroism, Sanctity, and Gender*, 30 Apr 2012 <<http://www8.georgetown.edu/departments/medieval/labyrinth/e-center/interscripta/mm.html>>.

interrogation of accepted values and gendered roles'.⁶² It is precisely this slipperiness that I seek to explore.

Floris, thought to have been composed around 1250, is extant in four manuscripts, none of which is complete, that date from the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.⁶³ The romance tells the story of Floris, the pagan son of the King of Spain, who travels to Babylon to rescue his beloved, Blancheflur, the Christian daughter of a slave woman, who has been sold to the Emir of Babylon and is being kept in his harem. Most previous studies have focused on the version of the romance which survives in Egerton 2862, as this is the most complete surviving version, although, along with all extant Middle English versions of the romance, it is missing a number of its opening lines. However, the Egerton text also omits certain lines describing Floris and Blancheflur which are crucial to my argument about masculinity. Following Erik Kooper, I thus take the Auchinleck *Floris* as my base-text.⁶⁴

Although popular in the Middle Ages, modern scholarship on the Middle English *Floris* has been minimal, with the majority of studies focusing instead on its Old French source, *Floire et Blancheflor*.⁶⁵ Indeed Donald Sands, who is dismissive of many Middle English romances, writes: 'editors agree that the earlier French version [...] possesses greater artistry' than 'any English redaction'.⁶⁶ Of those studies which have examined *Floire*, a number have highlighted its gender themes, indicating the prominence of this topic in the romance.⁶⁷ Indeed, Lynn Shutters contends that the

⁶² Charbonneau and Cromwell, p. 99.

⁶³ The romance is extant in London, British Library, Cotton Vitellius D.3 (before 1300) (a fragment of 451 lines, with approximately 180 lines legible); Cambridge, University Library, Gg 4.27.2 (c.1300) (824 lines); Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, Advocates 19.2.1 (Auchinleck) (c.1330) (861 lines); London, British Library, Egerton 2862 (olim Trentham/Sutherland) (1375-1400) (1083 lines).

⁶⁴ All references to *Floris*, unless otherwise indicated, are from Erik Kooper, *Sentimental and Humorous Romances: Floris and Blancheflour, Sir Degrevant, the Squire of Low Degree, the Tournament of Tottenham, and the Feast of Tottenham* (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2006). This edition is based upon the Auchinleck text, with the first 366 lines supplemented from Egerton. References to all other versions are from George H. McKnight ed., *King Horn, Floriz and Blauncheflur, the Assumption of Our Lady*, Early English Text Society O.S. 14 (London: Oxford University Press, 1901).

⁶⁵ Hereafter referred to as *Floire*. For a thorough examination of the relationship between the Old French romance and its European adaptations see Patricia Grieve, *Floire and Blancheflor and the European Romance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

⁶⁶ Donald B. Sands ed., *Middle English Verse Romances* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1966), p. 280.

⁶⁷ The most significant of these are Jane Gilbert, 'Boys Will Be...What? Gender, Sexuality, and Childhood in *Floire et Blancheflor* and *Floris and Lyriope*', *Exemplaria* 9.1 (1997): pp. 39-61;

romance itself highlights issues of gender over those of religion, arguing that *Floire* '[renders] Floire's masculinity, not his religion, the main obstacle to his love for Blanche-flor'.⁶⁸ I draw on studies of the Old French *Floire* in the development of my own argument about the function of gender in *Floris*: the first to fully consider the gender implications of the Middle English romance.

Floris presents two opposing models of eastern masculinity. The masculinity closest to that of the alpha sheikh hero, and thus to the typical knight-hero of medieval romance, is not that of the hero Floris but is exemplified in his rival, the Emir of Babylon, who purchases Blanche-flur and whose masculinity is violent and sexually avaricious. The Emir seems to correspond to typical romance masculinity. He is hosting a 'tournament' for '150 rich kings', and wields a sword as a symbol of violent masculinity.⁶⁹ The Emir also has a forty-two roomed 'harem' of maidens guarded by eunuchs and housed in an ornate, phallic tower, making him the only virile male in his Babylonian palace.⁷⁰ He is sexually active, exemplified in his 'strange custom' of 'every year [...] choosing a new wife' from amongst the maidens in his harem.⁷¹ Vern L. Bullough argues that 'male sexual performance was a major key to being male' in the Middle Ages, and that it was important 'to keep demonstrating [...] maleness by action and thought, especially by sexual action'.⁷² The Emir achieves this via a prominent, phallic symbol of sexual prowess in his tower, and the repetitive act of selecting a sexual partner, thereby drawing attention to his virility and, consequently, to his maleness. The Emir, then, displays a hypermasculinity defined by sexual excess and violence.

Floris, on the other hand, displays a gender identity much closer to the Orientalist stereotype of effeminate eastern masculinity. Floris has been widely recognised as having an unusually feminised masculinity. He weeps, swoons, and, to the

and P. McCaffery, 'Sexual Identity in *Floire et Blanche-flor* and *Ami et Amile*', *Gender Transgressions: Crossing the Normative Barrier in Old French Literature*, ed. Karen J. Taylor (New York: Garland, 1998), pp. 129-151.

⁶⁸ Lynn Shutters, 'Christian Love or Pagan Transgression? Marriage and Conversion in *Floire et Blanche-flor*', *Discourses on Love, Marriage, and Transgression in Medieval and Early Modern Literature*, ed. Albrecht Classen (Arizona: Arizona Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2004), pp. 85-86. Shutters offers a provocative reading of the way gender and religious conversion work together in *Floire*.

⁶⁹ justening (581); 'other half hondred of riche king' (582).

⁷⁰ 'bour' (199).

⁷¹ 'wonder [...] woon' (641, 642); 'everich yer [...] to chesen him a newe wif' (642-643).

⁷² Vern L. Bullough, 'On Being a Male in the Middle Ages', Lees, Fenster and McNamara, p. 41.

displeasure of his parents, spends all of his time with a young woman, Blancheflur, with whom he shares a common name: ‘flower’. While weeping, swooning and being compared with a flower do not, in medieval literature, connote femininity in themselves, by consistently identifying Floris with Blancheflur I would like to argue that this romance suggests that Floris is feminine because he looks and acts like a certain woman: Blancheflur.⁷³ Indeed, the lovers are almost physically identical: an innkeeper’s wife notes that Floris and Blancheflur are ‘alike [...] in all aspects, / Both in outward appearance and in sorrowful emotion’.⁷⁴ Furthermore, in contrast to typical knightly conduct (and indeed, in contrast to the Emir), Floris never fights.⁷⁵ An effeminate male hero is not unusual in Middle English romance: several other romances also contain less hypermasculine heroes, for example, *Sir Launfal*, as Charbonneau and Cromwell point out.⁷⁶ What is more particular to Floris is the consistent doubling of male and female, conflating masculine and feminine gender performance and disrupting the gender binaries of the romance.

Yet, while Floris and Blancheflur might be ‘alike in all aspects’, at this point in the romance their gender differentiation is still evident; the innkeeper’s wife recognises that ‘[Floris is] a man and [Blancheflur] is a maid’.⁷⁷ Floris might be effeminate, but he is still recognisably male at this point. It is not until later in the romance, in the Emir’s harem, that Floris becomes unidentifiable as a man:

The chamberlain has set out,
 Into [Blancheflur’s] bedroom he has come,
 And stands before her bed,
 And finds these two [Floris and Blancheflur], face to face,
 Face to face, and mouth to mouth:
 [.....]
 Into the tower he climbs up,
 And told his lord all that he had seen.
 The Emir commanded his sword to be brought,

⁷³ Karl P. Wentersdorf argues that being called a flower did not indicate a frail and timid person, but ‘represented handsome and vigorous young manhood’. He points out that the romance hero Amis ‘held flower and price over all [over al yholden flour and priis]’ (440) and that Havelock the Dane is described as ‘England’s bloom [Engelondes blome]’ (63) (‘Iconographic elements in *Floris and Blancheflour*’, *Annuaire Mediaevale* 20 [1981]: 95). The flower imagery of *Floris* is the subject of William C. Calin, ‘Flower Imagery in *Floire et Blanchefor*’, *French Studies* 18 (1964): 103-111.

⁷⁴ ‘ilich [...] of alle thinge, / Of semblant and of mourning’ (419-420).

⁷⁵ The only version of the romance in which Floris fights is the so-called ‘version populaire’, of *Floire*. I indicate how this is relevant for Floris’ masculinity later in this chapter.

⁷⁶ See Charbonneau and Cromwell, p. 99.

⁷⁷ ‘thou art a man and she is a maide’ (421).

He wanted to know about this occurrence.
 Forth he goes, with all his company,
 He and his chamberlain,
 Until they come to where those two lie;
 Yet did sleep still fasten their eyes.
 The Emir ordered their bed clothes pulled down
 A little below their chests.
 Then he saw, surely indeed
 That one was a man, the other a woman.⁷⁸

Here, the Emir does not know, until he pulls down the bed clothes and exposes the couple's chests, that Floris is a man – neither, according to this, does the chamberlain, who had '*told his lord all that he had seen*', which does not appear to include the fact of Floris' biological sex. Because Floris' gender identity is understood by the way he looks and acts – it is performative, as Butler has it – his gender performance prior to the exposing of his chest is feminine. So at this point, Floris is performing femininity to such an extent that he is actually mistaken for a woman: neither the Emir nor the chamberlain can tell from Floris' face that he is male.⁷⁹

Scholarship has tended to argue that Floris' effeminate masculinity is an indication of his youth.⁸⁰ Indeed, all four extant versions of the romance consistently refer to both Floris and Blanche-flur as children. This may be the reason why the Emir cannot tell that Floris is a man by looking at his face; it has been suggested that the ideal of youthful male beauty in the Middle Ages required beardlessness, for example

⁷⁸ 'The chaumberleyn hath undernome, / Into hir bour he his icome, / And stant bfore hire bed, / And find thar twai, neb to neb, / Neb to neb, an mouth to mouth: / [...] Into the tour up he steigh, / And saide his louerd al that he seigh. / The Ameral het his swerd him bring, / Iwiten he wolde of that thinge. / Forht he nimth with alle mayn, / Himself and his chaumberlayn, / Til thaie come thar thai two laie; / Yit was the slep fast in hire eye. / The Ameral het hire clothes keste / A litel binethen here breste. / Than segh he wel sone anon / That on was a man, that other a womman' (978-982; 984-995, my emphasis).

⁷⁹ Floris is likely to be naked while in bed with Blanche-flur, meaning that clues as to his gender identity cannot be read from his clothing. There has been a significant focus on the role of clothing in constructing gender identity in the Middle Ages, particularly in the work of E. Jane Burns, Susan Crane and James A. Schultz. See, in particular: Burns, 'Refashioning Courtly Love: Lancelot and Ladies' Man or Lady/Man?'; Schultz, 'Bodies that Don't Matter: Heterosexuality Before Heterosexuality in Gottfried's *Tristan*', in *Constructing Medieval Sexuality*, ed. Karma Lochrie, Peggy McCracken, and Schultz (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), pp. 111-134; and Crane, *The Performance of Self: Ritual, Clothing and Identity During the Hundred Years War* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002). Clothing does not seem to carry the significance in *Floris* that Schultz argues is evident in *Tristan*, yet it is potentially significant, I contend, that lack of gender differentiation occurs at a moment of lack of clothing. I discuss the effect of clothing on ethnic identity in Chapter 3.

⁸⁰ See Gilbert, 'Boys Will Be... What?', and Jocelyn Price, '*Floire Et Blanche-flor*: The Magic and Mechanics of Love', *Reading Medieval Studies* 8 (1982): 12-33.

Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*, the hero of a German romance, who is called 'the young man without a beard'.⁸¹ However, Floris' youth does not explain why his gender should suddenly now become unreadable in the Emir's tower.⁸² While Floris might be considered to be displaying femininity because he is a child, it is only in the east that his feminine gender performance becomes so marked that he is no longer understood as a man. I would like to suggest that Floris' effeminacy here, and in the rest of the romance, is not only due to his youth but, as this episode indicates, to a certain element of the east. I argue that instead of being read as a feminised youth here, Floris might instead be being read as a eunuch.

In *Floris*, eunuchs guard the Emir's harem:

no servant may be therein
 Who in his underwear bears the device,
 Neither by day nor by night,
 Unless he be made a eunuch.⁸³

Floris is informed that if any man is caught attempting to enter the Emir's tower unauthorised, the gatekeeper 'will both beat and castrate him'.⁸⁴ Evidently no man can gain access to the tower (except the Emir) with his genitals intact. While Floris' presence in the harem might be enough to suggest an association with the eunuchs 'therein', there are further similarities between Floris's gender performance and that of eunuchs. Almost all historical research on eunuchs to date has focused on the period of antiquity or on eunuchism in the Byzantine Empire.⁸⁵ Although eunuchs were less visible in the later Middle Ages in western Europe, legal and literary sources reveal an ongoing concern with eunuchs. One of the best-known figures of the Middle Ages is Peter Abelard (1079-1142), a French philosopher and theologian who was forcibly castrated by his young lover Heloise's uncle.⁸⁶ In England, several

⁸¹ Schultz, 'Bodies That Don't Matter', p. 93.

⁸² Shutters, writing about *Floire*, notes 'the importance of social and cultural contexts to gender discernment, as the Tower of Maidens provides a setting in which Floire's effeminate beauty becomes a marker of femininity' (p. 98).

⁸³ 'mai no seriaunt be therinne / That in his brech bereth the ginne, / Neither bi dai ne bi night, / But he be ase capoun dight' (629-632).

⁸⁴ 'wille him bothe bete and reve' (638).

⁸⁵ For an outline see Kathryn M. Ringrose, 'Living in the Shadows: Eunuchs and Gender in Byzantium', *Third Sex, Third Gender: Beyond Sexual Dimorphism in Culture and History*, ed. Gilbert Herdt, (New York: Zone Books, 1996), pp. 85-109.

⁸⁶ Jeffrey E. Brower and Kevin Guilfooy ed., Introduction, *The Cambridge Companion to Abelard* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 1. On Abelard and eunuchism see Martin

modern studies have sought to cast Chaucer's Pardoner as a eunuch.⁸⁷ Bullough and Gwen Whitehead Brewer suggest that representations of the Pardoner as a eunuch could have been brought about by returning crusaders, 'who had had contact with the Byzantine Empire and the Islamic world, where eunuchism was widespread, and where eunuchs were often identified in the popular mind with both passive homosexuality and lechery'.⁸⁸ It is generally agreed that *Floris* was a romance of Persian or Byzantine origin, suggesting that its transmission had occurred in a similar way and explaining why eunuchs might be present in this romance.⁸⁹ It is possible, then, that the presence of eunuchs in *Floris* carried specific meanings and connotations for its English audience.

Eunuchs were widely considered to display a feminised masculinity in the Middle Ages. They were not considered to *be* women, but due to the removal of their primary male organs (testes) they gained female characteristics.⁹⁰ If maleness and masculinity are symbolised and authenticated in the testes, not the penis, and if men's genitals are a large part of their embodiment as dominant males, the removal of the testicles through castration leads to emasculation; without testicles, eunuchs occupy the feminised position of the penetrated, as men's sexual prowess is fundamental to their gender identity.⁹¹ Those eunuchs castrated before puberty looked more like women as they had higher voices, hairless faces and bodies and

Irvine, 'Abelard and (Re)Writing the Male Body: Castration, Identity, and Remasculinisation', Cohen and Wheeler, pp. 87-106.

⁸⁷ In particular, see Vern L. Bullough with Gwen Whitehead Brewer, 'Medieval Masculinities and Modern Interpretations: The Problem of the Pardoner', *Conflicted Identities and Multiple Masculinities: Men in the Medieval West*, ed. Jacqueline Murray (London: Garland, 1999), pp. 93-110; and Carolyn Dinshaw, 'Eunuch Hermeneutics', *English Literary History*, 55.1 (1988): 27-51.

⁸⁸ Bullough and Brewer, p. 99.

⁸⁹ See McKnight, p. xxx; Grieve, pp. 19-20; Metlitzki, pp. 191-192. Maria Rosa Menocal has argued for an Arabic influence on much of the literature of western Europe in the Middle Ages (*The Arabic Role in Medieval Literary History: A Forgotten Heritage* [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987]).

⁹⁰ Peggy McCracken, 'Chaste Subjects: Gender, Heroism, and Desire in the Grail Quest', *Queering the Middle Ages*, ed. Glenn Burger and Steven F. Kruger (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), pp. 137-138.

⁹¹ A. J. Minnis, *Fallible Authors: Chaucer's Pardoner and Wife of Bath* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), p. 152; Murray, 'Sexual Mutilation and Castration Anxiety: A Medieval Perspective', *The Boswell Thesis: Essays on Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* ed. Matthew Kuefler (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), p. 264; Irvine, pp. 90, 93-94.

larger breasts.⁹² Eunuchs were perceived as ‘lacking courage and bravery, as being weak and feeble like women’: there was a theory in Byzantium that eunuchs were like women because they spent so much time with them.⁹³

Furthermore, having a beard was one of the primary distinctions between men and women in the Middle Ages: Isidore of Seville, whose *Etymologiae* was popular throughout the Middle Ages as I have mentioned, listed the soft face of a woman and a man’s beard among the anatomical features which function to distinguish between the sexes.⁹⁴ Joan Cadden argues:

many of the differences perceived between males and females [...] had to do with hair. [...] Prominent body hair not only marked the male among humans but also signified masculinity. In remarks about beards and body hair, the contrast is not simply between males and females but rather between the masculine and the non-masculine, including children of both sexes and castrati as well as women.⁹⁵

Appropriate male identity can be constructed in opposition to the inappropriately effeminate male: ‘once again the completeness of the real man is contrasted with the insufficiency of women, children, and eunuchs’.⁹⁶ Shaun Tougher identifies what qualities a man should display, simultaneously identifying what eunuchs lack: ‘men should have beards, deep voices, be heterosexual, control their passions, avoid the society of women and spend their time amongst men, display courage and bravery, get married, and have children’.⁹⁷ As well as symbolising, as Cadden argues, ‘the completeness of the real man’, the beard was a key signifier for performative, heterosexual masculinity; indeed, Tougher notes that men wore fake beards in the Byzantine Empire to distinguish themselves from eunuchs.⁹⁸ The eunuch, then, displays masculinity in opposition to the hyper-heterosexuality of the Emir.

Many of these identifiers of eunuchs map onto Floris. He too lacks courage and bravery, according to a typical modelling of romance hero behaviour. John A. Geck

⁹² Matthew Kuefler, *The Manly Eunuch: Masculinity, Gender Ambiguity, and Christian Ideology in Late Antiquity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), p. 34.

⁹³ Shaun Tougher, ‘Images of Effeminate Men: The Case of Byzantine Eunuchs’, Hadley, p. 95.

⁹⁴ Joan Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science, and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 182.

⁹⁵ Cadden, p. 181.

⁹⁶ Cadden, p. 181.

⁹⁷ Tougher, p. 95.

⁹⁸ Cadden, p. 181; Tougher, p. 94.

points out that Floris' inability to meet the Emir in open challenge, his use of 'skill' instead of force, and his frequent deployment of disguise serve to construct him as physically weaker than the Emir: Floris is 'hypo-masculinised [in] behaviour and appearance'.⁹⁹ Floris' parents are also concerned about the amount of time Floris and Blanche-flur spend together, although the reason for this concern is based more upon disapproval of their relationship rather than fear of a feminine influence. The association of eunuchs with a lack of beard is of particular interest when examining the Old French *Floire*. When the Emir discovers Floris in bed with Blanche-flur, in the Middle English romance their visible features above the bedclothes are not described, they are referred to simply as 'those two'. Yet in *Floire*, an explicit reason is given for Floire's performative femininity: he does not have any facial hair.

Floire lay next to his girlfriend; there was no sign that he was a man, for on his face and chin there was neither beard nor moustache. Apart from Blanche-flor, no maiden in the whole tower was lovelier. The Emir did not realise the truth [...] To the chamberlain, he said, 'Uncover the two girls' chests for me. First we'll see their breasts, and after we'll wake them up.' The chamberlain uncovered them, and realised that one of the pair was a man.¹⁰⁰

Jane Gilbert argues that 'it is, explicitly, Floire's lack of facial hair that renders him sufficiently effeminate physically to be taken for a girl'.¹⁰¹ While in both versions of the romance it is the exposing of Floris/Floire and Blanche-flur/Blanche-flor's chests which exposes their true gender identities, in the Old French romance, *Floire*'s lack of a beard is the main characteristic of his effeminate masculinity. It is no coincidence, I suggest, that this is also the primary signifier of eunuch masculinity.

A further comparison of *Floris* with a second Old French version of *Floire*, the so-called 'version populaire' written perhaps twenty years after the original 'version aristocratique', indicates how pivotal eunuchs are to subversive gender identity. This 'version populaire' characterises Floire as a typical romance hero; brave and

⁹⁹ 'ginne'; John A. Geck, "“For Goddes Loue, Sir, Mercy!” Recontextualising the Modern Critical Text of *Floris and Blanche-flor*", *Medieval Romance, Medieval Contexts*, ed. Rhiannon Purdie and Michael Cichon (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2011), pp. 88-89.

¹⁰⁰ 'Floires o s'amie gisoit: / En son vis nul samblent n'avoit / Qu'il fust hom; car a son menton / N'avoit ne barbe ne grenon: / Fors Blanceflor n'avoit tant bele / En la tor nule damoisele. / Li amirals ne connut mie: / [...] Au chambrelenc dist: "Les poitrines / Me descoevrez des deus meschines: / Lor mameles primes verrons, / Et puis si les esveillerons". / Cil les descoevre; s'aparut / Que cil est hom qui illuec jut' (*Floire et Blanceflor*, ed. Edélestand Du Ménil [Paris: P. Jannet, 1856], 2377-2392). The above translation is Gilbert's ('Boys Will Be...What?', pp. 42-43). All other translations from *Floire* are my own.

¹⁰¹ Gilbert, 'Boys Will Be...What?', p. 43.

combative, he displays his fighting prowess by acting as Blancheflor's champion and fighting a seneschal, has heroic conquests on the journey to Babylon and defeats invaders later in the romance.¹⁰² In other words, Floris acts as a typical, chivalrous romance hero. I would like to suggest that the difference in Floris' masculinity between the two versions is largely due to the absence of eunuchs in the 'version populaire'.

Whilst in the 'version aristocratique' it is Floire's hairlessness which marks him as feminine, the 'version populaire' alters the representation of Floris' femininity, by instead referring to his skin tone: '[the chamberlain] thought they were both maidens / Because of their beautiful complexions'.¹⁰³ Although Floire is still mistaken for a woman in this version, it is not because of a characteristic which is oppositional to typical romance masculinity: romance heroes are often described as beautiful in a similar way to romance heroines. Furthermore whereas all the Middle English versions of *Floris* and the French 'version aristocratique' are clear about eunuchs guarding the Emir's tower in Babylon, the 'version populaire' makes no mention of eunuchs, instead substituting 'two sergeants': men of high renown, but who are never referred to as eunuchs.¹⁰⁴ This version also states that 'there are but two people in the tower / That is Claris and Blancheflor', a further departure from the other versions' indications of the presence of eunuchs alongside other maidens within the tower.¹⁰⁵ It appears, therefore, that removing eunuchs from the text also serves to remove the anxious elements of Floris' masculinity: if there are no eunuchs, Floris is not as feminised. I argue that this reveals how central eunuchs are to the formulation of effeminate masculinity in *Floris*.

So if we accept that Floris' effeminacy is modelled, to some extent, on eunuch masculinity, what might this mean for gender in the romance? How does Floris' gender performance subvert the binary logic of gender in this romance? It has been recognised that Floris' effeminate gender performance inserts an anxiety into the romance: as Gilbert argues, 'this particular boy disturbs categories of gender'.¹⁰⁶ Floris' performance of eunuch gender and occupation of the same spaces as eunuchs

¹⁰² McKnight, pp. xxxiii-xxxiv.

¹⁰³ 'quida que ce fussent puceles / Por les coulors qu'avoient beles' (2883-2884).

¹⁰⁴ 'dui serjanz' (2683).

¹⁰⁵ 'il n'en a que dui en la tor, / (Ce est Claris et Blancheflor)' (2459-2460).

¹⁰⁶ Gilbert, 'Boys Will Be...What?', p. 46.

draws a link between them, but does not explain the anxiety about his non-normative masculinity. For this, we must consider contemporary attitudes towards eunuchism in the Middle Ages.

Throughout the Middle Ages, in England as well as France, Spain and Italy, castration was both an official and unofficial punishment for certain crimes, including homosexual activity, rape, adultery, and unsanctioned heterosexual activity.¹⁰⁷ The most famous example of this is undoubtedly Abelard, who was castrated after impregnating and then marrying his lover Heloise. Jacqueline Murray even notes that ‘there was an attitude of fear among men in the Middle Ages that might be identified as “castration anxiety”’, arguing that ‘castration and fear of castration, occupied a central place in theological, legal and popular discourses precisely because it was a real issue for medieval men’.¹⁰⁸ So eunuchs were associated with sexual transgression and punishment, their presence a constant reminder of the importance of adhering to sexual norms.

Floris’ performance of eunuchism is particularly anxious for the Emir, whose sexual prowess is fundamental to his hypermasculine gender identity, as it threatens to disrupt the whole romantic system of heterosexual, hegemonic gender identity. In Babylon, access to sex and, relationally, to power is predicated on a hegemonic sexual hierarchy in which the Emir is dominant because he is the only virile male in the tower. This system of hierarchical masculinity is reflected in the Emir’s tournament, from which a single man will presumably emerge victorious. For Floris to sleep with one of the Emir’s virgins usurps the Emir’s position as dominant male, but it does not necessarily upset the heterosexual structure of the romance: Floris would simply replace the Emir as dominant male. But because Floris does not display a normative masculinity when he sleeps with Blancheflur, his gender performance challenges the whole gender structure of the romance, disrupting the heterosexual hegemony at its core.

Butler identifies ‘a causal continuity among sex, gender, and desire’ which suggests ‘that desire reflects or expresses gender and that gender reflects or expresses

¹⁰⁷ See Murray, ‘Sexual Mutilation’, pp. 256-260.

¹⁰⁸ Murray, ‘Sexual Mutilation’, p. 255.

desire'.¹⁰⁹ The expectation, in a romance ordered by heteronormative gender binaries, is that someone who is biologically male will perform a masculine gender identity and desire women. Butler labels such concordances as 'intelligible' genders, 'which in some sense institute and maintain relations of coherence and continuity among sex, gender, sexual practice, and desire'.¹¹⁰ Floris' performance of eunuch masculinity is transgressive because it severs the links between sex, gender, and desire that maintain compulsory heterosexuality. When his male sex is revealed as the bed sheets are pulled down, a disjunction is introduced between Floris' biological maleness and his feminine gender performance, making his an *unintelligible* gender. Floris' transgression thus destabilises the hypermasculinity of the Emir which is dependent on a model of heterosexual difference predicated on the alignment of sex, gender, and desire. By performing feminised, subversive, eunuch masculinity, Floris disrupts the binary gender order of the romance.

Paradoxically, it turns out that Floris' queer gender performance works to restore normative, Christian gender relations. As a consequence of Floris' transgression with Blancheflur, the Emir's model of hegemonic hypermasculinity breaks down, and he is forced to modify his unusual sexual practices. Ceasing his serial, temporarily monogamous practice of marrying a different maiden each year (a practice already inflected with monogamy, as the Emir does not choose a different maiden each night), at the end of the romance, at Floris and Blancheflur's suggestion, the Emir marries Claris, making her his 'queen'.¹¹¹ The proximity of this union to the permanent marriage of Floris and Blancheflur in a 'consecrated place [...] with their own ring' presumably indicates that this marriage too will be permanent.¹¹² As the romance ends, both Floris and the Emir are drawn into the role of husband: a masculine identity defined according to a heterosexual gender framework. As Dawn M. Hadley points out, 'marital status was an important determining factor of gender identity' and in *Floris* it works to restore heterosexual gender difference: 'for most

¹⁰⁹ Butler, p. 30.

¹¹⁰ Butler, p. 23.

¹¹¹ 'quene' (1194).

¹¹² 'chirche [...] with here owene ringge' (1188-1189). In both modern sheikh romances and *Floris*, having multiple sexual partners is coded as eastern (non-Christian), whilst monogamy is associated with Christianity and/or the west. This adoption of western monogamy by the eastern hero can also be observed in sheikh romances, as, at the end of the romance, the sheikh admits his love for the heroine, relinquishes his past sexual habits and adopts the heroine's western model of monogamy. This also forms part of the heroine's westernising of the 'medieval' east.

people, marriage was the site where gendered difference became and remained most central, and most visible, in their lives'.¹¹³

Both marriages are immediately preceded by Floris' assumption of a normative masculine gender performance. Only nine lines before the Emir 'changed his mind and his mood' deciding to spare Floris and Blancheflur, Floris publicly announces in the Emir's court that 'I am a man, I shall go [and be beheaded] first'.¹¹⁴ As well as adopting a chivalrous masculine role, offering to undergo death for his beloved, this is the only time in the romance that Floris defines himself as a 'man'. Ultimately, following Butler, gender normativity can only be restored by a renewed performance of normative masculinity, which is what Floris achieves here through his gendered speech act. Floris' statement allows him to re-enter the heteronormative gender system of the romance, as by his own admission, he is no longer gender queer. Gaunt, writing about *Floire*, posits that 'the suppression of [Floire's] femininity leads to his integration into a recognisable and better order (from the dominant culture's point of view, if not from ours)'.¹¹⁵

Furthermore, I contend that it is Floris' vocal performance of normative masculinity, as well as the pity felt for the lovers, that prompts the Emir to pardon the lovers and to assume himself monogamous, heterosexual practices. As soon as Floris declares his masculinity, and is recognisable as a man, the Emir grants him Blancheflur, even though Floris is not the dominant male. The fact that the Emir allows Floris to marry Blancheflur and, effectively, to usurp his ownership of her body, suggests that what really upset the Emir about catching Floris in bed with Blancheflur was not the threat to his sexual dominance, but the threat Floris' queer gender identity posed to his own understanding of masculinity, predicated on heterosexual difference. Floris' transgression, therefore, was not that he wanted to have sex with Blancheflur, but that he activated sexual desire *without* first performing an appropriate heterosexual gender identity. As Dinshaw finds in her examination of the kiss in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the possibility of homosexual relations is both produced *and*

¹¹³ Hadley, Introduction, Hadley, p. 14; J. L. Nelson, 'Monks, Secular Men and Masculinity, c.900', Hadley, p. 122.

¹¹⁴ 'him chaungede mod and chere' (1141); 'Ich am a man, ich schal go bifore' (1132).

¹¹⁵ Gaunt, p. 90. Shutters posits that Floire's confirmation of normative masculinity is mutually dependent upon the love relationship with Blancheflur: Floire's masculinity must be established before his love for Blancheflur can be properly signified and it is his love for Blancheflur which confirms his masculinity (Shutters, p. 99).

denied in this romance: the possibility of homosexual relations is produced ‘only to – in order to – preclude it, in order to establish heterosexuality as [...] the only sexual legitimacy’.¹¹⁶

My analysis of *Floris* has shown that, just as in sheikh romance, alpha hypermasculinity is constructed by the east (in the figure of the Emir) and that this hypermasculinity can be destabilised by the very same east (Floris’ subversive gender performance). The eunuch, a symbol of eastern masculine lack, disrupts the binary distinction between male and female, questioning the binary construction of heterosexual gender difference in this romance. Returning to consider modern sheikh romance with this gender destabilisation in mind, we can see that as much as the sheikh’s hypermasculinity is dependent upon the east, there are certain elements of the east which have to be denied in order to sustain this hypermasculinity, for example, denying the feminising effect of traditional dress. Floris looks like Blancheflur, the effect of which is to make him appear effeminate. But when the modern sheikh hero in *For the Sheikh’s Pleasure* wears the same clothes as the heroine, the possibility that they might look the same, that the sheikh might perform a similarly subversive eastern masculinity, is immediately denied.

This denial of subversive masculinity can be connected with Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s idea of homosocial desire. Heterosexuality demands homophobia, for when the homosocial becomes eroticised, it becomes homosocial desire, moving homosociality into the realm of the erotic.¹¹⁷ As Gaunt argues: ‘homophobia is thus more than an attack on homosexuals: it is a means of regulating male homosocial bonds, of imposing normative models of heterosexuality and gender on all men’.¹¹⁸ Earlier in this chapter I quoted from Gargano, who argued that English men, such as Lawrence of Arabia, ‘sought in Arab culture a chance to express suppressed homoerotic impulses’, making explicit the link between eastern masculinity and

¹¹⁶ Carolyn Dinshaw, ‘A Kiss Is Just a Kiss: Heterosexuality and Its Consolations in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*’, *Diacritics* 24.2-3 (1994): 206.

¹¹⁷ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), pp. 1-2.

¹¹⁸ Gaunt, p. 81. On homosexuality in heterosexual romance fiction see Kathleen Therrien, ‘Straight to the Edges: Gay & Lesbian Characters and Cultural Conflict in Popular Romance Fiction’, *New Approaches to Popular Romance Fiction*, ed. Sarah S. G. Frantz and Eric Selinger (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2012), pp. 164-177.

homosocial desire. This suggests that the homosocial masculinity of the desert could prove deeply troubling to the dominant heterosexual paradigm in romance.

Indeed, this homosocial desire is acknowledged through overt homophobia in *The Sheikh's Disobedient Wife*.¹¹⁹ In one passage the heroine, Tally, is trying to convince the hero, Tair, that his masculinity is not as monolithically violent as it appears to be. Tally says: 'you might say you're a brutal, vengeful man, but I don't see it. Your men adore you-', to which Tair replies 'please don't say my men and adore in the same sentence. *It makes me extremely uncomfortable.* [...] You're confusing affection and respect. My men don't care about me. They fear me. Two significantly different things.'¹²⁰ Tally's conflation of affection and respect threatens to break down the heterosexual matrix of the romance by suggesting the possibility of homosocial attachment. Tair immediately denies the possibility of homosocial desire by reinstating his position within the heterosexual norm, which he does in the same conversation, deciding that '[Tally] was his woman. She was going to be his wife'.¹²¹ Here, heterosexual gender relations have been restored as Tair is repositioned as a heterosexual man and husband, effectively denying any hint of homosocial desire. So while modern sheikh romances, in contrast to *Floris*, seem to present only heterosexual, heroic masculinity, there are still moments when masculinity can seem more shifting and anxious, requiring a bolstering of its heteronormative credentials. Looking more closely at sheikh masculinity in light of the non-normative masculinities of *Floris* reveals that behind the construction of the sheikh's heterosexual masculinity sits a potential crisis of masculinity, which is only concealed through homophobia and the denial of effeminacy.

What is clear from all three sheikh romances and *Floris*, is that any subversive gender performance which disrupts the continuum of sex/gender/desire has to be eradicated in order to uphold the romances' binary framework of heterosexual gender difference. Non-normative masculinity disrupts the distance between male and masculine, and female and feminine, suggesting that what is different might appear

¹¹⁹ For a wider discussion of this passage and homophobia in heterosexual popular romance more generally see Amy Burge, 'Is Popular Romance Homophobic?', *Teach Me Tonight: Musings on Romance Fiction from an Academic Perspective*, 3 Oct 2011. 1 May 2012
<<http://teachmetonight.blogspot.co.uk/2011/10/is-popular-romance-homophobic.html>>.

¹²⁰ Porter, *The Sheikh's Disobedient Bride*, p. 105, my emphasis.

¹²¹ Porter, *The Sheikh's Disobedient Bride*, p. 106.

to be the same: someone who is male can be feminine. In order for the heterosexual romance to function, such a display of gender sameness must be denied in favour of maintaining an appropriate distance between two oppositional genders. The western heroine's gender identity, I argue, also works to maintain the binary distinctions between masculinity and femininity as dictated by the heteronormative romance narrative. I now consider the function of femininity in these romances, in particular, its role in facilitating the cross-cultural relationship.

'Beautiful Enough to Ensnare a Sultan': Performing Femininity

The characterless, passive female, [...] the utterly ineffectual heroine is the most important part of the story, [...] at the hands of the [...] male, the hero who will protect her'.¹²²

If the sheikh hero is hypermasculine, according to the binary construction of heterosexual gender relations on which the popular romance is based, the western heroine should be expected to display a form of hyperfemininity defined in opposition to the sheikh male's sexualised, aggressive masculinity. However, while western men might be characterised as effeminate foils to the sheikh, the western heroine does not, at first, appear to embody the submissive femininity which might be expected of her. Indeed, since the 1990s, the stereotypical romance model of a passive, submissive heroine, as described by Greer, has been largely superseded by a more independent heroine.¹²³ Regis argues that 'heroines in twentieth-century romance novels are not wispy, ephemeral girls sitting around waiting for the hero so their lives can begin. They are intelligent and strong'.¹²⁴ This shift has been noted in research on sheikh romance: Bach argues that heroines in sheikh romance are resistant to conventional romantic codes of femininity, writing that heroines 'refuse to be subservient' and constitute 'a worthy challenge for the sheik'.¹²⁵ As well as refusing to be subservient, the western heroine often attempts to remove herself from the system of heterosexual desire altogether, a fact represented by her donning of functional clothing concealing her body's curves. For her first meeting with Tariq in *Arabian Faye* wears a 'navy blouse [and] cotton trousers' with her 'long hair' clipped

¹²² Greer, pp. 204, 199.

¹²³ Moody, p. 143.

¹²⁴ Regis, p. 206.

¹²⁵ Bach, pp. 18, 23.

back.¹²⁶ These signifiers work to indicate the western heroine's denial of sexualised femininity. She thus seems to disrupt the binary construction of heterosexual gender relations as she does not appear to embody the oppositional hyperfemininity required by the sheikh's hypermasculinity.

But while the west might not be a place of femininity, the romance east is figured as the locus of feminine pleasures; Moody argues that the luxury and glamour of romance 'is a code of femininity denied by the austerity of the work world'.¹²⁷ For the heroine in sheikh romance, the austere work world is equated with the west, and the romance east represents a specifically feminine arena of pleasure. The femininity of the romance east is most evident in the figures of eastern women. The latter usually function in the sheikh romance as either servants and guides, or rivals to the western heroine. They thus represent two discrete models of eastern femininity: the virginal, submissive servant/guide, and the sexualised rival. While the figure of the submissive servant/guide is clearly drawn from contemporary rhetoric which figures eastern women as meek, uneducated, veiled and in need of the heroine's western model of female liberation, the sexualised rival is based upon Orientalist models of sexualised eastern femininity. The sexualised eastern woman is the singer with 'a gorgeous husky voice' at Tariq and Faye's wedding, whose 'lithe bodily undulations' Faye considers suitable for the harem. She is Jahmela al Nasser, Tariq's 'exotic Arabian ex'.¹²⁸ The submissive, virginal woman, on the other hand, is the shy, giggling maid who serves Faye in *Arabian*; and Bisma, a 'young woman dressed in traditional robes' who is shocked by Erin's 'disrespect' for the royal sheikh.¹²⁹ These two femininities are not always separated; Bach argues for a conflation in the figure of the typical eastern woman who is subservient to men and constantly sexually available.¹³⁰ Bach contends that this eastern woman acts as a negative counterpart to the western heroine: an oppositional figure against which the western heroine's lack of subservience and sexual immaturity can be highlighted. However, I would like to suggest that the eastern heroine functions not as a figure *against* which the western heroine defines her own femininity, but works to provide a model for the heroine's own process of feminisation.

¹²⁶ *Arabian*, p. 14.

¹²⁷ Moody, p. 148.

¹²⁸ *Arabian*, p. 90; *Sultan's Virgin*, p. 161.

¹²⁹ *Bidding*, p. 58.

¹³⁰ Bach, pp. 22-23.

For Bach, the romance east ‘functions as a transformative environment, enabling [the western heroine] to discover and delight in the genre’s ideal of true femininity’, which she associates with sexually available yet contented native women.¹³¹ Radway maps the narrative structure of romance as tracing ‘the heroine’s transformation from an isolated, asexual, insecure adolescent who is unsure of her own identity, into a mature, sensual, and very married woman, who has realised her full potential and identity as the partner of a man and as the implied mother of a child’.¹³² In sheikh romance, I argue, this transformation mirrors the heroine’s movement from the west, where she is ‘asexual’ and ‘insecure’, to the east, where her performance of sexualised femininity propels her towards the twin roles of partner, or wife, and mother. For Lynne Pearce and Jackie Stacey, such a transformation is a ‘key ingredient’ of the popular romance.¹³³ The romance heroine *transforms* when she is in the romance east through her performance of a form of sexualised eastern femininity. Bach has argued that the western heroine undergoes a three-stage process of feminisation in the east, its stages marked by abduction and consequent loss of control, which ‘initiates the heroine’s shift from a masculine to a feminine subject position’, the submission of the bath scene, and the removal of ‘practical, Western clothes’ and adoption of ‘filmy, feminine garments’.¹³⁴ Extrapolating from Bach, I examine how the stages of feminisation she identifies allow the western heroine to perform an eastern hyperfemininity, constructed in relation to the sheikh’s own hypermasculinity, thereby sustaining the binary heterosexual framework of the romance. I draw attention to the specific easternness of this form of femininity and the ways in which it is connected with sexual experience by adding a further significant stage: sexual activity with the hero.¹³⁵

The most significant stage in the western heroine’s display of eastern femininity is her adoption of eastern clothing. In *Bedded by the Desert King*, the heroine is grateful to be given ‘something clean to wear, especially something new and so undeniably feminine’ and whilst wearing a ‘richly embroidered abaya’, which was ‘such a change from her formal business attire’, the heroine of *The Sheikh’s*

¹³¹ Bach, pp. 12, 24.

¹³² Radway, p. 134.

¹³³ Pearce and Stacey, pp. 17-18.

¹³⁴ Bach, pp. 20, 24.

¹³⁵ While abduction connotes submission, I do not discuss it explicitly here as part of the process of feminisation but focus on it as a motif in Chapter 4.

Convenient Virgin ‘instantly [felt] more feminine’.¹³⁶ The feminising effect of eastern clothing for western heroines is a marked contrast to the denied feminisation of such clothing for the sheikh hero. Heroines are forced to wear eastern clothing, either because their own has been lost, or, more usually, because the sheikh hero demands it. In *Sultan’s Virgin* Farrah is gifted a dress ‘made of the finest silk, [in which] different shades of green and blue merged and blended together like the colours of a peacock feather’.¹³⁷ Yasmina, a girl ‘sent to help [Farrah] dress’ breathes ‘it is an extremely generous gift from His Highness’: ‘*how* he honours you’.¹³⁸ The effect, once Farrah is wearing the dress with ‘fabric of such superior quality that it was like wearing nothing next to her skin’, is that she appears ‘beautiful enough to ensnare a sultan’.¹³⁹ This is precisely the role of an eroticised eastern woman, here being performed by Farrah.

In *Bidding* the link between eastern clothing and sex is made even clearer, as the heroine wears

a forget-me-not-blue silk caftan decorated with exquisite beading on the bodice and sleeves and fastened at the back with tiny hooks [...]

There was something incredibly sensual about the brush of the silk caftan against her thighs when she walked. It made her think of Zahir’s hands stroking her skin, his lips pressing feather-light kisses down her throat to her breasts.¹⁴⁰

The tactile appeal of the fabric echoes the touch of the hero here, exploiting the sensory eroticism of the silk and equating the wearing of eastern clothing with a sexual encounter with the sheikh. The extent to which wearing eastern clothing can effect a transformation is evident in *Arabian* where the heroine, ‘inserted into an extraordinary [...] outfit’, ‘hardly recognised herself’ in the mirror: she concedes that she has been ‘transformed’.¹⁴¹ This transformation seems to have been forced upon the heroine; she is physically ‘inserted’ into the dress which ‘weighed a ton’ indicating that her performance of eastern femininity here is more of a burden than a liberation.¹⁴²

¹³⁶ Stephens, *Bedded by the Desert King*, p. 28; Morey, *The Sheikh’s Convenient Virgin*, p. 99.

¹³⁷ *Sultan’s Virgin*, p. 91.

¹³⁸ *Sultan’s Virgin*, p. 91.

¹³⁹ *Sultan’s Virgin*, p. 91.

¹⁴⁰ *Bidding*, p. 114.

¹⁴¹ *Arabian*, p. 87.

¹⁴² *Arabian*, p. 87.

Before the heroine wears eastern clothing she is usually bathed and prepared, one of the stages of feminisation identified by Bach. Before Faye wears the 'extraordinary' dress mentioned above, she is bathed in a passage worth quoting at length:

Some time after she had eaten, Shiran approached her to tell her that it was time for her bath. Faye frowned. 'Isn't it a little early?'

'It will take many hours to dress you for the ladies' reception tonight, my lady.'

'Oh...' [...] She had only slipped into the water already drawn for her use when her maids hurried in loaded with baskets of lotions and she realised that privacy was not on offer. Rose petals were hastily scattered on the surface of the scented water and Shiran insisted on washing her hair. Such a production was made of the varying rinses that Faye sighed at the longevity of the experience.

There was washing and there was washing, but Faye felt as if she were being scrubbed within an inch of her life. Wrapped in a towel, she was urged into another room in the same block, a steam room full of billowing clouds which almost sent her to sleep, so lethargic did it leave her. Next she was persuaded to lie down on a special couch to be massaged. The rich perfume of the oil rubbed into her skin made her eyes even heavier but she enjoyed the stiffness being eased out of her muscles, the smooth feel of her own pampered skin.

Her hair was dried and polished with a silk scarf. A manicure and a pedicure followed [...] and Faye lay back on her sofa feeling like a beauty queen.¹⁴³

The submissive effect of the bathing scene is clear in this soporific scene; Faye is often reclining, is almost 'sent to sleep', as the process left her 'lethargic' and 'made her eyes even heavier'. Her submission to this process is evident in her passivity; she is the object of pampering ('she was urged', 'she was persuaded', 'her hair was dried'). The underlying tone of the bathing scene is, of course, preparation for sex; unbeknownst to the heroine, she is being prepared for her wedding. Yet this is not undesired submission; Faye 'enjoyed' being massaged, and her sense of 'feeling like a beauty queen' suggests that the process is enjoyable. Bach writes:

the bath forces [the heroine] to acknowledge pleasure in submission, both to the orders of the sheik and to the ministrations of the native women. Outrage, defiance, anger and embarrassment are gradually replaced by reluctant enjoyment and, finally, by unadulterated pleasure.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴³ *Arabian*, pp. 85-86.

¹⁴⁴ Bach, p. 25.

Bach's identification of the role of pleasure in the process of submission is key to the feminisation of the heroine. It also highlights how the pleasure and submission experienced by the heroine during this bathing scene prefigures the pleasure and submission of sex with the sheikh which, I argue, is the final and, arguably, most fundamental way in which the western heroine performs eastern hyperfemininity.

The femininity performed by the western heroine here is not that of the veiled servant/guide, but is closer to the orientalised rival; this is an explicitly sexualised eastern gender identity, which entails possessing sexual knowledge, wearing sensual clothing and willingly engaging with the sensuality of the sheikh and the eastern space of the romance.¹⁴⁵ Gender is encoded in sheikh romance through sex and desire; just as the hero's hypermasculinity is defined both by his sexual attractiveness *and* his sexual desire for the heroine, so too is the heroine's hyperfemininity defined according to her desire for the hero and her attraction to him. By performing a specifically eastern femininity, the heroine taps into some of this erotic appeal: she is playing at being an orientalised object of desire. Yet there is one crucial difference between the western heroine and the eastern woman: the fact that she remains a western woman. Flesch remarks that 'the [western] heroine is always distinguished from the allegedly subservient and sexually available Arab woman', underscoring the superficiality of this performance of hyperfemininity.¹⁴⁶ The sheikh does not find eastern women attractive, as the failure of rival eastern women such as Jahmela in *Bidding* makes clear. Thus it is not eastern femininity itself that the sheikh desires, but the performance of an eastern-inflected hyperfemininity by a western heroine. The uniqueness of the heroine is further emphasised as she is the only woman who can occupy this position: as Taylor points out, the oriental harem is 'emptied of its Oriental women' and is occupied solely by the western heroine.¹⁴⁷

Yet, even as the heroine's hyperfeminine appearance is a display she assumes in the east, the romance traces hyperfemininity back into her past. The heroine herself does not experience a sense of femininity until she is in the romance east, as exemplified in the declaration of feeling 'more feminine' when wearing an abaya, highlighting both the performative nature of hyperfemininity *and* its specifically eastern nature.

¹⁴⁵ Bach, p. 24.

¹⁴⁶ Flesch, p. 214.

¹⁴⁷ Taylor, p. 1041.

Yet, even if she had not already felt feminine in the west, in the eyes of the sheikh, the heroine is already feminine. This becomes clear when comparing Erin's description of herself and that of Zahir when they first meet. Catching sight of her reflection in a mirror, Erin 'grimaced':

Her faded jeans and tee shirt were grubbier than she'd realised, and her hair, which she had secured in a long plait, had worked loose, so that riotous stray curls were framing her face.¹⁴⁸

But Zahir's description of Erin is markedly different:

A thick braid of auburn hair fell down her back, almost to her waist, the colour reminding him of the rich red hues of leaves in the fall. [...] Now he felt an overwhelming urge to untie the ribbon that secured the woman's hair and run his fingers through the mass of rippling red-gold silk.

His eyes slid lower, skimmed the small, firm breasts outlined beneath her tee shirt, and then moved down to her slender waist, narrow hips and long legs, encased in [...] sexy, tight jeans.¹⁴⁹

To Zahir, Erin is already hyperfeminine, as evidenced in his description which focuses on the parts of her body which accentuate her femininity: hair, breasts, waist, hips, legs. This *always already* hyperfemininity serves to retrospectively inscribe heterosexual gender difference, infusing the apparently un-feminised west with a hyperfemininity (even if the heroine is not yet aware of it). The locus of true femininity might be the east, but it is a femininity which was *already* inscribed onto the western heroine, and required only an awakening in the romance east.

'Weird and Kinky and Medieval': Virginit

A significant part of this hyperfemininity and, I argue, part of the heroine's *always already* hyperfemininity, is virginity. If the sheikh's hypermasculinity is based upon his reputation as sexually experienced, then the oppositional construction of hyperfemininity requires sexual innocence: virginity.¹⁵⁰ Virginity is a particularly prominent trope in sheikh romance. Of the fifty-seven sheikh novels published in the

¹⁴⁸ *Bidding*, p. 11.

¹⁴⁹ *Bidding*, pp. 14-15.

¹⁵⁰ I define 'virginity', according to its use in both Middle English romance and Mills & Boon romance as the state of not yet having had penetrative sex with a member of the opposite sex. While virginity is exclusively a female state in *Modern Romance* sheikh novels, there are examples of male virgins in modern popular romance: see Jonathan A. Allan, 'Theorising Male Virginity in Popular Romance Novels', *Journal of Popular Romance Studies* 2.1 (2011), n.p.

Modern Romance series, at least 32 feature virgin heroines.¹⁵¹ The heroines in all three of the Mills & Boon novels examined in this chapter are virgins.

The trope of virginity is not unique to contemporary sheikh romance; virgin heroines similarly persist in romances with Greek, Spanish, Italian, French, Mediterranean, and South American heroes. Sheikh romances do not contain significantly more virgin heroines than other foreign-hero romances. In fact, according to my research, proportionally there are at least as many virgin heroines in novels with Greek heroes as those with sheikh heroes, and there are proportionally more virgin heroines in novels with Spanish heroes than in novels with sheikh heroes.¹⁵² Female virginity is clearly linked with foreign heroes; of the 458 *Modern Romance* novels published from 2000-2009 featuring virgin heroines, 281 (approximately 61%) have foreign heroes. This is revealing of the western preoccupation with virginity and its situating of this virginity 'elsewhere'.

Yet, certain aspects of virginity are figured as specific to the romance east. When considering the titles of *Modern Romance* novels, an interesting distinctiveness seems to appear in the titles of the sheikh romance novels. In romance titles, the words 'virgin', 'innocent' or 'innocence' are used to signal that the heroine of that romance is a virgin. The majority of the romances with titles featuring one or more of these words contain foreign heroes: of a total of 84 romances with titles containing these words, 60 have foreign heroes.¹⁵³ This corresponds with the general association of the alpha foreign hero with the virginal hyperfeminine heroine. But when we look at those romances more carefully, the number of sheikh romances which contain the words 'virgin', 'innocent' or 'innocence' in the title is proportionately higher per romance published, than any other type of foreign-hero romance (see Table 4).

¹⁵¹ I have discounted one sheikh title which does not state whether the heroine is a virgin or not: Michelle Reid, *The Sheikh's Chosen Wife* (Richmond: Harlequin Mills & Boon, 2002).

¹⁵² Of the 115 *Modern Romance* novels published with Greek heroes, at least 65 have virgin heroines, and from a total number of 69 novels with Spanish heroes, a minimum of 45 feature heroines who are virgins.

¹⁵³ To put this into context, 931 titles were published in the *Modern Romance* series from July 2000 to December 2009 and 498 of these had foreign heroes.

Table 4: Distribution of ‘Virgin’ and ‘Innocent/Innocence’ in *Modern Romance* Titles of Novels with Foreign Heroes

Type of Hero ¹⁵⁴	Number of Titles Containing ‘Virgin’	Number of Titles Containing ‘Innocent/Innocence’	Total Number of Novels	Proportion of ‘Virgin’, ‘Innocent/Innocence’ Titles (%)
Sheikh	9	3	57	21
Greek	12	2 ¹⁵⁵	115	15
South American	2	2	29	14
Spanish	7	2	69	13
Italian	15	3	189	9.5
French	1	0	22	4.5

Source: the author. Information is drawn from my own research using web and library resources. Some titles did not make it clear whether the heroine was a virgin or not. I have included these in the count, assuming that the heroines in them are non-virgins, meaning that the number of virgin heroines may be slightly higher than noted here. The total number of novels which are unclear whether the heroine is a virgin are as follows: sheikh (1); Spanish (3); Italian (16); Greek (12); French (1); South American (1).

¹⁵⁴ In addition to the heroes mentioned here, and included in my count of romances with foreign heroes, are four romances with Russian heroes and Penny Jordan’s *Virgin For The Billionaire’s Taking* (2008) which has an Indian hero (apparently the first Indian hero in popular romance).

¹⁵⁵ Two romances with Greek heroes feature both ‘innocent’ and ‘virgin’ in the title, which I have counted only once under ‘virgin’.

This suggests that although sheikh romance novels might not contain more virgin heroines than romances with Spanish and Greek heroes, in terms of their marketing and appeal via their titles, virginity can, I suggest, be considered a prominent trope associated with the sheikh genre, thus explicitly connecting the romance east with virginity.

The romance east is a place in which female virginity is of great cultural importance. This is demonstrated in two ways. First, the west is assumed to be a place where virginity is no longer either valued or present. In most sheikh romances, the sheikh hero initially considers the western heroine to exemplify a promiscuous, western femininity, leading him to conclude that the heroine cannot possibly be a virgin.¹⁵⁶ This misunderstanding usually persists until the moment the couple have sex for the first time. In *Bidding* Zahir tells Erin: ‘you can drop the act of maidenly virtue now [...] Qubbah may be rooted in tradition, but I’m a modern guy and I’m happy to accept that you may have had lovers’.¹⁵⁷ The hero of *Arabian* similarly explains:

‘when we first met, I made the mistake of assuming that you were as innocent as you appeared [...]. But that was a boy’s fantasy. Many Arab men cherish similar fantasies but I am now more contemporary in my outlook’.¹⁵⁸

Sheikh heroes assume that it is impossible for the heroine to be a virgin because she is western, thus associating virginity with the east. The hero of *Arabian* acknowledges: ‘with his entrance into the more liberal culture of Europe, Tariq had [...] received an unparalleled education on the ways of western women’.¹⁵⁹ He acknowledges that ‘every other western woman I had been with was only interested in fun, sex and what I could buy’, connecting western femininity with promiscuity and lack of virginity.¹⁶⁰ Second, sheikh romances repeatedly highlight the importance placed on virginity in eastern culture. *Arabian*’s sheikh hero tells the heroine: ‘you do not appear to understand how high is the regard for a woman’s

¹⁵⁶ This draws on contemporary Middle Eastern attitudes which consider the west as ‘both the home and exporter of vice’ (Hopwood, p. 277).

¹⁵⁷ *Bidding*, p. 116.

¹⁵⁸ *Arabian*, p. 94.

¹⁵⁹ *Arabian*, p. 6.

¹⁶⁰ *Arabian*, p. 179.

virtue in my culture'.¹⁶¹ Heroines attempt to resist this discourse, but they too recognise and validate the emphasis on virginity in the romance east.

In Chapter 1 I indicated how in *Arabian*, Faye considered Tariq's concern for her virginity to be 'medieval', and yet simultaneously 'terribly, strangely, crazily sweet'.¹⁶² This passage links virginity with both the east *and* the 'medieval'. In fact, the insistence on virginity in sheikh romance is persistently and uniquely represented as 'medieval'. While sex is often described using words that have become synonymous with 'medieval' – savage, primitive, and barbaric – virginity is the only aspect of sexuality which is specifically labelled as 'medieval' in any way.¹⁶³ Consider the reaction of the heroine in *Arabian* when the hero's cousin accuses her of not being a virgin: she says 'I found that weird and kinky and medieval'.¹⁶⁴ Similarly labelled as medieval is the cultural expectation of virginity in the eastern nation; one heroine demurs that 'had she not been a virgin, she had the awful feeling even a pity date would not have occurred. It was medieval and felt like the worst kind of betrayal'.¹⁶⁵ The hero's obligation to marry the heroine after 'taking' her virginity is also 'medieval'. In *Possessed by the Sheikh*, the hero says: 'it is my duty to do as my brother commands me and, besides, since I took your virginity...' to which the heroine responds: 'you're marrying me because of that! But that's ... that's archaic...medieval...'.¹⁶⁶

As I have shown, some heroes described their move away from an insistence on virginal women as 'contemporary' and 'modern', indicating their denial of 'medieval' attitudes whilst, paradoxically, underscoring the 'medievalness' of the romance east's valuation of virginity. This suggests that the romance east, where virginity is prized, is somehow pre-modern in its views on female virginity. In her study of Harlequin romance novels, Mariam Darce Frenier observes that 'in this modern – and awful – world, virgin women were rare, and getting rarer [...] and that made them special'.¹⁶⁷ Here, Darce Frenier seems to suggest that romance offers a

¹⁶¹ *Arabian*, p. 92.

¹⁶² *Arabian*, p. 93.

¹⁶³ *Bidding*, p. 37; *Sultan's Virgin*, p. 169; *Arabian*, p. 104.

¹⁶⁴ *Arabian*, p. 90.

¹⁶⁵ Monroe, *The Sheikh's Bartered Bride*, p. 94.

¹⁶⁶ Jordan, *Possessed by the Sheikh*, p. 153.

¹⁶⁷ Mariam Darce Frenier, *Good-bye Heathcliff: Changing Heroes, Heroines, Roles, and Values in Women's Category Romances* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988), pp. 37-38.

unique space for celebrating virginity in a culture in which virginity is no longer valued. In their introduction to *Medieval Virginites*, Anke Bernau, Ruth Evans and Sarah Salih write:

virginity's association with the medieval speaks to deep-rooted myths about both: the Middle Ages are imagined as the location of chastity belts and *droit de seigneur*, while a popular conception of the whole period sees it as virginal in an uncontaminated innocence which is then frequently opposed to a present constructed as jaded, knowing – and more sophisticated.¹⁶⁸

So by constructing virginity as 'medieval', sheikh romances are simultaneously exploiting myths about virginity *and* sustaining the construction of the 'medieval' romance east, which is made *more* 'medieval' because it values virginity in such a way. These are precisely the ideals offered by the romance east: a validating of virginity in an eastern *pre-modern* world, in contrast to a modern western world where virginity is neither valued nor preserved.

As well as being of cultural importance, the heroine's virginity is also figured as something to be desired. Although they do not expect heroines to be virgins, sheikhs find they are 'very pleased' about it.¹⁶⁹ For Tariq, 'the knowledge that he'd been the first and only man to experience the seductive passion of Farrah Tyndall brought a soft smile of masculine satisfaction to his face'.¹⁷⁰ Similarly for Zahir, 'mixed with shock was another feeling that he was ashamed to admit – a ridiculous feeling of elation and primitive possessiveness'.¹⁷¹ However, while these comments emphasise the sheikh's desire for virginity, they also reveal a deeper desire for possession which, I would like to argue, lies at the root of the sheikh romance's insistence on virginity. For the sheikh to 'possess' a woman following his 'taking' of her virginity is a process with roots in discourses of ownership of women, predicated on a patriarchal heterosexual system of gender relations.¹⁷² I turn, once again, to medieval romance to explore the full implications of this discourse of possession.

¹⁶⁸ Anke Bernau, Ruth Evans and Sarah Salih, 'Introduction: Virginites and Virginity Studies', *Medieval Virginites*, ed. Bernau, Evans and Salih (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003), p. 1.

¹⁶⁹ *Arabian*, p. 104.

¹⁷⁰ *Sultan's Virgin*, p. 127.

¹⁷¹ *Bidding*, p. 127.

¹⁷² The valuing of women within a system of heterosexual patriarchy has been theorised by Gayle Rubin, 'The Traffic in Women: Notes on the "Political Economy" of Sex', *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, ed. Rayna R. Reiter (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975), pp. 157-210.

In *Bevis* and *Floris*, a similar prominence is given to virginity, although its significance is not linked exclusively with the east. In these Middle English romances, virginity is equally important to both western Christianity (for example in *Bevis*) and eastern Islam (for example in *Floris*), although for different reasons. In *Floris*, virginity is valued economically. The economic and social worth of virginity in the Middle Ages has been documented. Kim M. Phillips, in her analysis of court records from the late thirteenth to mid-fifteenth centuries writes: ‘evidence [...] indicates that premarital virginity was commonly believed to have a value which could be matched in money’.¹⁷³ This is reflected in *Floris*, in which women are referred to as ‘merchandise’.¹⁷⁴ Blanche-flur’s value is expressed economically; Floris’ parents expect ‘much property and goods’ in return for selling her and they receive a valuable and ornate ‘cup’ in return.¹⁷⁵ Even *Floris* alludes to an economic valuing of Blanche-flur as on his quest to find her he tells people that he is seeking his ‘merchandise’, directly aligning the value of Blanche-flur with the economic worth of goods and possessions. The Emir similarly regards Blanche-flur economically, paying for her ‘seven times her weight in gold / For he intended, without doubt / To take that fair maiden as his queen’.¹⁷⁶ Whilst the Emir’s purchase does not explicitly refer to Blanche-flur’s virginity here, the emphasis on female virginity throughout might suggest that the Blanche-flur’s worth is tied to her status as a ‘clean maiden [virgin]’.¹⁷⁷ By economically assessing Blanche-flur’s body, literally measuring the worth of her body’s weight, the Emir could be said to be simultaneously valuing the virginity of that body.

In *Bevis*, on the other hand, virginity is presented as a Christian ideal, and as vital for issues of heritage. Bevis needs a wife and heirs in order to regain his lands and rejoin the system of primogeniture. Kathleen Coyne Kelly points out that ‘both virginity and paternity are essential to the workings of a feudal society that held the bulk of its

¹⁷³ Kim M. Phillips, ‘Four Virgins’ Tales: Sex and Power in Medieval Law’, *Medieval Virginites*, ed. Bernau, Evans and Salih (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003), p. 86.

¹⁷⁴ ‘marchandise’ (484; 564). Casting women as goods and men as merchants is a trope which has been analysed by Kathleen Coyne Kelly in ‘The Bartering of Blanche-flur in the Middle English *Floris and Blanche-flur*’, *Studies in Philology* 91 (1994): pp. 101-110.

¹⁷⁵ ‘much catell and goode’ (150); ‘coupe’ (163).

¹⁷⁶ ‘sevyn sythes of gold her wyght, / For he thought, without weene, / That faire mayde have to queene’ (196-198). ‘Mayde’ also carries connotations of virginity.

¹⁷⁷ ‘mayde clene’ (59).

wealth in private, aristocratic hands and passed on such wealth from father to son'.¹⁷⁸ Bevis visits the patriarch in Jerusalem just before reuniting with Josian, who 'forbid him upon his life, / That he should take a wife, / Unless she were a virgin'.¹⁷⁹ Bevis later repeats these words to Josian, accentuating the link between Christianity and virginity. The main threat to Josian throughout *Bevis* is sexual: Brademond threatens to 'lay her by my side at night' after which he will give her 'to a carter, who is worn out!'; and Miles, intending to have Josian 'under the covers', tries to 'get her drunk [to get her] into bed' in order to 'have his will'.¹⁸⁰ Even Bevis is initially figured as a sexual threat to Josian; when her father is told that Bevis has allegedly 'deflowered his daughter', he considers this a crime so serious that he sends Bevis, whom he 'loved' and raised in his household, to be punished by Brademond, a 'Saracen king'.¹⁸¹ Sexual threat is taken seriously in *Bevis*. Up to the point of her marriage to Bevis, Josian's romance adventures centre on maintaining her virginity for the knight she chooses to give it up to: Bevis.¹⁸² So while the discourse around virginity in *Bevis* and *Floris* is related (the Emir's economic valuing of Blanche-flur's virgin body echoes the wealth in property and lineage that Bevis will gain via Josian's virginity), it is deployed in different ways and for different reasons.

On initial inspection, it seems as though the reasons virginity is valued in the modern romance east are closer to those in *Bevis*; virginity facilitates a desire for exclusive sexual possession of the heroine in order to protect inheritance. But the treatment of virginity in both medieval and modern romances is more complex, as repeated references to testing reveal. Bernau, Evans and Salih argue that 'virginity is a paradoxical condition [...] defined by both absence and presence'.¹⁸³ Kelly concurs, writing that virginity is 'something that counts only when it is thought lost'.¹⁸⁴ It is

¹⁷⁸ Kathleen Coyne Kelly, *Performing Virginity and Testing Chastity in the Middle Ages* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 8.

¹⁷⁹ 'forbed him upon his lif, / That he never toke wif, / Boute she were clene maide' (1967-1969).

¹⁸⁰ 'lay hire a night be me side' (924); 'to a weine-pain, that is fordrive!' (926); 'under covertour' (3184); 'make hire dronke a bedde' (3190); 'have is wille' (3161).

¹⁸¹ '[his] doughter [...] forlain' (1209); 'lovede' (569); 'king of Sarasine' (1071).

¹⁸² We could here apply Felicity Riddy's idea of 'temporary virginity', which she reads in *Le Bone Florence of Rome*, to Josian – neither romance is about the heroine preserving her virginity forever, but about protecting it long enough to lose it to the correct person (see Felicity Riddy, 'Temporary Virginity and the Everyday Body: *Le Bone Florence of Rome* and Bourgeois Self-making', *Pulp Fictions of Medieval England*, ed. Nicola McDonald (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), pp. 197-216).

¹⁸³ Bernau, Evans and Salih, p. 2.

¹⁸⁴ Kelly, *Performing Virginity*, p. 133.

difficult to test for something you cannot see. However, this does not prevent virginity tests being deployed in *Bevis* and *Floris*, as well as in some modern sheikh romances. Extrapolating from Kelly's argument about virginity in twentieth-century film, neither modern sheikh romance nor medieval romance contest 'the idea that virginity is a verifiable, testable condition'.¹⁸⁵

Every year, the Emir of Babylon selects a new wife from among his harem in a ritual with a virginity test at its core. The maidens are brought down from the harem into the Emir's fabulous garden: 'the fairest on earth'.¹⁸⁶ In the garden is a fountain, 'of such awesome quality', that:

If any woman approaches [the fountain] who has slept with a man
And she kneels on the ground
To wash her hands,
The water will scream as though it were mad,
And turn as red as blood.
Whichever maiden causes the water to act thus
Shall soon be put to death.
And those that are clean maidens [virgins],
They may wash themselves in the stream.
The water will run silent and clear
It will not cause them any harm.¹⁸⁷

The test is uncompromising and dramatic.¹⁸⁸ Kelly has noted the parallel between the fountain which runs with blood and screams and the moment a virgin is penetrated, arguing that the fountain is 'capable, apparently, of impersonating the young woman at the precise moment of penetration [...]: that is, what caused her to shed the blood of virginity'.¹⁸⁹ The test also indicates that although the Emir appears to be unconcerned about ensuring virginity for the purposes of lineage, as evidenced by the

¹⁸⁵ Kelly, *Performing Virginity*, p. 134.

¹⁸⁶ 'The fairest of al middelhard' (649).

¹⁸⁷ 'of so mochel eye' (664); 'Yif ther cometh ani maiden that is forleie, / And hi bowe to the grounde / For to waschen here honde, / The water wille yelle als hit ware wod, / And bicom on hire so red so blod. / Wich maiden the water fareth on so, / Hi schal sone be fordo. / And thilke that beth maidenes clene, / Thai mai hem wassche of the rene. / The water wille erne stille and cler, / Nelle hit hem make no daunger' (665-675).

¹⁸⁸ In the Old French *Floire* if an unchaste woman crosses the stream it becomes muddy. This makes the Middle English romance version more visceral than the Old French, suggesting, perhaps, that *Floris* places more emphasis on this testing.

¹⁸⁹ Kelly, *Performing Virginity*, p. 9.

complete lack of children in Babylon, he is careful to test his prospective wives to ensure that they are 'clean' and punishes those women who are not with death.¹⁹⁰

In *Bevis*, both Bevis and Josian are repeatedly put into situations which threaten their virginity and the tricks and bargains they use either to protect their virginity or to prove that they are still virgins feature prominently in the romance. When forced into marriage with Yvor, Josian wears an enchanted ring 'of such virtue' claiming that 'while I am wearing that ring, / No man shall sexually desire me'.¹⁹¹ After reuniting with Josian after his escape from Damascus, Bevis discovers that Josian has been married to Yvor for seven years and asks her: 'for seven years you have been a queen / And every night a king [lay] next to you / How might you then be a virgin?'¹⁹² Whilst the narrative has made it clear that Josian is a virgin through the use of a magic ring, Bevis does not know about the ring (and apparently Josian does not tell him). Josian's virginity is not evident, so Bevis proposes a test. Bevis, with the patriarch's advice to marry a 'clean maiden' fresh in his mind, has been told that Josian is married 'to be at table and in bed', suggesting that she has been a wife in every sense of the word.¹⁹³ Josian proposes a solution to 'prove' her virginity to Bevis, saying 'and if you do not find me to be a virgin, / According to what any man can say, / Send me back to my enemies / All naked in only my smock!'¹⁹⁴ Unlike the Emir's virginity test, the one proposed by Josian relies not on physical signs of virginity, but on verbal testimony: if she can prove beyond any slander or gossip that

¹⁹⁰ The association of a fountain or well with virginity is a folk motif. I found several examples of wells or fountains being used to measure virginity. These include two wells (one muddy, one clear) being used as a chastity index; a well that if an unchaste woman were to dip her arms into it, her skin would boil away; and a spring which wells up if the woman is not a virgin (see Stith Thompson, *Motif Index of Folk Literature* [Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1966], p. 412). The association of wells with virginity is also present in *Bevis of Hampton*. A dragon is besieging Cologne and before going to fight it, Bevis dreams that 'a virgin / Relieved him of all his pain [a virgine / Him broughte out of al is pine]' (2689-2690). Injured whilst battling the dragon the next day, Bevis is thrown into a nearby well. 'The well was of such virtue: / A virgin living in that country, / Had bathed in it, I believe, / That water was so holy, / That the dragon, for certain, / Dared not approach the well closer than forty feet, without doubt [The welle was of swich vertu: / A virgine wonede in that londe, / Hadde bathede in, ich understonde, / That water was so holi, / That the dragoun, sikerli, / Ne dorste neghe the welle aboute / Be fourti fote, saundoute]' (2804-2810). The water in the well heals Bevis and he defeats the dragon.

¹⁹¹ 'of swiche vertu'; 'while ichave on that ilche ring, / To me schel no man have welling' (1470-1472). Kelly notes that a magic ring was a common preserver of virginity (*Performing Virginity*, pp. 66-67).

¹⁹² 'thow havest seve year ben a quene, / And everi night a king be thee: / How mightow thanne maide be?' (2198-2200).

¹⁹³ 'bothe to bord and to bedde' (2012).

¹⁹⁴ 'boutte thee finde me maide wimman, / Be that eni man saie can, / Send me aghen to me fon / Al naked in me smok alon!' (2203-2206).

she is virgin, Bevis will accept it. The romance provides further evidence for Josian's virginity in her taming of two lions which attack her and Bevis: a lion not harming virgins is a common trope.¹⁹⁵ Both *Bevis* and *Floris*, then, in their insistence on testing virginity, promote the assumption that women *need* to be tested, as their virginal status cannot be taken for granted.

The virginity test persists into modern sheikh romance. A particular trope which occurs in at least three sheikh romance titles is that of visibly proving virginity on a blood-stained sheet following intercourse. The hero of *The Desert Sheikh's Captive Wife* 'went very still when he saw the evidence of her lost innocence on the white sheet' and 'the bloodstain on the sheet where he had lain with her' informs the hero of *Arabian* that the heroine had been a virgin.¹⁹⁶ Whilst checking the sheets for blood was not an authentic practice in fourteenth-century England, it is, according to Kelly, 'an ancient practice among certain peoples of the Mediterranean, North Africa and the Middle East' whose continued usage into modernity she notes.¹⁹⁷ A further connection between virginity in sheikh romance and the medieval is that blood-stained sheets as proof of virginity are frequently used as a trope in Mills & Boon medieval historical romances.¹⁹⁸ In sheikh romance it figures as an archaic and traditional aspect of eastern life; as the hero of *Possessed by the Sheikh* informs the heroine, 'it is a tribal custom amongst the nomad population that a blood-stained sheet is produced on the morning after a young woman is married as proof of her virginity'.¹⁹⁹ Here, the medieval emphasis on virginity is directly linked with the customs and culture of the romance east.

The ultimate virginity test for heroines in sheikh romance is, paradoxically, sex with the sheikh. In *Bidding* as Erin 'was forced to accept the awesome length of his erection', '[Zahir] felt the unmistakable barrier of her virginity'.²⁰⁰ What the sheikh

¹⁹⁵ Although the text here seems to place as much emphasis on her being 'a princess' [a kynges doughter] as on her being a 'virgin [maide]' (2392).

¹⁹⁶ Graham, *The Desert Sheikh's Captive Wife*, p. 151; *Arabian*, p. 94.

¹⁹⁷ Kelly, *Performing Virginity*, pp. 128-129.

¹⁹⁸ See Amy Burge, 'Getting Medieval: The Use of the Medieval in Modern Popular Romance Fiction', diss., University of York (2008), p. 42.

¹⁹⁹ Jordan, *Possessed by the Sheikh*, p. 101.

²⁰⁰ *Bidding*, p. 125.

feels is presumably (and gynaecologically suspiciously) Erin's hymen.²⁰¹ In *Sultan's Virgin* the sign of virginity is more uncertain but still apparent: Tariq apparently realises she is virgin through her body's 'instinctive [...] tighten[ing]'.²⁰² The reason this 'virginity test' is paradoxical is because the moment at which the sheikh realises the heroine is a virgin, is precisely the moment she *ceases* to be a virgin. As Kelly writes, 'in any given narrative, at the very moment virginity can be asserted, it can also be denied'.²⁰³ Any proof of virginity identified by penetration during a sex act can only be retrospective, for at the moment virginity is identified, it can simultaneously be disavowed. Encoded in the very basis of the sex act as virginity test, then, is a fundamental ambiguity, as virginity is something which exists only as it is lost.

Virginity tests in medieval romance can be similarly ambiguous and open to interpretation. Kelly suggests that the virginity test in *Floris*, as with many methods of testing virginity, is not perhaps as reliable as it might appear. She draws attention to the second part of the Emir's selection process, immediately following identification of virginity in the fountain, where a flower from the 'Tree of Love' falls onto the woman whom the Emir will select as his wife.²⁰⁴ The narrative reveals this part of the test can, and will, be manipulated by the Emir:

if there is any maiden [there]
Whom the Emir holds in greater value
The flower shall be made to fall onto her
Through cunning and through enchantment.
Thus he [the Emir] chooses via the flower
And ever we expect to hear that it shall be Blanche-flur [he chooses]'.²⁰⁵

Kelly argues that 'the two signifiers, fountain and tree, participate in a destabilising exchange by virtue of their narrative juxtaposition. That a signifier can be so patently false as the tree casts doubt on the signifier immediately preceding it – namely, the

²⁰¹ For a critique of the representation of the hymen in romance see Sarah Wendell and Candy Tan, *Beyond Heaving Bosoms: The Smart Bitches' Guide to Romance Novels* (New York: Fireside, 2009), pp. 27, 37-40.

²⁰² *Sultan's Virgin*, p. 126.

²⁰³ Kelly, *Performing Virginity*, p. 1.

²⁰⁴ 'Tre of Love' (678).

²⁰⁵ 'And yif ther ani maiden is / That th'Amerail halt of mest pris, / The flour schal on here be went / Thourh art and thourgh enchantement. / Thous he cheseth thourgh the flour, / And evere we herkneth when hit be Blaunche-flour' (684-689).

fountain'.²⁰⁶ In other words, if the Emir can manipulate the second part of the selection process, what is to say that the first part cannot also be manipulated, and the maidens' virginity faked?

The virginity test proposed by Josian in *Bevis* seems to be similarly abstruse. Josian's virginity test hinges not on physical evidence of bleeding or a hymen, but on a lack of verbal testimony: she is reliant upon people *not* saying she is *not* virgin. The test is thus something of a reversal; Josian is not proposing to prove her own virginity actively, but asserts that others should try to prove that she is not a virgin.

Presumably, even if she had slept with Yvor, Josian would pass if no-one spoke up to proclaim that her marriage to Yvor had been consummated. This is a test which invites silence on the issue. This is not the first time in the romance that verbal testimony has been associated with the proving or disproving of sexual relations. The terms of Josian's proposed test – that she should be proved a non-virgin '*according to what any man can say*' – echo the accusation of illicit sex for which Bevis is punished following their first sexual encounter. Although accused of having had 'illicit sexual relations' with Josian, the text declares that 'he did nothing but kiss her once / *There was nothing else about them that anyone knew*'.²⁰⁷ This rather odd line highlights what is at stake in Josian's virginity test: that the sexual state of bodies can be verbally discerned. In this romance, sexual encounters seem to be provable (or not) according to the accounts of others, emphasising the performative nature of sexuality: the state of the sexual body is constructed and hidden or exposed according to verbal testimony.

The test is referred to twice more, at significant moments in the romance. In the first, Bevis accepts Josian's proposed virginity test, stating: 'I willingly concede to that agreement!'²⁰⁸ Later in the romance, Bevis wins a tournament at Aumberforce upon which the maiden there proposes that he live chastely with her as her 'lord' for seven years.²⁰⁹ Bevis replies using exactly the same words he used earlier to agree to Josian's virginity test. That we should be so forcefully reminded of Josian's strange virginity test at a moment when Bevis's own chastity is under threat cannot be

²⁰⁶ Kelly, *Performing Virginity*, p. 9.

²⁰⁷ 'forlain' (1209); 'he dede nothing, bouthe ones hire kiste, / *Nought elles bi hem men ne wiste*' (1213-1214, my emphasis).

²⁰⁸ 'in that forward I graunte well!' (2208).

²⁰⁹ 'lord' (3836).

coincidental. It could be that the repetition serves to remind us of Josian's promise at a moment Bevis himself makes a similar promise. However, I would like to suggest that because Josian's test relies on the unstable testimony of others, which has already been shown to be unreliable in the false accusation of Josian's 'deflowering', the repetition of Bevis' words acts to imbue this new chastity agreement with the same instability to which Josian's was subjected, casting doubt on Bevis' promise of chastity.

The second time Josian's virginity test is alluded to occurs after Josian has killed Miles, her unwanted third husband, and is condemned to be burned to death. As Bevis rides up to rescue her, she is described on the pyre, where 'she stood naked in her smock'; an almost direct reference to her earlier proposed punishment for *not* being a virgin.²¹⁰ Aside from the original virginity agreement, this is the only time the word 'smock' is used in the entire romance. I am not arguing that the text here suggests that Josian is not a virgin. But by drawing our attention back to her original virginity test at a moment where Josian's virginity could be perceived by Bevis to have been at risk once again (from her marriage to Miles), and I argue that by reminding us of the strange terms of the virginity test throughout, *Bevis* underscores the importance of virginity whilst revealing that the terms of the agreement, like many virginity tests, elude clear interpretation.

In modern sheikh romance, too, virginity tests can be cheated. On some occasions, believing that the heroine is not a virgin, the hero will attempt to fake the proof by bleeding onto a sheet himself. In *Possessed by the Sheikh* the hero cut his arm and 'held [the sheet] against the cut' and the hero of *Arabian* murmurs 'I will cut myself and smear blood on the sheet'.²¹¹ The sheikh's falsifying of the virginity test is ironic as the heroine in both cases is a virgin. Yet as Kelly points out, if the loss of virginity can be faked, so too can a sexually experienced woman simulate virginity.²¹² This is precisely what the sheikh hero believes the heroine is doing: as I pointed out earlier, he does not believe she is a virgin because she is western. If virginity is performative, enacted through visible signs displayed on the body, as Salih and Kelly argue, then it

²¹⁰ 'in hire smok she stod naked' (3289).

²¹¹ Jordan, *Possessed by the Sheikh*, p. 101; *Arabian*, p. 93.

²¹² Kelly, *Performing Virginity*, p. 128.

would be possible for a false virginity to be displayed.²¹³ According to the sheikh, the heroine is performing promiscuous, western sexuality, and therefore *cannot* be a virgin. While he is pleasantly surprised to discover that she actually *is* a virgin, the fact that the sheikh misinterpreted her earlier sexual performance suggests that it could equally be possible to misread the performance of virginity; in other words, for someone to believably perform virginity who is *not* a virgin. Kelly argues that ‘in the end, all tests for verifying virginity are inherently flawed’.²¹⁴ Certainly, the tests in *Bevis*, *Floris* and these modern sheikh romances seem to be rooted more in uncertainty, than certainty.

These retrospective, liminal tests might not be reliable as clear indicators of virginity, but they do indicate what is at stake in a discourse which positions women as the possession of men to whom they have ‘lost’ their virginity. Loss is integral to virginity in sheikh romance; deploying penetrative intercourse as a test indicates how the test for virginity and the loss of virginity are one and the same. Doreen Owens Malek suggests that the reason virgins are so persistent in romance, is because their transition into womanhood, in other words their loss of virginity, is what is fascinating and appealing about the romance.²¹⁵ Virgin heroines as virgins are not interesting, it is their *ex*-virginal status and how they got there which is so absorbing. This also reveals that what makes you a woman in romance is the loss of virginity, and it is precisely this loss which allows the hero to possess her: the heroine is not possessed because she *is* a virgin, but because she is an *ex*-virgin. As Owens Malek notes, the heroine’s position as an *ex*-virgin is central to her construction as hyperfeminine within a system of heterosexual gender difference. Kelly argues that the virgin waiting to bestow her virginity on the one correct man is ‘an advertisement for the proper functioning of the sex/gender system [...] I would argue [...] that she is most visible – and most definitively heterosexual – when her virginity is endangered; that is, when we are forced to contemplate loss of virginity’.²¹⁶ So while virginity might be important as part of a construction of eastern femininity, what

²¹³ Sarah Salih, ‘Performing Virginity: Sex and Violence in the *Katherine* Group’, *Constructions of Widowhood and Virginity in the Middle Ages*, ed. Cindy L. Carlson and Angela Jane Weisl (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1999), pp. 95-112; Kelly, *Performing Virginity*, pp. 17-39.

²¹⁴ Kelly, *Performing Virginity*, p. 18.

²¹⁵ Doreen Owens Malek, ‘Loved I not Honor More: The Virginal Heroine in Romance’, Krentz, p. 118.

²¹⁶ Kelly, *Performing Virginity*, p. 137.

makes the western heroine hyperfeminine is actually *losing* her virginity to the right man: the sheikh hero. The heroine's virginity does not appear until it is lost, thus forms part of her *always already* femininity— she is hyperfeminine because she *was* a virgin, not because she *is* a virgin. It is this loss, and the associated adoption of the roles of bride, wife and mother within a patriarchal model of gender difference, that allows the hero to possess her.

This discourse of possession feeds into a wider system of heterosexual gender difference, exposing the ways in which hyperfemininity and hypermasculinity are reliant and oppositional, built on a platform which upholds male dominance and female submission. The treatment of virginity in these romances establishes heterosexuality as the norm; Kelly writes, 'the virgin is a charismatic figure within patriarchal discourse, the star of an [sic] sensational narrative that asserts and confirms male heterosexual hierarchical prerogatives while attempting to suppress alternative narratives, both of female autonomy and of homosexual desire'.²¹⁷ The emphasis on virginity in sheikh romance makes evident the power dynamics which are intrinsic to heterosexual gender difference. The importance of family and lineage in sheikh romance values virginity as part of a system of patriarchal family relations in which the loss of female virginity (and gaining of hyperfemininity in the process) positions women as brides, wives and mothers: submissive roles within patriarchal gender relations. This is, ultimately, what the discourse of possession in virginity is all about; ensuring ownership of women's bodies and their potential issue. The heroine's hyperfemininity, then, bound up with this dialogue of virginity, helps to sustain a model of heterosexual gender difference.

This leads me to a final consideration of how the positioning of virginity within this model of gender difference might work to affect the Orientalist construction of the feminine east as submissive and the masculine west as dominant. If (the loss of) virginity, which is embodied in the western heroine's performance of eastern-inflected hyperfemininity, is coveted because it allows for exclusive male possession of a woman, then the submissive, dominated Orient can be located in the western heroine. Because the hypermasculine sheikh is an eastern man, sexually dominating and possessing a western woman – even as she performs eastern femininity she does

²¹⁷ Kelly, *Performing Virginity*, p. 138.

not cease to be western – the Orientalist idea of a masculine west possessing and dominating a feminine east is completely inverted. In this way, then, sheikh romances rewrite Orientalist signification through the romance regime of heterosexual gender difference. However, this also reveals that while sheikh romance might be reformulating Orientalist ideas, they do not challenge the dual construction of gender difference, whereby masculinity is dominant and femininity is submissive. Gender identity, then, remains binary.

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined how gender is constructed in romance according to a model of heterosexual gender difference. It has shown that when binary gender difference is subverted, the heterosexual framework of the romance breaks down, meaning that a successful, heterosexual relationship cannot occur. Consequently, these romances must uphold and sustain heterosexual gender difference in order to facilitate the cross-cultural relationship.

That gender is connected with the romance east becomes clear when it is viewed in opposition to the romance west. The western world, as I have shown, is exemplified by chaste fiancés and androgynous work clothes: it is not the locus of sexualised gender roles. In this sense, it could be argued that the west is *hypo*-gendered: it is a place where the sexualised gender roles of romance, defined by heterosexual attraction, are not foregrounded. The east, on the other hand, is a place of *hyper*-gender, where binaries of masculinity and femininity and their function within a heterosexual model of sexual attraction are highlighted. Hypermasculinity, defined by dominance, aggression and sexual experience, is constructed in relation to hyperfemininity, defined by submission and paradoxical sexual availability and inexperience and which is based, in sheikh romance, on a specifically eastern femininity. Playing around with masculine gender identity in the medieval romance *Floris* reveals that stereotyping the east as effeminate according to a hegemonic gender model which privileges masculine traits was not something which emerged with modern Orientalism, but was used in western Europe to characterise the east a long time ago. Furthermore, the link between sex, gender and desire is similarly persistent and enduring.

Implicit in these representations of gender are representations of ethnicity: both hypermasculinity and hyperfemininity are constructed in relation to the romance east. Figurations of gender and ethnicity are thus connected, although their deployment in the frame of difference between east and west is more variable. The western heroine has the power of western imperialism supporting her, as I have already mentioned. So ethnically speaking, the heroine is dominant. Yet when the construction of gender difference is taken into account, as this chapter has shown, it is the sheikh hero who is dominant and the western heroine who assumes a submissive, feminine role. The sheikh romance thus disrupts the Orientalist dubbing of the east as feminine and the west as masculine.

Taylor has argued that when the sheikh hero becomes more westernised he becomes more feminised, as western virtues are associated with the heroine and, consequently, with femininity.²¹⁸ The hero and heroine thus move towards gender sameness, as they both become feminine. However if, as I have argued, the west is not feminised but is hypo-gendered, and the western heroine's hyperfemininity is actually dependent upon an eastern model of femininity, the association of the heroine's gender with the west is no longer persuasive: the hero might indeed become more westernised, but this is not necessarily enacted through feminisation. Indeed, the maintenance of heterosexual gender difference in these romances foregrounds gender difference rather than sameness. Nuancing Taylor's argument, it might be more appropriate to say that what is causing sameness here is not gender, but the elision of cultural difference: ethnicity. While ethnicity cannot be entirely divorced from gender, it is possible, I contend, that the upholding of gender difference can support the creation of sameness in ethnicity.

What I am arguing is that these romances do not challenge the heterosexual gender binary; they leave 'the cultural institution of heterosexuality relatively untouched', as Pearce and Wisker contend.²¹⁹ However, what these romances *do* do, I will argue in the next chapter, is to maintain heteropolarity in order to achieve a rapprochement of ethnic identity, thereby challenging the binary construction of ethnicity. While Taylor argues that the sheikh hero is a 'liminal, in-between' figure, this applies only

²¹⁸ Taylor, p. 1045.

²¹⁹ Pearce and Wisker, Introduction, *Fatal Attractions: Re-Scripting Romance in Contemporary Literature and Film*, ed. Pearce and Wisker (London: Pluto Press, 1998), p. 2.

to his ethnicity: his hypermasculine gender construction is never really in doubt.²²⁰ Similarly, in performing an eastern hyperfemininity, the western heroine maintains gender difference, but displays ethnic sameness. I now move to examine the construction of ethnicity and religion in romance, exploring how it functions alongside gender to facilitate the establishment of a relationship between hero and heroine.

²²⁰ Taylor, p. 1034.

CHAPTER 3: FABRICATING SAMENESS

In Chapter 2 I examined how gender identity is constructed in the modern and medieval romance east. These constructions function to maintain the gender difference required for a successful heterosexual relationship, yet simultaneously hint at a refiguring of ethnic and religious difference. This chapter extends the argument of Chapter 2, focusing on the articulation of ethnicity and religion, the two primary signifiers of difference between east and west in the Middle Ages and twenty-first century, within the overarching framework of difference.¹ I focus in this chapter on the way in which ethnic and religious identity can be ‘fabricated’. The chapter considers three romances: the modern sheikh romances, *Possessed by the Sheikh*, a retelling of *The Sheik*, and *The Sheikh’s Convenient Virgin*, in which the heroine is forced to marry the sheikh hero; and the Middle English romance *The King of Tars*, which relates the story of a Christian Princess forced to marry a Saracen Sultan and their subsequent, horrific offspring.² The analysis is concerned with how these romances articulate a sexual relationship between heroes and heroines with very different ethnic and religious identities.

The chapter begins with an examination of the ethnicity of the sheikh hero, whose liminal, hybrid ethnicity has been widely discussed by scholars. I extend this discussion to consider the figure of the Saracen hero of *Tars*, comparing his religious identity to the ethnicity of the sheikh.³ I then move to focus on the role of fabric in

¹ As I outlined in the Introduction, I use a broad definition of ethnicity in this thesis which encompasses aspects of ‘race’ (i.e. skin colour) as well as traits more conventionally aligned with cultural identity (i.e. language, dress, customs).

² Jordan, *Possessed by the Sheikh*, hereafter referred to as *Possessed*; Morey, *The Sheikh’s Convenient Virgin*, hereafter referred to as *Convenient Virgin*; F. Krause ed., ‘Kleine Publicationen aus der Auchinleck-hs. IX. *The King of Tars*’, *Englische Studien* 11 (1888): 3-62, hereafter referred to as *Tars*. Detailed plot summaries can be found in Appendix 1. *Tars* survives in three manuscripts: the so-called Auchinleck MS; Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Eng. poet. A.1 (Vernon), dated c.1390; and London, British Library, MS Additional 22283 (Simeon), dated c.1400. The version most often referred to by scholars is Auchinleck, as it is the earliest and most complete surviving version of *Tars*. However, the Vernon text offers a particular richness in its representations of ethnicity and fabric. I here take the Vernon as my base text, although I compare and contrast it with Auchinleck. Simeon is a close copy of Vernon. All references to *Tars* are from the Vernon text of the romance, unless otherwise indicated.

³ It should be noted that the central Saracen figure in Middle English romance is not always male: of the four romances I examine in this thesis, two contain Saracen heroines (these are Josian in *Bevis* and Marsabelle in *Octavian*). Furthermore, although Mills & Boon sheikh romances almost unwaveringly follow the pattern of western heroine and sheikh hero, four *Modern Romance*

the mediation of ethnic and religious identity, paying particular attention to its use in the construction of the western heroine's ethnicity which has heretofore remained largely unexamined.⁴ I outline the function and symbolism of fabric in all three romances and its effect on the relationship between hero and heroine. In the third part of the chapter, I consider how the performance of ethnic or religious identity, partly achieved through fabric, can cause anxiety. As an analysis of *Tars* indicates, the lack of a clearly defined identity is manifested in a fear of sexual contact between those of different religions and the potential consequences of that contact. I bring this analysis to bear on *Convenient Virgin* and *Possessed*, examining how they deal with ethnic difference in their preoccupations with procreation and progeny. The chapter ends by outlining the markedly different ways these medieval and modern romances deal with these concerns.

‘Neither Fish Nor Fowl’: Representing Difference

Variations in ethnicity and religion have long been used to demarcate differences between east and west and its inhabitants. As I have already mentioned, otherness is figured differently in Middle English romance, where religion is the primary marker of variation between east and west, and modern sheikh romance, where religion is subsumed into culture and ethnicity stands as the central difference between east and west. Therefore, the way in which those from the east are represented as different varies between medieval and modern romance. In modern sheikh romance, the sheikh hero is ethnically other. As I argued in Chapter 2, his masculinity is constructed in relation to the exotic romance east and its strange culture. For Katrina, heroine of *Possessed*, the desert kingdom of Zuran is ‘a different country with different customs’ and in *Convenient Virgin* the heroine Morgan is excited ‘to see for herself the colours and culture of a different world’ in the sheikh’s kingdom

novels have heroines who are part eastern. These are Sharon Kendrick’s *Promised to the Sheikh* (Richmond: Harlequin Mills & Boon, 2002), Jordan’s *The Sheikh’s Virgin Bride*, Porter’s *The Sheikh’s Virgin* and Sandra Marton’s *The Sheikh’s Wayward Wife*. While fully eastern heroines feature in Mills & Boon romance publishing more generally, for example in Kendrick’s *The Sheikh’s Virgin Stable-Girl*, they do not feature in any sheikh titles published in the *Modern Romance* series from 2000-2009.

⁴ I use the term ‘fabric’ in this chapter to refer to woven cloth used as, for example, throws, rugs or carpets, as well as clothing.

Jamalbad.⁵ Difference is here located in the ‘culture’ and ‘customs’ of the east which are, in turn, linked with the sheikh. In *Convenient Virgin* Morgan considers: ‘he was beautiful, this Arab sheikh of hers. He was powerful and magnificent, and he carried the colour and character of the desert with him’.⁶ Similarly in *Possessed*, according to Katrina, the sheikh, Xander, ‘tasted of heat and the desert, and a thousand and one things that had been imprinted on him, and which were alien to her’.⁷ In his association with the romance east, then, the sheikh is culturally and ethnically signalled as eastern: he has both the ‘colour’ and ‘character’ of the ‘desert’. Furthermore, ethnic markers which serve to masculinise the sheikh, including comparing him to eastern animals and describing him in eastern dress, simultaneously determine him as having an eastern ethnicity, which, as the quotation from *Possessed* indicates, is ‘alien’ to the western heroine.

In Middle English romance too, the romance east is generally considered a place of difference, although it is religion which functions as the dominant signifier of otherness. In *Tars* initial descriptions of the Saracen Sultan of Damascus and the Christian Princess of Tars appear to place them at opposite ends of a spectrum of alterity; the Sultan is ‘swarthy and black’, called a ‘heathen hound’ and a ‘tyrant’, and looks like ‘a wild lion’ who ‘tore [...] his clothing [...] off’ when enraged.⁸ Animalism and blackness are commonly used to denote Saracens in Middle English romance, indicating how markers of ethnicity are subsumed into a discourse of religious difference: the Sultan is black because he is a Saracen.⁹ Heng points out how religion ‘which we had assumed to belong purely to the realm of culture, can shape and instruct *biology*’, which is made clear in the association of blackness with Saracen religious belief.¹⁰ Lisa Lampert similarly argues that ‘somatic differences typically associated with ideas of ethnicity have been linked to representations of religious difference, particularly that of the Muslim or Saracen’.¹¹ The Sultan’s

⁵ *Possessed*, p. 22; *Convenient Virgin*, p. 75.

⁶ *Convenient Virgin*, p. 149.

⁷ *Possessed*, p. 11.

⁸ ‘swart and wan’ (279); ‘hepene hound’ (93); ‘tiraunt’ (63); ‘a wylde lyon’ (105); ‘rente [...] his robe [...] adoun’ (99).

⁹ Consider, for example, *Bevis*, where Saracens are repeatedly referred to as ‘heathen hounds’ (692, 699, 1006, 1804).

¹⁰ Heng, p. 228.

¹¹ Lisa Lampert, ‘Race, Periodicity and the (Neo-) Middle Ages’, *Modern Language Quarterly* 65.3 (2004): 401.

blackness is in marked contrast to descriptions of the Princess of Tars, who is ‘white as the feather of a swan’ and ‘virtuous’, with a ‘beautiful face’, underscoring the association of whiteness and moral ‘goodness’ with Christianity.¹² Our initial impression of the Sultan, then, is that he embodies typical Saracen otherness.

All three romances here seem to uphold ethnic and religious difference between east and west and to present as impossible a successful relationship between such distinct protagonists. According to Morgan, the sheikh hero belonged to ‘a world of which she was no part’ and in *Tars* the idea that the ‘pale’ Princess should ‘have such a hideous mate’ as the Sultan is considered ‘indecent’.¹³ The lack of cross-religious or cross-ethnic relationships in medieval romance or Mills & Boon romances more generally is revealing of their underpinning racist ideologies which demand ethnic or religious sameness in erotic encounters. Therefore, couples who do not demonstrate sameness, apparently like the protagonists in *Tars*, *Possessed*, and *Convenient Virgin*, cannot be imagined as having a successful erotic relationship.

However, a closer examination of these romances reveals that difference is perhaps not so monolithically marked in either medieval or modern romance. The sheikh hero’s heterogeneous ethnicity has been well documented over the years. Taylor notes, for instance, how sheikh heroes display ‘a visible gradation of race and ethnicity’ and Flesch simply states, ‘even the most dashing of Arab heroes are rarely quite what they seem’.¹⁴ The ‘visible gradation’ of the sheikh hero is demonstrated in multiple ways, usually located within tropes of education, ancestry, religious belief (or lack thereof), progressive social values, geography, language and dress. Thus, even as the sheikh is represented as having an eastern ethnicity – Taj, the hero of *Convenient Virgin* is still the ‘dark haired boy who had grown up wild and untamed in the deserts of Jamalbad’ and whose ‘accent [...] was like a blend of the richest

¹² ‘whit so feþer of swan’; ‘chaast’; ‘feir of chere’ (12-13). John Block Friedman argues of *Tars* that it demonstrates how ‘color polarities were easily interchanged with moral polarities, and the blackness of immortality contrasted with the whiteness of salvation’ (*The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought* [Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000], pp. 64-65). For whiteness in relation to Saracen women, particularly the Saracen Princess, see De Weever.

¹³ *Convenient Virgin*, p. 64; ‘briht of ble’ (362); ‘habbe so foul a mette’ (363); ‘vn-semely’ (361).

¹⁴ Taylor, p. 1043; Flesch, p. 211.

coffee and the darkest chocolate’ – he is simultaneously constructed as western in certain ways.¹⁵

The sheikh’s ethnic ‘gradation’ is indicated by: his education at a western institution, often Oxbridge or Harvard; a western ancestry, usually via a mother, grandmother or great-grandmother; atheism, or a distinctly relaxed attitude towards or non-adherence to Islam;¹⁶ a progressive outlook regarding the social and political values of his desert nation; a jet-setting lifestyle, either residing in or frequently visiting the west; an almost accent-less fluency in English;¹⁷ and an ease in both western clothing and traditional Middle Eastern garb. Thus Xander ‘had been educated in Europe and America’ as per the wishes of his English late mother, who had wanted him to ‘experience his European cultural inheritance’.¹⁸ Xander now acts as ‘roving Ambassador for [his nation] Zuran’, indicating the extent to which his daily role demands mediation between different cultures, and is involved in ventures to attract international tourism and investment, including a ‘marina development’.¹⁹ In *Convenient Virgin*, Taj has recently been in Paris and the Gold Coast of Australia and both he and Xander are fluent in English.

Yet, while every sheikh hero is described as culturally, linguistically, educationally or politically hybrid in some way, the way hybridity is indicated in skin colour is more complex. Xander’s mixed ethnicity is made evident in descriptions of his skin colour: ‘his English mother had been very pale skinned and fair-haired, which was no doubt why his own skin was warmly golden rather than teak brown’.²⁰ Xander’s European heritage is thus indicated in his pigmentation: he is less dark because he is less eastern. But even though at least twenty sheikh romances have heroes with western heritage, most sheikh romances do not nuance differences of skin colour in the way *Possessed* does, instead highlighting and eroticising the contrast between the sheikh’s dark skin and the heroine’s paler pigmentation.

The fetishising of contrasting skin colour is a well-documented trope in sheikh romances. Teo observes that ‘in *The Sheik* and particularly in [...] romances of the

¹⁵ *Convenient Virgin*, pp. 18-19.

¹⁶ This is part of the wider elision of overt references to religion in sheikh romance.

¹⁷ Bach notes that ‘the sheik is a flawless speaker of English’ (p. 31).

¹⁸ *Possessed*, pp. 15, 46.

¹⁹ *Possessed*, pp. 15, 19.

²⁰ *Possessed*, p. 51.

1980s and 1990s, much is made of the contrast between the whiteness of the heroine's skin and her blonde hair, and the sheikh's swarthy looks'.²¹ Taylor notes the sexualisation of the sheikh's 'darkness', highlighting the eroticisation of ethnic difference, and Jarmakani has observed, as I argued in Chapter 2, the 'interplay of race and sexuality in constructing the sheikh as an alpha-male hero'.²² Such eroticising is evident in *Modern Romance* sheikh titles. Consider, for example, this extract from *For the Sheikh's Pleasure*:

The dark bronze of his body was in contrast to her own paler skin and as he lay down beside her she was fascinated by the sight of his large long-fingered hand splaying possessively across her body. Who'd have thought anything so simple could be so erotic?²³

This contrast in skin colour is one of the few occasions in sheikh romance where there is an explicit desire for ethnic difference. It is striking, therefore, that the covers of the majority of sheikh romances do not reflect the desire present in the text, but seem to whiten the hero, reducing the visible contrast between the couple. Of the fifty-seven sheikh romances I examined, only six emphasise a contrast in skin colour on the cover (see, for example, Figures 6 and 7). Twenty-four covers feature a couple who have no evident skin colour contrast (see Figures 8 and 9); nine covers have a discernible difference, but it is not the main focus of the cover (see Figure 10); and eighteen covers do not feature the couple on the cover at all, which was the preferred cover design until around 2005 (see Figure 11).²⁴

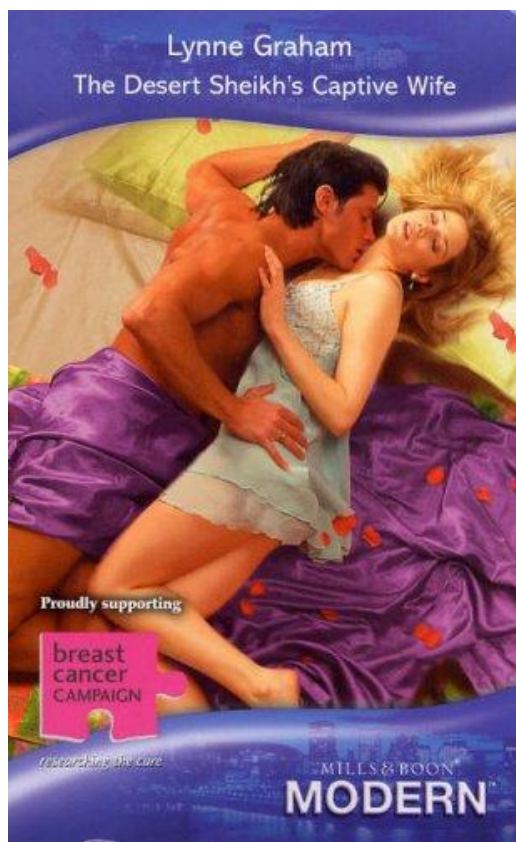
²¹ Teo, 'Orientalism and Mass-Market Romance', pp. 245-246.

²² Taylor, pp. 1042-1043; Jarmakani, 'Desiring the Big Bad Blade', p. 896.

²³ West, *For the Sheikh's Pleasure*, p. 104.

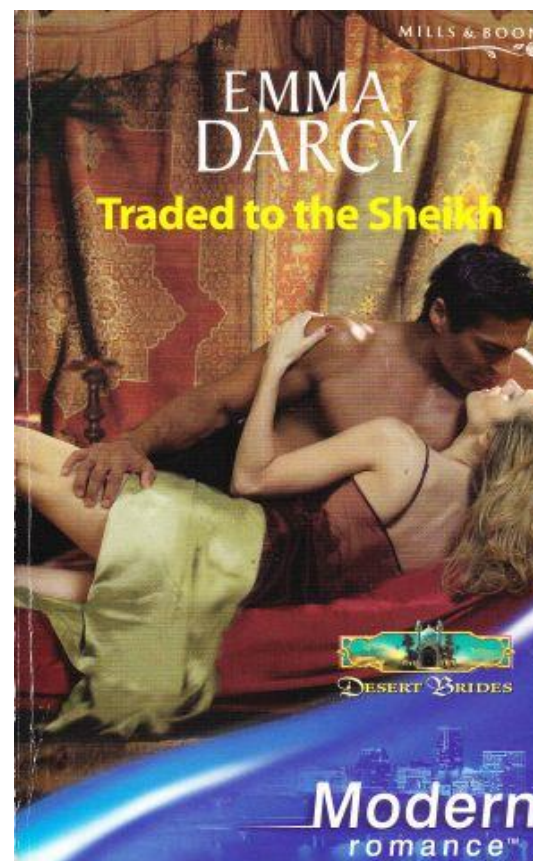
²⁴ Teo has observed that the covers of sheikh romances in the 1990s emphasised and celebrated racial difference as symbolised through skin tone ('Orientalism and Mass-Market', p. 250), which seems to correlate with the eroticisation of contrasting skin colour in the texts of the romances. Teo's observations are initially supported by Flesch's findings that the covers of sheikh romances published in the late 1980s and early 1990s emphasise a contrast between a blonde heroine and a dark hero. However, Flesch goes on to note that the covers of sheikh novels published in the 1990s by the same author reveal less contrast between hero and heroine (pp. 214-215). My analysis of novels published from 2000-2009 correlates more with Flesch's than with Teo's findings.

Figure 6: Cover of Lynne Graham, *The Desert Sheikh's Captive Wife* (2008)



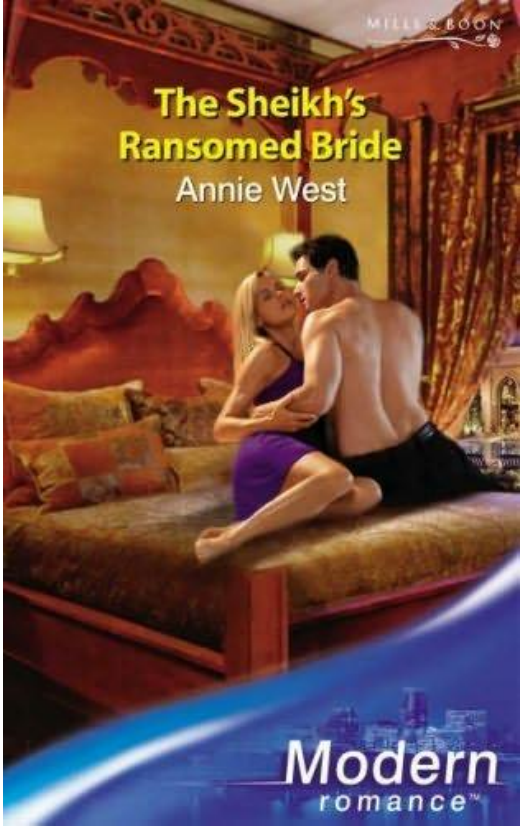
Source: Harlequin Mills & Boon

Figure 7: Cover of Emma Darcy, *Traded to the Sheikh* (2006)



Source: Harlequin Mills & Boon

Figure 8: Cover of Annie West, *The Sheikh's Ransomed Bride* (2007)



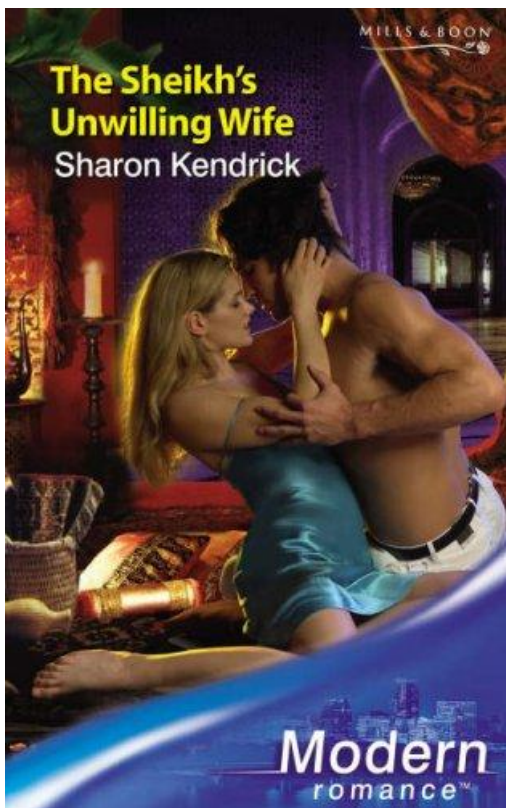
Source: Harlequin Mills & Boon

Figure 9: Cover of Kim Lawrence, *Desert Prince, Defiant Virgin* (2008)



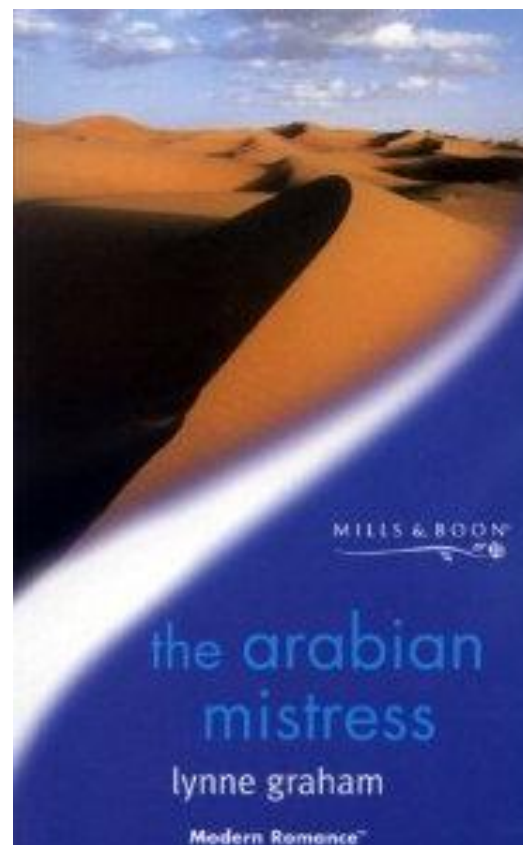
Source: Harlequin Mills & Boon

Figure 10: Cover of Sharon Kendrick, *The Sheikh's Unwilling Wife* (2007)



Source: Harlequin Mills & Boon

Figure 11: Cover of Lynne Graham, *The Arabian Mistress* (2001)



Source: Harlequin Mills & Boon

There seems to be no correlation between the skin colour of the sheikh hero on the cover and in the text; in an erotic scene between hero and heroine in *The Sheikh's Ransomed Bride* (Figure 8) the heroine's 'breath stopped at the sight of him there, one large, tanned hand on her pale skin', yet the novel's cover indicates no difference in skin colour between hero and heroine.²⁵ Similarly, in *Desert Prince, Defiant Virgin* (Figure 9) as the couple begin to have sex and the hero reaches for her, the heroine 'for a second [...] just stared at his hand, so much darker compared to her own', yet the cover completely elides this contrast.²⁶ A suggestive contrast thus arises between the representation of heroes in the text, where contrasting skin colour is eroticised, and the covers, where the contrast in skin colour is reduced and, in some cases, completely elided. This reveals a paradox within these romances: a desire for difference, but an insistence on sameness.

This paradox is also evident, for Jarmakani, in the elision of markers of dress on the covers of sheikh romances. She argues: 'prior to 2001, [...] romance novels often depicted the sheikh-hero "berobed" on the cover [...]. Since 2001, however, [...] the book covers have ceased to include any cultural markers, depicting instead a generalised image of a Mediterranean [...] hero'.²⁷ While the cover might still refer to Orientalised markers of the east, as I argue later in this chapter, according to Jarmakani, the sheikh himself is carefully dissociated from these.²⁸ It seems that in terms of the covers, these 'cultural markers' have been displaced from the sheikh onto the romance east.

Yet, Jarmakani admits that robes and headdresses 'remain an integral aspect of the romance story itself, making an appearance in many, if not all, mass-market romances'.²⁹ In the same way that the sheikh's skin colour can be whitened on the cover yet its chromatic difference eroticised in the text, so too can he be paradoxically associated and dissociated with cultural dress. Furthermore, the removal of sartorial markers such as headdresses, robes and veils, symbols connected

²⁵ West, *The Sheikh's Ransomed Bride*, p. 147.

²⁶ Lawrence, *Desert Prince, Defiant Virgin*, p. 107.

²⁷ Jarmakani, 'Desiring the Big Bad Blade', p. 920.

²⁸ None of the covers of the *Modern Romance* titles depicts the sheikh wearing robes or a headdress, although on the cover of Penny Jordan's *Prince of the Desert* the hero wears a gold open-necked tunic with stitched detail on the sleeves and collar which could be indicative of a certain kind of Orientalised dress (see Figure 12).

²⁹ Jarmakani, 'Desiring the Big Bad Blade', p. 920.

with Islam in the western imagination, from the covers of these romances novels reflects their wider subsuming of religious indicators into ethnicity. Jarmakani notes that ‘the “robes” are almost never directly linked to religion’, but rather that sheikh romances ‘conflate [...] ethnic/religious/ geographic identities while blurring any direct reference to the Middle East or Islam’.³⁰ Robes, veils and headdresses thus become associated with more malleable markers of ethnic identity rather than symbols of binary religious difference.

So why would the sheikh’s ethnicity, in terms of skin colour and cultural dress, be elided on the romance cover? Is this, perhaps, an example of a disjunction between what can be expressed in writing and what is acceptable to display visually?³¹ The covers of Mills & Boon novels are the initial point of visual engagement for the reader, as they form a large part of the commercial branding of the romances and advertise the genre and tone of the novel.³² Marketing a romance novel with a Middle Eastern hero at a time of political instability and western military engagement in the region could be seen as provocative. Mills & Boon may be attempting to solve this by de-emphasising the hero’s easternness through the elision of his differential skin colour and dress. Jarmakani similarly suggests a connection between political instability and the removal of headdresses and robes from sheikh romance covers, arguing that it reveals ‘the tricky balance [...] between highlighting exoticised cultural markers and carefully eliding reference to any cultural markers that come too close to uncomfortable realities for readers’.³³ She posits that the removal of difference ‘seems to be an effort to protect readers from too much reality’.³⁴ The contradictory ethnic representation of the sheikh, then, is rooted in contemporary concerns about difference.

The sheikh hero’s hybridity is underscored in *Possessed* and *Convenient Virgin* as he is represented as progressively at odds with the apparently intolerant moral standpoint of his desert nation. In *Convenient Virgin*, Taj acknowledges that whilst

³⁰ Jarmakani, ‘Desiring the Big Bad Blade’, pp. 921, 922.

³¹ John Berger et. al. consider the difference in meaning and impact between what can be seen (visual) and what can be read or heard (verbal), pointing out the ‘always-present gap between words and seeing’ (*Ways of Seeing* [London: BBC, 1972], p. 7).

³² George Paizis, *Love and the Novel: The Poetics and Politics of Romantic Fiction* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998), p. 51.

³³ Jarmakani, ‘Desiring the Big Bad Blade’, pp. 919-920.

³⁴ Jarmakani, ‘Desiring the Big Bad Blade’, p. 900.

‘tradition was important in Jamalbad, [...] he had been educated long enough in the west to believe that the idea a woman must remain untouched until marriage while the man was free to sow his wild oats wherever he chose was a classic double standard’.³⁵ Similarly, in *Possessed*, Xander repeatedly separates his more progressive Zuran social practices from the sexist and, according to the heroine, barbaric customs of the desert; when the heroine refuses to walk behind the hero, she exclaims ‘in Zuran men walk alongside their partners’, to which the hero replies: ‘this is not Zuran, it is the desert’.³⁶ Here, the desert nation itself is subdivided into the modern, western-friendly practices of urbanised Zuran, and the traditional customs of the desert. Xander, as a leader of Zuran, is aligned with its more liberal, urbanised customs while the desert, locus of sexist tradition, is relegated beyond the borders of the desert nation: the camp in which Xander and Katrina reside is ‘in the empty quarter beyond Zuran’s border’.³⁷ In this way, Xander follows the technique I identified in Chapter 1 of locating a more regressive, ‘medieval’ Middle East elsewhere, thereby making his own desert nation, and by extension himself, seem more modern by comparison. Thus, the custom to produce a ‘blood-stained sheet [...] the morning after a young woman is married’ is ‘a tribal custom’ practised in the desert which lies beyond the borders of the more cosmopolitan Emirate of Zuran, where the sheikh resides.³⁸

Sheikh romances also deploy the stock figure of the ‘bad Arab’ to illustrate the hybridity of the sheikh. In his study of Hollywood cinema, Jack Shaheen argues ‘that almost *all* Hollywood depictions of Arabs are *bad* ones’.³⁹ While the sheikh as hero disrupts this pattern, sheikh romances regularly situate a ‘bad Arab’ alongside the hero to underline by contrast both his heroism *and* his un-Arabness. Flesch writes that the “‘uncivilised” east is truly embodied in the secondary Arab characters – uneducated, dirty and brutal, and usually in active conflict with the hero’.⁴⁰ In *Possessed*, Nazir, the cousin of the Ruler, Xander’s half-brother, plots to orchestrate the Ruler’s assassination. As part of this plot, Nazir eventually shoots Katrina in the

³⁵ *Convenient Virgin*, p. 12.

³⁶ *Possessed*, p. 35.

³⁷ *Possessed*, p. 15.

³⁸ *Possessed*, p. 101.

³⁹ Jack G. Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People*, 2nd ed. (Northampton, MA: Olive Branch Press, 2009), p. 17.

⁴⁰ Flesch, p. 215.

arm. Katrina also suffers from the uninvited advances of a tribesman, Sulimen, who 'had been accused of both raping and beating at least two women, and [...] possessed a streak of sexual carnality and sadism'.⁴¹ Nazir and Suliman, then, are clearly 'bad Arabs': treacherous, lecherous villains.

In the same way that the sheikh's masculinity is constructed in relation to the east in descriptions of animalism, so too is the wickedness of the 'bad Arab' contrasted with the sheikh's heroism through the use of particular animalistic references. In *Possessed*, Katrina imagines the sheikh 'as a man with golden lion eyes' and he is similarly linked with a falcon when he forces a kiss: 'the downward swoop of his head had all the predatory intent of a desert falcon, swift and merciless'.⁴² By connecting the sheikh with an animal such as the lion, associated with power and royal status, he is imbued with positive qualities which construct him as the hero of the narrative, although his violent attitude towards women, represented in his falcon-like sexual predation, indicates that this is not a straightforwardly positive description of the sheikh; he shares with his fellow tribesmen something of their violence towards women, although the sheikh's behaviour is ultimately expressed more positively in the narrative.⁴³ Nazir, by contrast, is described as a 'snake'.⁴⁴ This is an unequivocally negative characterisation, supported by the symbolic understanding of snakes as treacherous and malicious, evoking 'feelings of revulsion'.⁴⁵

Gargano notes this opposition of eastern hero and villain, arguing that 'the horror of the "animalistic" embodied most clearly in the bestial [bad Arab], has its corollary in the sensual lure of the "beautiful animal", embodied in [the hero]'.⁴⁶ Furthermore, Bach notes that 'as the sheik's image is gradually "whitened", he can no longer be classed as the true villain of the romance', for the "'real" Arabs become the real

⁴¹ *Possessed*, p. 74.

⁴² *Possessed*, pp. 8, 63.

⁴³ As 'King of the Animals' the lion 'was at once fierce and noble, fearsome and magnanimous, indomitable and wise' (Martin Kemp, *The Human Animal in Western Art and Science* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007], p. 11).

⁴⁴ *Possessed*, p. 10.

⁴⁵ Beryl Rowland, *Animals with Human Faces: A Guide to Animal Symbolism* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1973), p. 146; Kemp, p. 2.

⁴⁶ Gargano, p. 180.

villains'.⁴⁷ In *Possessed*, heroism is located in the hybrid figure of the sheikh, whereas the villain is fully eastern, suggesting a mutually reinforcing connection between hybridity and heroism, and between easternness and evil behaviour. Here, the 'bad Arab' is represented by conservative, fully eastern villains, and the 'good Arab' by the liberal, progressive, western-friendly hero, whose identity as such is reinforced in opposition to the 'bad Arab'. The sheikh hero is thus distanced from cultural markers of the east which might bring to mind 'uncomfortable realities', particularly non-white skin colour and eastern dress, and his ethnicity is characterised as being drawn from multiple signifiers of both east and west.

The technique of marking the hero's identity in contrast to that of others is evident in *Tars*, although it is deployed in a slightly different way. Although I noted earlier that the Sultan seems initially to be constructed in opposition to the Christian Princess, a closer examination reveals that he is, at times, favourably compared with Christians. While the Sultan does appear to be categorised as a typical Saracen when he becomes 'madly enraged', the Christian King of Tars also becomes angry to the point of madness when the Sultan's marriage offer is presented: 'he grew almost out of his mind with anger'.⁴⁸ Furthermore, as Calkin points out, the Sultan's refusal to marry the Princess until she has converted to Islam parallels the Christian attitude towards marriage: that marriage must only happen between two people of the same faith.⁴⁹ Differences between Christians and Saracens are not, then, always so marked.

The Vernon text of *Tars* works in particular to reduce the monolithism of Saracens, especially the Sultan (see Table 5). In general, the Auchinleck text seems to present Saracens, including the Sultan, as violent and rude, whereas Vernon presents Saracens more sympathetically, suggesting a more nuanced model of Saracen alterity. In an early battle scene, Auchinleck describes the Saracen army as 'savage', and offers a visceral description of 'valleys running with the blood / Of Christians'. While Vernon retains reference to the Saracen army as 'crazed' and offers 'merciless' as an additional descriptor, the actions of the Saracen army here do not have the same violent effect on the Christians.

⁴⁷ Bach, p. 32.

⁴⁸ 'wod' (98); 'for wraþþe neih he waxeþ wood' (38).

⁴⁹ Calkin, *Saracens*, p. 109.

Table 5: Comparison of Passages from the Auchinleck and Vernon Texts of *The King of Tars*.

Auchinleck	Vernon
He acted like a <i>wild boar</i> ⁵⁰	He acted like a <i>madman</i> ⁵¹
He struck the table <i>so fiercely</i> ⁵²	He struck the table <i>straight down</i> ⁵³
There did <i>dogs</i> slay Christian men ⁵⁴	Three <i>heathens</i> against two Christian men ⁵⁵
[The Saracens] were so savage and crazed / That it was possible to see all the marshland / And the valleys running with the blood. / Of Christians who are friends and kin / The Sultan and his people at that time / Cut [them] down with serious wounds ⁵⁶	With weapons stout and strong / The merciless Saracens in that battle / Slew our Christian men straight down, / They fought, as thought they were crazed. / The Sultan's army at that time / [And] brought the Christians to the ground ⁵⁷
The [Sultan's] messengers went to give word to the king / And <i>told him</i> of the Sultan's response ⁵⁸	He quickly sent word to the king / And <i>thanked him</i> for his decision ⁵⁹
The Sultan made an announcement at that time / In the places all around, / That he would hold a tournament ⁶⁰	<i>For love of the Princess</i> at that time the Sultan / Let it be announced throughout his lands, / That he would hold a tournament ⁶¹
I shall forsake all my gods ⁶²	I shall forsake all my <i>false</i> gods ⁶³

Source: the author. Citations from Krause, my emphasis.

⁵⁰ 'Also a *wilde bore* he ferd' (98).

⁵¹ 'As a *wod mon* he ferde' (98).

⁵² 'De table *so heteliche* he smot' (103).

⁵³ 'De table *adoun riht* he smot' (103).

⁵⁴ 'Per hewe *houndes* on cristen men' (169).

⁵⁵ 'Preo *hepene* a3ein twey cristene men' (163).

⁵⁶ 'So wilde þai were & wode / þat men mi3t sen alle þe fen / Of cristen boþe fremd & ken / þe valays ren on blod. / þe soudan & his folk þat stounde / Hewe adoun wiþ grimli wounde' (171-176).

⁵⁷ 'Wiþ wepnas stif and goode / þe steorne Sarazins in þat fiht / Slowe vr cristene men doun riht, / Þei fouhte as heo weore woode. / Þe soudan ost in þat stounde / Feolde þe cristene to þe grounde' (165-170).

⁵⁸ 'De messangers went þe king tille / & *told him* of þat dede' (305-306).

⁵⁹ 'De kyng anon he sende tille / & *þonkede him* of þat dede' (287-288).

⁶⁰ 'De soudan ded cri þat tide / Ouer al bi ich a side, / A turnament to take' (514-516).

⁶¹ 'De soudan *for hire loue* þat tyde / Let cri3e in his lond bi vch a syde, / A turnament to take' (487-489).

⁶² 'Al mi godes ichil for-sake' (691).

⁶³ 'Mi *false* goddes i chul forsake' (652).

The Sultan in particular is represented as less typically Saracen. Vernon calls him a 'madman' instead of a 'wild boar', eliminating connotations of animalism, and Vernon also eradicates a reference to Saracens as 'dogs' at line 169. Whilst in Auchinleck the Sultan breaks a table 'fiercely', in Vernon this association is removed in favour of the more descriptive 'straight down'. The Sultan in Vernon is polite, as he 'thanked' the King of Tars for his daughter's hand in marriage, and even seems to adhere to the conventions of courtly love, as he organises a tournament for the 'love' of the Princess, a reason missing in Auchinleck. He even acknowledges the falsity of his Saracen gods just before baptism.

Gilbert contends that the Vernon text seems to be more sympathetic towards the Sultan, presenting 'the Sultan's feelings in such a way that they appear representative and even exemplary, worthy of being shared by the audience'.⁶⁴ Similarities between the grief of the Sultan following the birth of the monstrous child and that of the King of Tars on the loss of his daughter to the Sultan mean that 'audiences of Vernon are encouraged to sympathise with both fathers [the Sultan and the King of Tars] and not, as in Auchinleck, to identify with one alone'.⁶⁵ In terms of custom and behaviour, then, the differences between Saracens and Christians in this romance are not as stark as they first appear, with the Sultan in particular characterised as less different.

Saracens and Christians are thus not monolithically drawn in *Tars*, but exist on a continuum, with shared emotions and traits. Akbari has argued more generally for a gradation in fictional representations of Muslims, stating: 'within the medieval discourse of bodily diversity [...] corporeal difference is not an either/or, black/white dichotomy. Rather, it is a continuum, with the monstrous races [...] located on one end, and the normative European body on the other'.⁶⁶ Akbari thus refutes the idea that religious bodily identity is predicated on a Manichean binary of black/white, contending that there are many more inflections in the way that Saracens appear. I extend Akbari's continuum to include other aspects of how religious difference is represented, including custom, behaviour and culture. It is clear that cultural representations of religion and its practices in *Tars* are, to a certain extent,

⁶⁴ Gilbert, 'Putting the Pulp into Fiction: The Lump-Child and Its Parents in *The King of Tars*', McDonald, p. 114.

⁶⁵ Gilbert, 'Putting the Pulp into Fiction', p. 114.

⁶⁶ Akbari, *Idols*, p. 160.

represented along this continuum, suggesting that the Sultan's behaviour is more nuanced. The Sultan's identity is constructed using a mix of signifiers from both east and west: an echo of the hybrid construction of the modern sheikh hero. In this way, it can be argued that the Saracen Sultan also displays a form of hybridity.

Yet, hybridity is more complex in *Tars* than in *Possessed* or *Convenient Virgin*. For a start, while the Sultan's behaviour might be nuanced, his fundamental religious alterity, so long as he maintains his Saracen beliefs, remains absolute; Akbari acknowledges that religious difference is based on 'binarism', and this is a binary that *Tars* ultimately does not disrupt. This, then, is a more complex characterisation of Saracen identity, in which behaviour, often attributed to religious belief, can exist on a continuum, but which is still underscored by a binary religious difference: even though the Saracen Sultan might behave in a similar way to Christians, this does not, in itself, make him a Christian.

Furthermore, the Sultan's hybridity is not maintained throughout the romance. Following his conversion the Sultan follows conventional Christian baptismal practices and adopts a new name which happens to be the name of the priest who baptises him, distancing himself from his previous Saracen identity and heritage. After his baptism, the Sultan's contempt for his previous religious practices is established as *Tars* deploys the word 'idols' to refer to Saracen gods.⁶⁷ Not only does the term 'idols' connote a representation of a pagan deity as opposed to what the romance would consider to be an actual Christian deity, the Sultan's choice of words here is a repetition of the Princess' earlier disavowal of the Sultan's religion: she states 'my god himself [i.e. the Christian God] can do / More than your idols can'.⁶⁸

After the Sultan's post-baptismal separation from his previous religion, he is identified in Vernon as part of the Christian 'community', is twice called a 'Christian sultan' (in Auchinleck this phrase occurs only once) and calls one of his subjects a 'heathen dog' whilst invoking 'saint Michael'.⁶⁹ The invocation of the archangel Michael, who led God's armies against Satan in the Book of Revelation, underscores the Sultan's identification with the Christian side of this battle, now occupying a

⁶⁷ 'maumetes' (961).

⁶⁸ 'my god hym self con don / More þen þi maumetes can' (674-675).

⁶⁹ 'felawrede' (1066); 'cristene soudan' (1015, 1105); 'heþene dogge' (1085); 'seint Mihel' (1086).

position in opposition to his previous one leading the Saracen army. During the fight, the Sultan ‘said an [...] Ave Maria’ underscoring his commitment to Christianity in battle.⁷⁰ The Sultan is no longer hybrid, but presents himself as Christian in order to belong to the Princess’ family; it is no coincidence, I argue, that the Sultan invites the King of Tars to fight alongside him in converting his realm. It seems that the Sultan, in order to prove his Christian credentials, is employing a monolithic model of Saracen otherness (one that he and his fellow Saracens did not previously inhabit), against which he identifies his newly acquired Christian status and rejects all aspects of his previous Saracen identity. Defining this new religious identity in contrast to a monolithic Saracen otherness functions to shut down hybridity in *Tars*, re-establishing binary religious difference.

The most striking way in which the Sultan’s shift to a new religion and the restating of binary religious performance occurs during the baptism itself. As the Sultan steps ‘into the water [...] his skin colour, which was ugly and black / Became white through the grace of God’.⁷¹ Appearing before the Princess for the first time following his baptism, ‘she knew well [...] [that] he no longer believed in Mohammed, / Because of the change to his skin colour’.⁷² Unlike the sheikh, who is simultaneously white *and* ‘dark’, the Sultan’s changing skin colour reinforces the association of whiteness with Christianity, effectively shutting down any opportunity for hybridity: he cannot be a ‘black’ Christian. Prior to his conversion, the Sultan and other Saracens were constructed as comparable with Christians, in terms of customs and behaviour, but at the moment of baptism, as the Sultan’s blackness is re-emphasised, the binary distinction between Christian and Saracen is redrawn, with the previously Saracen Sultan now firmly on the Christian side. The nuancing of the Sultan’s Saracen identity before he converts could be read as an expectation of his

⁷⁰ ‘grette [...] vr ladi wiþ an aue’ (1090).

⁷¹ ‘in to þe watur [...] his colour, þat lodlich and blak was, / Hit bi-com feir þorw godes gras’ (833, 838-839). While the word ‘feir’ primarily connotes beauty, there are several reasons why I have chosen to gloss this as ‘white’. First, in Auchinleck, these lines read ‘his skin [...] Became completely white through the grace of God [His hide [...] Al white bicom þurch godes gras]’ (922-923). In this version of the romance, then, it is clear that the Sultan’s skin becomes white. Furthermore, later in the Vernon text, the Princess remarks on the ‘change [chaungynge]’ in the Sultan’s ‘colour [hewe]’ (855). Given this evidence and the fact that medieval Christian ideals of beauty were fundamentally linked with whiteness, as I have mentioned, it seems apparent that the meaning of ‘feir’ here is related to the Sultan’s skin colour, indicating the dual meanings of ‘feir’ effacing both the Sultan’s ugliness and his blackness: he is beautiful because he is white.

⁷² ‘wel heo wuste [...] on Mahoun he leeuede nouht, / Bi chaungynge of his hewe’ (853-855).

conversion to Christianity; Akbari suggests that ‘the scene of conversion [...] is anticipated in the initial depiction of the Saracen body’.⁷³ This both prepares the audience for his assimilation into Christian culture and underscores the specificity of his hybridity: no other Saracen converts in the same way or with the same effect.⁷⁴ For the sheikh hero too, as I have noted, hybrid ethnicity marks him as different from other, more monolithic easterners. In these romances, then, hybridity is a trait reserved for a few individuals.

Hybridity, in the way I use the term, works diversely in all three romances to open up and close down difference. In all cases, it is individualised; hybridity is defined in relation to those who are not hybrid, revealing the limited access most characters have to it. The initial effect of hybridity is also similar across the romances, as it works to minimise the effects of difference. However, because of the dissimilar ways in which difference is marked – by religion in *Tars*, and by ethnicity in *Possessed* and *Convenient Virgin* – the function of hybridity in facilitating the central erotic relationship varies. In *Tars*, the Sultan’s hybridity functions, ultimately, to facilitate his conversion to Christianity and, consequently, a successful relationship with the Princess. Hybridity is therefore temporary, serving its purpose and then disappearing as the romance reasserts religious binaries. Although the way religion is outwardly represented, in behaviour, dress and performance of custom, can be nuanced, this does not blur the binary difference between Christianity and Islam: there is no suggestion that the Sultan could be equally drawn between these two opposing religions. Yet, in *Convenient Virgin* and *Possessed*, where the sheikh is ethnically rather than religiously other, it is hybridity *itself* which facilitates the relationship between the sheikh and western heroine: these romances do not insist on ethnic binaries but celebrate a more permanent hybridity in a way which would not be possible if binary religious difference was foregrounded, as evidenced by *Tars*.

One important marker of identity is fabric, specifically fabric as clothing. Fabric plays a significant role in the construction of the sheikh romance east and mediates, I will argue, the ethnicity of the hero and heroine. As E. Jane Burns puts it, clothing

⁷³ Akbari, *Idols*, p. 166.

⁷⁴ Following his conversion, the Sultan insists that his subjects must also convert or otherwise be put to death, yet their experiences are given short shrift and there is no mention of any change in pigmentation.

can forge ‘sartorial bodies derived equally from fabric and from flesh, bodies that erode the ostensible line between artifice and nature’.⁷⁵ In other words, clothing has the power to create apparently new bodies and new ethnic identities. However, while critical attention has been paid to the clothing worn by the eastern sheikh hero, as I noted in Chapter 2, it is the effect of fabric on the identity of the western heroine which is of particular significance for my argument here. In the next part of the chapter, I consider more closely the function of fabric in *Possessed* and *Convenient Virgin*. I begin by examining how fabric is used in these romances, moving to focus on how clothing works to construct ethnic identity and its role in creating hybridity. The latter part of the section centres in particular on the effect of clothing on the ethnicity of the western heroine.

‘So This Was What a Desert Queen Looked Like’: Transformative Fabric in Sheikh Romance

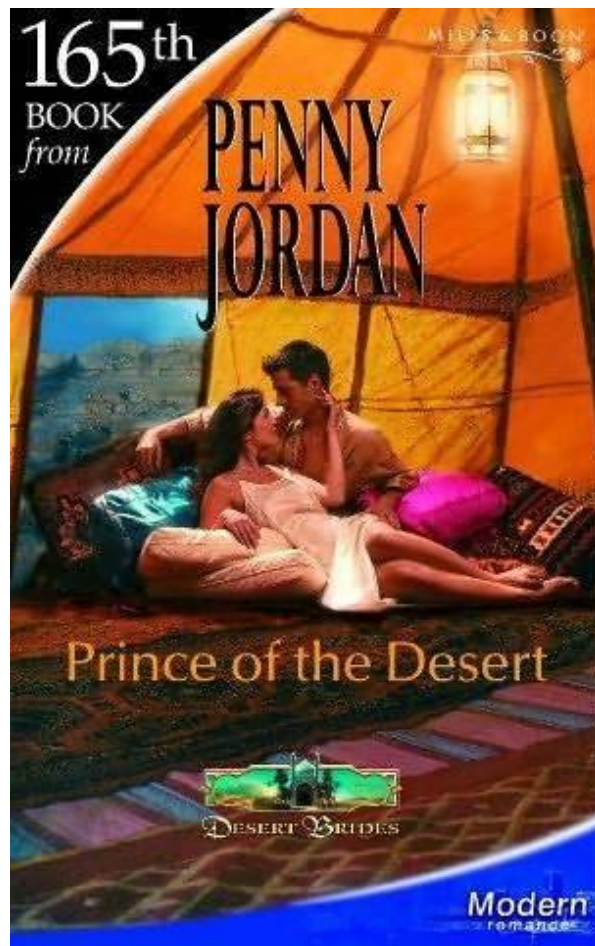
Fabric plays an important role in sheikh romance. Sheikh romances deploy fabric extensively to characterise the romance east, both on the covers and in the texts themselves. The use of fabric, in the form of carpets, cushions, clothing or bed sheets, as part of almost every cover image since 2005 reveals the importance placed on fabric as a signifier of the east in modern sheikh romance, following the long tradition of European Orientalist art. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Orientalist art regularly made use of fabric, particularly carpets and clothing, as symbols of the east, and this association is evident on the covers of sheikh romances.⁷⁶ Consider Figure 7, where the background is formed from two hanging carpets, framed at the top by further drapes. The colours of the bed sheets, which are almost certainly intended to be silk, a further association with the east, echo the colours in the carpets.

⁷⁵ E. Jane Burns, ed. ‘Why Textiles Make a Difference’, *Medieval Fabrications: Dress, Textiles, Clothwork, and Other Cultural Imaginings* (New York: Palgrave, 2004), p. 10.

⁷⁶ Fabric from North Africa and the Middle East, notably carpets and items of clothing, as well as jewellery and furniture, facilitated the emergence of what Roger Benjamin calls the ‘studio Orientalist’, who recreated an approximate east in Europe using these textile signifiers (*Orientalist Aesthetics: Art, Colonialism and French North Africa 1880-1930* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003]). See also Christine Peltre, *Orientalism in Art*, trans. John Goodman (New York: Abbeville Press, 1998); Nicholas Tromans ed., *The Lure of the East: British Orientalist Painting* (London: Tate Publishing, 2008). Taylor (pp. 1039-1040) and Bach (pp. 14-15) both note the similarities between Orientalist art and modern sheikh romance covers.

Figure 12 also foregrounds fabric. The couple recline on a mound of cushions: the floor is covered with carpets; the hero wears an embroidered tunic, reflecting the kind of eastern-style clothing worn in sheikh romances; and the scene takes place inside a tent where the couple are surrounded by eastern fabric. It also reinforces how cultural markers of the romance east have been displaced from the hero who, as I have examined, no longer wears robes or a headdress on the cover, to become signifiers of the romance east itself. While the sheikh's clothing does not normally connect him with the east, the fabric surrounding and, occasionally, covering him, does.

Figure 12: Cover of Penny Jordan, *Prince of the Desert* (2006)



Source: Harlequin Mills & Boon

The focus on fabric continues into the novels themselves. *Convenient Virgin* describes ‘richly patterned carpets’ and a magnificent space, ‘festooned with colourful Persian carpets echoing those covering the floor [...] deep sofas with tasselled cushions and a central pole from which was suspended a canopy of fabric for a ceiling’.⁷⁷ Fabric functions as more than decoration; in *Possessed*, fabric forms part of a traditional marriage ceremony. When Xander and Katrina marry in the Tuareg camp, a ‘length of silk fabric, so fine that it fluttered in the soft breeze’ is wrapped around both of their wrists as part of the ceremony, thereby visually displaying the binding vows in fabric.⁷⁸ This is represented as a traditional ‘Berber custom’; Xander explains that ‘by being bound together as they had been, they were now tied to one another in a way that had its roots deep in the tradition of his tribe’.⁷⁹

As well as forming a fundamental part of this eastern custom, fabric appears at significant moments in the development of the relationship, for example marriage and sex. Thus, Morgan’s wedding gown is described in great detail and, on their wedding night, its removal also merits extensive description. *Possessed* even suggests that fabric can erotically stand in for the hero:

The carpets covering the floor and ‘walls’ were exquisitely worked and far superior to anything she had seen in the shops she had visited. She touched one of them tentatively, stroking her fingertip along one of the branches and then down the thick trunk of its richly hued tree of life. The silky threads felt as warm as though they were a living, breathing entity. If she closed her eyes she could almost imagine...⁸⁰

The embroidered ‘trunk’ is clearly meant to symbolise the hero’s phallus and anticipates sexual interaction between the hero and heroine. It is striking that fabric should so clearly represent the hero’s body in this way. This is not uncommon in sheikh romances, as repeated references to the ‘matt satin gold’ or the ‘satin heat’ of the hero’s skin make clear.⁸¹ In *Convenient Virgin* the hero is described as having ‘skin that [...] felt like satin under [the heroine’s] hands’.⁸² The equivalence of the sheikh hero’s skin with fabric reinforces how both function as symbolic of the east.

⁷⁷ *Convenient Virgin*, pp. 47, 114.

⁷⁸ *Possessed*, p. 80.

⁷⁹ *Possessed*, p. 83.

⁸⁰ *Possessed*, p. 45.

⁸¹ *Possessed*, pp. 43, 73.

⁸² *Convenient Virgin*, p. 69.

Fabric is here positioned as at the very heart of traditional eastern culture, working as a signifier for it and for the sheikh hero.

Fabric connects the sheikh with the east, marking him as eastern. As I noted in Chapter 2, robes can serve to eroticise the sheikh hero, but they also work to *exoticise* him, highlighting his eastern ethnicity. Jarmakani posits that ‘the most obvious or salient way in which sheikhs are covertly racialised through cultural markers are in what amounts to a fetishisation of “Arabian” forms of cultural dress’.⁸³ Yet while wearing eastern clothing can serve to make the sheikh appear more eastern, he also wears western clothing that works to diminish his easternness and highlight hybridity:

Katrina was standing in the middle of the souk when she saw him. [...] He was standing on the other side of the narrow alleyway dressed in a traditional white *disha-dasha*, the sunlight filtering striking shards of light against the honey-coloured warmth of his skin, and glittering on the cruelly sharp-looking knife that was thrust into his belt.

[...] ‘He is from the Ayghar Tuareg Tribe’. [...] She knew a great deal about the nomad tribes of the Arabian desert and their history and it struck her sharply how much of an anomaly it was, both that a supposed Tuareg tribesman should go against centuries of tradition and reveal his face for the world to see, and additionally that a member of a tribe so well known for their indigo-dyed clothes that they were often referred to as ‘blue men’ should have such manicured hands that would not disgrace a millionaire businessman. [...] Behind her the door opened and a man stepped into the street. Tall and dark-haired, he was wearing European clothes – chinos and a linen shirt – but Katrina recognised him immediately, her eyes widening in surprise.

*The tribesman had become a European.*⁸⁴

Here, clothes mark the man; the sheikh hero becomes European *because of* his clothes, although even in western dress, Katrina still identifies Xander as a ‘tribesman’. This passage also reveals the extent to which Xander’s appearance more generally does not fully represent the heroine’s assumed appearance of the tribe. The incongruity of his ‘manicured hands’ marks a separation from depictions of ‘nomad tribes’ and, indeed, from those in the Tuareg camp; the heroine observes that ‘unlike Xander’s, [the tribe leader, El Khalid’s] nails were dirty and unkempt, the cuticles

⁸³ Jarmakani, ‘Desiring the Big Bad Blade’ p. 919.

⁸⁴ *Possessed*, pp. 5, 7, 8-9, my emphasis.

bitten and ragged'.⁸⁵ Thus, even when wearing Tuareg 'disguise' and despite the fact that 'his father did have some Tuareg blood', Xander cannot conceal his hybrid ethnicity from the heroine and his appearance here, predominantly signified through his clothing but also by his clean appearance more generally, functions to underscore the sheikh's ethnic hybridity.⁸⁶ However, it is not just the sheikh hero whose identity is mediated through fabric. The western heroine's ethnicity is, I argue, also affected by the clothing she wears.

As I argued in Chapter 2, in order to sustain a framework of binary gender difference, the western heroine performs eastern femininity, a large part of which involves wearing eastern clothing. In *Possessed* and *Convenient Virgin*, heroines wear very specific eastern clothing, drawn from fantasy imagery of the east, which erotically reveals the body underneath. In *Possessed*, Katrina repeatedly fantasises about erotic encounters with the hero in which fabric features prominently:

[The silk] was gossamer-fine and just the right shade of ice-blue for her own strawberry-blonde colouring [...]. In such a fabric her body could be tantalisingly semi-revealed by its gauzy layers, and she could let her hair down in a silken cloud as a man with golden lion eyes looked upon her...⁸⁷

Katrina woke abruptly from the wantonly erotic and symbolic dream she'd been having, in which she had been carried in the folds of a richly hued carpet into the tent of a powerful warrior who'd borne a heart-shaking resemblance to Xander [...]. She had presented herself to Xander, her body clad in diaphanous rainbow-coloured veils so sheer that her body had been openly visible through them. Her nipples had been painted with a soft gold paste, her sex lightly covered in a sheath of the transparent silk that had done far more to enhance its mystery than modestly protect it.⁸⁸

These extracts emphasise how the eroticism of fabric is largely contained in its ability to simultaneously conceal and reveal; the 'diaphanous', 'sheer' silk 'lightly' covers Katrina's body, allowing it to be 'tantalisingly semi-revealed'. The silks are so fine that her body is 'openly visible through them', yet the effect is one of enhanced mystery. Visual eroticism is also highlighted here, as the hero 'looked upon her' as she 'presented herself 'to him. This is the kind of clothing worn by the

⁸⁵ *Possessed*, p. 79.

⁸⁶ *Possessed*, p. 59.

⁸⁷ *Possessed*, p. 8. This passage also identifies eastern clothing as suiting the heroine, connecting the heroine more concretely with eastern fabric. This is again underscored by the sheikh's mother, who later tells Morgan: 'I think that amber shade is wonderful with your hair and eyes' (p. 98).

⁸⁸ *Possessed*, p. 91.

sexualised, Orientalised eastern woman who, I argued in Chapter 2, provides a model for the heroine's own feminisation. This kind of eastern clothing is, then, erotic, and serves to eroticise the heroine for the hero.

The heroine wears other kinds of clothing too. Although not typically 'eastern', luxurious, expensive designer clothes are a prominent signifier of belonging to the sheikh's wealthy Emirate world. Katrina is informed that 'Xander will of course establish accounts for you with the designers of your choice' and some designer clothing appears to have a similar erotic effect as the 'rainbow-coloured veils' she had earlier imagined:

the delicate fabric felt wonderful against her skin, whilst both the demi-cup bra and the minute low-waisted, short-cut briefs that clung seductively to her skin were a perfect fit, although they were a rather more sensual design than she would have chosen for herself. As she caught sight of her own reflection in the mirror the rounded shape of her breasts was enhanced by the bra, whilst the briefs emphasised the slender length of her legs and the curve of her bottom.⁸⁹

Clothing is eroticised here both tactilely – 'the delicate fabric felt wonderful against her skin' – and visually – 'she caught sight of her own reflection in the mirror'. This clothing is not specifically eastern, although silk is largely marked as an eastern fabric, but it does symbolise the eroticism inherent in the sheikh's world of luxury and exclusivity. This passage also indicates how designer underwear reacts differently with the heroine's body from eastern clothing. Here the clothing enhances and emphasises the heroine's body, meaning it is her body that is visually foregrounded, as opposed to the fabric itself, which seems to be more prominent when she wears eastern clothing, evident in the extract describing her fantasies above.

Yet, there are some types of eastern clothing that the western heroine is reluctant to wear. In *Possessed*, Xander tries to force Katrina to wear 'one of the all-enveloping black garments worn by women in public', stating: 'it will be expected by the women that you will dress as they do and by the men that you dress as my wife. Truly it is for your own protection that you must dress traditionally'.⁹⁰ The description of the robe marks its contrast with the 'diaphanous veils' and 'transparent silk' Katrina had

⁸⁹ *Possessed*, pp. 158, 140.

⁹⁰ *Possessed*, pp. 98, 100.

earlier imagined and indicates its association with the alternative model of virginal, submissive eastern femininity. The 'black garment [...] is 'all-enveloping' and awkward; indeed, before she rejects and removes the robe, 'it took Katrina several minutes to settle the all-encompassing folds of the robes [...] comfortably around her own slender person'.⁹¹ This eastern dress, then, represents the opposite of the sexualised femininity encapsulated in the veils and silks Katrina chooses for her fantasies; this is the dress of other eastern women in the camp, who remain unnamed and exist merely to indicate the contrast between themselves, as representatives of 'heavily veiled', non-sexual eastern femininity, and the western heroine, who represents eroticised eastern femininity whilst wearing revealing eastern clothing.⁹²

Certainly the robes seem to deny sexuality; Xander tries to persuade Katrina to wear the robe by pointing out its efficacy in dispersing unwanted sexual advances and Katrina, initially threatened by Xander's sexual advances, wished 'that she had the protection of the traditional black garments and veils, like those worn by the women she had seen within the camp, to take refuge behind'.⁹³ The tribeswomen's clothing indicates the particular charge of the 'all-enveloping black garment': the concealment of the woman underneath. While these two types of feminine eastern dress, revealing and concealing, are not directly transferrable (the heroine's donning of revealing clothing, for example, is limited to intimate situations), the heroine's acceptance or rejection of them in certain contexts is indicative of the gendered sartorial politics of the romance.

By presenting concealing traditional clothes as undesirable, sheikh romances engage with contemporary views of Islamic difference and the dominant western signifier of eastern dress: the veil. As the most visible symbol of Islam, the veil has become synonymous, in modern western media discourse, with the oppression of women and the rise of Islam.⁹⁴ The contrast between the concealing clothes of the Tuareg women and the revealing veils Katrina imagines is part of a western discourse which

⁹¹ *Possessed*, pp. 100-101.

⁹² *Possessed*, p. 80.

⁹³ *Possessed*, pp. 100, 66.

⁹⁴ This is indicative in France's 2011 banning of full face veils: anyone wearing a niqab or burqa faces a fine, or French citizenship lessons ('France Begins Ban on Niqab and Burqa', *Guardian.co.uk*, 11 Apr 2011, 8 Jul 2011 <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/apr/11/france-begins-burqa-niqab-ban>>. For a discussion of the 'headscarf controversy' in Britain see Christian Joppke, *Veil: Mirror of Identity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009), pp. 81-106.

constructs some eastern clothing as repressive for women.⁹⁵ The acceptance and rejection of different types of eastern clothing shows that the main distinction between them revolves around concealment and disclosure: heroines reject clothing which conceals, yet enjoy wearing clothing which reveals them to be erotic in certain situations. The heroine's denunciation of the black garment represents her effort to deny those aspects of the culture that she considers unacceptable, whilst her imagining of silk and 'diaphanous' veils is a simultaneous and paradoxical endorsement of an eastern culture rooted in the fantasy tradition of sheikh romance. By making specific sartorial choices, the western heroine dissociates herself from the kind of ethnic identity which is commonly perceived in the west to be oppressive, represented in concealing robes and veils, instead performing a role drawn from desert fantasy, defined by the erotic. The heroine's clothing choices thus disconnect her from the apparent cultural repression of certain types of eastern clothing.

The effect of the heroine's wearing of certain eastern clothing is more than just erotic; just as the sheikh's clothing seems to have an effect on his visible ethnicity, so too, I would like to suggest, does wearing eastern clothing affect the western heroine's ethnicity. Fabric, with its properties of cloaking and revelation, is able to mediate identity, being used as a statement of public identity, or as disguise. Crane has argued, in the context of medieval romance, that 'the concretely visible', i.e. clothing, 'is crucial to establishing identity'.⁹⁶ Crane's argument seems to bear out in modern sheikh romance, as wearing eastern clothing seems to give the western heroine a new identity as an eastern woman. Take, for example, this passage from *The Desert King's Pregnant Bride*, where the western heroine is assimilated into eastern culture through her dress:

⁹⁵ In both *Possessed* and *Convenient Virgin*, modernity can be claimed by the sheikh's desert nation through the exclusion of what is perceived in mainstream contemporary media to be restrictive clothing for women. This is also one of the few areas in sheikh romances where religion is overtly mentioned; in *An Arabian Marriage* the sheikh hero tells the heroine: 'Quamari women don't shroud themselves because we are not Muslim' (p. 79). Here, the hero directly connects the act of veiling with Islam and rejects both.

⁹⁶ Crane, *The Performance of Self*, p. 9.

The room was full of women, like brightly coloured birds in their traditional finery. He knew from their costume that they'd travelled far from their home in the mountains. [...] His gaze came to rest on a figure in amber silk.⁹⁷

The 'figure' in question is the western heroine who is here completely absorbed into the cultural codes of eastern ethnicity, symbolised in dress. Through the disguising effect of eastern fabric, this western heroine is here indistinguishable from the eastern women suggesting that she looks like an eastern woman herself.

The transmogrifying effect of clothing is also apparent in *Convenient Virgin*. The heroine, Morgan, is transformed head-to-toe through fabric, make-up and jewellery 'from an uptight PA with a chip on her shoulder and an aversion to men to a princess bride':

They styled her hair into lush glossy curls and dressed her in silken underwear, and then a slip so gossamer-thin as to be translucent. Over the top they wrapped a robe spun with golden thread, with hand stitched jewels in the panels at her neckline and wrists. It was a gown so beautiful it brought tears to her eyes as she stared at her reflection.

So this was what a desert queen looked like?⁹⁸

Through appearance, the heroine is changed into an eastern woman, from her hair, to her underwear, to her wrists and neck. She is literally 'wrapped' in eastern cloth, making her appear to be 'a desert queen'. Later, Taj gives Morgan a necklace 'like a pirate's treasure: a necklace of diamonds and precious stones from which was suspended a dozen or more drops of gems in more shapes and more colours than she'd ever seen in one piece of jewellery'.⁹⁹ She looks at her reflection in the mirror, and 'a stranger stared back at her'.¹⁰⁰ The heroine becomes a 'stranger' to herself, when wearing eastern jewellery and clothing. This echoes Morgan's earlier comments when she first meets the sheikh, who 'she knew [...] was a stranger'.¹⁰¹ By wearing eastern clothing, Morgan has apparently become as strange, as eastern, as the hero.

A secondary female character in this romance, Sapphire, the Australian wife of neighbouring ruler Sheikh Khaled Al Ateeq and the heroine of *Stolen by the Sheikh*,

⁹⁷ Annie West, *The Desert King's Pregnant Bride* (Richmond: Harlequin Mills & Boon, 2008), p. 146.

⁹⁸ *Convenient Virgin*, p. 104.

⁹⁹ *Convenient Virgin*, p. 123.

¹⁰⁰ *Convenient Virgin*, p. 124.

¹⁰¹ *Convenient Virgin*, p. 17.

functions as a reference point for the extent to which Morgan might eventually integrate into Jamalbad culture and the importance of clothing in effecting this transformation. On their first meeting, Sapphire is described as ‘a woman in a stylish blue abaya [who] burst through the crowd’, seemingly part of the ‘crowd of well-wishers’.¹⁰² As Sapphire leaves, Morgan reaches out a hand to her and ‘the woman in blue turned back’: Sapphire is here reduced to her identity as a woman among many, marked by her eastern clothing.¹⁰³ Later, it takes Morgan a long time ‘to track down the Australian woman in the sea of women chattering away in the banquet hall’, suggesting that despite her ‘large blue eyes’ and ‘dark-gold hair’ Sapphire blends in with the group of eastern women.¹⁰⁴ Sapphire’s integration is confirmed as she is represented, wearing a ‘cerulean abaya’, as part of this eastern society: ‘Sapphy and Khaled and all the other tribespeople were due to leave’.¹⁰⁵ Sapphire’s outward sartorial appearance thus serves to position her as one of the ‘tribespeople’. Sapphire acts as an indicator of how Morgan’s donning of eastern clothing might similarly lead to her apparent integration into Jamalbad culture.

Appearing outwardly eastern in dress can prompt further ways of integration for the heroine, including speaking the language, enjoying eastern food and drink and participating in customs, as well as learning about the history and culture of the country and taking on an official role as the sheikha.¹⁰⁶ Whilst Katrina had ‘learned Zuranese’ and is therefore able to communicate with Xander and other eastern characters, Morgan ‘could speak not a word of [the] language’.¹⁰⁷ Yet, she gradually adopts signifiers of eastern ethnicity, beginning with ‘desert queen’ clothing, then participating in cultural activities such as falcon hunting, archery and a historical visit to ‘the ruins of an ancient fortress’.¹⁰⁸ In the process, Morgan ‘started to feel at home in her new role [...] and with the assistance of a tutor she was making her first tentative steps into learning the language, so she could communicate with them on

¹⁰² *Convenient Virgin*, p. 109.

¹⁰³ *Convenient Virgin*, p. 110.

¹⁰⁴ *Convenient Virgin*, p. 128; Trish Morey, *Stolen by the Sheikh* (Richmond: Harlequin Mills & Boon, 2005), p. 9.

¹⁰⁵ *Convenient Virgin*, p. 150.

¹⁰⁶ The role of sheikha that Morgan has adopted was apparently reserved for an eastern woman, Abir, by the sheikh’s cousin, Nazir (*Convenient Virgin*, p. 146). Morgan thus fills a role intended for an eastern woman.

¹⁰⁷ *Possessed*, p. 22; *Convenient Virgin*, p. 104.

¹⁰⁸ *Convenient Virgin*, p. 145.

their own terms'.¹⁰⁹ Crucially, the sheikh hero even changes Morgan's name to make it more eastern, stating 'I will call you Murjanah: Murjanah is softer I think, and more feminine. In Arabic it means "small pearl". It suits you'.¹¹⁰ Morgan's renaming as 'Murjanah' functions to conceal and overwrite her western identity, indicating the extent to which aspects of the east can work to reinscribe ethnic or cultural identity.

Adopting elements of eastern identity can seem to signal a more substantial identification with the east.

Somehow the relaxed lifestyle of the desert kingdom had worked its way into her senses, unwinding her from that buttoned up PA she'd been and transforming her into someone who loved the freedom of the desert dress, freeing her from the support stockings to the feel of the desert wind in her hair.¹¹¹

Here, 'the relaxed lifestyle of the desert' prompts a more substantial, sensory shift for Morgan away from her previous western identity, represented by 'support stockings', to engage with a fantasy eastern identity, signalled in 'the freedom of the desert dress' and 'the feel of the desert wind in her hair'. It seems, then, that by displaying aspects of eastern ethnicity, most notably dress, language and custom, the western heroine can alter her ethnic identity.

However, even as western heroines appear to have assimilated into the east, they retain some signifiers of their western ethnic and cultural heritage. Although Sapphire has integrated into the desert community, she is still distinguishable by her 'large blue eyes' and 'dark-gold hair', which work to demarcate her appearance. Furthermore, that Morgan seeks Sapphire's advice on assimilating into desert life reminds us that at one time Sapphire herself was not so ethnically integrated. Sapphire's identity is thus more complex. For Morgan too, while she looks like a 'desert queen', her 'honey-blond hair' and 'hazel eyes' mark her as ethnically quite different from eastern women who might have expected to fulfil the role of sheikha.¹¹² Indeed, the contrast between Morgan and Joharah, the sheikh's eastern

¹⁰⁹ *Convenient Virgin*, p. 146.

¹¹⁰ *Convenient Virgin*, p. 59. Sapphire is also known by a different name in the east – 'Zafira' – although her anglicised forename is the name of an eastern jewel (*Convenient Virgin*, p. 109). In *Tars* the Sultan and his son both adopt new names when they are christened, indicating the link between names and ethnic identity.

¹¹¹ *Convenient Virgin*, p. 150.

¹¹² *Convenient Virgin*, pp. 12, 26.

ex-fiancée is highlighted: 'fair-skinned, with honey-blonde hair and a generous mouth, she [Morgan] looked nothing at all like Joharah'.¹¹³

As I have noted, in many sheikh romances, the reader is regularly reminded of the contrasting paleness of heroines in relation to the darker-skinned sheikh: a signifier of her non-eastern ethnicity. Similarly, while heroines embrace the culture of the east, learning the language and participating in local customs, they retain existing western attitudes, particularly towards traditions relating to marriage and the social position of women. In *Convenient Virgin*, the heroine's attitude towards arranged marriage differs from that of Nobilah, Taj's mother, who views marriage between two people who 'hardly know each other' not in the way Morgan does, as 'pre-historic', but as meaning that they 'will have an entire marriage to get to know one another'.¹¹⁴ So even as clothing, language and social position (as sheikha) can make the western heroine appear to be eastern, her skin colour and social values mark her as western. Her identity is thus constructed, like the sheikh's, from signifiers of both east and west.

The heroine's new body which, drawing on Burns is 'derived equally from fabric and from flesh', is not an eastern body, or a western body, but one drawn between the two; fabric and flesh, ethnicity and culture, east and west combine to create a new hybrid identity for the western heroine. At this point, the hero and heroine both seem to display hybrid ethnicity, similarly drawn from cultural markers of east and west. The effect of the heroine's ethnic hybridity, then, is to minimise difference between the hero and heroine, reinscribing their differences as sameness: what I term sameness in hybridity. The heroine's adoption of eastern clothing and aspects of the sheikh's culture serves to hybridise her, thereby facilitating her relationship with the sheikh hero which is now marked more by sameness (in hybridity) than by difference. Yet, it is worth noting that in the same way that hybridity is uniquely available to the sheikh hero, the heroine's hybrid ethnicity is similarly available only to her. Morgan's performance of hybrid ethnicity in the same moment that she appears to be a 'desert queen' simply works to emphasise that the only women who can become desert queens in these romances are western women dressed up in

¹¹³ *Convenient Virgin*, p. 13.

¹¹⁴ *Convenient Virgin*, p. 100.

eastern clothing. For the heroine too, then, hybrid ethnicity is something only available to her.

However, the heroine's performance of hybridity can also lead to anxiety, specifically related to progeny. When she wears eastern clothing, or participates in eastern traditions, the transforming effect to her ethnic identity is external, rather than internal. Her appearance as hybrid could thus function as a temporary disguise, rather than as an indication of a permanent, internal change. The ethnic sameness between hero and heroine might not, then, be as stable as it first appears. The concern over identity is revealed in the way that these romances deal with the production of children from cross-cultural relationships. A romance clearly concerned with offspring and with disguise is *Tars*. In the final parts of this chapter I examine more closely the disguising effect of fabric on identity in *Tars*, and consider the consequences of such a disguise for reproduction and inheritance in all three romances.

‘Dressed / As Though She Were Saracen’: Disguising Religion in *The King of Tars*

The use of clothing to mark religious identity was an established practice in the Middle Ages, encoded in contemporary legal regulation of Saracens and Jews. These regulations addressed concerns about cross-religious contact and sanctioned easy, visual identification of different religious groups through clothing in order to limit contact between those of different faiths. It was with the advent of the Crusades and the increasing European settlement of the Levant in the early twelfth century that restrictions were put in place to distinguish between Christians and Saracens. The Council of Nablus (1120), which took place in Jerusalem, decreed that Muslims were not permitted to wear the Frankish dress of western Europeans and the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), called in response to the defeats of the Fourth Crusade, declared that Muslims were required to wear beards and have specific haircuts and dress.¹¹⁵ Clearly, existing differences of skin colour, diet, and language were not

¹¹⁵ James, A. Brundage, ‘Prostitution, Miscegenation and Sexual Purity in the First Crusade’, *Crusade and Settlement*, ed. Peter W. Edbury (Cardiff: University College Cardiff Press, 1995), p. 61.

considered sufficient to differentiate adequately between Christians and Saracens: an additional visual indicator was required. While these regulations were primarily concerned with areas in which there was a large amount of contact between those of different religious groups, the use of clothing as a marker of religion was clearly an idea which held some currency in late medieval England, as the romance evidence suggests.¹¹⁶ While no Middle English romance overtly refers to such regulations, the association of certain types of clothing with particular religions is evident in romance, as I will show. Differences between Christians and Saracens can thus be expressed in clothing choices.

Yet, the privileging of sartorial appearance as a marker of religious identity means that clothing can be deployed as disguise. Cohen documents an example of a group of medieval Muslims who circumvented the blockade of Acre by pretending to be Christians; they shaved their beards, donned western clothing and placed pigs on their ships, thereby ‘distilling the visible essence of Christianity into sartorial choice, grooming and food consumption’.¹¹⁷ The Muslims successfully disguised themselves as Christian using, among other indicators, clothing. The use of clothing as disguise to project a false religion is evident in the Middle English romance *Octavian*. In this romance, the Christian hero’s father, Clement, infiltrates the Saracen Sultan’s camp by ‘dressing himself / As a foul companion [...] As though he were a Saracen’.¹¹⁸ These examples indicate how clothing as a marker of identity is both more rigid, in

¹¹⁶ Indeed, while not related to ethnicity, sumptuary laws were introduced in fourteenth-century England and permitted certain clothing, such as silk and furs, to be worn only by those of a particular rank to alleviate the fear of people dressing above their social station (see Raymond Van Uytven, ‘Showing Off One’s Rank in the Middle Ages’, *Showing Status: Representation of Social Positions in the Late Middle Ages*, ed. Wim Blockmans and Antheun Janse [Turnhout: Brepols, 1999], pp. 17-34). The first of these appeared in 1337, prohibiting the wearing of fur amongst those of lower status (Alan Hunt, *Governance of the Consuming Passions: A History of Sumptuary Law* [New York: St Martin’s Press, 1996], p. 299). The second piece of sumptuary legislation, ‘Ordinance of New Apparel’, was introduced in 1363 and presented much more detailed rules on the kind of clothing which could be worn by different social groups; silk was restricted to the rank of esquire or above (Negley B. Harte, ‘Silk and Sumptuary Legislation in England’, *La Seta in Europa Secc. XIII-XX, Atti della ‘Venticquattresima Settimana di Studi’ 4-9 maggio 1992* [Florence: Le Monnier, 1993], p. 804; see also Hunt, pp. 303-305). Although this legislation was repealed the following year, as Hunt notes (p. 305), interest in sumptuary law did not wane, and in 1378 Parliament once again petitioned the Crown for a sumptuary statute, indicating the continued importance attached to fabric as a mediator of social identity. These sumptuary laws thus paralleled the similar laws which regulated ethnicity.

¹¹⁷ Cohen, ‘On Saracen Enjoyment’, pp. 18, 22.

¹¹⁸ Clement ‘hymselfe dyght / As an onfrely feere; [...] A Sarsyn as thogh he were’ (Frances McSparran, ed. *Octovian*, Early English Text Society 289 [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986], 1442-1443, 1446).

that certain clothing can indicate a particular religious affiliation, and less stable, as clothes can conceal an underlying religious identity. Cohen argues, writing about a twelfth-century French romance, *Aliscans*, in which the hero blackens his face to disguise as a Saracen, the fact ‘that race can be performed, that dominant representations and the bodies grouped beneath them do not necessary coincide, is dangerous knowledge which can topple whole epistemological systems’.¹¹⁹

The disguising effect of eastern clothing is particularly evident in *Tars*. Upon her arrival in Damascus, ‘[the Princess] was dressed in expensive clothing / As though she were heathen [Saracen]’.¹²⁰ These lines from Vernon emphasise the transforming effect of clothing to a much greater extent than the same lines in the Auchinleck version of *Tars*, where the Princess ‘was dressed / According to the fashion of heathen [Saracen] women’.¹²¹ Not only does the Vernon text of *Tars* indicate the power of certain types of clothing to mediate religious identity, but it also reveals how easily clothing can change the outward display of religious affiliation. The Princess of Tars’ donning of Saracen clothing serves to make her appear outwardly Saracen; clothing can make her look ‘as though she were heathen [Saracen]’. That clothing is central to the Sultan’s image of the Princess is evident from his repeated expressions of a desire to dress her. In his marriage request to the King of Tars, the Sultan says he will ‘clothe’ the Princess in ‘fine cloth’.¹²² Later, the Sultan repeats his intention, explaining to his gathered ‘men’ that he had proposed to dress the Princess ‘in costly clothing’.¹²³ From the very beginning of the romance, then, attention is paid to clothing and the effect of wearing certain types of dress.

The Princess’ outward Saracen identity is enhanced by her performance of Saracen religious rites. She is required to convert from Christianity before the Sultan will marry her, and her conversion is described as follows:

The maiden replied in a joyful mood
To the Sultan, as you may hear:
‘Sir, I will cause you no displeasure:
Teach me about your customs,
And thus will I make my prayers,

¹¹⁹ Cohen, ‘On Saracen Enjoyment’, p. 123.

¹²⁰ ‘wiþ riche cloþes heo was clede / Heþene as þau3 heo ware’ (353-354).

¹²¹ ‘was cladde, / As heþpen wiman ware’ (380-381).

¹²² ‘cloþe in palle’ (29).

¹²³ ‘lordynges’ (115); ‘in worþli wede’ (119).

And believe in your gods!
 To Tirmagaunt¹²⁴ I will devote myself
 And I will forsake Jesus Christ
 Who made Adam and Eve,
 And serve you, sir, according to your will,
 Early and late, loudly and quietly,
 In the morning and also in the evening'.¹²⁵

The Princess converts 'in a joyful mood', promising the Sultan 'no displeasure' and declaring, without qualifier or hesitation, 'thus will I make my prayers, / And believe in your gods!'¹²⁶ Her conversion is later made even more convincing, as 'when she had learned *her* [Saracen] customs, / She spoke them clearly and aloud', suggesting that these are her laws and that she is ostensibly Saracen.¹²⁷ Here, the Princess' conversion has been so credible that she is considered by the Sultan to be a Saracen; the Sultan 'believed [...] night and day, / [That] she believed in his [Saracen] religion', although the text is clear to state that 'she did not forsake Christ'.¹²⁸ This performance of Saracen religious custom, along with her adoption of clothing which makes her look heathen, marks the Princess visually and performatively as a Saracen, creating a disjunction between her external Saracen appearance and her internal Christianity.

The heroine's performance is, at first, convincing for the Sultan, who marries her 'according to the customs of his [Saracen] faith' and in 'just three months [...] [the Princess] was pregnant'.¹²⁹ The Sultan is happy to consummate the marriage and conceive children with the Princess because he thinks she has converted and that

¹²⁴ A fictitious deity supposedly worshipped by Muslims ('Termagaunt', *Middle English Dictionary* 30 May 2012 <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/med>).

¹²⁵ 'Þe mayden onswerde wiþ glad chere / To þe soudan, as 3e may heere: / "Sire, i nul þe no þing greue: / Tel me, which is 3oure maneere, / So schal i make my preyere, / And on 3or goddes leue! / To Tirmagaunt i chul me take / And Jesu Crist i chul forsake / Þat made Adam and Eue, / And serue þe, sire, at þi wille, / Erli and late, loud and stille, / A morwe and eke an eue"' (451-462).

¹²⁶ Compare this with the same statement in Auchinleck, where the Princess declares: '[I] will make my prayers [to the Saracen gods], / *When* I believe in them! [[I] schal make mi preiere, / *When* ich on hem bileue!]' (482-483, my emphasis). Auchinleck thus offers something of a get-out clause in her conversion: she promises to pray *when* she believes suggesting, by extension, that she may never believe.

¹²⁷ 'whon þat heo *hire* lawes couþe, / Heo seide hem openly wiþ mouþe' (475-476, my emphasis). Auchinleck does not indicate any possession here, reading: 'though she had learned all the laws [þei sche al þe laws couþe]' (502).

¹²⁸ 'wende [...] niht and day, / [That] heo hedde ileeued on his [Saracen] lay' (481-482); 'Crist for-3at heo nouht' (477).

¹²⁹ 'In þe maner of his [Saracen] lay' (521); 'bot moneþus þre [...] [the Princess] was grete wiþ childe' (524-525).

theirs is a religiously aligned union. While the audience knows that the Princess has not really converted, the Sultan is convinced by her religious performance. But, the Sultan is to discover that this apparent sameness is not all it seems when, a few months later, the Princess gives birth to their child:

And when the child was born,
Anguished was the midwife who had delivered.
For [the child] had no limbs,
But was formed as a lump of flesh,
It lay before her in the room,
Bloodless and boneless.
The Princess was anguished, as though she would die,
It had neither a nose nor eyes,
But lay as still as a stone.¹³⁰

The lump-child is indefinable, embodying, according to Calkin, ‘a monstrous indeterminacy created by the loss of defining cultural borders’.¹³¹ The lump-child is the product of two incompatible, competing religions and thus has no defined religious identity. Calkin contends that the lump-child is provocative precisely because its lack of definition insists that cross-religious intercourse signals the end of the ability to differentiate cultural groups and inheritances: ‘religious identity can no longer be clearly discerned, and miscategorisation occurs’.¹³² In this way, the lump-child is the inevitable result of cross-religious sexual intercourse between a Christian and a Saracen.

However, I want to argue that the lump-child also functions as a manifestation of the heroine’s own religious disjunction: her unaligned internal and external religious identities. Regulations such as those of Nablus, which required those of certain faiths to wear specific clothing, highlight the importance of coordinating inward and outward religious identity. While her sartorial and linguistic performance define her as Saracen, the Princess privately maintains her Christianity: it is only her outward appearance which is Saracen. The Princess’ disjunctive religious identity is thus constructed from both Christian and Saracen signifiers, demonstrating a religious

¹³⁰ ‘And whon þe child was ibore, / Wo was þe midwyf þer fore. / For lymes hedde hit non, / But as a roonde of flesch icore, / In chaumbre lay hire bi fore, / Wiþ outen blod or bon. / Þe ladi was wo, as heo wolde dye, / Hit hedde nouþer neose nor ei3e, / But lay stille as a ston’ (535-543).

¹³¹ Calkin, *Saracens*, p. 118.

¹³² Calkin, ‘Marking Religion on the Body: Saracens, Categorization, and the *King of Tars*’, *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 104.2 (2005): 224.

hybridity which, represented in the body of the lump-child, is deeply troubling. Calkin argues that ‘given [...] assertions about the permeability of the boundaries between the body, its clothing, and its cultural identities’, the Princess of Tars’ enthusiastic conversion and wearing of Saracen clothes cannot be taken lightly; ‘it is very difficult to maintain the borders between Christian and Saracen when the distinctions are somewhat fuzzy and when one is fully immersed in the Saracen world’.¹³³ In other words, because she performs so effectively as a Saracen, the Princess is no longer fully Christian, and her continued internal adherence to Christianity means that she is not really Saracen either. The Princess is both Christian (internally) *and* Saracen (externally), meaning that she is effectively religiously hybrid in a way that the Sultan never is.

But instead of hybridity functioning, as it does for the heroine of sheikh romance, to allow her to belong to both east and west, for the Princess it serves to loosen her adherence to either religion: because she is not fully (internally and externally) one religion or the other she is, I contend, neither. The Princess’ hybridity, her lack of a single religious identity, has been transferred to her child, manifested in its *lack* of religious markers. That the Princess’ hybridity functions to slacken her adherence to either religion rather than allow her to belong to both is clear from Calkin’s observation that some analogues of *Tars* display a child who is half black and half white.¹³⁴ Such a child would be equally drawn between Christian and Saracen, indicative of a hybridity that permits simultaneous adherence to both religions at once. Yet, the child in the Middle English *Tars* does not display such a hybridity: because the Princess is neither fully Christian nor fully Saracen, the lump-child has no religious identity.

Hybridity, here, is dangerous. After seeing the child, the Sultan realises that the Princess has not really converted and immediately blames her, stating: ‘this child, which has been born, [...] it is lost, / Because of your false beliefs’.¹³⁵ This is the central moment of anxiety in the romance; the moment when the Sultan realises that

¹³³ Calkin, ‘Marking Religion on the Body’, p. 224; Calkin, *Saracens*, p. 112.

¹³⁴ Calkin, *Saracens*, p. 115. On analogues of *Tars* see Lillian H. Hornstein, ‘New Analogues to the *King of Tars*’, *Modern Language Review* 36 (1941): 433-422; Hornstein, ‘The Historical Background of the *King of Tars*’; and Robert J. Geist, ‘On the Genesis of the *King of Tars*’, *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 42 (1943): 260-268.

¹³⁵ ‘þis childe, þat is ibore, [...] hit is forlore, / Þorw þi false by-leeue’ (550-552).

the Princess' outward Saracen identity has been a disguise and that instead of religious sameness, it is religious difference which has defined their relationship.

'Is [This Child] Not Mine, That I Created?': Lineage and Miscegenation

The reason that the lump-child is so troubling is due to the emphasis on lineage and inheritance in *Tars*. The need to secure an heir and the potentially disastrous consequences of conceiving with the wrong person are acute in Middle English romance; Angela Florschuetz posits that 'Middle English popular romances and related genres almost obsessively return to the problems and vicissitudes of producing and retaining viable heirs to continue valued bloodlines'.¹³⁶ Established themes of reclaiming lost titles or inheritance (for example in *Bevis*), searching for missing children (as in *Octavian*) and upward social mobility (evident in *Guy of Warwick*) indicate the importance of ensuring lineage.¹³⁷ As Robert Bartlett observes, 'this was a world in which blood and descent were seen as fundamental' and this was reflected in romance: Oren Falk argues that 'a concern with progeny was central to fourteenth-century political thinking, in the realms of both romance and reality'.¹³⁸ *Tars* itself emphasises lineage; the Princess of Tars is introduced near the start of the romance as the 'rightful heir' to her parents' kingdom.¹³⁹ Furthermore, the Princess is often referred to as a 'daughter' in the Vernon text, emphasising her role within a family structure and highlighting what is at stake in her marriage to the Sultan: she is, as far as we know, her parents' only heir.¹⁴⁰ *Tars* thus anticipates and heightens the anxiety of the lump-child's disruptive appearance by foregrounding the importance of lineage, making the monstrous emergence of the first heir all the more devastating.

¹³⁶ Angela Florschuetz, 'Women's Secrets: Childbirth, Pollution, and Purification in Northern *Octavian*', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 30 (2008): 236, n.2.

¹³⁷ For more on social mobility in Middle English romance see Harriet Hudson, 'Middle English Popular Romances: The Manuscript Evidence', *Manuscripta* 28.2 (1984): pp. 67-78.

¹³⁸ Bartlett, p. 44; Oren Falk, 'The Son of Orfeo: Kingship and Compromise in a Middle English Romance', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 30.2 (2000): 248.

¹³⁹ 'heore rihte heir' (11).

¹⁴⁰ 'dou3ter' (10).

The emphasis on ensuring lineage in Middle English romance co-exists with the view that ‘inter-faith sexual and marital relations [...] contravened the separation of various religions’.¹⁴¹ This was considered so serious that it has been argued that regulations which sought to distinguish visually between Christian, Saracen and Jew were intended primarily to prevent sexual relations between different religions. James A. Brundage suggests that the conventions of Nablus sought specifically to discourage sexual encounters between Latin Christians and local peoples loyal to Islam.¹⁴² This was reflected in heavy punishments for those convicted of having sex with someone of a different religion; the Council of Nablus pronounced that male Saracens who married Latin women and Latin men found guilty of sex with Saracen women should be castrated, and that the Saracen women should have their noses cut off.¹⁴³ Heroes and heroines in Middle English romance must, then, ensure that they marry someone of the same religion.

The main concern in the Middle Ages about inter-faith marriage and sexual relations between Christians and those of different religions, was miscegenation. The term ‘miscegenation’, coined in 1864, was first used extensively in the United States after the Civil War where it referred specifically to cross-racial sexual relationships.¹⁴⁴ Since the 1980s medievalists have appropriated the term to refer to sexual encounters between those of different religions. Brundage, for example, defines miscegenation as ‘interbreeding between a Christian and a non-Christian’.¹⁴⁵ David Nirenburg similarly narrows the term in his study of southern France and Aragon in the fourteenth century to reflect what he calls ‘medieval miscegenation’, which he also draws along religious lines, rather than necessarily those of skin colour.¹⁴⁶ Several have considered relations between those of different religions in medieval Spain in terms of miscegenation, including David Hanlon, Bruce Rosenstock and Kinoshita, whose analysis of the medieval French romances *Floire et Blancheflor* and *La fille du comte de Pontieu* reworks the term as ‘MiscegeNation’, alluding to Homi Bhabha,

¹⁴¹ Calkin, ‘Marking Religion on the Body’, p. 225.

¹⁴² See Brundage, ‘Prostitution, Miscegenation and Sexual Purity’, p. 61.

¹⁴³ James, A. Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 195, 207.

¹⁴⁴ See Elise Lemire, *‘Miscegenation’: Making Race in America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002).

¹⁴⁵ Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society*, pp. 207, 129.

¹⁴⁶ David Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence: Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), p. 129, n. 7.

linking religious identity with genealogy and national identity.¹⁴⁷ For the purposes of this study, I take miscegenation to denote procreation between people of different religious identities in Middle English romance and those from different ethnicities in modern sheikh romance.

Concerns about miscegenation, rooted in religious difference, are evident in *Tars*. The Sultan was aware of the risks of a sexual union between different religions when he declared that he would not consummate his marriage before the Princess had converted.

A magnificent bed was prepared
For that noble maiden.
When it had been made ready,
The Sultan would not approach it,
Not for any friend or enemy;
Until he could force that maiden
To believe in his false religion,
[.....]
A Christian man would be completely unwilling
To have sex with a heathen [Saracen] woman,
Who believed in a false religion;
And just as unwilling was that Sultan
To take that maiden [as his lover]¹⁴⁸

The Sultan would not even approach the Princess' bed for fear of her religious difference, underscoring that the specific fear here is rooted in the anticipation of what might result from such a union. The lump-child is the terrible product of the couple's forbidden intercourse. Procreation is thus at the centre of the Sultan's opposition to a cross-religious relationship.¹⁴⁹ The Sultan's declaration makes clear

¹⁴⁷ David Hanlon, 'Islam and Stereotypical Discourse in Medieval Castile and León', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 30.3 (2000): 479-504; Bruce Rosenstock, 'Alonso de Cartagena: Nation, Miscegenation, and the Jew in Late-Medieval Castile', *Exemplaria* 12.1 (2000): 185-204; Kinoshita, *Medieval Boundaries*, pp. 176-199.

¹⁴⁸ 'A riche bed þer was idiht / For þat maiden hende. / Whon hit was al redi wrouht, / Þe soudan nolde þerin come nouht, / For fo ne for frende; / But he mihte make þat may / To leeuē vpon his false lay, [...] Ful loþ were a cristene mon, / To ligge bi an heþene wommon, / Þat leeuēde on false lawe; / And as loþ was þulke soudan, / Þulke maiden for to tan' (371-377, 379-383).

¹⁴⁹ Compare the lines in Vernon – 'A Christian man would be completely unwilling / To have sex with a heathen [Saracen] woman' – with the parallel lines in Auchinleck: 'A Christian man would be extremely unwilling / To marry a heathen [Saracen] woman [Wel loþe was a cristenman, / To wedde an heþen woman]' (406-407, my emphasis). While marriage does carry the connotation of sexual interaction, Vernon here makes much clearer that it is sexual contact between Christians and Saracens which is undesirable.

that the concern, when having sex with someone of a different religion, is the disruption this may cause to any potential issue.

The anxiety that the lump-child causes is about lineage. The Sultan attempts to restore the child by praying to his Saracen gods for ‘so long, that he became hoarse’ and baptising the child according to his religion.¹⁵⁰ But the child remains a lump of flesh. The Princess then suggests trying to baptise the child as a Christian, upon which the child is miraculously cured, and ‘had both limbs and a face’.¹⁵¹ The lump-child now has a defined Christian identity and is no longer between religions. This also makes clear the romance’s privileging of Christianity, in that defined identity can only be imagined within Christianity. Yet at this point, the heroine deliberately plays on the Sultan’s fears of losing his successor. The Sultan tells her: ‘my love / Now am I incredibly glad / No man could ever be happier’, to which the heroine replies: ‘yes, sire [...] by Saint Katherine,¹⁵² / If even one half of the child were yours, / Then might you feel happiness’.¹⁵³ The Sultan responds: ‘lady [...] how is that? / Is [this child] not mine, that I created?’, to which the heroine answers: ‘no, sir [...] / Unless you were a Christian, as he is, / You have no part thereof, in truth, / Neither of the child nor of me’.¹⁵⁴

Gilbert has pointed out that ‘this is not a question of biology: [...] the paternity lacking pertains not to the Sultan’s acknowledged physical fatherhood but to his right to be named as the child’s father’, and this can only occur within Christianity.¹⁵⁵ As the Sultan remains a Saracen, whereas both his wife and son are now Christian, he cannot ensure his lineage: he has effectively lost a wife and a child. Calkin argues that the child’s conversion marks him as belonging only to one Christian parent; by claiming the child as Christian, the heroine denies the Sultan’s capacity to secure a

¹⁵⁰ ‘so longe, þat he wox al hos’ (593).

¹⁵¹ ‘hedde boþe lymes and fas’ (734).

¹⁵² This reference to the virgin martyr Katherine is unique to the later versions of *Tars*: in Auchinleck, the Princess exhorts ‘saint Martin [seyn Martin]’ (802). The cult of St Katherine of Alexandria was prominent in the religious landscape of late fourteenth-century England, as evidenced in her inclusion in the Vernon and Simeon texts of *Tars*. For more on Katherine in late medieval England see Katherine J. Lewis, *The Cult of St Katherine of Alexandria in Late Medieval England* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2000).

¹⁵³ ‘lemmon myn, / Icham nou glad wel a-fyn / Mai no mon bliþur be’ (763-765); ‘3e, sire [...] be seint Katerin, / 3if haluendel þe child were þyn, / Þen miht 3e gladnes se’ (766-768).

¹⁵⁴ ‘dame [...] hou is þat? / Nis hit not myn, þat ich bi3at?’ (769-770); ‘no, sire [...] / Bot þou weore cristne, as hit is, / Þou nast no part þer of, i-wis, / Nouþer of child ne of me’ (771-774).

¹⁵⁵ Gilbert, ‘Putting the Pulp into Fiction’, p. 108.

lineage, moving towards a more binary construction of difference in which the Sultan cannot exist as a parent unless he too converts.¹⁵⁶ The Sultan thus has to be baptised as Christian in order to protect his lineage for if he does not, not ‘even one half of the child’ would be his.

Connecting this to anxieties about cultural lineage, Calkin observes that ‘with firm adhesion to one sociocultural identity and category, the lump acquires a clear physical form. A distinct religious identity or category thus results in biological determinacy and intelligibility’.¹⁵⁷ At this point, the heroine’s hybridity is also broken down, as she is no longer pretending to be Saracen, therefore no longer experiences a disjunction between her internal and external religious identity. The effect of miscegenation in *Tars*, then, is to deny the Sultan his family lineage. Religious boundaries have been redrawn and now serve to exclude the Sultan from any claim to his family and to his inheritance. *Tars* thus shuts down the possibility of inter-religious existence, drawing a line between Christian and Saracen and only allowing for a productive Christian patrilineage.

I turn, with the anxiety of miscegenation in mind, to modern sheikh romance. In the same way that inheritance and lineage are central to many Middle English romances, so too do they play a prominent role in sheikh romance. The romance east is regularly constructed as a locus of family values. Teo notes ‘western perceptions of the strength of family ties in Arab countries’, a claim supported by repeated reference to the extended families of Taj and Xander in *Convenient Virgin* and *Possessed*.¹⁵⁸ The focus on the sheikh’s family relationships is underscored by contrast with the heroine’s estrangement from her own family, a common feature of modern popular romance.¹⁵⁹ In *Convenient Virgin*, Morgan feels she has been ‘wrenched’ from her family which consists solely of her sister, brother-in-law and niece.¹⁶⁰ The sheikh’s family, on the other hand, is extensive, and their wedding is

¹⁵⁶ Calkin, *Saracens*, p. 124.

¹⁵⁷ Calkin, ‘Marking Religion on the Body’, p. 230.

¹⁵⁸ Teo, ‘Orientalism and Mass Market Romance’, p. 256.

¹⁵⁹ Geraldine Finn, ‘Women, Fantasy, and Popular Culture: The Wonderful World of Harlequin Romance’, *Popular Cultures and Political Practices*, ed. Richard Gruneau (Toronto: Garamond Press, 1988), p. 203; David Margolies, ‘Mills & Boon: Guilt Without Sex’, *Red Letters* 14 (1982-1983): 10.

¹⁶⁰ *Convenient Virgin*, p. 140.

celebrated with a huge gathering of ‘families and clans’.¹⁶¹ The emphasis on family ties in the romance east is figured as desirable for the western heroine. Morgan’s sister observes that she is ‘obviously desperate to have [her] own family’ and in *Possessed*, Katrina’s parents had died when she was seventeen, leaving her an orphan ‘with no other family’ and ‘with an aching need for someone to love her, someone to complete her’.¹⁶² A place where family values are endorsed and prized is thus appealing.

Yet this emphasis on family and lineage can also be problematic. Concerns over the lack of an heir are often made public; Taj’s cousin Nazir tells ‘the council members he believes Jamalbad’s future cannot be assured unless there is solid provision for the future. Unless there is an heir’.¹⁶³ Nazir conveniently proposes his own daughter, Abir, as a potential bride, also indicating the kind of woman considered suitable; as the sheikh’s secretary, Kamil, puts it: ‘you cannot marry just anyone. The bride of a ruler of Jamalbad must be pure of mind and body’.¹⁶⁴ In other words, not the kind of western woman the sheikh’s secretary imagines, as he remarks: ‘have you not seen the women on the beach? [...] I am not sure that the council would approve of such a queen’.¹⁶⁵ *Possessed* indicates exactly what is at stake in intercourse between a hero and heroine as it ‘drew from him not only his orgasm, but the seed of life itself’.¹⁶⁶ So in terms of securing lineage, the stakes are high.

Miscegenation played a significant part in early sheikh romances, including *The Sheik*. Gargano notes: ‘Hull’s numerous novels of the desert are haunted by the fear of “miscegenation,” and she subjects her plots to considerable strain in order to “guard” her heroines from interracial marriage’.¹⁶⁷ In her analysis of *The Sheik*, Teo posits that ‘much of the novel’s shocking sexual titillation arises from overt miscegenation’ and that ‘the white woman’s irresistible and insatiable desire for the black or brown-skinned native was European colonial culture’s darkest fantasy and

¹⁶¹ *Convenient Virgin*, p. 146.

¹⁶² *Possessed*, p. 22.

¹⁶³ *Convenient Virgin*, p. 9.

¹⁶⁴ *Convenient Virgin*, p. 12.

¹⁶⁵ *Convenient Virgin*, p. 12.

¹⁶⁶ *Possessed*, p. 177.

¹⁶⁷ Gargano, p. 172.

fear, exceeded only by the horror of her hybrid progeny'.¹⁶⁸ Yet, some critics have argued that miscegenation is no longer an issue in modern sheikh romances.¹⁶⁹

Teo argues that 'unlike sheikh novels of the 1920s, issues of religious difference, race, skin colour, hybridity and miscegenation scarcely matter' in modern Australian-published sheikh romances of the 1990s.¹⁷⁰ Whereas in *The Sheik* the establishment of a European lineage for the hero Ahmed was necessary to allay fears of miscegenation, Teo contends that 'the continuing plot device of western parentage and hybridity matter [in modern novels] only insofar as they provide enough common cultural ground and sufficient western tendencies to let the heroine hope that her sheikh may indeed be redeemed to become more "western"'.¹⁷¹ However, I contend that there is evidence to suggest that some sheikh romances are still concerned with miscegenation and that echoing the concerns of *Tars*, the anxiety surrounding miscegenation in sheikh romances is similarly linked to fears of subsequent loss of lineage. I would like to suggest that in modern romances, miscegenation does not necessarily manifest itself in a fear of the hybrid progeny, as it does in *Tars*, but in the loss of patrilineage that it represents.

At first, it seems that miscegenation is not an issue in either *Possessed* or *Convenient Virgin*. As I have already argued, heroines develop an ethnically hybrid identity as they adopt eastern signifiers such as dress. Just as, in *Tars*, the Princess appears to be Saracen and therefore religiously the same following her conversion, so too do the western heroines of *Convenient Virgin* and *Possessed* seem to display ethnic sameness in their hybrid identities. The sheikh's concern, therefore, about selecting a wife who is appropriately ethnically similar is allayed, as the heroine seems to offer such a sameness in her own apparent ethnic hybridity. Consequently, the hero and heroine sleep together and, as the couple rarely use contraception, potentially conceive a child.

On their wedding night, Morgan wears eastern clothing, participates in eastern customs, and fulfils the role of sheikha. Taj simultaneously highlights the importance

¹⁶⁸ Teo, 'Orientalism and Mass Market Romance', pp. 246, 247.

¹⁶⁹ On miscegenation in modern romance in the context of Native American culture see Stephanie Wardrop, 'Last of the Red Hot Mohicans: Miscegenation in the Popular American Romance', *MELUS* 22.2 (1997): 61-74.

¹⁷⁰ Teo, 'Orientalism and Mass Market Romance', p. 250.

¹⁷¹ Teo, 'Orientalism and Mass Market Romance', p. 251.

of lineage in the romance and the suitability, in this moment, of ‘Murjanah’ to be the provider of those heirs. He tells her, “You have performed your functions more than adequately tonight” [...] soaping her belly, his thumbs making large circles over it as if he was worshipping it. “You will make the perfect vessel for my heir”¹⁷² She will be perfect because she is at her most ethnically similar to the hero here. It is not just the sheikh who recognises this sameness; in *Possessed*, Xander’s half-brother ‘is so pleased that Xander has finally met the right woman! A woman who loves him, and yet who understands the complexity of his mixed heritage’.¹⁷³ There seems to be no concern about miscegenation at this point in either romance.

But an anxiety about miscegenation does arise soon after the couple have sex, when the ethnic difference the hero had assumed absent reappears. In *Convenient Virgin*, just after the sheikh says the heroine makes a ‘perfect vessel’ for heirs, she rejects the eastern identity she had apparently adopted, reasserting ‘my name is Morgan’ and plans to escape.¹⁷⁴ The hero, believing her transformation to have been complete and legitimate, is shocked to discover the plotted escape, angrily accusing her that ‘all the time you were sleeping in my bed, making love with me, pretending you were happy, you were plotting to escape the first chance you got’.¹⁷⁵ The heroine thus no longer embodies the model of ethnic sameness which the hero thought so perfect for bearing a child. Her desire to escape rather than embrace the east emphasises ethnic difference, rather than sameness. This rejection is signified in fabric as the heroine of *Possessed* requests her own clothing before fleeing the country; Katrina’s rejection of the romance east involves a rejection of the clothing which had previously served to mark her as ethnically similar to the sheikh.¹⁷⁶

Just as in *Tars*, the anxiety for the hero at this point is that he may have conceived a child with someone who no longer shares his hybrid ethnic identity. This concern is manifested in a fear of loss of patrilineage, prompting the sheikh to assert ethnic ownership of the child by stamping his own ethnicity onto it: Xander angrily refutes

¹⁷² *Convenient Virgin*, pp. 125, 126.

¹⁷³ *Possessed*, pp. 156-157.

¹⁷⁴ *Convenient Virgin*, p. 127.

¹⁷⁵ *Convenient Virgin*, pp. 156-157.

¹⁷⁶ *Possessed*, p. 146. This is interestingly paralleled in *Tars* where neither the Princess nor the Sultan can wear eastern clothing whilst performing Christian religious rituals; the Princess removes her Saracen ‘clothing [palle]’ (430) to pray and the Sultan ‘quickly undressed [dihte him naked a-non]’ (832) to ‘be baptised [reseyuede þe baptise]’ (834).

Katrina's refusal to marry him, shouting 'I will not have my child born without my name!'¹⁷⁷ The sheikh adopts a strategy similar to the earlier ethnic assimilation of the heroine, encouraging the child to adopt certain markers of the east in order to make the child's ethnicity as hybrid as his own. Children are taught the sheikh's language, introduced to traditional activities such as camel rides (reminiscent of the tourism tropes used to construct the fictional Middle East) and are quickly assimilated into the sheikh's family, often separated from the heroine within the palace.

Another strategy regularly deployed by the sheikh and his family to assert an ethnic claim on the child is by physically removing the child and its mother, or the pregnant heroine, to their desert kingdom. This is a common trope drawn from western perceptions of Islamic law, which gives fathers exclusive rights to children over a certain age.¹⁷⁸ It is more difficult for heroines to reclaim the child after arrival in the desert nation; as the hero of *One Night with the Sheikh* explains: 'in [the desert kingdom] it is a father whose rights are paramount' and he 'would be within [his] legal rights in ensuring that [she is] not permitted to leave the country with [his] child – either before or after his or her birth!'¹⁷⁹ In *Possessed* Xander tells Katrina: 'I can't allow you to leave me [...] there is no way I will allow my child to go anywhere without me!'¹⁸⁰ Morgan is also aware of the difficulties associated with escaping whilst pregnant, acknowledging that 'the last thing she needed was a baby on board when she fled the country'.¹⁸¹

These strategies, of acculturation and legally sanctioned captivity, combine to make the heroine feel as though the child, who until now existed solely within her cultural lineage, is moving away from her into the sheikh's ethnic influence. In *Desert King Pregnant Mistress* the sheikh tells the heroine: 'you must accept that our daughter inhabits the same world as her father', to which the heroine replies: 'from which I am

¹⁷⁷ *Possessed*, p. 153.

¹⁷⁸ In some schools of Islamic law in the Middle East in the case of divorce, the mother loses custody of her children to their father when the male child reaches between age of seven (Saudi Arabia) and nine (Syria) and of female children until she is eleven (Syria) or becomes a wife herself (Saudi Arabia) (Abdullahi A. An-Na'im, ed., *Islamic Family Law in a Changing World: A Global Resource Book* [London: Zed Books, 2002], p. 102). That nationally specific legal customs can be applied, in sheikh romance, more generally across the Middle East is reflective of the conflation of eastern customs and traditions in western discourse about the Middle East.

¹⁷⁹ Jordan, *One Night with the Sheikh*, pp. 176-177.

¹⁸⁰ *Possessed*, p. 182.

¹⁸¹ *Convenient Virgin*, p. 138.

excluded?’¹⁸² The heroine of *Bidding* despairs: ‘she had devoted her life to [the child] for three years, but how could she compete with the roomful of wonderful toys Zahir [the sheikh] had provided and camel rides? [...] how could she compete with royalty?’¹⁸³ Therefore, in the same way that the lump-child in *Tars* is the result of the union of two different religions, the child of modern sheikh romance is drawn between two oppositional ethnicities, as the sheikh and western heroine compete for ownership of the child to secure its position in their own, separate, ethnic lineage.

Yet such a competition, drawing the child between two cultures, is not a solution for miscegenation, as it can be problematic for the child’s own ethnic identity, as is evident from accounts of the sheikh hero’s childhood. The anxious effect of rival ethnicities is evident in the sheikh’s experience of having parents drawn from oppositional ethnic backgrounds. This is evident in descriptions of Xander’s childhood in *Possessed*:

‘The thing is that the boy is neither fish nor fowl, really...’ the diplomat had announced critically, or so it had seemed [...].

And the diplomat had spoken the truth, Xander acknowledged bleakly now. Whilst the greatest part of him would always belong here in the desert, there was another part of him that felt most fulfilled when he was involved in the cut and thrust of diplomacy in Washington and London and Paris, and the work he did promoting Zuran. He had grown up surrounded by the love of his Zurani relatives, yes, but at the same time he had been aware that he was different from them. He was not European, but neither was he totally Zurani either!

And because of that, coupled no doubt with the loss of his mother, he carried with him the secret, guarded burden of his own inner sense of isolation.¹⁸⁴

Here hybridity is marked as a loss, a space between identities that only the sheikh hero inhabits: Teo goes so far as to label this ‘cultural schizophrenia’.¹⁸⁵ The hero’s hybridity here denies him true belonging to either background. Xander had previously wondered, ‘how could he ever hope to find a woman that could both accept and understand both opposing sides of him, and at the same time appeal to both of them?’¹⁸⁶ That it is the tension between two opposing ethnicities which is the

¹⁸² Susan Stephens, *Desert King, Pregnant Mistress* (Richmond: Harlequin Mills & Boon, 2008), p. 107.

¹⁸³ *Bidding*, p. 70.

¹⁸⁴ *Possessed*, p. 47.

¹⁸⁵ Teo, ‘Orientalism and Mass Market Romance’, p. 250.

¹⁸⁶ *Possessed*, pp. 97-98.

issue here is evident in the fact that this sentence uses the word ‘both’ three times. So ethnic difference can rework the meaning of hybridity; instead of being the locus of sameness it is now the site of concerns about contradictory ethnic identities. I term this ‘anxious hybridity’.

All three romances, *Tars*, *Convenient Virgin*, and *Possessed*, break down any illusion of ethnic or religious sameness as their protagonists are faced with competing ethnicities, oppositional religious identities and the loss of patrilineage through miscegenation. However, all offer resolutions for these concerns: in *Tars*, through religious conversion, which is simultaneously miraculously marked on the body as racial sameness; and in *Possessed* and *Convenient Virgin* by an assimilation back into a shared model of ethnic hybridity. In *Tars*, the Sultan’s patrilineage is secured as he rejects his Saracen religion and is christened by a priest, after which his skin colour changes from black to white. As I noted earlier, the Sultan’s shifting skin colour reasserts binary religious difference, indicating his Christian identity and shutting down any lingering hybridity. The Sultan’s fears about losing his lineage are resolved by this re-establishing of religious sameness, the results of which are visible in the common whiteness of skin colour: the Sultan, his wife and his son are all now religiously the same both internally and externally. At this point, the romance forecloses any further blurring of boundaries. That *Tars* is now more polarised in its distinction between Christian and Saracen is evident in the now Christian Sultan’s lack of negotiation with his subjects: they must convert, or they will be ‘hung [...] high from a tree’.¹⁸⁷ As Calkin notes:

the fantasy of easy religious categorisation according to biology becomes the concluding note of a text that earlier problematised the relationship between categorisation and physical appearance and envisioned a radical, uncategorisable mode of existence in which Saracen and Christian were integrated rather than differentiated.¹⁸⁸

Thus, having introduced the possibility of passing as a member of a different religion, the Sultan’s whitening removes it. A permanent alteration in skin colour is what is now required to signify conversion: verbal and visual adherence rooted in fabric is not enough, as the romance has shown us how fabric can cloak and deceive.

¹⁸⁷ ‘hong [...] hei3e vppon a tre’ (869).

¹⁸⁸ Calkin, ‘Marking Religion on the Body’, p. 231.

Sheikh romances too make efforts to restore patrilineage. When a sheikh discovers that he has a child or that he has made a heroine pregnant, he insists on marrying her to publicly ensure his lineage: the sheikh will effectively ‘own’ the child and the heroine by formalising his relationship with her. As Xander shouts in *Possessed*: ‘you are already my woman, now you must become my wife!’¹⁸⁹ While marriage is not always what the heroine wants, it can also protect the heroine’s claim to the child, securing her access rights. Once the couple are married, both the child and the western mother become subsumed into the sheikh’s familial lineage, resolving previous anxieties about broken cultural borders: the sheikh, the heroine and the child all become part of the same eastern family. As the hero of *The Arabian Love-Child* puts it, ‘we will greet [my son] as a single unit, marry with him at our side, and become a family’.¹⁹⁰ The incorporation of the western heroine into the sheikh’s family is facilitated by her own relative familial isolation; as I have mentioned, the heroine is rarely shown to have a close family unit of her own. Thus, while marriage can establish a single ethnicity shared between heroine, hero and their child, the equitability of this ethnic sameness is questionable.

However, the public statement of marriage often serves only to restore external sameness. The heroine returns to the east and takes her place as the sheikh’s wife, displaying once again, on a public level, ethnic hybridity and thereby appearing to restore sameness. However, marriage does not always function to restore internal hybridity: while the heroine may have settled in the east, she does not necessarily embrace it in the way she previously did. Even after she returns to the sheikh’s home following her thwarted escape, Morgan tells Taj: ‘I don’t belong here’.¹⁹¹ Ultimately, what works to restore hybrid ethnicity for the heroine and achieve a permanent ethnic sameness is the love union, whereby the sameness in hybridity which had previously been performed by the western heroine, is reinstated. As Teo puts it, ‘the fulfilment of love between western heroine and sheikh hero heralds more hybridity, not less’.¹⁹²

Furthermore, the love union not only resolves the hero and heroine’s concerns about ethnic difference and miscegenation, but also the sheikh’s anxious hybridity. The permanent ethnic sameness of the heroine can provide the sameness in hybridity that

¹⁸⁹ *Possessed*, p. 154.

¹⁹⁰ Michelle Reid, *The Arabian Love-Child* (Richmond: Harlequin Mills & Boon, 2002), p. 83.

¹⁹¹ *Convenient Virgin*, p. 177.

¹⁹² Teo, ‘Orientalism and Mass Market Romance’, p. 251.

the sheikh hero so craves; Katrina underscores this whilst imaginatively addressing Xander's deceased English mother, stating: 'I love the person he is – everything and all that he is, the unique blend of cultures and characteristics that have made him'.¹⁹³ As Teo puts it, 'the love of a Western woman, the sheikh's equal in every way, heals the cultural schizophrenia arising from his hybridity'.¹⁹⁴ What is often different about the heroine, compared with the sheikh's mother, is that she accepts and embraces the romance east in a way that the sheikh's mother never did, suggesting that this new union will be successful in maintaining sameness and alleviating any anxieties about hybridity.

Yet, hybridity is not all that it seems. Teo posits that 'hybridity is the hallmark of modernity in contemporary sheikh novels', arguing that a hybrid life between two personalities, a hybrid progeny and a new, hybrid culture represents the reversal of the racist resolution to Hull's *The Sheik* where a relationship between two people from different cultures cannot be imagined.¹⁹⁵ Others have argued that hybridity itself can challenge binary difference. Bhabha has argued that hybridity functions to create a 'third space' of negotiation between the binaries which construct frameworks of cultural identity and Kelly Chien-Hui Kuo contends that 'the politics of hybridity is to overcome cultural unevenness and to challenge binary divisions—between upper and lower, western and eastern, white and black, Occident and Orient, etc'.¹⁹⁶ In the way that these sheikh romances deal with questions of difference, then, it is clear that ethnic and cultural otherness is assuaged through hybridity.

Furthermore, because religion is subsumed into ethnicity in sheikh romance, they can more easily imagine a hybrid ethnic identity: they are not subject to the binary of religious identity that prevents such a hybridity in *Tars*.

However, the heroine's hybrid ethnicity does not seem, in *Possessed* and *Convenient Virgin*, to represent a more 'modern' stance on cross-cultural relationships or to challenge binary divisions between east and west. Rather, the insistence on shared hybridity between hero and heroine highlights a continued need for ethnic sameness in these romances and the denial of relationships occurring between different

¹⁹³ *Possessed*, p. 178.

¹⁹⁴ Teo, 'Orientalism and Mass Market Romance', p. 250.

¹⁹⁵ Teo, 'Orientalism and Mass Market Romance', p. 251.

¹⁹⁶ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*; Kelly Chien-Hui Kuo, 'A Euphoria of Transcultural Hybridity: Is Multiculturalism Possible?', *Postcolonial Studies* 6.2 (2003): 234.

cultures. While the celebration of hybridity in *Possessed* and *Convenient Virgin* indicates a more lenient attitude towards cross-cultural relationships than *Tars*, in that an identity drawn from two cultures is celebrated, the fact that both partners have to demonstrate hybridity in order for the relationship to be successful reveals that these modern novels still deny difference. Furthermore, the hybridity available in these romances is limited, accessible only to the central couple. In their insistence on sameness and the exclusivity of hybridity these sheikh romances are not all that different from the racist attitudes of Hull's novel or, indeed, the binary religious politics of difference in *Tars*.

Conclusion

Sameness is essential. All three romances, *Possessed*, *Convenient Virgin*, and *Tars*, make very clear that ethnic or religious sameness is the way to both resolve concerns of miscegenation and to ease the progress of the erotic relationship. The title of this chapter, 'Fabricating Sameness', refers to the prominent role of fabric and clothing in mediating such a sameness. This chapter began with a comparative examination of the ethnicity of the sheikh hero in *Possessed* and *Convenient Virgin* and the religious identity of the Sultan in *Tars*. It found that the identity of all three heroes was drawn from signifiers of both east and west, indicating hybridity. This was constructed in a number of ways, including temperament, skin colour, language, education and cultural affiliation. Yet, while hybridity worked in all three romances to lessen the difference between hero and heroine it achieved this in different ways. In *Tars* the Sultan's hybridity functioned as an indicator of his eventual conversion to Christianity, thereby shutting down hybridity and safeguarding a binary model of religious difference. In *Possessed* and *Convenient Virgin*, on the other hand, it was the sheikh's hybridity itself which created sameness between himself and the heroine, facilitated by her own hybrid ethnicity. Previous studies of popular romance have focused on the hero's hybridity, yet by reading sheikh romances through fabric, this chapter has shown that the heroine can appear just as hybrid as the sheikh hero. By adopting signifiers of eastern femininity, in particular dress, the western romance heroine's identity is also drawn between east and west. In this way, the romance

heroine appears ethnically the same as the sheikh: they both display sameness in hybridity.

Yet, this display of sameness can be anxious, as demonstrated by *Tars*. In this romance, the Princess seems to display religious sameness as she dresses as a Saracen and converts to Islam. Yet, when their first child is born, it is traumatically revealed that her sameness was a disguise. *Tars* thus indicates that the root of the need for religious sameness is procreation. Reproduction and inheritance are central issues in all three romances; the importance of lineage and the need to secure an heir are of vital concern. The revelation that apparent sameness has been illusory is troubling for the eastern hero because it raises the possibility of miscegenation, the result of which is to deny him his lineage. When the lump-child is born in *Tars*, it has no defining religious signifiers and therefore cannot belong in the heritage of either the hero or the heroine. However, after the child is baptised, it moves into the Christian lineage of the Princess, effectively denying the Sultan access to his family and to any family line. The disclosure of ethnic difference in sheikh romance works similarly, with the sheikh hero attempting to stamp the child with his own cultural legacy in order to effect some ownership over it. The revelation of a lack of sameness is thus a central moment of crisis in these romances.

All three romances offer a solution for the anxiety of the miscegenous child, albeit in varying ways. In *Tars*, difference is reasserted in order to establish sameness; the boundaries of Islam and Christianity are redrawn, with their edges marked physically on the body in the giving of form to the child and the whitening of the Sultan. In *Convenient Virgin* and *Possessed* on the other hand, while sameness is also reinstated, it is the reassertion of hybridity that resolves ethnic difference; the hero and heroine are once again equally hybrid, equally drawn between east and west. However, while this resumption of sameness allows the hero and heroine to resolve their differences, it does not challenge the overarching binary which positions east and west as oppositional.

What is ultimately evident from the move towards sameness in these romances is the exclusivity of their resolutions. The hybridity which mediates ethnic and religious identity and works to facilitate a successful erotic relationship between east and west is only available to the hero and heroine. The fundamental, overarching difference

between east and west is not disrupted, as evidenced in the continued inclusion of the 'bad Arab', the animalistic Saracen, and female stereotypes of the submissive servant/guide and harem odalisque. The hybrid heroine thus occupies a unique position in the romance, shaped by her ethnic, religious and gender identity. Such a position can offer an agency to the heroine allowing her, as I argue in Chapter 4, to rework established motifs of the romance east, in particular abduction. In this way, then, the romance heroine can, to a certain extent, rewrite her own position within the east. In the final chapter, I examine the effect of gender difference and ethnic sameness on the abduction motif.

CHAPTER 4: ROMANCING THE ABDUCTION MOTIF

In this final chapter, I bring arguments on the transfiguring of difference into sameness to bear on a significant motif in romance: abduction. The abduction or captivity motif has long been deployed in fictional narratives, and plays a significant role in popular sheikh romance.¹ Of the fifty-seven sheikh titles in the *Modern Romance* series, forty contain abduction or captivity motifs, with thirteen of these featuring the physical abduction of the heroine or the heroine's child by the hero.² Themes of abduction are similarly not unusual in Middle English romance; several romances refer to captivity and ransom, for example *Richard Coeur de Lion*, and buying and selling people, for example *Guy of Warwick*, *Sir Isumbras* and *Floris*.³ Abduction features prominently in the three romances on which I focus in this chapter. In *The Sheikh's Disobedient Bride*, the heroine, Tally, is abducted by the hero, Tair, who carries her on horseback to his desert camp, and in *The Sheikh's Ransomed Bride*, the heroine, Belle, is kidnapped by rebels and rescued by Rafiq, the hero.⁴ Several different abductions occur in *Octavian*⁵, but it is the abduction of the Sultan's daughter, Marsabelle, by the romance's hero, Florent, which pervades the

¹ For the history of abduction as a literary motif from antiquity to the present day see Carole G. Silver, 'Abductions, Motifs R10-R99', *Archetypes And Motifs In Folklore And Literature: A Handbook*, ed. Jane Garry and Hasan M. El-Shamy (Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 2005), pp. 381-388. For an outline of the abduction motif in British literature see Joe Snader, *Caught Between Worlds: British Captivity Narratives in Fact and Fiction* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2000).

² Other common articulations of the motif that are not technically abductions include forced marriage and emotional and financial blackmail.

³ Karl Brunner, *Der Mittelenglische Versroman über Richard Löwenherz*, (Vienna, 1913); Zupitza, Julius, ed., *The Romance of Guy of Warwick*, Early English Text Society E.S. 42 (London: Oxford University Press, 1966); *Sir Isumbras* in Hudson, ed., *Four Middle English Romances*.

⁴ Porter, *The Sheikh's Disobedient Bride*, hereafter referred to as *Disobedient*; West, *The Sheikh's Ransomed Bride*, hereafter referred to as *Ransomed*. See Appendix 1 for full plot summaries of all three romances.

⁵ *Octavian* was widely disseminated throughout Europe during the Middle Ages. The Middle English romance survives in two distinct versions, known as the Northern and Southern *Octavians* (NO and SO). NO is extant in two manuscripts: Cambridge Ff. 2.38 (c.1450) and Lincoln, Lincoln Cathedral Library MS 91 (Lincoln Thornton) (c.1430-1440). SO is preserved in a single manuscript: London British Library MS Cotton Caligula A.2 (1446-1460). Both versions are thought to have been composed during the same period, around 1350, although surviving copies of the romance date to almost one hundred years later (McSparran, pp. 41-42). In this chapter I focus on the version of NO in Cambridge, Cambridge University Library, MS Ff.2.38, as it contains the most interesting details about abduction. All references to *Octavian* are from McSparran's edition.

narrative: introduced at line 994, her abduction is not completed until line 1524.⁶

Abduction of the heroine by the hero is rare in Middle English romance: *Bevis* is the only other text I know of where the hero abducts the heroine (and in *Bevis* it is with Josian's consent).⁷

However, even though abduction and captivity are prominent motifs in these romances, they remain little analysed. Whilst many have recognised the prevalence of abduction in sheikh romance, only three articles to date have examined its occurrences in any detail, with only one of these, Haddad's 'Bound to Love' focusing on it at length.⁸ *Octavian* similarly lacks detailed analysis of its themes of abduction, although there has been substantial examination of the social reality of kidnap in the Middle Ages.⁹ Scholarship on *Octavian* is not extensive, and has tended to focus on the textual transmission of the romance, relationships between the versions, and the romance's representation of social position and mobility.¹⁰ While many have noted the presence of abduction in *Octavian*, no research has yet examined its significance in any detail. This chapter seeks to redress the lack of attention paid to abduction in these romances.

⁶ The Cambridge Ff.2.38 version of *Octavian* is 1731 lines long. This is a marked contrast with SO, where the hero first visits the Sultan's daughter at line 1169 and has abducted her into Paris by line 1255.

⁷ In *Lybeaus Desconus* the gender polarity is reversed: the maiden keeps Lybeaus captive in her bedroom for twelve months and in *King Alisaunder* there is a suggestion that the hero is held captive by Queen Candace (*Lybeaus Desconus* in George Shuffelton, ed., *Codex Ashmole 61: A Compilation of Popular Middle English Verse* [Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2008], 1417-1422; *King Alisaunder*, 7688-7692).

⁸ See Kaler; Haddad; and Jarmakani, "'The Sheik Who Loved Me'", pp. 1004-1006. For the captivity narrative in modern romances with native American heroes, see Kate McCafferty, 'Palimpsest of Desire: The Re-emergence of the American Captivity Narrative as Pulp Romance', *Journal of Popular Culture* 27.4 (1994), pp. 43-56.

⁹ See, for example, P. J. P. Goldberg, *Communal Discord, Child Abduction and Rape in the Later Middle Ages* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Henry Angsar Kelly, 'Statutes of Rapes and Alleged Ravishers of Wives: A Context for the Charges Against Thomas Malory, Knight', *Viator* 28 (1997): 361-419; J. B. Post, 'Ravishment of Women and the Statutes of Westminster', *Legal Records and the Historian* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1978), pp. 150-164.

Dominique Battles has discussed abduction in the romance *Sir Orfeo*, arguing that it demonstrates an awareness of racial differences between Anglo-Saxons and Normans ('*Sir Orfeo* and English Identity', *Studies in Philology* 107.2 [2010]: 179-211). This thesis, however, is the first to examine abduction in Middle English romance in the context of Saracens and Christians.

¹⁰ For more on the relationship between the NO and SO see: Maldwyn Mills, 'The Composition and Style of the "Southern" *Octavian*, *Sir Launfal* and *Libeaus Desconus*', *Medium Aevum* 31 (1962): 88-109. On social mobility see: John Simons, 'Northern *Octavian* and the Question of Class', *Romance in Medieval England*, ed. Jennifer Fellows, Carol M. Meale, and Maldwyn Mills (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1991), pp. 105-111; and Martha Fessler Krieg, 'The Contrast of Class Customs as Humor in a Middle English Romance: Clement and Florent in *Octavian*', *Fifteenth-Century Studies* 9 (1984): 115-124.

Abduction often has a pivotal role in the establishment of a relationship between the couple; Haddad argues that as a narrative device, abduction functions to bring the hero and heroine into proximity, ‘keep[ing] a resistant heroine and her future husband together long enough for both to realise and acknowledge that they are in love’.¹¹ However, in addition to being a literary motif, abduction is a real-life concern. During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries (when *Octavian* was thought to have been composed and from when extant manuscripts of the romance date) and the twenty-first century, as well as at other times, kidnap is a real danger for some. It thus seems paradoxical that romances would trope on a motif of real danger to bring the romantic couple together; as Haddad posits, ‘we might expect that as real threats began to approximate fantasised ones, the therapeutic effect of the fantasy would diminish’.¹² Yet, as Haddad notes, and as I will argue in this chapter, abduction remains a prominent motif in romance. How, then, do these romances reconcile for their audiences their use of the abduction motif with the dangerous reality of kidnap? How can a successful relationship between hero and heroine be imagined in the context of such a reality?

Haddad has suggested that post-2004 sheikh romances reacted to the renewed reality of the kidnap of western women in the Middle East by downplaying the importance of abduction. According to Haddad, representations of abduction in sheikh romance are muted via the replacement of western heroines with heroines of eastern ethnicity, the minimisation or elimination of the Arab world as a setting, and a reduction in the significance of abduction to the plot.¹³ She argues: ‘in short, while the conventional elements of the captivity-based romance plot remain in place, their significance is consistently downplayed’.¹⁴ However, while I concur with Haddad that sheikh romances do make an effort to distance their representations of abduction from the reality of contemporary kidnap, in *Disobedient* and *Ransomed* the strategies she proposes for the downplaying of abduction are not particularly evident. The east and its cultural symbols, such as the harem, continue to play a prominent role in the romance narrative, captivity still forms a substantial part of the plot, in particular in

¹¹ Haddad, p. 42.

¹² Haddad, p. 56.

¹³ Haddad, pp. 56-60.

¹⁴ Haddad, pp. 57-58.

Disobedient, and as I pointed out in Chapter 3, only four heroines are of any kind of eastern descent in all fifty-seven *Modern Romance* sheikh novels.

This chapter considers anew the articulation of the abduction motif, comparing its representation in medieval and modern romance to illustrate its similarities and differences. Expanding on Haddad's work, I argue that medieval and modern romances rework the abduction motif in two main ways. First, I examine the various ways these romances distinguish between what I term 'romance abduction', which I will define, and the reality of kidnap in the Middle Ages and the twenty-first century. I argue that all three of these romances are aware of the reality of kidnap and make a conscious effort to define their own articulations of abduction in relation to this reality. Second, I consider the possibility of finding liberation, a freedom, within this motif. Haddad argues that captivity can be reworked as liberating as 'the structure of captivity' becomes 'transmogrified as marriage'.¹⁵ Marriage, by virtue of being 'captivity's successor and opposite number' can be figured as liberation, 'even if marriage is functionally a continuation of captivity: literally, wedlock'.¹⁶ The chapter ends by examining how the frameworks of gender and ethnic or religious difference function to articulate the balance of power within the abduction motif. Drawing on Haddad's model of locating freedom within captivity, I examine how the heroine's hybridity functions to imbue her experiences of captivity with agency and freedom, paying attention to her positionality in relation to other women in the romance.

Redefining Abduction

One of the most striking features of the abduction motif in *Ransomed*, *Disobedient* and *Octavian* is the way in which it can be distinguished from the contemporary reality of kidnap.¹⁷ In modern times, kidnappings are a prominent aspect of western relations with the Middle East. An Al Qaeda training manual discovered after 9/11 identified kidnapping as a specific tactic for Islamist terror cells.¹⁸ There have been a

¹⁵ Haddad, p. 49.

¹⁶ Haddad, p. 50.

¹⁷ For ease of understanding, when discussing the literary motif I use the term 'abduction' and when I am referring to real-life events I use the term 'kidnap'.

¹⁸ Benjamin Cole, *The Changing Face of Terrorism: How Real is the Threat From Biological, Chemical and Nuclear Weapons?* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2011), p. 70.

number of high-profile kidnappings of western men and women, particularly since the commencement of military conflict in Iraq and Afghanistan: it has been estimated that more than 60 foreign nationals were kidnapped in the first year of engagement in Iraq.¹⁹ Haddad and Jarmakani consider the abduction motif in the context of contemporary US politics and the use of kidnapping as a tool in rebel politics. Haddad mentions several female hostages who were reported to have been held in Iraq, most notably the charity worker Margaret Hassan, killed in October 2004, and Jessica Lynch, an American soldier taken captive in March 2003; the apparent trauma of Lynch's case garnered 'extraordinary attention' in the American media.²⁰ Therefore, while kidnap is not something a typical Mills & Boon romance reader has to deal with in her daily life in the west, it is likely to be something she readily associates with the contemporary Middle East.

In late medieval England, on the other hand, the threat of kidnap was, for some, very real. John Bellamy posits that the 'charge of abduction [...] [was] very common in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries' and studies of statutes from the later Middle Ages reveal increasing sanctions for kidnap in England throughout the fourteenth century.²¹ P. J. P. Goldberg examines in detail the kidnapping of Alice de Rouclif from a house outside York in 1365 and in 1388, in the case *Lording v. Carshill*, John Lording successfully accused Thomas Carshill of kidnapping his wife Isabel.²² Henry Ansgar Kelly notes that historians have tended to focus on the kidnap of women, although it has been argued that the capture of male heirs was actually more prevalent.²³ Yet, legal statutes in 1275, 1285 and 1382 specifically addressed the

¹⁹ Mark Oliver, 'Kidnapped', *Guardian.co.uk*, 5 Aug 2004, 6 Jun 2012
<<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2004/aug/05/iraq.markoliver?INTCMP=SRCH>>.

²⁰ Haddad, pp. 55-56.

²¹ John Bellamy, *Crime and Public Order in England in the Later Middle Ages* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973), p. 33. Sue Sheridan Walker and Christopher Cannon have both noted an increase in the number of cases relating to ravishment of wards and wives in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries (Walker, 'Punishing Convicted Ravishers: Statutory Strictures and Actual Practice in Thirteenth and Fourteenth-Century England', *Journal of Medieval History* 13 [1987]: 249, n.4; Cannon, 'Rapists in the Champagne Release', *Speculum* 68.1 [1993]: 84, n. 49).

²² Goldberg, *Discord*: for the outline of the case see pp. 21-31; Henry Ansgar Kelly, 'Statutes of Rapes and Alleged Ravishers of Wives', p. 405. The case of Alice de Rouclif has also been examined by Noël James Menuge ('Female Wards and Marriage in Romance and Law: A Question of Consent', *Young Medieval Women*, ed. Katherine J. Lewis, Menuge and Kim M. Phillips [Stroud: Sutton, 1999]).

²³ Sue Sheridan Walker, 'Free Consent and Marriage of Feudal Wards in Medieval England', *Journal of Medieval History* 8 (1982): 127, n. 28, quoted in Kelly, 'Statutes of Rapes', p. 361, n.2.

kidnap of women, suggesting that while others may have also been captured in the Middle Ages, kidnap was a significant problem for high status and wealthy women in the later Middle Ages, who may well have been the audience for *Octavian*.²⁴ Bellamy notes that the ‘abduction of heiresses [...] seems to have become commoner towards the end of the Middle Ages’.²⁵ Indeed, it has been suggested by Goldberg that kidnappings of marriageable women ‘were an established strategy within aristocratic culture’.²⁶ Caroline Dunn identified 556 cases brought between 1200 and 1500 which relate to the capture of women, 407 of which were considered in the fourteenth century.²⁷ In fact, Dunn posits that the second half of the fourteenth century, the period in which *Octavian* was composed, was the period in which the highest number of cases of kidnap were brought in the Middle Ages.²⁸ *Octavian* was thus composed during a period when the capture of women was a particularly prominent social and legal concern.

Yet, what exactly constituted kidnap in the Middle Ages? As many have noted, ideas of rape, capture, and forced marriage were interlinked in the Middle Ages.²⁹ Brundage argues that ‘notions of rape [in the Middle Ages] emerged from the *raptus* – literally carrying off by force – of the Roman law’, of which sexual intercourse was not a necessary element.³⁰ Brundage contends further that ‘medieval definitions of rape required abduction of the victim’ and Bellamy posits that charges of rape and kidnap were often brought together.³¹ While rape and kidnap are discrete crimes today, in the Middle Ages such offences were regularly prosecuted as a single transgression, denoted by the term *raptus* which could indicate both abduction and rape.³² Isabelle Mast contends: ‘it is often difficult to distinguish between rape as

²⁴ John Simons considers that the audience for *Octavian* were likely to have been merchants and lower members of the court circle not, as has previously been suggested, a popular low bourgeois audience (Simons, pp. 106-107).

²⁵ Bellamy, p. 32.

²⁶ Goldberg, *Discord*, p. 23.

²⁷ Caroline Dunn, ‘The Language of Ravishment in Medieval England’, *Speculum* 86.1 (2011): 79-116.

²⁸ Dunn, p. 101.

²⁹ See Corinne Saunders, *Rape and Ravishment in the Literature of Medieval England* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2001), p. 4.

³⁰ James A. Brundage, ‘Rape and Seduction in the Medieval Canon Law’, *Sexual Practices and the Medieval Church* ed. Vern L. Bullough and Brundage (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1982), p. 141.

³¹ Brundage, ‘Rape and Seduction’, p. 144; Bellamy, p. 34.

³² There has been much debate over the meaning of the term *raptus*, for example see Caroline Dunn, ‘The Language of Ravishment’ and Henry Angsar Kelly, ‘Meaning and Uses of *Raptus* in

“forced coitus” and rape as “abduction”; the Latin *raptus* and *rapere* could mean either’.³³ Early medieval law distinguished between rape and abduction, but by the time of the first legal statute against abduction in 1275, the two crimes had become legally blurred.³⁴ Corinne Saunders has argued persuasively for the close connection between rape and abduction and the frequent blurring of these concepts into the more generalised notion of *raptus*, which she argues is closest to the modern English term ‘ravishment’.³⁵ The distinctions between rape and abduction were, then, ambiguous.

The connections between abduction and rape provocatively insinuate a sexual undertone to the capture of women which is inherent in Florent’s abduction of Marsabelle, as I will show. The conflation of medieval terms and ideology relating to rape and abduction also fruitfully remind us that sexual violation remains a significant danger for women in captivity today, as the sheikh hero of *Ransomed* acknowledges in his concern that the heroine has been raped by her kidnapers. Thus even today, when rape and abduction are legally distinct, their association remains tangible. While I do acknowledge the links between kidnap and rape in *Disobedient*, *Ransomed* and *Octavian*, my primary focus in this chapter is on abduction alone, not on rape or abduction as a conflation of rape and kidnap.

That the taking away of women in the late Middle Ages was closely linked to rape and that it was a concern for high-status women reveals the most common reasons for the capture of women. Kidnap was not carried out for reasons of political dissent, as it is in today’s Middle East, but was generally motivated by efforts to secure property and wealth. The easiest way to achieve this was through forced marriage. Dunn posits that ‘men who sought economic and social promotion targeted wealthier widows, captured them, took them away from their families, forced them to speak words of matrimony in front of complicit priests, and raped them to consummate the

Chaucer’s Time’, *Studies in the Ages of Chaucer* 20 (1998): 101-165. For a detailed examination of the legal use of the term *raptus* see Cannon.

³³ Isabelle Mast, ‘Rape in John Gower’s *Confessio Amantis* and Other Related Works’, *Young Medieval Women*, ed. Katherine J. Lewis, Noël James Menuge and Kim M. Phillips (Stroud: Sutton, 1999), p. 104.

³⁴ Saunders, *Rape and Ravishment in the Literature of Medieval England* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2001), p. 59.

³⁵ Saunders, *Rape and Ravishment*, p. 4. Kathryn Gravdal has noted the slippage in meaning from violent abduction to sexual pleasure of the thirteenth-century French term *ravissement* which, she argues, conflates ideas about women’s attractiveness and a man’s desire to rape (*Ravishing Maidens: Writing Rape in Medieval French Literature and Law* [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991], p. 5).

marriage'.³⁶ It was not just widows who were at risk: the capture of wards (both male and female) was a significant issue with the motivation for kidnap often being to secure the wealth of the ward's estate.³⁷ This seems to have been evident in the kidnap of Alice de Rouclif, whose marriage had been arranged over a large sum of money which her prospective husband, John Marrays, was undoubtedly aiming to secure when he brought the case.³⁸ Furthermore, laws against kidnap in the Middle Ages regularly figured the capture of a woman as loss of property for her husband, father or guardian. Bellamy and Christopher Cannon both note that kidnapping was referred to as trespass, along with such crimes as 'breaking into houses [and] taking goods', which usually sought 'financial compensation for the monetary loss incurred from the wrong'.³⁹ Contemporary cases thus reveal how 'medieval men sought to retain possession of their ravishable women'.⁴⁰ This is kidnap for fiscal gain, not for politics.

In both the twenty-first century and the Middle Ages, then, capture is a very real danger for both men and women and was effected for reasons of politics or acquisition of wealth. The romances themselves acknowledge the reality of kidnap. At the start of *Ransomed*, Belle is held captive by terrorists, in *Disobedient* Tally is kidnapped by rebels and *Octavian* features numerous instances of kidnap, including the kidnap of Florent several times as a child, and the capture of Christian forces by Saracens near the end of the romance. While kidnap has historically been a concern for both men and women, as the evidence demonstrates, in sheikh romance the motif of abduction is concerned almost exclusively with women. *Disobedient* and *Ransomed* thus deviate from the demographics of actual kidnap in the modern Middle East. *Octavian*, on the other hand, does give some prominence to the kidnap

³⁶ Dunn, p. 92.

³⁷ A ward was a young man or woman below marriageable age (in the Middle Ages this was twelve for girls and fourteen for boys) who was placed into the legal care of an adult guardian. Wardship was a lucrative way to turn a profit in the Middle Ages; as Menuge posits, 'large sums of money could be made from the sale of wards and their marriages' ('Female Wards and Marriage', p. 154). On wardship and the law see Sue Sheridan Walker, 'The Feudal Family and the Common Law Courts: The Pleas Protecting Rights of Wardship and Marriage, c. 1225-1375', *Journal of Medieval History* 14 (1988): 13-31; 'Free Consent and Marriage of Feudal Wards', pp. 123-134.

³⁸ Menuge, 'Female Wards and Marriage', p. 160.

³⁹ Bellamy, p. 33; Cannon, p. 80.

⁴⁰ Dunn, p. 116.

of male characters. The abduction of Marsabelle, however, is more central to the romance narrative.

While *Disobedient*, *Ransomed* and *Octavian* contain several different instances of capture, I focus my analysis on a specific type of abduction which I term ‘romance abduction’ and whose use is reserved solely for women in all three romances. I use the term to differentiate it from modern-day political kidnap and medieval kidnap for pecuniary gain, which is usually characterised by brutality, carried out by characters other than the hero, with a politically or financially motivated aim (e.g. to gain influence, political power or property). Romance abduction, on the other hand, is carried out by the hero, aims to secure sexual interaction or to facilitate a marriage between hero and heroine, is presented as distinctly non-political (even as it is deeply political), and is not carried out in order to gain wealth (unlike instances of kidnap in the Middle Ages which force marriage or sexual interaction to secure wealth). I fully outline the components of romance abduction in the course of this chapter.

All three romances distinguish between political or wealth-driven kidnap and romance abduction. *Disobedient* initially highlights the reality of captivity as the heroine, Tally, had ‘read about kidnappings in the Middle East’.⁴¹ Yet Tally quickly dissociates herself from the kind of politics that might lead to her capture, stating: ‘I’m not political, I take no sides, I do not even know the history of these border wars you talk about’.⁴² Whilst the initial reasons for Tally’s kidnap are political – Tair believes (accurately as it turns out) that her guides are insurgents – her abduction is quickly converted into non-political, romance abduction. It is revealed that she is being held captive in order to become the hero’s wife, indicating that this is now an abduction to effect a marriage. Political abduction becomes transformed into romance abduction as Tair is repositioned as potential husband rather than captor.

This transformation is similarly evident in *Octavian*. Florent’s initial capture of Marsabelle is interpreted by some, including her father, as a straightforward kidnap. However, for the audience of the romance, this kidnap is more clearly romance abduction, as what is foregrounded as the reason for abduction is desire, rather than financial avarice. The transformation of kidnap into romance abduction has been

⁴¹ *Disobedient*, p. 7.

⁴² *Disobedient*, p. 32.

noted by Haddad, who argues that ‘captivity is allowed to morph into marriage’ in sheikh romance.⁴³ Jarmakani concurs, noting ‘the transformation of the sheikh from captor to hero’.⁴⁴ Both Haddad and Jarmakani thus highlight conversion as a central aspect of the mediation of the abduction motif.

Rather than converting one form of abduction into another, some sheikh novels construct romance abduction in relation to other kidnappings. In the same way that Jarmakani proposes that the captor-sheikh becomes heroic ‘in terms of his stance against those characters who are coded as terrorists’, so too, I argue, can romance abduction be constructed in opposition to kidnappings undertaken for reasons of politics or acquisition.⁴⁵ In *Ransomed*, Belle’s kidnap at the start of the novel is explicitly political. The romance begins with her capture by terrorists, whose leader happens to be the sheikh hero’s cousin, Selim. This is not a romance abduction; it is undertaken by the novel’s villain and is characterised by brutality and political ambition. Selim abducts Belle as part of a ‘campaign of terror’.⁴⁶ Clearly, this is a political kidnap, and her rescue by Rafiq is prompted by his desire for stability: ‘Q’aroum didn’t need the international notoriety that the kidnap and execution of foreign nationals would bring’.⁴⁷ Yet, the hero’s rescue follows a similar pattern to Selim’s kidnap. Belle was taken by Selim from a boat on which she was working, an action alluded to by Rafiq, who tells her his ancestors ‘weren’t averse to snatching a beautiful woman off a ship bound for another port’.⁴⁸ Furthermore, after he has ‘rescued’ her, Rafiq effectively forces Belle to marry him, persuading her to stay in his palace. While this rescue is figured very differently from the earlier political kidnap, it also effectively functions as abduction, albeit one with romantic rather than political aims.

These romances thus work to dissociate romance abduction from other kidnappings either by converting kidnap into romance abduction, or by constructing romance abduction in relation to kidnap. However it is achieved, I argue that these romances create this distinction in three main ways: one, by reworking romance abduction as

⁴³ Haddad, p. 49.

⁴⁴ Jarmakani, “‘The Sheik Who Loved Me’”, p. 1004.

⁴⁵ Jarmakani, “‘The Sheik Who Loved Me’”, p. 1005.

⁴⁶ *Ransomed*, p. 79.

⁴⁷ *Ransomed*, p. 26.

⁴⁸ *Ransomed*, p. 63.

cultural tradition; two, by figuring it as protection or rescue; and three, by eroticising romance abduction, presenting it as sexual fantasy. I now move to outline these in turn.

‘You’re Part of My Harem’: Abduction as Cultural Custom

One of the most significant ways in which romance abduction is distinguished from kidnap is in the way it is set up as a cultural custom or tradition. This is achieved in *Ransomed* and *Disobedient* in three ways: one, by associating abduction with the cultural trope of the harem; two, by identifying romance abduction as a form of bride kidnap; and three, by providing a history of abduction within the sheikh’s family. That cultural tradition is embedded deep within the abduction motif is clear; Kaler notes the need for ‘ethnic traditions and cultural customs to satisfy captivity’s conventions’, many of which are present in the romances’ repetitious use of cultural practices such as purdah, the harem and the desert as the locus of captivity.⁴⁹ The romance east and its customs are thus central to its articulation of romance abduction.

The first way in which romances rework abduction is by associating it with the trope of the harem which, I argued in Chapter 2, is also used to characterise the sheikh hero’s alpha masculinity.⁵⁰ The harem has long been of particular fascination to the west. Lewis defines the harem as a private family space without an overtly sexual connotation, yet acknowledges that this is not the image of the harem which was and continues to be of interest to the west.⁵¹ The image of the harem as a sexualised realm of cruelty and excess was well established by the early twentieth century, notably in its sustained appeal as ‘apotheosing the two characteristics perceived as essentially oriental: sensuality and violence’.⁵² Significantly, sensuality and violence are two elements that constitute the abduction motif in romance. The harem was assumed to encourage and foster polygamy, even though the reality was somewhat different. Polygamy, in decline by the late nineteenth century, had assumed an

⁴⁹ Kaler, p. 87.

⁵⁰ For an examination of the harem trope in modern sheikh romance see Taylor, pp. 1040-1042.

⁵¹ Reina Lewis, *Rethinking Orientalism: Women, Travel and the Ottoman Harem* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2004), p. 97.

⁵² Melman, pp. 59-60.

importance out of all proportion to actual practice as a marker in the debate between modernisation and tradition.⁵³ Lewis argues:

contrary to western expectations, few harems housed more than one wife of any single man and those that were polygamous were usually restricted to two of the total of four wives permitted by religious law. Polygamy was for long periods and certainly by the nineteenth century an expensive practice that was mainly the preserve of the elite.⁵⁴

The harem, in sheikh romances, is presented almost exclusively in the context of polygamy and sexualised captivity. The heroine of *Disobedient* rails: ‘you can’t make me marry you’, to which the hero replies, ‘I can actually [,] I’m a sheikh [and] you’re part of my harem-’.⁵⁵ The sheikh hero seems keen to distinguish between the fantasy and reality of the harem, pointing out that ‘harem doesn’t mean a dancing girl, Tally Woman [,] it means part of one’s household [...] like cutlery or dish towels’, removing the sexual implications (although not the connotations of ownership).⁵⁶ However, later in the same romance, a female servant tells Tally that the sheikh has ‘had many women’, although ‘not a harem’, thereby reconnecting the harem with sex and, given the mention of multiple women, with the polygamy assumed to inhere within it.⁵⁷

Disobedient, unusually, refers to the harem as active in the present day. *Ransomed*, on the other hand, along with most other sheikh romances that mention harems, locates it in the past, although this does not lessen the impact of the harem on the romance narrative. As Rafiq tells Belle about his ancestors, he situates both their historical abductions and his present-day conversation with Belle in the harem, which is decorated with a peacock mosaic, one of the family motifs. ‘The peacock’, he explains, ‘is a symbol of the rich beauty of [the sheikh’s] wives. This part of the palace was designed as the harem – hence the mosaic, as a compliment to the Sheikh’s women’.⁵⁸ Although this is a historical harem, no longer occupied, Belle is immediately associated with it. The ransom Rafiq has given to save Belle is ‘the Peacock’s Eye’, bestowed upon the sheikh’s favourite from his harem and echoed in

⁵³ Lewis, *Rethinking Orientalism*, p. 97.

⁵⁴ Lewis, *Rethinking Orientalism*, p. 97.

⁵⁵ *Disobedient*, p. 115.

⁵⁶ *Disobedient*, p. 115.

⁵⁷ *Disobedient*, p. 159.

⁵⁸ *Ransomed*, p. 61.

its architecture.⁵⁹ Furthermore, Belle herself fantasises about being in the sheikh's harem, as 'a strange thrill skittered down her back at the knowledge she'd actually spent the night in a sheikh's harem. In *his* harem. Damn, she had it bad'.⁶⁰ Not only does she occupy the harem, she also embodies the kind of woman who would have been resident, as she is likened to a courtesan by the hero: just before they have sex, the heroine, her 'passion unleashed, [...] had transformed into a *houri*, the most seductively dangerous woman known to mankind'.⁶¹ The harem thus remains a prominent aspect of these sheikh romances.

As well as providing exoticism, the harem has a specific function in the articulation of abduction. Haddad notes that the fantasy of the harem is 'perversely attractive' to popular romance and argues that it functions in sheikh romance to 'recuperate captivity as connection': part of the transition from captivity to marriage.⁶² For Haddad, 'ventures into harem fantasy help to facilitate [the heroine's] acceptance of captivity as a constituent of both courtship and marriage'.⁶³ By associating captivity with the harem rather than with rebel politics, *Ransomed* and *Disobedient* rework the connotation of the heroine's abduction away from contemporary politics and towards the development of the relationship: in other words, romance abduction.

The second way in which *Disobedient* and *Ransomed* distinguish between romance abduction and political, terrorist kidnap is by connecting romance abduction with the conventions of bride kidnap. Bride kidnap is associated with eastern culture in these sheikh romances and elsewhere and is one of the clearest analogues for romance abduction. Bride kidnap is generally understood as the seizing of a woman, usually by the projected groom and his male friends or family, who is then coerced into marrying her abductor. It is not just within fiction that traditions of bride kidnap survive; there has been a documented surge in bride kidnapping in Kyrgyzstan in recent years, as well as evidence of the practice occurring in 'the Caucasus, areas in the Middle East, South East Asia and elsewhere'.⁶⁴ Thus, while bride kidnap is not

⁵⁹ *Ransomed*, pp. 67, 181.

⁶⁰ *Ransomed*, pp. 61-62.

⁶¹ *Ransomed*, pp. 42, 139.

⁶² Haddad, pp. 50, 52.

⁶³ Haddad, p. 50.

⁶⁴ Lori Handrahan, 'Hunting for Women: Bride-Kidnapping in Kyrgyzstan', *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 6.2 (2004): 208. See also: Anne E. McLaren, 'Marriage by Abduction in Twentieth Century China', *Modern Asian Studies* 35.4 (2001): pp. 953-984;

usually classified as the kind of political capture associated with terrorism in the Middle East, it is still a contemporary danger for women in the area, although, we would assume, not usually for western women.

There are clear similarities between this tradition and the construction of romance abduction in these narratives. While the first kidnap of Belle in *Ransomed* is linked to terrorist politics, her second abduction by the hero is presented as part of a custom stretching back to Tariq's grandparents. Even though the reason they are marrying, to ensure the stability of the country, is deeply political, the way it is represented in *Ransomed* is more like the tradition of forced marriage, distanced from political events, and warranted by its status as cultural tradition. In *Disobedient* too, the trajectory of romance abduction seems to follow traditional patterns of bride kidnapping. Tair abducts Tally from a neighbouring North African country and carries her on horseback to a desert encampment. While this abduction begins as a political kidnap, it also validates his personal choice of her for his wife, echoing the way his own father chose his mother and integrating this new abduction into the tradition of bride kidnap. Significantly, the practice of bride kidnap has long been labelled as a cultural tradition; in her study of bride kidnap in Kyrgyzstan, Lori Handrahan claims that 'bride-kidnapping has come to be understood as a fundamental "Kyrgyz tradition"' and is tolerated and, to a certain extent, celebrated in that country because of its perceived cultural importance.⁶⁵ This anticipates the representation of abduction in *Disobedient* and *Ransomed* as based on tradition and cultural precedent, normalised and validated by evidence of successful abduction and forced marriage amongst the sheikh hero's ancestors.

Bride kidnap depends heavily on an understanding of women as objects of value who can be possessed. In this way the heroine can be imagined as a purchasable possession, passing from the custody of one man into the ownership of another.⁶⁶ In *Ransomed*, the hero's possession of the heroine is made explicit as it emerges that he

Cynthia Werner, 'Bride Abduction in post-Soviet Central Asia: Marking a Shift Towards Patriarchy Through Local Discourses of Shame and Tradition', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 15 (2009): pp. 314–331.

⁶⁵ Handrahan, p. 209.

⁶⁶ This has a clear parallel in the kidnapping of women for wealth and property which occurred in the Middle Ages.

has paid a ransom to rescue her from her kidnappers, which means, according to the customs of his people, that he has paid for her:

By morning the whole island nation would know that the Peacock's Eye, the most revered and coveted family heirloom in the world, and one of his country's national treasures, had been paid for the life of the woman in his arms. [...]

'According to the custom of my people, [...] since I relinquished it in return for you, I've paid it as a bride price. Which means that, as far as Q'aroum is concerned, Belle, you are my affianced bride'.⁶⁷

The payment of a 'bride price', also mentioned in *Disobedient*, connotes the traditional trade in bodies and dowry payment which the west has typically associated with the east.⁶⁸

The established relationship between abduction, marriage and possession is particularly evident in the association of forced marriage with the wearing of eastern jewellery. Kaler argues: 'often the need to bedeck the heroines with jewels serves as a veiling effect similar to the signs of sexual bondage – bracelets suggest handcuffs, necklaces replace collars, and ankle bracelets represent shackles'.⁶⁹ On her wedding day, Belle wears a heavy 'solid gold collar around her throat [...] that sat like a brand on her skin'.⁷⁰ This jewellery has a more sinister undertone than a traditional wedding gift, drawn from discourses of forced marriage, bride kidnap and slavery. The sheikh says: 'the sight of her, adorned by al Akhtar gold' is a 'symbol of their marriage' – 'of his ownership' – connecting the 'magnificently barbaric necklace' with captivity and possession.⁷¹ The motivations for romance abduction are thus closer to those of bride kidnap (securing a wife) than the aims of political kidnap (securing ransom or regime change).

The third and final way in which romance abduction is figured as a cultural tradition is through the provision of a history of abduction in the sheikh hero's family which is framed as romantic success. *Ransomed* explicitly connects Belle's present-day captivity with the history of the desert nation and Rafiq's ancestors. Rafiq outlines

⁶⁷ *Ransomed*, pp. 27, 67.

⁶⁸ *Disobedient*, p. 42. A historical example of western interest in the trade in bodies associated with the east is the slave market, which was a tourist attraction for westerners visiting the Middle East and North Africa in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Lewis, *Rethinking Orientalism*, p. 132).

⁶⁹ Kaler, p. 90.

⁷⁰ *Ransomed*, pp. 102, 103.

⁷¹ *Ransomed*, pp. 102, 109.

his family's history, focusing on the abduction of his English great-grandmother by his great-grandfather:

'Of course, it wasn't just gold and gems that my ancestors took as their right [...]. They appropriated money, of course, and weapons and ships. But the al Akhtars have always had a taste for the best in all things. [...] They had an eye for beauty in all its forms [...]. And their taste in women was renowned.'

'Kidnapping as well as piracy then! No wonder your family had a reputation for ruthlessness'.⁷²

The hero of *Disobedient* has a similar heritage, noting that 'his father had kidnapped his wife – Tair's own mother'.⁷³ Tair also provides a model of successful abduction and similarly draws a comparison between his abducted mother and the captive heroine, stating:

'Did I ever tell you that my father kidnapped my mother? [...] My mother was English. She was a schoolteacher. She was teaching for the International School in Atiq when my father saw her, kidnapped her, took her to his kasbah and made her his.'

'Did your mother hate your father for what he did?' [...] 'No. She loved him. They were still quite together when my father died. [...] My mother never returned to Britain. She stayed here in Ouaha and then only recently has moved to Baraka. She has a home in Atiq. [...] You'll have to meet her. She's almost as feisty as you'.⁷⁴

The hero compares the characters of his mother and the heroine, as well as their experiences of abduction: the heroine too has been abducted, removed to the hero's home and forced into marriage. In tracing the similarities between them, the hero both indicates that the heroine's experience is of a romance abduction, not political kidnap, and indicates that such an abduction might have a happy outcome.

Identifying an individual, personal aspect of abduction, and presenting previous abductions as securing happy endings permit heroes to suggest that heroines' own experiences of captivity might have positive outcomes. Talking about his ancestors' abduction of women, the hero of *Ransomed* states:

'Of course by today's standards it would be barbaric. But only a couple of generations ago it was another matter. And it wasn't always as dire as you

⁷² *Ransomed*, p. 63.

⁷³ *Disobedient*, p. 28.

⁷⁴ *Disobedient*, p. 90.

think. My great-grandmother had no wish to leave here after she'd been... liberated from a ship.'

Her eyes grew huge. 'Your own great-grandmother?' She shook her head in amazement. [...] 'She was more than happy to stay after she met my great-grandfather. She'd been on her way from England to India to marry some military man she hardly knew. Family lore has it that she and my great-grandfather made a love match of it'.⁷⁵

By carefully labelling his great-grandmother's abduction as liberating, and her resulting relationship with his great-grandfather as 'a love match', the hero seeks to rewrite the potential barbarism of abduction, even 'by today's standards'. In his presentation of abduction as both tradition – 'the pair of them started a family tradition' – and successful – 'his ancestress had got exactly what she desired, however unorthodox her meeting with her future husband' – the hero sets up a model for himself and the heroine to follow.⁷⁶ So figuring abduction as family tradition makes it both inevitable (it is in his blood) and romantic (a love match can be obtained). It also inscribes the western notion of marriage based on love rather than family alliances or other concerns as the dominant mode of heteronormative relations in these romances, although *Ransomed* here locates marriage for love in the east, rather than the west. This relocation serves to legitimise abduction and its role in facilitating this love.

The construction of abduction as part of the sheikh's family heritage also serves to temporally distance the heroine's experiences of abduction from political reality. By connecting the hero with his ancestors' predilection for abduction, the heroine of *Ransomed* can re-imagine her own abduction by the hero in the context of his ancestors and not as modern, political kidnap. She visualises

how his ancestor had stormed a passing ship and boldly abducted a woman simply because she'd pleased his eye. A woman he'd kept in the harem where Belle had slept.

But in her mind it was Rafiq on the deck of that ship. Rafiq with his feet planted wide, his muscled arms bare, his eyes gleaming with purpose and promise as he spied his prize: the woman he would take for his own.

And, of course, to Belle's despair, that woman was herself.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ *Ransomed*, pp. 63-64. The text here suggests that arranged marriages occur in the west as well as east, a technique of comparison employed by these romance novels which I discuss later in this chapter.

⁷⁶ *Ransomed*, pp. 65, 64.

⁷⁷ *Ransomed*, pp. 72-73.

For the purposes of her romantic fantasy, Belle transports both Rafiq and herself to the past occupied by his ancestors, taking their places in the abduction. Belle never considers her forced captivity by the hero to be abduction, presumably to establish a distinction between her traumatic abduction at the start of the romance and her forced marriage to a man she desires. The heroine's feeling of 'despair', as she fantasises about being abducted, indicates the paradox between desiring abduction and recognising it as unacceptable. However, I contend that distancing the idea of her first kidnap from her subsequent experiences of captivity at the hands of the sheikh exploits the cultural production of a past time when the abduction of women was more prevalent, was carried out primarily for desire rather than politics and was, perhaps, more acceptable.

Recoding abduction as cultural custom rather than as political act serves to normalise and license it. In *Ransomed*, the hero justifies their forced marriage as 'the tradition' and the hero of *Disobedient* uses the cultural codes of his country to justify his abduction of the heroine, even as he recognises, through his English heritage, that 'it was wrong':

Tair knew what the American woman said, knew in her world what he did was criminal, knew in her world he had no right. But she wasn't in her world, she was in his, and here what he did was allowed. Permissible. Just.⁷⁸

Here, responsibility for the abduction is shifted from the individual, Tair, to the culture of his eastern world, thereby depersonalising his actions and repositioning liability. The shift in responsibility from abuser to culture has been noted in sociological work on domestic violence in migrant cultural groups; Nilda Rimonte posits that justifying abduction as accepted and acceptable cultural tradition shifts 'responsibility from the abuser to his culture', thereby denying 'his personal responsibility [...] accepting and legitimizing the view that there is no crime and no victim'.⁷⁹ I contend that a similar shift occurs in sheikh romance, with the reworking of abduction as cultural custom.

⁷⁸ *Ransomed*, p. 95; *Disobedient*, pp. 69, 73.

⁷⁹ Nilda Rimonte, 'A Question of Culture: Cultural Approval of Violence against Women in the Pacific-Asian Community and the Cultural Defense', *Stanford Law Review*, 43.6 (1991): 1325. Rimonte analysed the perpetuation of domestic violence against women in Pacific-Asian communities in the US, analysing how tradition and culture were effectively used as a defence from prosecution by male perpetrators.

The transfer of responsibility for abduction from the sheikh abuser to his culture is evident in *Disobedient*, as instead of escaping from the hero, it is specifically his culture from which Tally tries to flee: she wants to ‘go, just go: not to necessarily leave Tair, but to leave here, leave the confinement and the women’s quarters and the world that kept her in long dresses and veils and away from action’.⁸⁰ Abduction is thus more closely associated with eastern culture – veils, seclusion and confinement – than with the hero himself. I have argued elsewhere in this thesis that the sheikh hero is often distanced from apparently restrictive aspects of eastern culture and the dissociation of the sheikh from the eastern tradition of abduction is a further facet of this detachment. Such a separation absolves the hero from responsibility and decriminalises his actions; abduction as part of eastern culture is not only tolerated, but celebrated by the romance narrative. Furthermore, Rafiq’s ancestors, being ‘renowned for their rapacious passion and the single-minded pursuit of what they wanted’, seem to offer a justification and endorsement for his similar behaviour.⁸¹ As Rafiq himself asks: ‘who could fight centuries of conditioning?’⁸² Belle wonders, ‘perhaps his barbaric inheritance was latent, close to the surface even in this modern-day monarch, who ruled a progressive nation funded by offshore oil revenues’.⁸³ Tair describes his forced marriage to the heroine as ‘kismet [...] fate’, suggesting it is inevitable and unavoidable and that, therefore, he is not responsible for it.⁸⁴ So, to a certain extent, the hero’s possessive character and the enforced captivity of the heroine are excused by his heritage, removing his personal responsibility and providing him with what has elsewhere been labelled a cultural ‘excuse’.⁸⁵

Finally, while abduction is marked as an eastern custom in sheikh romance, it is also surprisingly connected with the west in a move that serves to minimise the otherness of romance abduction, challenging distinctions which associate the west with freedom and the east with captivity. Thus, even as abduction is constructed as a facet of eastern culture, it can also be used to comment on relationship customs in the west. Earlier, I quoted a passage from *Ransomed*, in which Rafiq describes how his English great-grandmother was abducted from a ship whilst ‘on her way from

⁸⁰ *Disobedient*, p. 158.

⁸¹ *Ransomed*, p. 33.

⁸² *Ransomed*, p. 32.

⁸³ *Ransomed*, p. 60.

⁸⁴ *Disobedient*, p. 107.

⁸⁵ See Rimonte.

England to India to marry some military man she hardly knew'.⁸⁶ As well as providing a precedent for the sheikh's own abduction of Belle, this passage simultaneously reveals that marriage to an unknown man and the removal of a woman to a different culture was not a custom limited to the eastern world, but one which also occurred in the past of the west. The restrictions of abduction are also paralleled in the west. In *Disobedient*, the hero, discussing his father's abduction of his mother, asks Tally: 'your father didn't kidnap your mother?'.⁸⁷ Tally's mind

flashed to the cramped trailer, and the trailer park, she'd grown up in and cringed inwardly. He might as well have, she thought, thinking about her father who couldn't ever keep a job thanks to his drinking and her mother who juggled several but never particularly well.⁸⁸

Directly comparing the abduction of Tair's mother with her parents' western relationship makes Tally's own restriction in captivity at once more familiar and less serious; there is a dichotomy between the romance east, where abduction is tolerated and is a documented way of establishing an eventually loving relationship, and the west, where abduction is unacceptable, but where relationships are unsuccessful and may constitute a form of restriction. The narrative sets up the western model of failed love and unhappy relationships to endorse and authorise forced marriage via abduction by presenting certain aspects of the western model of love and relationships as unsuccessful. Romance abduction, considered in this wider context, does not seem so very restrictive after all.

Constructing romance abduction using tropes of the harem, bride kidnap and creating a personal heritage of abduction for the sheikh hero functions to recast abduction as a familiar, established, cultural tradition. This disrupts the association of romance abduction with political kidnapping, reducing its potential trauma and facilitating the cross-cultural relationship by removing such obstacles to it. But sheikh romances are not the only genre to deal with the reality of kidnap by reworking their representations of abduction. As I mentioned earlier, abduction was also a concern in the Middle Ages. I would like to suggest that just as *Disobedient* and *Ransomed* reduce the anxiety of abduction by recasting it as established cultural tradition, so too

⁸⁶ *Ransomed*, p. 64.

⁸⁷ *Disobedient*, p. 91.

⁸⁸ *Disobedient*, p. 91.

does *Octavian* distance its representation of abduction from the reality of kidnap via temporal alterity, and re-labelling abduction as conversion.

Octavian is set during the time of the Crusades. The first crusade to the Holy Land was called by Pope Urban II in 1095 and the last remaining western Christians were forced from the Levant in 1291, meaning that the major engagements of the conflict had ended by the time *Octavian* appeared in Middle English. Yet, as I pointed out in Chapter 1, the impact of these conflicts resonated throughout the Middle Ages and indeed, as Asbridge argues, ‘between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries [...] the medieval Crusades attained a semi-mythic status’, with calls for crusades continuing ‘through the fourteenth century and beyond’.⁸⁹ Middle English romance continued to use the Crusades as the backdrop for its narratives, throughout the Middle Ages. I would like to suggest that by setting the romance’s action during a non-contemporary temporal moment, *Octavian* distances its articulations of kidnap and abduction from those occurring in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century England.

Whilst the main patriarch of the romance is anomalously a Roman Emperor named Octavian, the romance is not set in Roman times. Furthermore, although Muslim forces from Spain did invade France in the eighth century, this does not seem to be the temporal setting for the romance either.⁹⁰ The romance is populated by Saracens who are almost certainly from the Holy Land. Marsabelle’s handmaiden ‘Olive’ is ‘the Princess of Sodom’, inferring a fictional contemporary Saracen place in the east with biblical connotations of evil.⁹¹ *Octavian* also refers to Jerusalem, similarly located in the Holy Land. Octavian’s wife travels to Jerusalem with her son, also named Octavian, and is welcomed and hosted by the ‘king’ who ‘immediately recognised her’.⁹² The Christianity of the king is further established as he ‘allowed [the child] to be christened’.⁹³ The fact that the king welcomes and recognises the empress suggests that this refers to the time of a Christian ruler in Jerusalem (1099-

⁸⁹ Asbridge, pp. 670, 657.

⁹⁰ Roger Collins writes: ‘military expeditions under successive governors of Al-Andalus did expand Arab conquests along the Mediterranean coast of southern France, reaching as far as Avignon in 737, but the main thrust of such undertakings was into Aquitaine via Pamplona’. Following their defeat at the Battle of Poitiers in 732/3 (also known as the Battle of Tours), Arab advances into France were curbed (*Early Medieval Spain: Unity in Diversity 400-1000*, 2nd ed. [Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995], p. 251).

⁹¹ ‘Olyvan’ (1096); ‘the kyngys doghtur of Sodam’ (1097).

⁹² ‘kynge’ (499); ‘full well he hur kende’ (504).

⁹³ ‘let [the child] crystenyd bee’ (512).

1187), therefore during the main thrust of the Crusades, long before the fourteenth-century composition of *Octavian*.

The theme of abduction and captivity in this romance can also suggest a strong link with the period of the Crusades. Peggy McCracken notes: ‘the taking of captives was a common practice in Crusade warfare’, and the captivity of Florent, his father and the king of France along with ‘dukes, earls and barons’ echoes similar captures which occurred throughout Crusade warfare.⁹⁴ They are referred to as ‘the Christian prisoners’, cementing their identity primarily as Christian and foregrounding that the opposition between enemies here, as between opposing crusading armies, is religious.⁹⁵ *Octavian* is thus temporally other, as it sets its events either during the time of the Crusades or, alternatively, in a fantasy or imaginary time, where temporally specific references, such as the Roman emperor Octavian, a Saracen invasion of France, or a Christian ruler of Jerusalem, are removed from their contexts. I would like to argue that *Octavian* shifts its articulations of abduction away from the contemporary context of kidnap and captivity in England towards an older or fantasy ‘other’ temporal moment, largely inflected with influences of the Crusades. I contend that *Octavian* is working in a similar way to *Disobedient* and *Ransomed*; situating its own abduction as temporally distant, allowing for an engagement with the motif without raising anxieties by associating it with a more immediate danger.

Abduction is also reworked in *Octavian* by association with conversion. One of the main aspects which separates the experiences of *Octavian*’s heroine, Marsabelle, from those of the romance’s contemporary audience is that she is Saracen. Abduction thus takes on a different meaning due to her religious affiliation. The central condition of Florent’s abduction is that Marsabelle ‘will be christened’.⁹⁶ That this abduction works as a conversion is made particularly clear in NO, for whereas in SO Marsabelle’s conversion to Christianity is negotiated after her abduction, in NO it is worked into the terms of the abduction, thereby suggesting much more clearly how abduction can function as conversion. Conversion is an established practice, and by

⁹⁴ ‘dewkys, erlys and barons’ (1631). Peggy McCracken, ‘Romance Captivities in the Context of Crusade: The Prose Lancelot’, *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 124.2 (2009): 576.

⁹⁵ ‘the Crysten prysoners’ (1621).

⁹⁶ ‘wyll [...] crystenyd be’ (1457).

repurposing her abduction as such, *Octavian* reworks its meaning and acceptability, authorising it as an acceptable method for conversion, as well as further distancing it from the reality of kidnap for property or wealth in medieval England.

In the same way as modern sheikh romances, so too does *Octavian* distance its representation of abduction from the contemporary reality of kidnap. Representations of abduction in *Octavian* are set either in the time of the Crusades or in a fantasy, atemporal moment, thereby creating a disjunction between contemporary kidnappings in England and the kinds of abduction detailed in the romance. While *Octavian* does contain representations of capture for monetary gain (the kidnapping of Florent) and for politics (the capture of Christian knights by the Saracen army), I contend that because it locates these abductions in a temporality which is simultaneously both the past and fantasy time, they are distanced from the kinds of kidnap occurring in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century England. In *Octavian*, then, kidnap is ‘othered’: abduction in the romance is not the same as the kidnapping which occurs in contemporary England.

The kidnaps of Florent and the Christian knights are further dissociated from Marsabelle’s abduction by gender. Hers is the only female abduction in the narrative and stands somewhat apart from other instances of capture. These kinds of capture for money or politics are not the kinds of abduction which happens to women in this romance, and Marsabelle’s own experience is presented as distinct. These other abductions thus offer a contrast, against which Marsabelle’s experiences can be read differently to such politically motivated kidnappings. Repurposing Marsabelle’s abduction as conversion, a practice so established in romances featuring Saracens that it could arguably be considered a convention, works to further dissociate her abduction by Florent from other examples of capture in the romance. While they effect it differently, all three romances, *Octavian*, *Disobedient* and *Ransomed*, work to distance their articulations of romance abduction from the contemporary reality of kidnap.

‘Keeping You Here is Keeping You Safe’: Abduction as Protection

The second major way in which abduction is reworked in these romances is in the way it is redefined as rescue or protection. In modern sheikh romances, the created east poses numerous dangers for the heroine. Both *Ransomed* and *Disobedient* are clear about the hazards it presents for the heroine. In *Ransomed* Rafiq’s enforced captivity of Belle protects her from terrorist threats and, by abducting Tally from her rebel guides in *Disobedient*, Tair protects her both from the rebels and from the risks of the desert. Heroines are constructed as vulnerable to these dangers. In *Ransomed*, Belle worries that she will not be safe alone following her abduction:

There was a niggle of tension in the pit of her stomach that she’d tried to ignore ever since she’d left her hospital room. A niggle that had grown alarmingly into a tight, hard knot of fear.

Fear that alone in the expedition team’s house she might not be safe. That masked men might burst in, brandishing guns.⁹⁷

The heroine is made similarly vulnerable through her isolation. Whilst abduction itself contributes to the isolation of the heroine, as I mentioned in Chapter 3, the modern romance heroine is almost always without parents or support from friends, remote and cut off from the world. In both *Disobedient* and *Ransomed* the heroines have strained or distant relationships with their families. Tally lives alone and ‘as far as her family knew, she’d been missing for years’ and Belle’s mother and sister, whom her father left years earlier, are almost inaccessible to her.⁹⁸ So the heroine’s seclusion constructs her as more susceptible to both the dangers of the east and to the threat of abduction. The effect of this is to engineer heroines as requiring protection, even if they do not know or admit it.

Almost immediately after Belle privately expresses her fear of not being safe, Rafiq has her escorted to his palace, the doors of which close behind her ‘like the slam of a cell door: final and forbidding’ and tells her: ‘it’s my duty now to keep you safe’.⁹⁹ Despite the heroine’s assurances that she is safe, the hero reiterates: ‘I will make sure you are. [...] We will take no chances with your well-being. Until the man-hunt is over you will reside here. In the palace’.¹⁰⁰ Here, captivity is justified through the pretence of offering protection. In *Disobedient* Tally continually rejects the sheikh’s

⁹⁷ *Ransomed*, p. 46.

⁹⁸ *Disobedient*, p. 19.

⁹⁹ *Ransomed*, pp. 48, 52.

¹⁰⁰ *Ransomed*, p. 52.

insistence on protection, even though Tair declares that she needs it.¹⁰¹ However Tair's prediction is proved correct, as the heroine is kidnapped by rebels, yet is 'calmed by the knowledge that Tair would help her. Tair would save her. He always did'.¹⁰² This time it is the romance narrative itself which justifies the captivity.

Thus, even when abduction is transformed into protection, an undertone of captivity is still evident, indicating the paradoxical relationship between protection and captivity. In fact, the division between hero and captor is narrow; in *Disobedient*, Tally tells Tair: 'you nearly killed me!' to which he replies: 'fortunately I also saved you', suggesting a fine distinction between protection and threat.¹⁰³ Later in the romance, the hero is even more direct, stating 'keeping you here is keeping you safe'.¹⁰⁴ Protection is as closely linked with the east as the abduction motif itself, for the sheikh's understanding of abduction and captivity as protection, in contrast to the heroine's viewpoint, is drawn from cultural conventions. Tair muses: 'in his culture men didn't discuss women – unless they were foreign women and then the assumption was that they were up for grabs'.¹⁰⁵ Tair resolves that 'he had to do what was right. To protect her. To ensure no one exploited her', deciding to force Tally to marry him in order, the narrative suggests, to protect her from being 'grabbed' by his men.¹⁰⁶ So not only are the reasons for abduction drawn from the cultural traditions of the east, but the reason the heroine requires protection in the first place is rooted in the perils posed by the same romance east.

The metaphor of captivity as protection is similarly present in *Ransomed*, although here it is reversed, indicating how rescue and protection can be figured as captivity. Even when he embodies the role of rescuer, Rafiq's rescue of Belle is inflected by captivity motifs. Although 'she had no doubt he would give his all to save her', still 'instinct warned her to be wary of this man'.¹⁰⁷ When sheltering Belle from the storm

Rafiq

lifted her in a single easy movement, tucking her close. A wall of solid muscle supported her, warmed her. Strong arms bound her and she sank

¹⁰¹ *Disobedient*, p. 146.

¹⁰² *Disobedient*, p. 165.

¹⁰³ *Disobedient*, p. 13.

¹⁰⁴ *Disobedient*, p. 56.

¹⁰⁵ *Disobedient*, p. 58.

¹⁰⁶ *Disobedient*, p. 59.

¹⁰⁷ *Ransomed*, pp. 19, 20.

gratefully into him, finding comfort in his strength and the steady, calming rhythm of his heart.

Despite the roar of the storm, the living pulse of the waves smashing on the shore, she could almost believe nothing bad would happen while she was with him.¹⁰⁸

Yet in spite of the tone of rescue and protection here, an undercurrent of captivity is present: 'his arms held her in a grip of steel as if he'd never let her go' and as he covers her with his body, sheltering her from the storm, 'a barrier against the terrifying wind that roared through the night', Belle begins to hyperventilate: 'it was difficult to draw breath with him pressing down on her. Sand clogged her nostrils and her breathing came in rapid pants. [...] She had to get free'.¹⁰⁹ The hero keeps the heroine captive for her own protection, literally shielding her with his body. This physical protection acts as a precursor to the heroine's later enforced captivity in the hero's palace.

A notable effect of reworking abduction in this way is to position the abducted heroine as passive. The apparent passivity of the female romance heroine has been well observed; David Margolies argues that this passivity seems to be one of the fantasies of romance.¹¹⁰ Ann Barr Snitow similarly contends: 'the Harlequin form of romance depends on the heroine's being in a state of passivity, of not knowing'.¹¹¹ Some have argued that this passivity has an effect beyond romance. Wood has analysed the perpetuation of romance as part of the primary gender narrative in western culture, arguing that it shapes as normal 'for women to defer and subordinate themselves and their interests'.¹¹² It has also been argued that although 'romance formulas have changed', female passivity lingers; 'the persistent pattern of male authority and female passivity suggests that these alterations may be less substantial than they appear on the surface'.¹¹³

In modern sheikh romances, it is clear that captivity plays a large part in producing a passive role for women. Tally equates her captivity with 'passivity' and

¹⁰⁸ *Ransomed*, p. 22.

¹⁰⁹ *Ransomed*, p. 23.

¹¹⁰ Margolies, p. 8.

¹¹¹ Ann Barr Snitow, 'Mass Market Romance: Pornography for Women is Different', *Desire: The Politics of Sexuality*, ed. Snitow, Christine Stansell and Sharon Thompson (London: Virago Press, 1984), p. 263.

¹¹² Wood, p. 247.

¹¹³ Mussell, p. 143.

‘despondency’, deeming it ‘far better to risk life and limb than sit captive, passive’.¹¹⁴ Passivity is endemic in the romance east, where heroines are massaged, dressed and prepared by multitudes of servants and aides. In preparing for her wedding, Belle ‘stood statue-still as [...] women clustered around her, chattering and adjusting her delicate robes with a tweak here and a stitch there’.¹¹⁵ This is a passivity that the heroine vocally, although not physically, rejects, wondering ‘surely it didn’t take so many to dress her?’¹¹⁶ Yet heroines do not always rebuff their enforced inactivity. Certain aspects of their captivity are presented as luxurious, sensual and desired by the heroines. Tally compares Tair’s room with ‘the VIP rooms at the elite hotels and clubs’ she knows, admitting that ‘Tair’s world was more seductive, more erotic than anything she’d found in Seattle or the Pacific Northwest, Tair’s world was... indulgent’.¹¹⁷

In her study of popular romance, Radway links the enjoyment of passivity within romance to a regressive fantasy of nurture. She posits that reading romances provides women with ‘an important emotional release’ from their routine as primary familial nurturer, arguing:

Passivity *is* at the heart of the romance experience in the sense that the final goal of each narrative is the creation of that perfect union where the ideal male, who is masculine and strong yet nurturant too, finally recognises the intrinsic worth of the heroine. Thereafter she is required to do nothing more than *exist* as the center of this paragon’s attention. Romantic escape is, therefore, a temporary but literal denial of the demands women recognise as an integral part of their roles as nurturing wives and mothers.¹¹⁸

Radway uses Chodorow’s theory of nurture and mothering to suggest that romance reading provides the nurture demanded by women’s desire to regress into infancy.¹¹⁹ This is evident in *Ransomed* and *Disobedient*, most obviously as the heroine’s relationship with the hero is represented in terms of parenting: he adopts a fatherly role. In *Disobedient*, Tally compares her relationship with Tair to that with her father, suggesting an emotional, if not literal, transference from one to the other. As she wonders why she is attracted to Tair, Tally considers: ‘maybe [it was] because

¹¹⁴ *Disobedient*, pp. 70, 139.

¹¹⁵ *Ransomed*, p. 87.

¹¹⁶ *Ransomed*, p. 87.

¹¹⁷ *Disobedient*, pp. 125-126.

¹¹⁸ Radway, pp. 95, 97.

¹¹⁹ Radway, p. 136.

men who kept her at arm's length made her work for their love, made her feel as if she'd had to earn their love. Like her father'.¹²⁰ Tally compares her feelings towards her father with her feelings for Tair, placing him, emotionally, into the space vacated by her father, effectively replacing one with the other.

A similar repositioning of hero as replacement father is evident in *Ransomed*, as Belle observes Rafiq to be 'imbued with the qualities of loyalty and a profound sense of responsibility that she'd always sought in a man and never found': 'the qualities her father had so patently lacked'.¹²¹ Rafiq himself assumes a father-like role when he learns that Belle's father had 'walked out and left [her] without a word', as 'he felt a surge of protectiveness so strong it staggered him'.¹²² Rafiq's reaction indicates the pervasive links between passivity, protection and the fatherly role. By presenting the hero as a father-figure, it is possible that the captivity he enforces can be reinterpreted as part of a fulfilment of an atavistic fantasy of passivity and nurture: in short, of being cared for. So by emphasising the dangers of the east, these romances redefine abduction as protection, offering a veneer of passive enjoyment which obscures the persistent undertone of captivity.

The theme of reworking abduction as rescue and protection is particularly evident in *Octavian* and, I would like to argue, is revealing of the way in which the romance engages with contemporary discourses surrounding kidnap. Marsabelle too requires protection, although she seems to be more aware of situational danger, and asks for protection herself. After arriving in France, Marsabelle contacts the King of France, requesting 'to lodge at nearby Montmartre, / Three miles from Paris [...] for she wanted to see marvellous things'.¹²³ The King grants her permission and offers her safe passage, in doing so explicitly laying out the potential dangers involved:

The King of France greeted the maiden,
For he was truly a King and knight,
And swore by his faith,
That she could confidently travel [to Montmartre];
For no man would harm her

¹²⁰ *Disobedient*, p. 140.

¹²¹ *Ransomed*, p. 119.

¹²² *Ransomed*, pp. 98, 99.

¹²³ 'to lye at Mountmertrons þere nerehonde, / From Parys mylys thre [...] for auentours wolde sche see' (788-789, 792).

Either in daylight or at night.¹²⁴

The identified threat here is sexual: as I mentioned earlier, the danger of rape was a consistent subtext in the abduction of women. The King assures Marsabelle that ‘no man’ will ‘harm her’, the Middle English word ‘mysdo’ here carrying connotations of sexual assault.

The sexual threat to Marsabelle is made evident when Florent ‘travelled directly / To Montmartre where the maiden was residing’ bearing the head of the giant he has just killed.¹²⁵ Florent greets the Princess, presenting her with the head, to which the Princess responds: ‘I think he [the giant] has kept his promise; / When he could not obtain the King’s head, / He sent me his own instead’.¹²⁶ So far, their conduct seems appropriately demure, yet Florent here retorts:

‘Maiden [...] beautiful and fair
Now I will have what you promised to him’:
And over the saddle he leaned.
Again and again he kissed that maiden,
And picked her up, and rode away.¹²⁷

Marsabelle’s sudden abduction here is startling and is particularly emphasised in the Cambridge Ff 2.38 version of *Octavian*. In the text of *Octavian* in Lincoln, Cathedral Library, MS 91 (Thornton), the line reads ‘and picked her up and *intended* to ride away’, suggesting that the attempted abduction is more conditional.¹²⁸ The abduction is thus more abrupt and definite in Cambridge Ff 2.38; it is clear that Florent *does* ride away with Marsabelle, although he does not get far, as he is forced to ‘put the maiden down, / And ready himself to fight’.¹²⁹

The elements of this attempted abduction reveal an interesting blurring between abduction and rescue. Whilst the reaction of others in the romance suggests that this is a straightforward kidnapping – ‘tumult and commotion rose in the town’ and

¹²⁴ ‘The kyng of Fraunce þe maydyn hyst, / As he was trewe kyng and knyzt, / And swere hur be hys fay, / That she must sauely come þerto; / Ther schulde no man hur mysdo / Neythur be nyght ne day’ (793-798).

¹²⁵ ‘toke the ryght way / To Mountmertrons þere the mayde lay’ (994-995).

¹²⁶ ‘Me thynkyth he was trewe of hete; / The kyngys when he myght not gete / Hys own that he me sende’ (1012-1014).

¹²⁷ ‘“Damysell [...] feyre and bryght, / Now wyll y haue þat þou hym hyght” / And ouyr hys sadull he leynyd. / Oftesythys he kyste that may, / And hente hur vp and rode away’ (1015-1019).

¹²⁸ ‘and hent hir vpe and *wolde* away’ (931, my emphasis).

¹²⁹ ‘let the maydyn adowne / And made hym bowne to fyght’ (1025-1026).

Marsabelle's father is so angry 'that it was dreadful to see' – there are aspects of the abduction which are more reminiscent of chivalric behaviour.¹³⁰ For example, immediately after he abducts her, Florent cuts off part of Marsabelle's 'scarlet sleeve' telling her: 'mistress, by this you will recognise me' in battle.¹³¹ This courtly and chivalric convention was regularly deployed in the literature of the period.¹³² Furthermore, the sudden and intense expression of love between the two protagonists is typical of courtly depictions of love and suggests a relationship akin to that of victim/rescuer, as opposed to victim/abductor: the romance reveals 'such love grew between the two of them'.¹³³ So whilst some aspects of this abduction serve to construct it as straightforward kidnap, others suggest that it is a rescue, partly formed by elaborate chivalric ritual.

This abduction-cum-rescue is further complicated by the ambiguous position of Florent. If we read his actions as prompted by chivalric convention, Florent is presented as lover and rescuer, courting and liberating Marsabelle. However, if this is simply an abduction, Florent becomes a villain, assuming the place of the predatory giant. There is plenty of evidence to label Florent as lover. Although Florent's taking away of Marsabelle can be read as abduction – Marsabelle later refers to Florent as the man who 'abducted [her] from the Borough of the Queen' – it is not necessarily non-consensual abduction.¹³⁴ The romance makes it very clear that Marsabelle did not want to kiss the giant; in fact, she 'would rather be punished'¹³⁵ / Than see him access her chamber: / So hideous a creature was he'.¹³⁶ Thus, by killing the giant,

¹³⁰ 'crye and noyse rose yn the towne' (1021); 'that hodyus hyt was to see' (1071).

¹³¹ 'skarlet sleue' (1027); 'lady, be thys ye shall me ken' (1028).

¹³² Nigel Saul, *For Honour and Fame: Chivalry in England, 1066-1500* (London: Bodley Head, 2011), p. 271.

¹³³ 'Soche loue waxe betwene þem two' (1030).

¹³⁴ 'rauyschyd [her] fro Borogh Larayn' (1244). In his edition of *Octavian* Maldwyn Mills considers that 'Borough Larayn' corresponds to 'modern Bourg-la-reine in the [Parisian] arrondissement of Sceaux' (*Six Middle English Romances* [London: Dent, 1973], note to line 787, p. 203).

¹³⁵ Specifically by being dragged behind a horse on a cart or sledge. Appropriately, this form of punishment seems to have been most frequently used for those who had committed sexual transgressions (J. A. Sharpe, *Judicial Punishment in England* [London: Faber and Faber, 1990], p. 21). A more serious form of this punishment also features in the romance *Amis and Amiloun* as Amis fears that he will be executed and dragged behind horses which Edward Foster notes is 'neither a cruel nor unusual punishment for [his] breach of fidelity and chastity' (Edward E. Foster ed., *Amis and Amiloun, Robert of Cisyle, and Sir Amadace*, 2nd ed. [Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2007], note to line 645).

¹³⁶ 'she had leuyr drawyn bene / Than yn hur chaumbur hym to sene: / So fowle a wyght was he' (808-810).

Florent has removed the threat of an unwanted relationship and allowed himself to be fixed as Marsabelle's rescuer.

The romance also construes Marsabelle as so much in love with Florent that she 'wept with sorrow, / When he could not win her' suggesting a desire not just for Florent, but for the abduction itself.¹³⁷ Indeed, for the rest of the romance, Marsabelle devotes herself to arranging a more successful second abduction. Furthermore, the use of the word 'win' shifts the tone of events from abduction – 'picked her up, and rode away' – to the idea of winning a woman by triumphing at a task: in this case, the killing of the giant.¹³⁸ This practice was at the heart of the literary romantic and chivalrous ethos and is a regular feature in romance.¹³⁹ By representing Marsabelle as a willing participant in this subsequent abduction, and defining the first attempted abduction as the courtly actions of a lover, the romance positions Florent as a rescuer, liberating Marsabelle both from sexual contact with a giant and, as this is a Christian-centric romance, from her Saracen companions and religion.

But the abducting Florent can also be read as villainous. In attempting to abduct Marsabelle, Florent assumes the role of the giant he has defeated. Yet he goes further than simply claiming victory and returning the giant's head to Marsabelle: he not only claims the 'one kiss' that Marsabelle had promised to the giant, but proceeds to claim several more: 'again and again he kissed that maiden'.¹⁴⁰ Moreover, Florent proceeds to abduct Marsabelle, moving from one kiss to claiming her whole body, fulfilling the abduction from which the king of France promised to protect Marsabelle. Florent's statement – 'now I will claim what you promised to him' – establishes Marsabelle as a spoil of war, or a prize for defeating the giant. Yet, this is not a prize offered to Florent but one he designates for himself.

¹³⁷ 'wepte for wo, / When he ne wyne hur myght' (1031-1032).

¹³⁸ The word 'win' is used nine times in the Cambridge Ff 2.38 version of *Octavian* and refers to Marsabelle on five occasions. The Middle English Dictionary notes various uses of 'win' to denote possessive acquisition, including the gaining of a woman in a contest ('winnen', *Middle English Dictionary*, 26 Jul 2012 <<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=id&id=MED52917>>). By using this word to describe abduction, *Octavian* thus nuances its meaning.

¹³⁹ Consider, for instance, the maiden of Aumberforce in *Bevis* who is offered as a prize to the winner of a tournament.

¹⁴⁰ 'oon cosse' (816).

Furthermore, although Marsabelle arranges her second abduction by Florent, this first abduction is not constructed as offering her any real agency. The inference is that she will be abducted either way and although it would be preferable to be kidnapped by Florent rather than by the giant, this is not really figured as a choice for Marsabelle. This episode illustrates the contradictory characterisation of Florent as both lover and rescuer, villain and abductor, demonstrating the paradox of the captor-hero, which is common in modern sheikh romance but much rarer in medieval romance. It also reveals the undercurrent of violence which pervades chivalrous behaviour and the extent to which conventions of romance can be used to recast violent abduction as romantic rescue.¹⁴¹

Reworking abduction as rescue in *Octavian* is a reflection of medieval ideologies, for such a redefining can be observed in some surviving records of kidnap from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.¹⁴² The engagement of *Octavian* with discourses surrounding contemporary kidnap is thus more complex than that of sheikh romance; while at times the romance works to distance Marsabelle's abduction from the reality of kidnap, here *Octavian* engages with discourses surrounding real kidnappings of women, exploiting and, as I will argue, extending the rewriting of abduction already evident in contemporary legal and social discourse.

'Voluntary abduction' is defined as kidnap with the consent of the abductee: in other words, elopement. Dunn contends: 'medieval authorities considered such departures prosecutable offenses, so such elopements or abandonments appear in judicial records'.¹⁴³ For example, in 1355 Maud Lenegor was 'abducted by her own will' from her husband by the skinner William Rothewell, and in 1394 Alice Grondon eloped from her husband with one Henry Londlake.¹⁴⁴ Sue Sheridan Walker claims that 'women allowed themselves to be abducted in order to affirm their own choice of a husband and force their families to accept the relationship and [that] they allowed themselves to be abducted in order to leave their husbands'.¹⁴⁵ There is thus scope for a reading of kidnap which offers agency to the female 'victim' and

¹⁴¹ For the violent undertones of chivalry, see Richard W. Kaeuper, *Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1999).

¹⁴² Walker, 'Punishing Convicted Ravishers', p. 248.

¹⁴³ Dunn, p. 86.

¹⁴⁴ Dunn, p. 102.

¹⁴⁵ Walker, 'Punishing Convicted Ravishers', pp. 237-238.

refigures it as rescue: either from an unwanted suitor (such as the giant in *Octavian*), or an abusive or undesired marriage (such as Bevis' liberation of Josian from her forced marriage to Yvor and his rescue of Josian from the pyre following the murder of her second husband, Miles).

It appears that the recasting of kidnap as rescue or as voluntary was a source of concern in the later Middle Ages. Dunn posits that 'lawmakers became more concerned with preventing the voluntary departure of their wives and daughters over the course of the Middle Ages' and Cannon argues that such cases 'produced a common anxiety throughout the fourteenth century, judging from the number of cases in both local and royal courts that concern this kind of "ravishment"'.¹⁴⁶ This concern seems to have been translated into legal statute: in 1382 a statute decreed that 'when men ravish women (maids, wives, widows) who later consent to the ravishment [...] both the men and the women lose their rights of inheritance'.¹⁴⁷ Furthermore, 'the husband or closest male relative of the woman can sue the man and seek the death penalty'.¹⁴⁸ Voluntary abduction was thus a source of considerable concern at the time *Octavian* was translated into Middle English and the romance's use of the discourse reflects this.

However, just as in modern sheikh romances, recasting abduction as rescue does not liberate women from their position as a male possession, either in real life or in romance. Just as Florent's attempted abduction of Marsabelle carried implications of women as prizes, so too were women in real life treated as male possessions, as I noted earlier. Goldberg considers that abduction was part of a long tradition of marriage by captivity, allowing a man to achieve marriage or effect control over a marriage and circumvent familial hostility or problems of dowry negotiation.¹⁴⁹ What is clear about this tradition is that, as Goldberg argues, the consent of the abducted woman was not the primary issue; because a woman was legally the property of either her husband or her father, it was the lack of consent from the man owning her that was of primary concern. Hence the legal provision for the 'husband or closest male relative' to sue.¹⁵⁰ The classifying of abduction as theft from a man reveals the

¹⁴⁶ Dunn, p. 109; Cannon, p. 81.

¹⁴⁷ Kelly, 'Statutes of Rapes and Alleged Ravishers of Wives', p. 380.

¹⁴⁸ Kelly, 'Statutes of Rapes and Alleged Ravishers of Wives', p. 380.

¹⁴⁹ Goldberg, p. 162.

¹⁵⁰ Goldberg, p. 162.

extent to which women were ‘owned’ by their male relatives.¹⁵¹ Even if consensual abduction offered women the possibility of choosing their own partners, abduction as rescue still carried implications of ownership and possession.

Octavian deals interestingly with these themes of possession and ownership. As I have mentioned, other kidnappings in the romance, themed around the trade and purchase of bodies, provide a context for the romance abduction of Marsabelle. The first of these is that of the two brothers, Florent and Octavian, who are banished from Rome along with their mother. One son, Octavian, is borne away by ‘a lioness’, although he is eventually reunited with his mother.¹⁵² The other son, Florent, has a more prolonged absence from his mother; abducted by ‘an ape’, then liberated from the ape by ‘a knight’ who himself ‘encountered ten outlaws’ who ‘won the child from him’.¹⁵³ The ‘outlaws’ then sell Florent to Clement for ‘twenty pounds’.¹⁵⁴ Clement takes Florent to Paris where he raises him as his son. So from the very beginning of their lives the brothers’ fates are closely tied up with abduction and, Florent’s in particular, with ransom and the economic valuing of bodies. Themes of captivity return towards the end of *Octavian*, as Florent and several others who have been involved in combat with the Saracen army, including the king of France and (unbeknownst to him) Florent’s real father, the Roman Emperor, are captured by the Saracen army. The text reveals that ‘the Saracens hastily made their preparations / To ride home in glory’, suggesting a hostage situation.¹⁵⁵ Indeed the prisoners are poorly treated:

With innumerable terrible wounds
 [.....]
 [They were] led [...] in iron chains,
 Their feet under the horse’s belly:
 It is a great pity to tell of it.¹⁵⁶

The group are prisoners of war, as is made clear in the details of their release.

¹⁵¹ Goldberg, p. 164.

¹⁵² ‘a lyenas’ (338).

¹⁵³ ‘an ape’ (331); ‘a knyght’ (533); ‘mett owlawys ten’ (542); ‘wanne þe chylde hym fro’ (548).

¹⁵⁴ ‘twenty pownde’ (587).

¹⁵⁵ ‘the Sarsyns buskyd them wyth pryde / Into ther own londys to ryde’ (1549-1550).

¹⁵⁶ ‘Wyth woundys wondur fele [...] / [They were] ladd [...] wyth yron stronge, / Hur fete vndur þe hors wombe: / Grete dele hyt ys to telle’ (1554, 1558-1560).

Octavian the younger, who has been residing with his mother in Jerusalem, travels to free the prisoners.

The first man whose bonds he loosened
Was his father, it is true,
Without any lie;
And he loosened the bonds of his brother Florent
Before he loosened those of the King of France
Yet he did not know who he was.¹⁵⁷

Although he is not aware of Florent's true identity, Octavian here unwittingly follows the conventions of ransom at the time of the Crusades, freeing family members first.¹⁵⁸ So the themes associated with abduction in these two examples are economic and combative; people are won either through purchase – Clement buys Florent – or physical prowess – the knight fights the ape, Octavian liberates the prisoners. Moreover, although Florent, a captive son, is eventually rescued, Marsabelle, a captive daughter, is not, which could be read as a comment on the trade in bodies which values, exchanges and owns both men and women as possessions and objects of exchange. Framing Marsabelle's abduction within this context of trade in bodies shows how even as abduction is refigured as protection, just as in *Ransomed* and *Disobedient*, *Octavian* too reveals the implications of possession, ownership and slavery which underlie abduction, even an abduction that is redefined as voluntary rescue.

'Cherishing the Chains of their Bondage'¹⁵⁹: Abduction as Sexual Fantasy

The final way in which romance abduction is reworked from the reality of kidnap is through eroticisation. Even as heroines experience romance abduction as passive possessions, sheikh romances regularly represent the abduction or captivity as erotic for the heroine. The vulnerability of heroines to sexual assault in captivity ensures

¹⁵⁷ 'Hys fadur was the furste man / That he of bondys to lowse began, / Ye wete, wythowten lees; / And he lowsyd hys brodur Floraunce / Or he dud the kyng of Fraunce, / yt he wyste not what he was' (1633-1638).

¹⁵⁸ Yvonne Friedman, 'Captivity and Ransom: The Experience of Women', *Gendering the Crusades*, ed. Susan B. Edgington and Sarah Lambert (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2001), p. 132.

¹⁵⁹ Greer, p. 202.

that sex is a dominant theme in the abduction motif. Furthermore, as I have mentioned, romance abduction usually functions to facilitate sexual interaction between hero and heroine, thereby positioning sex at the centre of romance abduction. I contend that recasting abduction as romance abduction transforms what can be seen as rape or sexual violence into a necessary seduction, reconstructing rape as 'romantic'.

Ransomed shows particularly clearly the way abduction can be presented as erotic fantasy. At the beginning of the novel the heroine has sexual fantasies involving 'pirates', suggesting a precedent for her experience of finding abduction arousing, referring in her erotic fantasies to Rafiq whose ancestors were pirates.¹⁶⁰ The heroine dreams of being dominated by 'a tall, fatally attractive pirate. An arrogant prince who'd demanded she obey his every command'.¹⁶¹ She is amazed by 'how she'd revelled in his dominance. She, who'd never let any man control her!'¹⁶² Her fantasy is explicitly connected with Rafiq:

She shook her head in denial. Of his words. Of the fierce, frightening heat building within her. She couldn't mistake it. It had been there when he spoke of al Akhtar men claiming their women. Stealing them from the high seas and making sure they never wanted to leave.

Excitement. That was what she felt. And desire.

The appalling realisation held her in frozen immobility as she stared back into his piercing eyes.

She didn't even *know* this man, yet some atavistic part of her psyche revelled in the idea of being claimed as his woman. Of belonging to him.¹⁶³

The paradoxical nature of experiencing abduction as erotic fantasy is evident in this passage. On the one hand, the heroine is aroused by the idea of women being stolen by men and being so sexually satisfied by their abductor that they 'never wanted to leave', yet on the other, Belle considers her attraction to be 'appalling', indicating how this fantasy of abduction is both erotic and unacceptable. This romance thus illustrates the dichotomy between the feminist notion that women should be appalled by this kind of action and yet that it can simultaneously be experienced as a fantasy.

¹⁶⁰ *Ransomed*, p. 16.

¹⁶¹ *Ransomed*, p. 57.

¹⁶² *Ransomed*, p. 57.

¹⁶³ *Ransomed*, p. 70.

This contradiction is well documented in accounts of women's sexual fantasies. In Nancy Friday's collection of women's sexual fantasies 'Gail' experiences her rape fantasies as both erotic and disturbing saying: 'at times I enjoy my fantasies, and at other times I become almost sick'.¹⁶⁴ The passage from *Ransomed* also indicates how closely erotic fantasies of abduction are associated with the atavistic fantasies of passivity and possession I discussed earlier; the distinction between violence and protection is narrow and is crucial, I argue, to the presentation of abduction as erotic for the heroine.

Even when the heroine is outwardly resistant to being imprisoned, her captivity can still be eroticised by the narrative separation between body and mind: the heroine outwardly denies what her body 'really' wants. Romances thus present an ambivalent narrative of denial and consent. In *Ransomed*, this paradox is played out in a sexual encounter between Rafiq and Belle which is purposefully modelled on her first experiences of abduction, thereby drawing explicit parallels between these episodes. As I have described, Belle is kidnapped at the start of the romance by terrorists, who place her in manacles as they 'sadistic[ally]' enjoy 'their victims' desperate fear'.¹⁶⁵ Although he assumes a 'rescuer' role in relation to the first abduction, when they have sex, Rafiq exploits the eroticism of captivity as he ties Belle up and holds her captive.

First, Rafiq moves on top of Belle and pins her hands, binding them, pausing as he does so to ask if the 'fading scar' from her earlier abduction 'still hurt?'.¹⁶⁶ Then, to Belle's 'outraged confusion', he 'carefully looped [...] soft cotton around both wrists, binding them together'.¹⁶⁷ That the 'rescuer' hero would evoke Belle's earlier abduction during their first lovemaking seems both incongruous and purposeful, and indeed 'for an aching moment the shadow of terror skittered through her, with the memory of her abductors closing rusty manacles around her wrists'.¹⁶⁸ Even after she has consented to being bound, as Rafiq 'drew [her wrists] back, over her head, and towards the tent pole behind the sleeping platform [...] doubt gnawed at her'; 'how

¹⁶⁴ Nancy Friday, *My Secret Garden: Women's Sexual Fantasies* (London: Quartet, 1976), p. 113.

¹⁶⁵ *Ransomed*, p. 8.

¹⁶⁶ *Ransomed*, p. 144.

¹⁶⁷ *Ransomed*, p. 144.

¹⁶⁸ *Ransomed*, p. 144.

had she agreed to something that left her so much at his mercy?'.¹⁶⁹ Although she initially consents to being bound, Belle begs to be released throughout the entire scene, thus constantly suggesting that she is tied up against her will, reminiscent of her first abduction.

So far, this episode is only erotic for the hero, who admits 'he'd found the act of binding her hands, of having her helpless before him, so sexually stimulating that he'd allowed himself free rein', bruising the heroine in the process: 'there was a red mark on her neck, and another near her collarbone. He'd been too rough. He hadn't considered how easily her soft skin might bruise'.¹⁷⁰ Rafiq's actions here echo the 'deliberately sadistic' attitude of Belle's original abductors, who also bind and bruise her, placing the hero in the role of sadistic violator himself.¹⁷¹ This sexual encounter, then, is an echo of Belle's earlier, non-erotic captivity. Furthermore, the fact that Belle is bound for her first sexual encounter with the hero is disturbingly reminiscent of the threat of rape which loomed over her first abduction; although it is firmly established that she was not raped by her captors, when Rafiq believes that she has been violated he is 'sicken[ed]', uttering 'a burst of guttural Arabic, savage and uncompromising'.¹⁷² Yet, it is difficult to ignore the parallels between the threat of rape for Belle when she is bound during her first abduction, and the hero's binding of her when they have sex, which ultimately works to position the hero as potential rapist. This sexual encounter is, then, effectively constructed as a mock rape.

But within the narrative frame of romance abduction, with its requisites of assumed consent and captor-hero, this rape can be reformulated as erotic fantasy. Although Belle outwardly rejects being bound during this sexual encounter, the narrative constructs her experience of it as erotic. Even as 'doubt gnawed at her', as 'Rafiq slid back down her body [her] every nerve clamoured for more'.¹⁷³ Completely different from her first captivity, this encounter is 'an erotic voyage of discovery'; 'never before had she experienced such exquisite sensuality, nor responded so wantonly, so completely to a man'.¹⁷⁴ It seems that this sexual experience is enhanced by her

¹⁶⁹ *Ransomed*, p. 145.

¹⁷⁰ *Ransomed*, pp. 152, 161.

¹⁷¹ *Ransomed*, p. 28.

¹⁷² *Ransomed*, pp. 36, 35.

¹⁷³ *Ransomed*, p. 145.

¹⁷⁴ *Ransomed*, pp. 147, 147-148.

bondage, which allows the hero to direct the action, preventing him from ‘explod[ing] [...] far, far too soon’.¹⁷⁵ For Belle, the eroticism of being bound is closely connected with her feelings of love for the hero; initially ‘outraged’ by his actions, the heroine’s ‘fear dissolved [...] as she realised just how completely she trusted him. [...] she’d given him not only her body, but her heart, her whole self’.¹⁷⁶

Eroticising bondage in this way could perhaps be seen as therapeutic, reshaping her earlier experiences of abduction from pain into pleasure. Belle has a similar reaction when she is comforted by the hero after her first abduction - ‘she cried out her pain’ whilst the hero ‘cradle[d] her against his torso’ – and following her sexual encounter with the hero after he releases her from her bindings:

she realised how tightly her fingers dug into the spare flesh of his back.
He’d untied her hands, so she could caress him.
She squeezed her eyes tight shut against the absurd tears that flooded her eyes. She had no idea why she was crying. It was ridiculous, appalling. And utterly unstoppable.¹⁷⁷

It seems that echoing her first abduction in this subsequent sexual encounter and eroticising her binding works to dissociate being bound from violence, and instead conjoin it with erotic satisfaction. This is a perfect illustration of the distinctions some sheikh romances attempt to draw between abduction as violent action and what I have termed romance abduction. However, it simultaneously demonstrates the fine line between rape and violent abduction, and the erotic potential of romance abduction, suggesting, perhaps, that abduction is eroticised to some extent precisely *because* of its association with sexual violence, revealing its contradictory appeal.

In line with other reworkings of abduction, a significant part of the eroticisation of abduction is due to its apparent connection with eastern tradition. Just as the construction of abduction as protection depends largely on presenting abduction as rooted in eastern tradition, so too is the understanding of abduction as erotic linked with the eastern world in which it takes place. As I noted in Chapter 2, sexual violence seems contextually to belong to the romance east. It is easy to see how a

¹⁷⁵ *Ransomed*, p. 152.

¹⁷⁶ *Ransomed*, pp. 144-145.

¹⁷⁷ *Ransomed*, pp. 37, 150.

cultural tradition which defines women as male possessions can also justify the use of sexual violence against them and endorse the fetishising of their captivity.

Ransomed exploits this association. Early in the narrative, as Rafiq rescues Belle from her abductors, he envisions her as ‘a suppliant’, or ‘some sexy modern-day slave, begging’.¹⁷⁸ This is echoed in a later sexual encounter, as he observes her ‘spread out before him like some waiting harem slave’.¹⁷⁹ The harem plays a significant role here, as the locus of sexual captivity. The setting for the couple’s bondage-themed lovemaking is a ‘traditional nomad’s tent’ in a desert oasis (a favourite trope of sheikh romances), with ‘an interior luxuriant with rugs in dark jewel colours [...] burnished hanging lamp at the entrance and [a] scatter of cushions’: to the heroine, ‘it looked like something out of an old storybook’.¹⁸⁰ Furthermore, what the sheikh uses to bind the heroine is, appropriately, his headscarf: a fundamental signifier of the romance east. This neatly reminds the reader that bondage is associated with the east: he is keeping her captive using a potent symbol of eastern culture. It seems that the eroticisation of captivity is easy to achieve in the romance east.

One important effect of the eroticisation of captivity along specifically eastern lines, is that it works to distance captivity from contemporary political kidnap, which is never erotic. As I have already mentioned, by presenting captivity as an ancient custom, these romances serve to designate romance abduction as apolitical and authorised by cultural tradition. Eroticising captivity similarly endorses it. If the heroine is enjoying it, then it becomes acceptable for the sheikh to find it erotic as well. If sexual violence is something deeply embedded within the cultural practices of the east, how can the hero, drawn from this culture, resist the erotic imagery of captivity? That the hero cannot resist the heroine when she is captive plays into a commonly stated aspect of rape fantasies: ‘a man says to a woman that she is so desirable that he will defy all the rules of honour and decency in order to have her’.¹⁸¹ Consequently, ‘the assault is redefined, not as a negative act of hatred, but as

¹⁷⁸ *Ransomed*, p. 32.

¹⁷⁹ *Ransomed*, p. 142.

¹⁸⁰ *Ransomed*, p. 133.

¹⁸¹ Hazen, p. 8. Handrahan notes that ‘many men and women claim it is an honour to be kidnapped because bride-kidnapping is seen as the ultimate confirmation of a woman’s worth; “only beautiful women are kidnapped”, etc’ (p. 209).

an acknowledgement of women's finest qualities'.¹⁸² Thus, sexual violence is justified by being defined as both cultural precedent and flattery.

The abduction and rape of women as displayed in the media, literary culture and, in particular, romance novels have been extensively criticised, most significantly by feminist critics such as Andrea Dworkin and Catherine MacKinnon.¹⁸³ Discussing popular romance novels, Geraldine Finn notes that some feminists regard romance novels as 'sado-masochistic' and romance readers themselves seem to reject romances which feature male violence and domination of the heroine.¹⁸⁴ For some, then, the eroticisation of abduction, captivity and sexual violence is an indication of sexual perversity. Yet there is a counter-discourse which suggests that women are able to enjoy representations of sexual violence as fantasy, in a similar way to the enjoyment of passivity. A number of critics view romance novels as 'an acceptable part of the sexual script for most women', including their representations of violent sexuality.¹⁸⁵ Helen Hazen, for instance, posits that romance contains an element of regressive fantasy that can be released through certain situations.¹⁸⁶ In a well-known article in *Ms. Magazine*, Molly Haskell claimed that the difference between rape and rape fantasy is control: 'the point of rape is that a woman is violated against her will. In one there is sheer helplessness; in the other, the helplessness is one of the conditions controlled by the fantasiser'.¹⁸⁷ This distinction is evident in Belle's binding during sex in *Ransomed*. The hero asks Belle whether she trusts him enough to allow him to bind her, to which she consents, indicating how this sexual encounter can be seen as an erotic rewriting of her initial kidnap experience, during which she had no choice whether to be bound or not. Reinterpreting the sexual violence inherent in the abduction motif as a deliberate and chosen erotic fantasy could therefore provide a space for enjoyment of the motif.

¹⁸² Jo-Ann Castagna and Robin Radespiel, 'Making Rape Romantic: A Study of Rosemary Rogers' "Steve and Ginny" Novels', *Women and Violence in Literature: An Essay Collection*, ed. Katherine Anne Ackley (New York: Garland, 1990), p. 319.

¹⁸³ See Lynne Segal, 'Only the Literal: The Contradictions of Anti-Pornography Feminism', *Sexualities and Society: A Reader*, ed. Jeffrey Weeks, Janet Holland and Matthew Waites (Cambridge: Polity, 2003), pp. 95-104.

¹⁸⁴ Finn, pp. 61-62; Radway, p. 76.

¹⁸⁵ Kelli-an Lawrence and Edward S. Herold, 'Women's Attitudes Toward and Experience with Sexually Explicit Materials', *The Journal of Sex Research* 24 (1988): 168.

¹⁸⁶ Helen Hazen, *Endless Rapture: Rape, Romance and the Female Imagination* (New York: Scribner, 1983), p. 8.

¹⁸⁷ Molly Haskell, 'The 2000 Year Old Misunderstanding', *Ms.*, Nov 1976, pp. 84-85, quoted in Hazen, p. 87.

However, even as *Ransomed* indicates some element of choice in this passage, it simultaneously demonstrates how the distinction between consent and coercion can be blurred. This is evident in the disjunction between Belle's vocal objection to being bound, and the romance narrative's representation of her bodily desire for the erotic experience. Earlier in the romance, Rafiq tries to force Belle to have sex with him. Although this sexual encounter does not evoke themes of captivity as clearly as the later bondage-themed sexual episode, it does outline the issue of consent. Just after Belle and Rafiq are married, he declares: 'you're mine, Belle', and attempts to 'take what [he] want[s] from [her]'.¹⁸⁸ The heroine resists, asking the hero to 'put me down', begging 'Rafiq, no!', 'we can't do this [...] we have to stop' and exclaiming: 'please, Rafiq. Don't'.¹⁸⁹ The hero continues his sexual assault, even as he 'read real distress in her face', arguing: 'why do you fight the inevitable, Belle? [...] Your body knows it even as your mind fights it'.¹⁹⁰

It is clear, from what she says, that the heroine does not want to have sex with the hero and his attempts to persuade her are distressing for Belle. However, although she will not admit it to Rafiq, Belle's internal dialogue echoes his assertion; Belle realises she 'couldn't pretend much longer [...] her body knew what she wanted even if her mind didn't'.¹⁹¹ As Nina Philadelphoff-Puren finds in her analysis of romance novels and rape, 'the narrative description of [the heroine's] desire *supports* the hero's interpretation: she does truly want him and is lying when she says that she does not'.¹⁹² The effect is that 'it is the hero who legitimates or delegitimizes her refusal'.¹⁹³ In other words, by representing the heroine as inwardly desiring sex even as she consistently says no, the romance narrative removes the heroine's ability to consent, as it is the hero who decides and consents on the heroine's behalf. So even as the experiences of the heroine in captivity can be erotic, this does not negate the fact that captive sexuality is male-defined and arbitrated.¹⁹⁴ These sheikh romances

¹⁸⁸ *Ransomed*, pp. 103, 113.

¹⁸⁹ *Ransomed*, pp. 110, 111, 112.

¹⁹⁰ *Ransomed*, p. 111.

¹⁹¹ *Ransomed*, p. 112.

¹⁹² Nina Philadelphoff-Puren, 'Contextualising Consent: The Problem of Rape and Romance', *Australian Feminist Studies* 20.46 (2005): 33.

¹⁹³ Philadelphoff-Puren, p. 34.

¹⁹⁴ It is worth noting that this pattern of hero-defined consent is not unique to sheikh romances; indeed, Philadelphoff-Puren analyses Charlotte Lamb's *The Boss' Virgin* (Richmond: Harlequin Mills & Boon, 2001) in her article, a workplace-based romance set in London. The model of passive female sexuality and male domination has been noted as common to romance novels

thus tread an uneasy line between consent and denial, in the separation of body and mind intrinsic to erotic fantasies of captivity.

A similar eroticisation of abduction can be observed in *Octavian*, although it is not as clearly articulated as in *Ransomed*. I have already examined how Marsabelle's desire for Florent and eagerness to be abducted by him can potentially be read as her craving for the protection he offers; abduction is certainly foregrounded in the development of their relationship. Yet Marsabelle's desire to be abducted by Florent can also suggest, I argue, a potential eroticising of abduction itself. After his first abduction attempt, Marsabelle's memories of Florent are bound up with his abducting actions as she says: 'alas, that I were with my lover, / *Where he would have taken me*'.¹⁹⁵ When she tells her 'maidservant' Olive about Florent, again her description of him centres on abduction: 'I cannot but think about a boy / *Who would have taken me to Paris*'.¹⁹⁶ By contrast, Florent does not mention abduction when he later 'thought about his beautiful maiden' suggesting that abduction is uniquely part of Marsabelle's fantasy.¹⁹⁷ Abduction itself seems to foster erotic attraction; it is after Florent 'picked her up, and rode away' that Marsabelle's desire for Florent is made apparent (although a precedent for this attraction has been earlier established as 'she considered it to be a glorious joy / To see the Christian knights ride').¹⁹⁸

That Marsabelle desires her romance abduction by Florent is made clear as she herself carefully orchestrates a plan for her abduction from her father's camp by Florent, underscoring that abduction is the only way Florent and Marsabelle can be together. Marsabelle's relatively detailed plan for her own abduction is repeated twice, once when she explains it to Florent, then again just over 100 lines later when the abduction takes place. At a secret meeting 'by the riverside' Florent asks

(see, for example, Margolies; Mussell; Finn). So while I contend that captivity enhances the effect of silent consent, the pattern of male-defined consent is evident in many other romance novels.

¹⁹⁵ 'allas, wyth my lemman þat y ne were, / *Where he wolde me haue broght*' (1091-1092, my emphasis).

¹⁹⁶ 'may' (1094); 'On a chylde ys all my thought / *That me to Parys wolde haue brozt*' (1102-1103, my emphasis). The word 'broght' occurs 25 times in *Octavian*, and is repeatedly applied to the movement, consensual and non-consensual, of people, supporting the predominance of abduction as a central theme of this romance.

¹⁹⁷ 'thought on hys feyre may' (1190).

¹⁹⁸ 'sche thought yoye and pryde / To see þe Crystyn knyghtys ryde' (802-803).

Marsabelle: ‘mistress [...] what is your best advice / For how I should win you?’.¹⁹⁹

Marsabelle replies:

send a well-built ship,
With excellently skilled men,
Along the river.
While other men are preoccupied with the battle,
Then might the men lead me away
And bring me directly to your city.²⁰⁰

And this is what Florent does:

He did not go to battle that day,
But prepared himself a ship;
He took the lady away from where she was residing
At Montmartre, to Paris,
No-one knew anything about it.²⁰¹

Florent’s assumption of the task (he does not send ‘skilled men’ as Marsabelle suggests but carries out the abduction himself) sustains the eroticism of abduction: it is more fully a romance abduction if Florent abducts Marsabelle himself.

The fact that Marsabelle plans her own abduction suggests both that it is a motif desired by her and that she is familiar with it and uses it to her own advantage. In this she can be linked with the heroine of *Ransomed*, who consents to an erotic interpretation of abduction. The use of the word ‘took’ in the description of Marsabelle’s abduction is a reminder of her own earlier words, showing how the described events fulfil the realisation of her fantasy. However, the planned abduction also reveals that even as Marsabelle arranges her own abduction, the place she creates for herself within it is still one of passivity; she remains the ‘damsel’ who needs to be rescued, a function which becomes clear as she all but disappears from the narrative following her final abduction.

There is no doubt that captivity is restrictive for women and that the reality of kidnap can be traumatic. However, as I have argued, romance abduction works to nuance the

¹⁹⁹ ‘Be the reuer syde’ (1382); ‘lady [...] How were beste yowre counsayle / That y yow wynne myght?’ (1405-1407).

²⁰⁰ ‘sende be the flode, / Wyth men þat crafty were and gode, / A schyppe þat well were dyght. / Whyll þat men are at þat dere dede, / That whyle myzt men me away lede / To yowre cyté ryght’ (1411-1416).

²⁰¹ ‘To batell wente he not that day, / A schyppe he hath hym dyght; / Fro Mountmertrons þere þe lady lay / To Parys he broght hur away, / Ne wyste hyt kyng ne knyght’ (1520-1524).

trauma of abduction by reworking its meaning away from non-romantic kidnap, constituting it varyingly as cultural custom, protection or rescue, and sexual fantasy. Furthermore, as I now argue, the heroine can herself reconstitute the apparent powerlessness of abduction via her hybridity.

‘This [...] Wasn’t Freedom’: Colonising the Abduction Motif

Abduction is, at root, the denial of freedom. In sheikh romance, this lack of freedom is expressed in the context of the romance east. The role forced upon the western heroine by abduction is ostensibly that of the submissive eastern woman (the servant/guide identified in Chapter 2), and is indicated in romance primarily through clothing and domesticity. Veiled, silent, submissive: this is a role outwardly rejected by western heroines, as I argued in Chapter 2. Tally repeatedly refuses to wear the customary robe offered to her in *Disobedient* and rejects Tair’s opinions on the proper role of women, including his assertion that she needs ‘a husband’: he tells her ‘women need husbands and children or they dry up’.²⁰² In *Ransomed*, Belle considers Rafiq’s assertion that he will marry her in order to bring stability to his country to be ‘ridiculous!’, ‘distressed at having her freedom curtailed’.²⁰³

The idea of home and family is repeatedly emphasised and linked with the east: the hero of *Disobedient* states that ‘women belong at home [...] in my culture’.²⁰⁴ The abduction forces the heroine into a domestic situation to which she is initially resistant. Belle considers her arranged marriage to be ‘a bind’.²⁰⁵ When Tair suggests arranging a marriage for her, Tally thinks: ‘this was worse than anything she could have ever imagined’, asserting that ‘she craved freedom, freedom and adventure [...] And this, she thought, stricken as his body touched hers in every place it shouldn’t, wasn’t freedom [...] she couldn’t live in his world here’.²⁰⁶ The domestic role demanded by the romance abduction is figured as the opposite of freedom.

²⁰² *Disobedient*, pp. 39, 39-40.

²⁰³ *Ransomed*, pp. 82, 87.

²⁰⁴ *Disobedient*, p. 24.

²⁰⁵ *Ransomed*, p. 128.

²⁰⁶ *Disobedient*, pp. 40, 54.

However, by the end of the romance, the heroine manages to locate freedom in captivity, where she previously experienced a *lack* of freedom. Both *Disobedient* and *Ransomed* end with celebrations of this east, represented by the sheikh hero, as home. In the sheikh's arms, Belle 'was coming home' and when the hero of *Disobedient* asks Tally to 'come home', 'she moved the rest of the way into his arms', declaring 'I have'.²⁰⁷ So the restrictive, domesticated role previously rejected by the heroine is celebrated at the end of the romance. Furthermore, the heroine is able to locate a certain freedom within the previously captive position she rejected. Tally feels a sudden freedom as she swims in Tair's pool: 'her smile stretched and she felt suddenly, surprisingly carefree. My God. She was here, she was okay, she was- [...] she hadn't ever felt so free before'.²⁰⁸ The hero even remarks, 'I've never seen you so happy'.²⁰⁹ The heroine's previously held ideas of freedom, which mainly involved escaping back to the west and the rejection of eastern culture and the sheikh hero himself, are turned on their head, as she is apparently able to experience new-found levels of freedom within an eastern captivity that she had previously thought utterly restrictive.

How is it possible that heroines can find freedom in a situation which they previously experienced as captivity? Have these heroines abandoned their ideas of freedom? Certainly, in *Disobedient* Tally admits that Tair 'mattered to her [...] maybe more than her own freedom'.²¹⁰ Or are these romances attempting to refigure the domesticity of eastern captivity *as* freedom? I consider that it is a little of both; the heroine abandons some of her original western conceptions of freedom, whilst retaining others and modifying her position in the east accordingly.

As I have already mentioned, Haddad argues that captivity, in sheikh romance, is transmogrified into marriage, and this is what allows it to be reworked as freedom. She also suggests that a way in which the trauma of abduction is minimised in a small number of post-2004 sheikh romances is by substituting half-eastern heroines for western ones, thereby reducing the anxiety of western kidnap by diminishing cultural conflict between east and west.²¹¹ I extrapolate from Haddad to argue that

²⁰⁷ *Ransomed*, p. 184; *Disobedient*, p. 186.

²⁰⁸ *Disobedient*, p. 127.

²⁰⁹ *Disobedient*, p. 128.

²¹⁰ *Disobedient*, p. 131.

²¹¹ Haddad, p. 60.

while the heroines of *Ransomed* and *Disobedient* are not figured as ethnically eastern in the way she claims, their adoption of signifiers of the east and subsequent hybrid ethnicity work similarly to reduce trauma and to figure a relative freedom within captivity: their abduction can be read as less shocking precisely because they have adopted aspects of eastern ethnicity and culture, within which abduction is normalised. I contend that it is the heroine's ethnic hybridity which is central to her experience of a potential freedom within captivity.

That the heroines of *Disobedient* and *Ransomed* become ethnically hybrid is clear. According to the signifiers of eastern femininity I outlined in Chapter 2, Tally assumes the part of Tair's eastern wife – she wears 'silky robes', takes charge of activities for local woman, and has her status as the sheikh's wife literally written on her body, as she is hennaed before their wedding.²¹² At the end of *Ransomed*, Belle wears the 'Peacock's eye', a necklace given by the sheikh to his wife:

Suddenly she didn't feel like Belle Winters any more. [...] Sitting before him, there she was, unrecognisable now as a mere hard-working marine archaeologist. Transformed by the remarkable jewelled necklace into someone altogether different.

Even with her arm in a sling, and wearing her ordinary clothes, she'd subtly changed. It had to be the awesome beauty of the jewellery that did it.

She frowned. No, it was more than that. She felt different. As if the collar was imbued with the weight of all those centuries of tradition. As if she was, indeed, the true bride of a prince.²¹³

In addition to indicating how her position in eastern culture has shifted – 'as if she was, indeed, the true bride of a prince' – this passage also shows the extent to which captivity itself can function to make the heroine appear ethnically eastern. The jewellery Belle wears, a 'collar' is reminiscent of captivity: an echo of the shackles in which she was kept during her first abduction. That this jewellery, heavy with connotations of ownership, should symbolically represent a more figurative captivity – that of marriage to the sheikh – indicates the role of abduction and its signifiers in representing Belle as the wife of the sheikh: a position usually reserved for eastern women. This passage also demonstrates the extent to which imprisonment is written into the performance of eastern femininity, locating captivity at the very heart of eastern female identity.

²¹² *Disobedient*, pp. 139, 144-145.

²¹³ *Ransomed*, p. 180.

But, as I discussed in Chapter 3, even as Belle and Tally adopt signifiers of eastern ethnicity, they remain, partly, western women with, as I have indicated, the power of western cultural imperialism behind them. They thus do not completely abandon their previous ideas of freedom. Even as the western heroine adopts markers of eastern femininity, as she is forced to marry the sheikh hero and wear eastern clothing, she still resists the abduction which forces her into a domestic situation. In an argument with the hero in *Disobedient* Tally tells him:

‘Tair, you might have married me, but you didn’t buy me. You don’t own me and can’t control me. I don’t have to wear your clothes the way you want me to. I can wear clothes the way I want just as I can keep my own name, my own personality, my own identity.’²¹⁴

I would like to suggest that because she fights to retain aspects of her western identity (her ‘name’, ‘personality’ and ‘identity’) and her western ideas of freedom, the heroine can negotiate the terms of her captivity in the romance east. The heroine’s demands are based upon her western ideologies. This means no polygamy – the hero of *Ransomed* assures the heroine that ‘times have changed’ – and the promotion of western-style development focused on women’s rights: the heroine of *Disobedient* ‘was sure [...] that these ladies deserved some place nicer than a rooftop and cemetery for socialising’.²¹⁵ The heroine’s western ideals of freedom are further upheld in the sheikh’s efforts to modernise the desert nation in specifically ‘western’ ways while still retaining some elements of tradition (usually the sheikh’s standing as head of state and conservative rules on women’s sexuality and marriage). The hero of *Ransomed* tells the heroine:

You’ve seen the new town, the wealth invested in education and modern infrastructure. Change is occurring, but Q’aroumis are slow to give up some things – such as their love of royal pomp and custom. That’s one of the reasons I remain as head of state though we have a democratically elected parliament.²¹⁶

Of course, the sheikh hero is himself ethnically hybrid. The hero of *Disobedient* has an English mother and his western sensibilities are highlighted in his disdain for the superstitions of his people, when one of his men labels Tally a witch and poisons her. The culprit, Ashraf, identifies the sheikh’s distance from eastern ideals as he claims:

²¹⁴ *Disobedient*, p. 155.

²¹⁵ *Ransomed*, p. 181; *Disobedient*, p. 121.

²¹⁶ *Ransomed*, p. 69.

‘Ah! But see, you’ve just proven my point. Look what this woman has already done to us. Look at the evil she’s brought on us. You’re going to kill me and she is what... will live here with you?’.²¹⁷ The presence of the heroine is a thinly veiled metaphor for the potentially damaging incursion of western values which the sheikh, as her captor, is responsible for bringing into eastern society.

It is clear that for the heroine, the mutually reinforcing frames of gender, ethnicity and religion work together within the abduction motif to indicate dominance and submission. As Christopher Castiglia has observed, western women are located at the ‘shaky nexus of white/male domination’; ethnically dominant, but submissive in gender.²¹⁸ This is certainly evident in the model of the captive heroine who finds agency within the abduction motif because of her ethnicity, but is trapped within it by her gender. Yet, as I have previously argued, the ethnic hybridity of the western heroine is unique: this is not an ethnicity available to any other women in the romance. Therefore, the ability to negotiate the terms of abduction and to experience a freedom within this motif is similarly available only to the western heroine.

Although the eastern woman provides the model for captivity in sheikh romances, she is absent from the romance abduction of these narratives. This model of abduction and the negotiation of its terms are not available for the eastern woman; in the romance east, it is only the hybrid western heroine who can occupy the space of paradoxical freedom and captivity created by romance abduction. Eastern women, then, must rely on the western heroine to negotiate liberation on their behalf; it is the western heroine, not the eastern woman who argues for improved healthcare, democracy and improvements in women’s rights, as evident in the western heroine’s modernisation of the ‘medieval’ east I outlined in Chapter 1. Jarmakani contends that ‘the iteration of global feminism proffered by [sheikh romance] novels defines the white heroine’s freedom in opposition to her Arab female counterpart’ and her ‘espousal of feminist notions [...] parallels an imperialist form of global feminism’

²¹⁷ *Disobedient*, p. 97.

²¹⁸ Christopher Castiglia, *Bound and Determined: Captivity, Culture-Crossing, and White Womanhood from Mary Rowlandson to Patty Hearst* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), p. 6.

as privileged white, western women step in to ‘rescue’ their disadvantaged, eastern sisters.²¹⁹

Such ‘rescuing’ was the subject of much critique in the 1980s, as feminists sought to make visible patterns of imperialist dominance which had previously been obscured within the feminist movement.²²⁰ Chandra Talpade Mohanty problematises the ‘homogeneity of women as a group’, arguing that in order to make fully visible the differential factors which produce subordination, attention must be paid to the ‘historically specific material reality of groups of women’.²²¹ But in sheikh romances, where the romance east blurs cultural specificities into a homogeneous romance east, eastern femininity is, as I have argued, essentialised into two models, the submissive servant/guide and the Orientalised, sexualised rival, both of whom rely on the western heroine to improve their lives. Some have observed the assimilation of the western heroine into eastern culture as a kind of female Orientalism.²²² The heroine moves physically and ethnically into the eastern spaces previously occupied by eastern women. As the heroine redefines eastern feminine identity according to her own agenda (for example, setting up women’s education facilities) this can be seen as her appropriation of the sheikh’s culture: through her hybridity, she tries to redefine what it means to be eastern. In this way, then, these sheikh romance novels published in the western world perpetuate ideologies of western cultural superiority.²²³

Does the heroine’s acculturation seem more sinister if we think of her as a coloniser? Certainly, western women’s sympathy for the plight of eastern women, consistently referred to in sheikh romances, is structured by Orientalist assumptions of white superiority: backwards women liberated by their more advanced white sisters.²²⁴ This superiority also indicates something of a separation between the experiences of western women and their eastern counterparts which is illustrated in their differential

²¹⁹ Jarmakani, “‘The Sheikh Who Loved Me’”, pp. 999, 1001, 1002.

²²⁰ For an outline of these debates see Heloise Brown, ‘White?Women: Beginnings and Endings?’, *White?Women: Critical Perspectives on Race and Gender*, ed. Brown, Madi Gilkes and Ann Kaloski-Naylor (York: Raw Nerve Books, 1999).

²²¹ Mohanty, ‘Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourse’, *Feminist Review* 30 (1988): 65.

²²² See Lewis, *Gendering Orientalism*; Jarmakani, “‘The Sheikh Who Loved Me’”, pp. 1001-1004; Taylor; and Teo ‘Orientalism and Mass Market Romance’, pp. 253; 259-260.

²²³ This is certainly a common accusation: see Taylor; Teo, ‘Orientalism and Mass Market Romance’.

²²⁴ Lewis, *Gendering Orientalism*, p. 22.

positions within the abduction motif. Because of her hybridity, the western heroine can rework something restrictive (eastern domesticity) into something liberating, but this is a unique ability made possible by her dominant ethnicity. Ultimately, the reworking of the abduction motif does not challenge occurrences of kidnap more generally, but only the singular romance abduction of the western heroine. The real captives of sheikh romances, then, are the absent eastern women, who are not equipped to form their own abduction fantasies, but must wait to be rescued by the western woman who can redefine her abduction as freedom only because she is western.

It could be argued that Marsabelle, an eastern woman, offers an exception to this rule, as she manages to manipulate and control her own abduction in *Octavian*. However, although she is a Saracen woman, Marsabelle is as hybrid as Tally and Belle; she is distinguished from her Saracen counterparts, as are many of the Saracen princesses in medieval romance. She is ‘white as a lily flower’, and described as ‘the most beautiful creature alive / Either in Christendom or heatheness, / And the most pleasing to look upon’.²²⁵ This is in contrast to her father and other Saracens in the romance, who speak a different language: the Sultan owns a monstrous horse and recruits a giant as part of his army.²²⁶ Not only is Marsabelle distanced from other Saracens by her appearance, she also desires Christian knights: as I have mentioned, whilst Marsabelle was residing in Montmartre she ‘considered it to be a glorious joy / To see the Christian knights ride’. The only other suitor available to Marsabelle is the giant, who is shown to be inappropriate and undesired by Marsabelle.²²⁷ The romance thus very clearly anticipates Marsabelle and Florent’s relationship.

Because of her ethnic hybridity Marsabelle can benefit from the independence her Saracen role offers (for example, travelling to France with her father on a military campaign) and is able to assimilate easily into Christian society. Indeed, Marsabelle could be read as a ‘pre-Christian’ in the same way as the Sultan of Damascus in *Tars*: one who has not yet converted but who gives every indication that she will. In the modern romances, it is the hybrid heroine’s assumption of an ethnicity drawn between east and west which allows her to negotiate the meaning of abduction into

²²⁵ ‘whyte as lylly flowre’ (1363); ‘the feyrest þynge alyue þat was / In Crystendome or hethynnes, / And semelyest of syght’ (784-786).

²²⁶ See *Octavian*, lines 1510, 1480-1482.

²²⁷ *Octavian*, 805.

freedom. I argue that it is precisely Marsabelle's religious hybridity which permits her to shift readily between Christian and Saracen in *Octavian* and which allows her to experience abduction as a liberation from her previous Saracen religion.

Yet, even as these romances represent the heroine as being able to locate a freedom within 'romance abduction', it is debatable how 'free' she actually is. Although sheikh romance might provide agency and influence for the hybrid heroine within abduction, occupying the space of the abducted still places women in a position of relative passivity and powerlessness. These women are captive, they do not have the power to abduct others, and their activity within the abduction and within the romance is predicated on the hero. Furthermore, what constitutes this 'freedom' is perhaps more limiting than it might seem. Certainly, *Disobedient* seems to attempt to refigure lack of choice as freedom. Whereas Tally had earlier railed against Tair's removal of her ability to choose, by the end of the romance lack of choice is refigured more positively, returning her to Tair: 'Tally knew what she had to do. Knew where she had to go. Knew it wouldn't be easy but she was Tair's woman and she had to be where he was. It wasn't an option. She had no choice'.²²⁸ Because of the celebration of the domestic in this romance and the positioning of the hero as representing 'home', lack of choice can here be reworked as freedom. *Ransomed* too returns to the theme of freedom and choice at the end of the romance, as the hero tells the heroine: 'all that matters is that you're mine, of your own free will', indicating the importance of freedom (and the lack of it) within abduction.²²⁹ Yet what kind of freedom is this? Apparently one defined by lack of choice, dominated and dictated by a man.

However, perhaps more disturbingly it seems to be difficult for the heroine to locate true freedom anywhere. Castiglia argues that captives often realise the impossibility of freedom, as whilst western society is envisioned as freedom, it is still a form of captivity, a sentiment supported by *Disobedient*'s comparisons between restrictive relationships in both the east and the west.²³⁰ Handrahan further highlights this, arguing 'while women in England or the United States may not fear being bridekidnapped, they do suffer the same dynamics from issues of male dominance

²²⁸ *Disobedient*, p. 180.

²²⁹ *Ransomed*, p. 185.

²³⁰ Castiglia, pp. 10-11.

and the link to violent subjection of women'.²³¹ Whilst celebrating domesticity is an acknowledged aspect of romance novels – Dixon recognises that 'Mills and Boon novels never belittle domesticity' – and although these romances do indicate some reworking of abduction to offer a limited agency to women, it is debatable how liberating it really is to constitute abduction and captivity as freedom.²³²

Conclusion

This chapter has drawn together arguments developed in the thesis to examine how three romance narratives, *Ransomed*, *Disobedient* and *Octavian* deal with the motif of abduction in light of the thesis' previous arguments for gender difference and ethnic sameness. The chapter suggested that these romances construct their articulation of romance abduction in relation to the reality of contemporary kidnap, working to distinguish it from romance abduction. In *Disobedient* and *Ransomed* abduction is presented as cultural custom, connected with the harem, conventions of bride kidnap and familial tradition. This serves not only to distance abduction from reality, but also serves to authorise it. In *Octavian*, abduction of the Saracen princess is presented as a conversion, thus subsuming the conventions of abduction into the established custom of baptism. Abduction is also figured, in all three romances, as protection or rescue, recoded according to the script of the romantic narrative. In *Octavian*, this is particularly marked, as Marsabelle's abduction is presented as part of the courtly conventions which structure many medieval romances. Furthermore, *Octavian* exploits rewritings of abduction already evident in contemporary legal and social discourses which attempt to label some kidnappings of women as 'voluntary' and thus orchestrated and desired by women themselves. This begins to suggest an agency for abducted women, offering a potentially more dominant position for Marsabelle. However, while reworking abduction as protection might nuance the trauma of the experience, it still positions the heroine as a passive possession: the hero's role might have shifted from abductor to carer, but his control over the heroine's body remains.

²³¹ Handrahan, p. 225.

²³² Dixon, p. 158.

I have further argued that these romances eroticise abduction, redefining the sexual violence inherent in the motif as erotic fantasy. A particularly rich episode in *Ransomed* makes clear the narrow yet crucial distinctions between captivity in the context of erotic fantasy, which can be legitimately enjoyed, and non-erotic captivity and sexual violence, which is to be rejected. Yet, while representing abduction as erotic may satisfy a fantasy of being abducted, it also reveals the heroine's limited ability to consent and underlines the extent to which romance sexuality continues to be defined and managed by the hero.

Finally, this chapter considered how these romances attempt to reinscribe the heroine's captivity as freedom, albeit a narrow model of freedom which offers limited liberation for heroines. I have argued that the heroine's hybrid identity can position her uniquely within the abduction motif, allowing her to experience captivity as a kind of freedom. The heroine can enjoy the domestic, passive east because of her adoption of elements of eastern ethnicity, and yet she can negotiate that space to make it acceptable to her western ideologies. Yet, as I made clear in Chapter 3, the ethnic hybridity which permits the heroine to experience captivity as freedom is uniquely available to her: this is not a freedom available to any other women in the romance and certainly is not available to eastern women. The real captives of these romances, then, are eastern women, who must wait for the western woman to redefine their positions on their behalf.

The way in which these three diverse narratives rework abduction reveals a consistency in its representation in two different time periods. For example, in both periods, romances construct their representations of abduction in relation to the contemporary realities of kidnap. Furthermore, while the representation of abduction and captivity remains deeply problematic, it is clear that the narratives attempt to find an agency for some women within a motif in which women are traditionally powerless: all three show ways in which women can find some leverage within abduction and captivity. However, the fact that the abduction motif has been persistent over time is not entirely encouraging; it is perhaps especially surprising to see continued reference to a motif which extols female passivity and male dominance

in a genre such as Mills & Boon, which is female dominated in audience and in authorship and claims to celebrate representations of powerful women.²³³

The refiguring of the abduction motif to locate a freedom for the western heroine within captivity is the most revealing aspect of this genre's imperialist ideology, as it shows how the western woman's colonising of the motif parallels a colonisation of the eastern world. Since abduction is represented as tradition, by modifying and redefining it, the western heroine recasts eastern tradition according to her own values. This could be seen as representative of the heroine's role in eastern conflict: one of development, defined by feminist principles, improving the lives of eastern women through feminist Orientalism. However, it is also clear that this is an agency reserved for the western heroine. In contrast to the reality of activism amongst women in the Middle East and North Africa, the typical eastern woman of sheikh romance continues to be silent, veiled and invisible, awaiting rescue by the western heroine, unable to effect change herself.

²³³ Author guidelines for the *Modern Romance* series claim: 'though she may be shy and vulnerable, [the heroine]'s also plucky and determined to challenge [the hero's] arrogant pursuit' ('Mills & Boon Modern Romance', *Mills&Boon.co.uk*, 21 Jun 2012 <<http://www.millsandboon.co.uk/AAModernR.asp>>).

ROMANCE IN THE EAST: CONCLUSIONS

This thesis sought to examine how erotic relationships between east and west are imagined in the popular romance of two distinct periods: the Middle Ages and the twenty-first century. The popular romances I analysed portray a relationship between two protagonists drawn from very different ethnic, cultural and, for the Middle Ages, religious, backgrounds. These romances operate within two frameworks of difference, gender and ethnicity or religion, which are mutually reinforcing, yet held in tension with each other, and upon which the success or failure of the cross-cultural relationship rests. This thesis has been an examination of how these frames work together, tracing their boundaries and functions, exploring how they affect the development of the erotic relationship. The central conclusion of this research is that these romances, both medieval and modern, facilitate the relationship between east and west, albeit in different ways, through a renegotiation of perceived differences to highlight sameness.

This is one of the first studies to have combined the apparently disparate genres of modern popular romance and Middle English romance. Certainly, there are many reasons why one would not study these romances together. They have very different audiences and authorships, for example modern romance is feminised in authorship and consumption in a way that Middle English romance was not. The romances are also structured in distinct ways; modern romances place the erotic relationship at the centre of the narrative, whereas in Middle English romance the relationship more usually forms just part of the overall plot. Yet my analysis has shown that comparing these two seemingly disparate genres exposes affiliation and proximity in the ways that they describe the function of a sexual relationship between east and west, and is revealing of the progressiveness of social and cultural values in today's popular romance.

Playing with Reality

A key finding of this thesis is that modern sheikh romances facilitate the cross-cultural relationship by distancing their romance east from the otherness of the

contemporary real east. Fictionalised and homogenised, the romance east is a place of fantasy, drawn from long-standing Orientalist tropes, bolstered by the homogenisation of customs and traits. This artificial romance east thus prioritises sameness by presenting a singular idea of the east, effectively distancing the artificial romance east from the variations inherent in the real east. The differences of the real east are reduced, in favour of a singular, homogeneous, seemingly familiar romance east. The veracity of such an east is sustained through meticulous detail; descriptions of clothing, customs, buildings, food, events and people contribute to the verisimilitude of the modern romance east. Furthermore, invented nations are specifically positioned within a shared eastern world which works to fabricate a common geographical map of the romance east.

The homogeneous romance east is not the result of a lack of contemporary awareness of the geopolitical reality of the Middle East. On the contrary, it has always been constructed, this thesis argues, in relation to contemporary realities: the romance east was not always fictional. Early sheikh romances were set in real locations such as Yemen or Morocco, and were indicative of political currents at the time. While Mills & Boon sheikh romances might not explicitly have dealt with political situations, by setting romances in Cairo in the 1930s, or Yemen in the 1960s, they revealed an awareness of contemporary politics. The shift to fictionalised locations in the early 1980s seemed to deny any further explicit association with most of the real east. However, a closer examination revealed that while their created settings might be fictional, many of today's sheikh romances are actually modelled on the modern-day UAE, in particular, Dubai.

Luxurious, accessible and western-friendly, with particular links to Britain, Dubai enjoys a unique position in the contemporary Middle East. Disconnected from the otherness inherent in parts of the region, Dubai is a space where leisure and tourism, rather than repressive politics and conflict, are foregrounded. Furthermore, Dubai is itself an artificial, created space, where 'traditional' culture is divorced from its origins and offered up as a carefully constructed tourist attraction. The homogeneous romance east thus draws on this real blurring of culture and tradition, exploiting the lack of distinction between reality and fiction in Dubai's artificial culture. Using Dubai as a model for the romance east is thus a deliberate technique to create a

compelling, believable fantasy world, and to distance the romance east from eastern otherness, creating a space in which the cross-cultural relationship can be fostered.

The extent to which the modern romance east is distanced from certain geopolitical realities of the Middle East is made clear by contrast with the medieval romance *Bevis*. As this thesis noted, it has generally been assumed that the geography of most Middle English romances, like sheikh romances, is fantastic, unrelated and unrelatable to any contemporary reality. However, the geography of one of the most popular Middle English romances, *Bevis*, demonstrates significant contemporary geographical knowledge. *Bevis* is deeply concerned with geography. The romance has a wide geographic scope with places, routes, and methods and times of travel described in unusual detail. The geographic range maps onto contemporary English interests in trade, crusade and pilgrimage, with the symbolic connotations of many places, such as Rome, Jerusalem and Damascus, exploited in the text. It is even possible, I argue, that *Bevis* could have functioned as a form of travelogue for its contemporary audience, itself contributing to the geographic knowledge of the period.

The geographical world of *Bevis*, then, instead of homogenising the differences between real places, as sheikh romance does, highlights their specificity, drawing on contemporary knowledge to locate and distinguish between geographic sites. It thus provides a counterpoint to the homogeneous, singular east of modern sheikh romance. Furthermore, the inclusion of such a level of detailed description in one Middle English romance challenges the assumption that Middle English romance cannot be realistic; the specificity of geographical knowledge in *Bevis* argues against a monolithic classification of Middle English romance as purely fantastical.

As well as highlighting homogeneous artificiality, some sheikh romances seek to further distance themselves from certain realities of the Middle East. The otherness of the Middle East is encapsulated, for western audiences, in the political and media discourse which labels certain parts of Middle East as ‘medieval’, meaning barbaric and retrograde. As I have examined, what is considered to be ‘medieval’ about the contemporary Middle East are attitudes drawn from radical Islam, in particular, customs which discriminate against women, for example, veiling. While sheikh romances do refer to this rhetoric, with particular reference to the denial of women’s

rights, they nuance their articulation of the ‘medieval’ away from its meaning in contemporary media and politics, thereby distancing themselves from the discourse and, by extension, from the ‘medieval’ Middle East.

Moreover, what the efforts of sheikh romance to dissociate themselves from the ‘medieval’ make clear is that religious difference is elided in modern sheikh romance. While the sheikh romance might label certain attitudes towards women in the romance east as ‘medieval’, these are attitudes located in secular ethnic culture rather than religion. Repressive aspects of the east about which the heroine is concerned, such as veiling or a lack of education for women are, in the western imagination, rooted in religion. In the sheikh romance, however, their religious connotations are elided as such attitudes are articulated as ethnic customs rather than religious ones. Consequently, such apparently ‘medieval’ traditions are dislocated from the binary of religious difference, which is seen to define the oppositional distance between east and west, and are instead considered as part of a more malleable (and thus ‘solvable’) discourse of ethnicity and culture. The division between the romance east and those parts of the Middle East considered to be ‘medieval’ is widened as the sheikh romance labels other countries in the east as ‘medieval’, re-establishing the distance between the fantasy romance east and the real ‘medieval’ east. The attitudes of the romance east are thus dissociated from the ‘medieval’ attitudes imagined to inhere in a religiously intolerant Middle East.

In addition to their nuancing of discourses about the ‘medieval’ Middle East, some sheikh romances, as I argued in Chapter 4, redefine their use of abduction to create a distance between their use of the motif and contemporary instances of political kidnap in the Middle East. While, as Haddad has argued, abduction serves as a plot device to bring the hero and heroine together, the connotations of political kidnapping in the Middle East can also function as a barrier to a successful relationship. While some romances do contain so-called political kidnaps, when describing the abduction of the heroine by the hero they distinguish it from other forms of captivity by reworking it into what I termed romance abduction. The Middle English romance *Octavian* effects a similar reworking, distancing the abduction of the heroine by the hero both from other instances of captivity in the romance and from the reality of kidnappings in medieval England.

As I argued in Chapter 4, this reworking of abduction away from the reality of kidnapping is carried out in three central ways; establishing abduction as a cultural tradition, refiguring romance as protection, and constructing it as erotic fantasy. All three of these strategies serve to distance the abduction of the heroine by the hero – romance abduction – from kidnappings carried out by people other than the hero. The effect of distinguishing romance abduction from other kidnappings is to lessen the trauma of abduction and, consequently, to remove any obstacles it might pose to the development of the relationship between hero and heroine. Given that abduction is a reality for some women in both periods, Middle English and sheikh romances work to mute the real contemporary danger, instead offering a space within which a fantasy of abduction can be created and, within the parameters of the romance east which reconstructs abduction as cultural tradition and as protection or rescue, erotically enjoyed. The erotic enjoyment of captivity has a parallel in the presentation of certain tropes which are considered to be ‘medieval’ – an insistence on virginity or sexual violence – as erotic by association with the romance hero, thereby subduing their ‘medieval’ effect. These romances, then, enjoy a complex relationship with the reality of the east, as they exploit the fantasy aspects of its culture, while rewriting its more undesirable features in order to create a world in which a cross-cultural relationship can be imagined.

Negotiating With/in the East

Many of the strategies by which these romances smooth the development of the cross-cultural relationship between hero and heroine involve a paradoxical engagement with and rejection of the culture and customs of the romance east. This is most clearly demonstrated in the multifarious construction of gender, ethnicity and religion from signifiers of both east and west. Medieval and modern romances draw on aspects of the east to construct the masculinity of the hero. The sheikh hero is hypermasculine in line with the ubiquitous alpha-male of modern popular romance, sexualised and violent, but with his masculinity in part characterised by his association with the east. This is evident in references to the harem to typify his sexual appetite, the use of animals associated with the east, such as the lion or hawk, to symbolise his character and the explicit connection between the sheikh and his

nation. The sheikh hero's hypermasculinity is in contrast to the masculinity of western men who, if they feature in these romances at all, noticeably lack traits of hypermasculinity, functioning as a foil to the sheikh hero. These romances thus disrupt the Orientalist discourse which labels the east as effeminate, denying any possibility that the sheikh hero would not be hypermasculine. Here, then, the east works to shape and uphold binary gender identity.

Yet the east can be troubling to heteronormative definitions of gender, as demonstrated by the Middle English romance *Floris*. In this romance, normative heterosexual masculinity is both bolstered and subverted by elements of the romance east. The Emir of Babylon, the hero's rival, displays a hypermasculinity which is defined, in the same way as modern romances, through violence and sexual avarice. Yet this model of masculinity is undermined by the hero Floris' display of non-normative masculinity. Floris' effeminate gender performance can, I argued in Chapter 2, be aligned with the gender performance of eunuchs. His lack of courage and beardlessness are central indicators of his effeminised gender and destabilise the hegemonic order of heterosexual gender identity on which the popular romance depends. In order for the relationship between hero and heroine to be legitimised, binary gender relations have to be restored through a normative gender performance. The east can thus both reinforce and disrupt heterosexual gender relations, acting as catalyst for and barrier to the successful, heterosexual relationship.

Considering modern sheikh romance in light of the gender play in *Floris*, it becomes clear that the hypermasculinity of the sheikh is not as stable as it might appear. By deliberately and overtly denying the effeminising effect of eastern clothing, these romances reveal the anxiety underlying the sheikh's hypermasculinity. The Orientalist construction of the east as locus of effeminate masculinity and homosociality is raised as troubling to the gender framework of the sheikh romance, and has to be denied. The sheikh's hypermasculinity is thus constructed both in conjunction with and in denial of the east.

The east similarly impacts on the heroine's gender. The framework of heteronormativity in sheikh romances requires that the heroine display a complementary gender identity – hyperfemininity – in relation to the sheikh's own hypermasculinity. The heroine achieves this by adopting signifiers of eastern

femininity, such as feminine clothing, submissiveness and virginity. For example, many western heroines exchange their western business suits, which conceal their curves, for silken robes, that draw attention to a newly discovered femininity. The heroine's virginity, which is made visible at the very moment it is lost, inscribes her into a hegemonic system of gender hierarchy, where the loss of her virginity allows her to be possessed by the hero to whom she lost it. The loss of her virginity positions the heroine as part of a gender system where she assumes the role of bride, wife, or mother, and is thus submissive in relation to the hero, who takes the dominant oppositional roles of husband and father. Thus, just as the east can function to hypermasculinise the hero, it simultaneously works to hyperfeminise the heroine, establishing heteronormative binary gender relations. Gender, then, is one aspect of these romances where it is the upholding rather than the elision of difference which facilitates the relationship between hero and heroine.

As I argued in Chapter 3, gender is closely linked with ethnicity and religion in these romances. In sheikh romance, heroic masculinity is constructed in conjunction with ethnicity: the sheikh hero is hypermasculine both *because* of and *despite* his ethnic heritage. Similarly, the sheikh romance heroine's performance of eastern hyperfemininity is one of ethnicity as well as of gender. Yet, while gender performance in these romances functions to maintain binary difference, articulations of ethnicity and religion, on the other hand, highlight sameness. In romance representations of the east in both the Middle Ages and the twenty-first century, it has been presented as a place of otherness, inhabited by those who are different. Yet, a central finding of this thesis was that ethnic and religious identity, often assumed to be monolithic and binary, is not as rigidly drawn in these romances as might be expected. This thesis found, via an analysis of the sheikh romances *Possessed* and *Convenient Virgin* and the Middle English romance *The King of Tars*, that ethnic and religious differences are reduced to facilitate the development of the central erotic relationship.

These romances simultaneously create and destabilise binaries of ethnic and religious identity, paradoxically emphasising difference – for example, in textual descriptions of the sheikh hero's dark skin or the violent temperament of the Sultan of Damascus in *Tars* – and eliding difference; on the covers of most of the sheikh novels the sheikh hero's contrasting skin tone is whitened and the Sultan has a more nuanced

character: while he might be short-tempered he is also polite and adheres to courtly conventions, just like the Christian King of Tars. The ethnic identity of the sheikh hero, and the religious identity of the Sultan are thus drawn from signifiers of both east and west: the hero is thus hybrid.

In sheikh romance the western heroine's ethnicity, which has so far remained unconsidered by scholarship, is similarly drawn from markers of east and west. She wears eastern clothing, learns the language and partakes in eastern customs, all of which work to identify her as eastern: indeed, in some sheikh romances, the western heroine can be indistinguishable from eastern women. Yet, at the same time, heroines retain certain aspects of their western identities, in particular moral and political values. The heroine's ethnic identity is thus created, in the same way as the sheikh's, from a combination of markers from both east and west. Sheikh romances thus indicate what I have referred to as sameness in hybridity between the couple.

This hybridity works, in medieval and modern romance, to reduce difference and facilitate the cross-cultural relationship, albeit in varying ways. In *Tars*, the Sultan's hybridity eases his transition from Islam to Christianity, establishing sameness for both hero and heroine within Christianity. Hybridity thus functions as an indicator for his eventual conversion. The fundamental binary of religious difference is not disrupted by the Sultan's temporary hybridity. In sheikh romance, on the other hand, it is ethnic hybridity itself which removes difference. Because of the heroine's apparent ethnic sameness indicated in her performance of eastern femininity, previously existing ethnic differences are obfuscated, creating an apparent sameness in hybridity between hero and heroine. Binary ethnic difference is thus removed in favour of sameness.

Yet, the heroine's hybridity is more complex, as exemplified by *Tars*, which indicates how hybridity can be illusory. That sameness is required and is central to erotic relationships between east and west is apparent from the monstrous birth in *Tars*. The Princess of Tars dresses and acts as though she were a Saracen, while secretly maintaining her Christianity. She thus appears to be as Saracen as the Sultan, and therefore similar enough to conceive a child with him. However, the birth of the lump-child exposes her religious disguise and indicates the consequences of procreation between those with different religions: a child whose own religious

identity is so undefined that it cannot form part of the inheritance of either parent. The troubling lump-child acts as a physical manifestation of the heroine's own religious hybridity which, according to the logic of otherness in this romance, cannot be sustained. There is no possibility that the Princess or her child could be equally drawn between both religions.

The inability to define religious identity thus disrupts the conservative family values central to inheritance. The underlying impetus behind an insistence on sameness is reproduction. Lineage and inheritance are essential to Middle English romances and the conservative ideology of these narratives insist on sameness in order to avoid miscegenation, thereby denying the possibility of a successful relationship between those of a different religion. The religious performance of the Princess thus disrupts the ability to discern religious identity and to choose an appropriate sexual partner: a vital aspect of these romances' sexual ideology. While these romances ultimately achieve sameness in their erotic relationships, they also reveal that the performance of religious identity is a site of anxiety as it can conceal otherness.

Anxieties about lineage are not confined to the Middle Ages; the need for an heir to ensure a stable lineage is just as pronounced in many modern sheikh romances. This is underscored by the presentation of the romance east as the locus of family values. The heroine's adoption of eastern femininity can be just as illusory as the Princess' adoption of Saracen religion; she too can reject eastern culture, indicating that her apparent sameness in hybridity was not genuine. The sheikh thus experiences an anxiety that he might have conceived a child, an all-important heir, with someone whose ethnic identity does not match his own. This anxiety is manifested as the sheikh attempts to stamp his own cultural heritage onto the child in order for them to share a similar ethnic identity. The specific focus of the romance east on family and inheritance thus prompts concerns about miscegenation.

The ways in which these romances, medieval and modern, solve such anxieties are revealing of the logic which requires ethnic or religious sameness for procreation. In *Tars*, the Sultan is baptised, his skin colour changes, and religious difference is redrawn more definitely than before, with the Sultan, the Princess and their son clearly positioned on the same (Christian) side. In sheikh romance, ethnic hybridity is permanently re-established as the hero and heroine settle, in love, in the east,

functioning, ultimately, to solve even the sheikh's own anxious hybridity. Yet, even in hybridity, such a resolution still emphasises sameness.

Romantic Orientalism

Yet, sameness is selective. The solutions offered for concerns over miscegenation are not universal. What becomes clear again and again in these medieval and modern romances, is that hybridity is individual. Romance narratives use hybridity to create a sameness which facilitates the cross-cultural relationship, but this hybridity is only available to the hero and heroine. Thus, in *Tars*, the Sultan's hybrid identity which leads to his conversion is available only to him, and the ethnic hybridity adopted by the sheikh hero and western heroine are similarly exclusive. These popular romances ultimately leave unchallenged the overarching framework of difference which continues to structure the east and its inhabitants as other.

These romances are fundamentally encoded by western imperial attitudes towards the east. The modern romance east is modelled on real locations with which the western world is both familiar and enjoys a friendly relationship. Furthermore, a significant way difference is reworked into sameness is through westernisation. In modern romances the 'medieval' otherness of the east is solved through modernisation heralded by the western heroine. Through her ministrations, and with the support of the hybrid hero, social and political advances are made which work to 'correct' those aspects of the romance east which were labelled 'medieval', by endorsing western models of democracy and relationships, for example, monogamy. The 'medieval' romance east is thus modernised by being westernised. Such a 'westernisation' is similarly apparent in medieval romances through the conversion of Saracens: Christianity was the major religion most readily associated with medieval western Europe. Therefore, just as Middle English romances endorse the triumph of Christianity as the final outcome of the narrative, so too do modern sheikh romances continue to perpetuate the superiority of the west in their modifications to 'improve' the romance east.

Significantly, this thesis explored how the particular dominance of the western heroine signals the legacy of imperialist thought in these romances. The hybridity of

the western heroine permits her a certain agency within the romance east. For example, the hybrid heroine can negotiate a position of relative freedom within the abduction motif. The eastern aspects of her ethnicity permit her to experience elements of domesticated eastern captivity as more liberating, while her residual western identity prompts her to mould her own abduction into a form more acceptable to her (by disallowing polygamy, for example). While the western heroine adopts certain aspects of eastern femininity (modelled on the femininity of the servant/guide or the sexualised *houri*) for the purposes of making the cross-cultural relationship work, she retains some agency through her residual western ethnicity. Thus, while she might be submissive in the context of her performed gender identity, her ethnic identity continues to allow her some position of dominance and control. The eastern woman, on the other hand, does not have the benefit of hybrid ethnicity and thus has no similar position of authority or control; she is submissive in terms of both her gender and her ethnicity.

The heroine's culturally imperialist western position allows her to mediate in eastern politics in a way not open to most other women. Thus, she can solve the 'medieval' crisis of the east, in particular finding solutions to apparently sexist and restrictive practices such as women being required to walk behind the hero. Furthermore, because the desert nation is so inextricably linked with its absolute sheikh ruler, by establishing a relationship with the hero, the heroine creates a relationship with the country and is able to influence decisions more quickly than she might otherwise. Heroines, then, have the power to mediate and to be heard within the politics of the east.

But this power is reserved for the hybrid heroine. Because it is her hybridity which permits her to locate a freedom within captivity and to negotiate and solve the apparent problems of the romance east, these resolutions become individualised; only the heroine can be hybrid and therefore only she has the power to effect these changes. The eastern woman remains, for the most part, silent. The sheikh romance often represents eastern women as veiled, uneducated and in need of the western heroine's help; their representation is aligned with the widely critiqued discourse that says that eastern women are in need of western intervention and cannot help

themselves. In this sense, modern sheikh romances continue to perpetuate an Orientalist attitude.

Next Steps

This thesis, as far as I am aware, is the first full-length comparative study of medieval and modern popular romance. While there is still much work to be done in this underdeveloped area, the study has made a significant preliminary contribution, and can stand as a stepping stone for future research on sheikh romance, Middle English romance and the east. The thesis used an innovative methodology, contributing to a small but growing number of comparative studies of medieval and modern literature. I analysed a unique set of sources, many of which have not been fully addressed by existing scholarship, and examined the engagement of romances with contemporary events and literary tropes. The thesis has also begun to open up medieval romance to popular romance scholarship, allowing non-medievalists to engage with fascinating and relevant medieval romances.

Although beyond the bounds of this thesis, a wider contextualisation of more of the medieval romances I identified as containing relationships between Christians and Saracens, and of sheikh romances from previous decades or from different series and publishers would widen the scope of the thesis. Similarly, a comparative investigation of *Modern Romance* titles with sheikh heroes alongside those with heroes from other ethnic backgrounds (e.g. Greek, Italian, Spanish or French heroes) might reveal interesting observations which could further inform this study. With more space, I would have liked to extend the discussion of the use of the ‘medieval’ in sheikh romances to include a comparative analysis of modern historical romances set in the Middle Ages, to examine whether the idea of the ‘medieval’ quoted in Mills & Boon sheikh romance is similar to that in these overtly medievalised texts.

This thesis has argued that the functioning of a cross-cultural erotic relationship between east and west is based upon a relative framework of gender difference and ethnic sameness, thus opening the way for further consideration of ethnicity and religion in romance. While there is a substantial and growing body of work on religious difference in medieval romance, the articulation of ethnicity remains a little

analysed aspect of modern popular romance. In addition, this study focused on British romances, yet both medieval romances and sheikh novels exist in different languages and countries. Further research might extend this project beyond its Anglo-centric boundaries and consider its wider contexts. These are areas in which I seek to expand this research.

To conclude, this thesis has shown how disparate romances, of the Middle Ages and the twenty-first century, engage with ethnic, cultural, social and political differences between east and west to ensure the successful creation of a cross-cultural erotic relationship. My study has focused on the constructed romance east, and the ways in which gender, ethnicity and religion function within it. What is perhaps the most remarkable result of this study is the way it has highlighted the similar strategies adopted by medieval and modern romance for dealing with difference. Even as the kind of otherness imagined to inhere in the east differed greatly in each period, with religion being the operative indicator of difference in the Middle Ages and ethnicity standing as the main marker of otherness in the twenty-first century, the romances of each period reveal a shared impetus towards sameness. The romances of both periods systematically privilege sameness over difference, even as they achieve it in varying ways.

As I noted in this thesis, it has been argued, in recent years, that Mills & Boon romances are responsive to contemporary social and cultural shifts, modifying their narratives and characterisation accordingly. In some respects, for example the inclusion of sex before marriage and the celebration of women's careers, this seems to be the case. Furthermore, given the historical lack of representation of 'other' ethnicities in Mills & Boon romance novels, it could be argued that the sheikh romance, by virtue of its inclusion of a cross-cultural relationship, is reflective of more progressive social attitudes towards sexual contact between east and west. But this thesis' comparative analysis of sheikh romances alongside medieval romances reveals that in terms of a relationship across cultural and ethnic borders, these romances are not as progressive as might be claimed. While they might appear to endorse an erotic relationship across ethnic borders, their use of hybridity to create ethnic sameness reveals that these romances continue to perpetuate the 'same-race, different gender rule'. Indeed, in their continued insistence on ethnic sameness between hero and heroine, these twenty-first century sheikh romances do not

significantly differ from medieval romances read 700 years earlier. In this time, the story might have changed, but its themes, problems and means of resolution, have not.

By exposing the historical roots of romance representations of the east, this thesis invites a closer look at popular attitudes towards the east and the kinds of solutions proposed for its apparent problems. Despite the major differences between the medieval period and the present day, in terms of western romance constructions of the east, there continues to exist an east which is both repulsive and desired, characterised by conservatism and fantasy, and which is still moulded, defined and arbitrated by our western popular imagination.

APPENDIX 1: ROMANCE PLOT SUMMARIES

Jane Porter, *The Sultan's Bought Bride* (Richmond: Harlequin Mills & Boon, 2004)

Nicolette Ducasse, Princess of the small Mediterranean island kingdom of Melio and Meija, poses as her sister in order to fulfil an arranged marriage with Sultan Malik Nuri of Baraka in North Africa. The marriage would reunite her sister with her estranged daughter and protect their inheritance, although Nic plans to elope at the last moment. But as Nic spends more time with Malik, whom she finds intensely physically attractive, she begins to have second thoughts about eloping, finding herself drawn to exotic Baraka. After they sleep together, Nic reveals her true identity and Malik admits that the plot all along had been to secure Nic herself, rather than her sister, in marriage. After an initial resistance to the wedding and to what she considers to be Malik's deception, Nic and Malik are happily married in her home country.

Sabrina Philips, *The Desert King's Bejewelled Bride* (Richmond: Harlequin Mills & Boon, 2009)

As a teenager, model Tamara Weston had travelled to Crown Prince Kaliq's kingdom of Qwasir, where she developed an intense crush on him. But when Kaliq proposed marriage, Tamara refused, on the grounds that he wanted to marry her for duty, rather than love. Years later, Kaliq contacts Tamara with an assignment in Qwasir that she cannot refuse: to model the royal jewels which are traditionally given to the Crown Prince's bride. They will be modelled at a dinner designed to deflect attention from Kaliq's ailing father, the King. The return to Qwasir rekindles Tamara's feelings for Kaliq.

On the night of the dinner, Tamara is attacked by thieves while wearing the jewels and Kaliq rescues her, riding to a myth-laden cave in the desert where the couple make love. Upon discovering that speculation is rife following their escape into the desert, Kaliq declares that Tamara must pose as his fiancée. Almost immediately, the couple travel to Montéz, an island in the Mediterranean Sea where Kaliq's family have a holiday home. While they are there, Kaliq's father dies and Kaliq returns, alone, to Qwasir. Realising that she loves Kaliq and willing to marry him, against her own wishes, for the sake of his country, Tamara flies to Qwasir to join Kaliq. The couple are married and, following a brief separation, reunite happily in London.

***Bevis of Hampton* (c.1300)**

The romance begins with the arranged marriage of the elderly Guy of Hampton and the daughter of the King of Scotland. Seven years pass, during which time Guy's wife gives birth to Bevis. However this is not a happy union: Guy's wife is sexually dissatisfied and plots her husband's murder with the help of her former lover, the Emperor of Germany. Bevis escapes death, with the help of his guardian, Saber, but is sold to merchants and exiled to heathen lands. Upon arrival in Ermony (Armenia),

the merchants present Bevis to King Ermin, who is delighted. Bevis is offered the King's beautiful daughter, Josian, in marriage, if he will convert from Christianity, but he refuses. Yet he remains with the King and becomes his chamberlain.

Seven years pass and Bevis, now fifteen, kills some of Ermin's men who insult his religious knowledge. When he is told of the fight, Ermin sentences Bevis to death, but Josian defends him and his life is spared: she heals his wounds with herbal cures she has concocted. Not long after, Bevis slays a wild boar which has been terrorising the community and staves off a jealous attack by the King's steward. Around the same time, King Brademond arrives in Ermony, demanding Josian for his wife. King Ermin refuses and pledges to defeat Brademond in battle. With Josian's encouragement, Ermin knights Bevis, who is presented with a sword, Morgelai, and a horse, Arondel. Bevis is hugely successful in battle and captures Brademond, making him swear allegiance to Ermin.

After the battle, Josian goes to Bevis and declares her desire for him which he initially refuses, until she promises to convert to Christianity. The couple happily embrace, but unfortunately their conversation is witnessed by Bevis' chamberlain, whom he had captured from the ranks of Brademond's army. Ermin is furious and devises a punishment for Bevis; he is to deliver a sealed letter to Brademond, travelling without armour or weapons, which declares that he has taken Josian's virginity and calling for his execution. When Bevis arrives in Damascus he is imprisoned in a deep pit, infested with poisonous animals. Meanwhile, in Ermony, Ermin marries his daughter to King Yvor of Mombraunt, gifting his new son-in-law with Arondel and Morgelai. Unhappily married, Josian wears an enchanted ring to preserve her virginity.

After seven years, Bevis manages to escape from prison, killing two Saracen giants in the process. Bevis rides to Jerusalem where he seeks his confession and the advice of the patriarch, who tells him that he should make sure any woman he marries is a virgin. After discovering Josian's marriage to Yvor, Bevis rides to Mombraunt to reclaim Josian, as well as his horse and sword. Disguised as a pilgrim, Bevis makes himself known to Josian and she is quick to reassure him of her protected virginity. The couple elope, first hiding in caves where they are attacked by lions, then fleeing to Cologne, recruiting a Saracen giant named Ascopard as a servant along the way. When they arrive in Cologne, Josian is baptised by Bevis' uncle, a bishop called Saber Florentin, but Ascopard becomes angry at the size of the font (being much smaller than his giant-self) and refuses to be baptised. Whilst in Cologne, Bevis kills a dragon residing nearby which is feared by the local population; he is revived during the fight by bathing in the waters of a nearby well in which a virgin had bathed. After killing the dragon, Bevis sails back to England, reuniting with his guardian, Saber, and reclaiming his lands from his mother and stepfather, who are both killed.

Meanwhile, in Cologne, an earl, Miles, wishes to marry Josian. She writes to Bevis, informing him of events and begging him to return, but with no-one to protect her, Josian takes matters into her own hands. On their wedding night, she asks Miles' attendants to leave the room, under guise of passion, and as Miles approaches the bed, she throws a rope around his neck and hangs him using the railing of the bed curtains. The following morning when the earl's attendants do not see him rise, they go to the room and find Miles' body and a defiant Josian. She is sentenced to be burned for her crime but is rescued at the last minute by Bevis and Ascopard.

Returning to England, Bevis is reinstated as the lord of Hampton and he and Josian are married by Saber Florentin. Josian becomes pregnant with twins.

During the first year of their marriage, Bevis travels to the King of England's court, where he wins a tournament with his horse Arondel, building and naming a castle after his horse with the winnings. Unfortunately, the King's son tries to steal Arondel, who kicks and kills him. Rather than sentence Arondel to death, Bevis offers his lands and title to save his horse, and leaves England with Ascopard and Josian, making Saber's son, Terri, his squire. Annoyed by his sudden change in fortune, Ascopard betrays Bevis and returns to his old master, Yvor of Mombraunt, who orders him to kidnap Josian and return her to him.

As Josian, Terri and Bevis travel towards Ermony, Josian goes into labour and insists Bevis and Terri move away to give her some privacy. She gives birth, alone, to two twin boys. Unfortunately, Ascopard passes with a company of Saracens who kidnap Josian, leaving the children for dead. To evade recognition, Josian secretly eats a herb which she knows will make her look like a leper, and she is imprisoned in a tower for half a year with Ascopard as her jailer. Meanwhile Terri and Bevis return and find the children alone. Suspecting Ascopard's treachery, they entrust the children, which he names Guy and Miles, to guardians and ride to Amberforce, where they win a tournament. Bevis is awarded top prize - a king's daughter to marry - but she agrees to wait seven years to consummate the relationship in case Josian returns.

Back in England, Saber dreams that Bevis is wounded and travels to Mombraunt to rescue Josian. Saber and Josian try to find Bevis eventually, after seven years, arriving at Amberforce. The couple are reunited and the king's daughter is married to Terri. They all travel to Ermony, where Josian's father, King Ermin, is being besieged by King Yvor, Josian's first husband. Bevis fights and captures Yvor, who is released following the payment of an expensive ransom to Bevis. Not long after, Ermin dies, leaving his kingdom to Bevis' son Guy who crusades with his father and Christianises the country.

In the meantime, Yvor steals Arondel, but the horse is rescued by Saber, who returns him to Ermony, pursued by Yvor and his army. Bevis and Yvor fight one another to save further bloodshed and Bevis wins, killing Yvor's army and seizing his lands. After the battle, a messenger informs Saber that King Edgar of England has disinherited his heir, Robaunt. They all travel to London to challenge the King's decision. Bevis visits the King in London and is re-granted his heritage at Southampton, but a steward reminds the King that Bevis was the cause of his son's death and is a threat to the King. Bevis leaves the Court in anger and enters the City of London, pursued by the steward and sixty knights who encourage all the people of London to fight against Bevis.

Bevis and his six companions battle against the steward, whom Bevis kills, but they struggle against the multitude population of London. Word reaches Josian and their sons in Putney that Bevis has been killed in battle. Bevis' sons vow to avenge their father and enter the battle riding on an Arabian horse and a camel. Reunited and fighting together, Guy, Miles and Bevis kill 32,000 Londoners, then hold a feast which lasts for a fortnight. To make peace between them, King Edgar offers his daughter to be married to Miles, Bevis' younger son.

After the wedding, Bevis returns to Mombraunt with Josian, leaving Guy to govern Ermony and Terri to return to his wife in Amberforth, leaving his lands in Southampton to Saber. After living happily in Mombraunt for twenty years, Josian, Bevis and Arondel die on the same day. Their bodies are buried and a fine marble tomb and chapel are constructed.

Floris and Blancheflur (c.1250)

This romance tells the story of Floris, the pagan son of the King of Spain, and Blancheflur, the Christian daughter of a slave woman, who are raised together and fall in love. Through the plotting of Floris' parents, who disapprove of their relationship and fear that the youngsters will marry, Blancheflur is sold to merchants and then to the Emir of Babylon, who imprisons her in a fortified tower with other maidens, guarded by eunuchs. The Emir intends to marry Blancheflur via a selection process which involves an elaborate virginity test carried out in his ornate garden.

When he hears of Blancheflur's fate, Floris goes to her rescue and, with help along the way, manages to enter the tower, concealed in a basket of flowers. Floris is discovered by Blancheflur's friend Claris, and the lovers are reunited and immediately go to bed. So distracted are the couple that Blancheflur misses two engagements with the Emir. Investigating her absence, the angered Emir discovers the sleeping lovers in bed, although he at first thinks that they are both women. When he pulls down the bedcovers, the Emir discovers that they are actually a man and a woman, and is furious. Floris and Blancheflur are imprisoned and sentenced to death, but the Emir's advisors take pity on the children and persuade him to spare their lives. All are reconciled and their identities revealed: Floris is knighted and he and Blancheflur are married, as are the Emir and Claris, before returning to Floris' kingdom to rule as King and Queen.

Lynne Graham, *The Arabian Mistress* (Richmond: Harlequin Mills & Boon, 2001)

At the age of eighteen, Faye Lawson meets Prince Tariq Shazad ibn Zachir, ruler of Jumar, at a wedding. The couple talk and start dating. Unfortunately, when Faye invites Tariq to her house for dinner, where they will be alone, they argue, as he assumed her invitation meant she was not as inexperienced as she appeared. Upset, Faye spills wine on herself and, after showering, is caught by her stepfather, Percy, in conversation with Tariq while leaving the bathroom wearing only a towel. Percy, a financial opportunist, blackmails Tariq, threatening to publicly expose the scandal. To combat the threat, Tariq marries Faye in the Jumarian embassy in London and then immediately appears to divorce her. Faye flees, unaware of the money that had changed hands, devastated that Tariq had had an apparent change of heart.

Fourteen months later, Faye's brother Adrian has been imprisoned in Jumar after getting into financial difficulties over a construction project in the country. Faye travels to Jumar to beg Tariq to release her brother. Tariq, incensed at what he considers Faye's desertion and acceptance of the bribery money, agrees to release Adrian on the condition that Faye becomes his mistress. At first Faye refuses,

insulted, but, considering she has no choice, eventually agrees to Tariq's 'indecent proposal'. Faye is transported to Tariq's palace in the desert, ostensibly to be housed in the harem quarters. After checking that Adrian has been freed, she attempts to escape from the palace, but is caught in a sandstorm. Tariq rescues her and they shelter in a cave where they have an argument. After the sandstorm, Tariq and Faye fly to a tribal gathering in the desert. That evening, an opulent reception is held that, unbeknownst to Faye, is a wedding ceremony, following which Faye and Tariq consummate their relationship and he discovers that she is a virgin.

The following day, Faye returns to the palace, still believing that she is Tariq's mistress. Tariq eventually reveals that he had never divorced her and that they had been re-married in the desert. Faye is furious that Tariq has not been honest with her and storms off, accidentally falling down a spiral staircase and ending up in hospital. When she has recovered, she demands a divorce of Tariq, but when she realises that he really does care for her, she decides to stay and the couple reside happily in Jumar.

Sarah Morgan, *The Sultan's Virgin Bride* (Richmond: Harlequin Mills & Boon, 2006)

Eighteen-year-old Farrah Tyndall accompanies her father to the desert nation of Tazkash, where she first meets Tariq, the Crown Prince. Observing her interest in his country, Tariq appoints himself as her guide. One day Tariq takes Farrah to the Caves of Zatus where, according to local legend, the Sultan met incognito with his lover: a local girl, Nadia. In the cave they share a kiss and Farrah declares her love for Tariq. After a month in the desert, Farrah returns with Tariq to Fallouk, the capital city and location of Tariq's palace home. She is overwhelmed by the formality and protocol of palace life and is made unwelcome by Tariq's cousin Asma, who attempts to sabotage their budding relationship. Tariq, sensing Farrah's unease in the palace, asks her to be his mistress to secure her a more permanent position. Farrah, devastated that he had not asked her to marry him, refuses, and returns home to the USA.

Five years later, Farrah and Tariq meet once again at a charity dinner. Tariq declares that he has come to marry Farrah although, unbeknownst to her, he is planning only a temporary marriage to secure her shares in her father's oil company. Farrah refuses, but an incensed Tariq abducts her from the dinner and onto a private jet for Tazkash. They travel immediately to the desert camp of Nazaar, where Farrah and Tariq had met five years earlier. Farrah, desperate not to marry Tariq, although she acknowledges their physical attraction, takes a car and attempts to escape during a sandstorm. But she gets the car stuck in a sand dune and is rescued by Tariq who returns with her to Nazaar. At dinner that evening Tariq persuades Farrah to stay in Tazkash for two weeks to give their relationship another chance. They spend time exploring the desert and, at the end of two weeks, they return to the Caves of Zatus, where Tariq proposes once again. Mollified by his thoughtfulness over the past fortnight, Farrah accepts, and they spend their first night as newlyweds in the cave.

The following morning, they return to Tariq's palace in Fallouk. Wandering the corridors that evening, Farrah overhears Asma talking to her mother who reveals that Tariq had only married Farrah to gain control of her shares. Furious, Farrah seeks out

Tariq and confronts him. Tariq admits the truth, but adds that he is no longer planning a temporary marriage, but, because of their intense physical attraction, intends to make theirs a permanent arrangement. Unable to cope being around Tariq, Farrah eventually decides to flee, persuading Asma to obtain her a car to cross the border into neighbouring Kazban. But at the border, Tariq is waiting for her, and as he declares that he does love her, Farrah decides to stay with him in Tazkash forever.

Chantelle Shaw, *At the Sheikh's Bidding* (Richmond: Harlequin Mills & Boon, 2008)

Erin Maguire, an orphan who had led a tumultuous early life, secured a job working for Faisal, Prince and heir apparent of the Middle Eastern kingdom of Qubbah at his home in North Yorkshire. After Faisal was diagnosed with an inoperable brain tumour, he persuaded Erin to enter into a marriage in name only in order for her to assume custody of his three-year-old son, Kazim.

Three weeks after Faisal's death, his brother Zahir arrives to claim Kazim and return him to Qubbah, where Kazim is now heir to the throne. Erin, unaware that Faisal had any family, is resistant to Zahir's demands, but accepts that it would be good for Kazim to visit his family. Exploiting the physical attraction between them, Zahir persuades Erin to travel to Qubbah with Kazim immediately. When they arrive in Qubbah Erin realises that Zahir had never intended for theirs to be a temporary visit, and angrily refuses his offer of a financial settlement in return for relinquishing custody of Kazim.

In order to secure Kazim's settlement in Qubbah, Zahir's father, the King, proposes that Zahir marry Erin. Defiant, Erin flees the palace with Kazim, intending to return to England. Unfamiliar with driving in the desert, she damages the car and is forced to await rescue. After Zahir finds them, he informs Erin that if she wishes to remain in the palace she must marry him and Erin agrees, for the sake of Kazim.

Five days later Erin and Zahir are married and travel to a desert camp for their honeymoon. In the desert they consummate their marriage and Zahir discovers that Erin is a virgin and that, therefore, her marriage to Faisal had not been a true marriage. Yet Erin reminds him that her claim to Kazim now stands through their own marriage. After their honeymoon, the couple return to the palace where Erin grows jealous of another woman, Jahmela, whose family had expected her to marry Zahir. Jahmela encourages the growing rift between Erin and Zahir and publicly exposes Erin's troubled past. Distraught, Erin flees to England, already pregnant with Zahir's child. Two weeks later, however, Zahir follows her, revealing that he already knew of her past and affirming his love for her. They return to Qubbah to raise their family.

Penny Jordan, *Possessed by the Sheikh* (Richmond: Harlequin Mills & Boon, 2005)

Katrina, an archaeologist excavating in the desert, is shopping in the souk when she witnesses a man dressed as a Tuareg tribesman change into European clothes in order to escape pursuers. To complete his disguise, the man kisses Katrina, pretending that

she is his partner. The man is Sheikh Alessandro, known as Xander, half-brother of the Ruler of Zuran, who has infiltrated the Tuareg tribe in disguise to investigate a plot against his half-brother's life by his cousin Nazir.

The following day Katrina is drugged by her boss who drives her to a remote location in the desert to seduce her. Fleeing, Katrina runs into the path of Tuareg tribesmen, including Xander who lifts her onto his horse and rides with her to the Tuareg desert camp in the 'Empty Quarter' beyond the borders of Zuran. Xander wins a fight with another tribesman, Sulimen, to stake his claim to Katrina. To further protect her from the advances of other men in the camp, Xander marries Katrina in a 'sham' traditional ceremony, after which he discovers, contrary to his assumptions, that she is a virgin.

The day before the plotted assassination, Nazir visits the desert camp and threatens to shoot the disguised Xander. Katrina, witnessing, flings herself between the two men to save Xander's life and is injured in the process. She wakes up in Zuran hospital where she discovers Xander's true identity. Upon her release from hospital, Katrina is transferred to the Palace, where she discovers that her 'sham' marriage has been upheld by Xander's brother, the Ruler. Xander tells her that as they had slept together and he had taken her virginity, they must now remain as husband and wife. The couple travel to Xander's parents' villa, the shell of a Saracen stronghold which Xander's English mother had decorated in a hybrid style, blending aspects of east and west. Katrina is reluctant to endorse their marriage but cannot deny her physical attraction to Xander and the couple eventually settle their differences and the novel ends with the birth of their son.

Trish Morey, *The Sheikh's Convenient Virgin* (Richmond: Harlequin Mills & Boon, 2005)

Australian heroine Morgan, working as a companion to the mother of Sheikh Taj, is asked to travel to their desert kingdom, Jamalbad. Leaving her small family behind, Morgan leaves on a private jet, fighting her attraction to Taj on the journey, although they share a passionate kiss. But when they arrive in Jamalbad, Morgan discovers that she has been brought to Jamalbad to pose as Taj's wife, in order to appease the country's political rulers.

Morgan is furious, determined to escape. But Taj is insistent and, after discovering she is a virgin, details their elaborate wedding plans. Captivated by the clothing, customs and traditions of the east, as well as by Taj himself, Morgan acquiesces and the couple are married. However, on their wedding night, after they consummate their relationship, Morgan is repulsed by the idea that Taj has only married her to produce a much-needed heir. She rejects Taj and his eastern culture, pleading with the Australian-born wife of a neighbouring sheikh ruler, Sapphire, to help her escape.

Sapphire promises to assist Morgan's escape, but encourages her to spend a little more time getting to know Taj and his culture and, as she does, Morgan decides to stay. But not long after, Morgan is caught up in a plot by the sheikh's power-hungry cousin who had intended that he should marry his own daughter, Abir. Believing that Taj does not really love her, Morgan flees on horseback but is caught in a sandstorm.

On the point of death, she is rescued by Taj, who declares his love for her and brings her 'home' to his desert palace.

The King of Tars (early fourteenth century)

The Saracen Sultan of Damascus has fallen in love by hearsay with the Christian princess of Tars. Smitten, he sends messengers to ask for her hand in marriage, but the horrified King and Queen of Tars, after consulting with their equally horrified daughter, turn him down. Incensed, the Sultan attacks the Kingdom of Tars, which sustains heavy battle losses. Distressed by the slaughter of her people, the princess offers to marry the Sultan in order to stop the fighting. Devastated, but grateful, the King and Queen reluctantly let her leave.

The delighted Sultan welcomes his new bride, but tells her they cannot be married until she converts to his Saracen beliefs. That night, the princess dreams she is chased by black dogs but is saved by a figure, dressed in white, who tells her not to be afraid, as he will help her in her need. When she awakes, the Sultan takes her to his temple and she outwardly converts, although privately retaining her Christian faith.

Three months later the princess falls pregnant but when the child is born it is an insensate, limb-less, feature-less lump of flesh. The shocked Sultan blames the monstrous birth on his wife's lack of belief in his gods, yet the princess throws his accusation back at him and challenges his gods to cure the child. But no matter how long or fervently he prays, the Sultan's gods cannot heal the lump-child.

Defeated, the Sultan destroys his idols and returns to the princess, agreeing that if her Christian god can cure the child, he will convert to Christianity. Locating a priest in the Sultan's prison, the lady arranges the baptism of the lump-child, who is miraculously transformed into a healthy boy. To re-join his now Christian family, the Sultan is also baptised, his skin colour changing from black to white in the process. The Christian family send for the princess' father, the King of Tars, with whom the Sultan embarks on a violent crusade to forcibly convert his own people to Christianity.

Octavian (c.1350)

The romance begins with the longed-for birth of twin sons to Octavian, Emperor of Rome and his wife. The Emperor is overjoyed, but his happiness quickly turns to anger as, through the plotting of his mother, it appears that his wife has been adulterous. Unable to burn his wife and children, the proposed punishment, the Emperor exiles all three of them.

Wandering in the forest, the Empress becomes lost and her two children are kidnapped. The first, named Octavian after his father, is captured by a griffin, then a lioness, but is rediscovered by the Empress. Mother and son travel to Jerusalem where they are greeted by the Christian ruler and Octavian is baptised. The second child, Florent, is kidnapped by an ape and then found by a knight and outlaws respectively, who eventually sell the child to Clement, a Parisian merchant. Clement

and his wife raise Florent as their own child, although it becomes evident that Florent is of noble birth and not, therefore, their son.

When Florent is grown, France is besieged by Saracens, who camp just outside of Paris. The daughter of the Saracen Sultan, Marsabelle, writes to the King of France for permission to reside at Montmartre. Amongst the Saracen host is a giant, whom Marsabelle agrees to kiss if he can bring her the head of the King of France. The giant attacks Paris, but Florent, dressed in Clement's rusty armour, kills him. Florent cuts off the giant's head and rides to Montmartre where he presents it to Marsabelle, claiming the kiss she had earlier promised. He then attempts to abduct Marsabelle, lifting her over his saddle, but is forced to release her as an outcry rises in the town. Marsabelle returns to her father's camp, where the Sultan is incensed by Florent's actions, assuring his daughter that she will be revenged. Marsabelle, however, confides in her maid, Olive, that she has fallen in love with Florent and wishes that he would come to abduct her. Meanwhile, Florent returns to Paris and is knighted at a feast where his true parentage is revealed.

Riding near the Saracen camp one day, Florent spies Marsabelle and Olive walking by the riverside and crosses the river on his horse to speak with her. Marsabelle tells him of her plan for how Florent should abduct her and tells him about her father's best horse, which Clement, in disguise, steals from the Saracens. The next day Florent enacts Marsabelle's plan, carrying her to Paris, but his absence from the battlefield means that Octavian and the King of France are captured. Florent tries to rescue them but fails, and all the Christians are imprisoned.

Word of their capture reaches Jerusalem, and the young Octavian decides to rescue his father. He and his mother travel to France with an army, ambush the Saracens and defeat them. Octavian rescues the prisoners and reveals his identity, reuniting the joyful family. Marsabelle is christened and marries Florent. They all return to Rome.

Jane Porter, *The Sheikh's Disobedient Bride* (Richmond: Harlequin Mills & Boon, 2006)

Photographer Tally is kidnapped in Baraka by Sheikh Tair, who takes her to a rough desert encampment in his neighbouring nation, Ouaha. Tair questions her, asking why she was travelling with men he considers to be bandits and confiscating her camera. Tally insists she had only hired the men as guards and begs Tair to release her and return her camera, but he refuses, suggesting that he would marry her to one of his tribe. Desperate to escape, Tally steals a horse and flees across the desert only to be caught in a sandstorm. Tair rescues her and returns her to the camp where he proposes to keep Tally for himself. Horrified, Tally tries to escape once again the following day, only to wander into quicksand and be rescued once again by Tair. That evening as Tally and Tair talk over dinner she collapses, having been poisoned by one of the tribe. Realising the danger she is in, and determined to claim her as his woman, Tair travels with Tally to his home, a luxurious palace carved out of a massive rock formation.

When they arrive Tair informs Tally that they will be married and that the palace is now her home. Tally is resistant, but cannot deny her attraction to Tair. Despite her

protestations they are married. Following the wedding, Tally and Tair travel to visit his mother, but Tally is kidnapped on the journey by the bandits who had previously posed as her guides. Tair rescues her, but proceeds to annul their marriage and send her back to the USA, for her own protection, pretending that he no longer wants her. Grieving back in the USA, Tally eventually realises that Tair does care for her, and returns to Ouaha in the hope of being recaptured by him. Tair finds Tally riding in the desert and they reunite.

Annie West, *The Sheikh's Ransomed Bride* (Richmond: Harlequin Mills & Boon, 2007)

The romance begins with archaeologist Belle Winters kidnapped by rebels and left to die on a remote island in the Gulf state of Q'aroum. She is rescued by Rafiq, Sovereign Prince of Q'aroum, to whom she is instantly attracted. However, their retreat from the island is delayed by a cyclone. Rafiq protects Belle from the storm, literally sheltering her with his body, and reassuring her following her traumatic experience. The following day, a helicopter arrives and takes Belle to hospital where she quickly recovers. Leaving the hospital in a chauffeured limousine, Belle is not taken home, as she expected, but is driven to Rafiq's palace for an audience with the sheikh. Rafiq insists that she remain in his palace until the rebels are apprehended for her own security. While she is residing in the Palace, Rafiq tells her of the history of his family, and their traditions of piracy and kidnap, especially of women. He informs her that he traded the Peacock's Eye, a symbolic national heirloom traditionally given to the sheikh's bride, for her release and that according to his nation, she is now effectively his fiancée.

Belle is initially resistant, but after a bomb attack in another part of Q'aroum, she agrees to pose as his fiancée in order to restore political stability. Following their politically expedient wedding, Rafiq tries to persuade Belle to consummate their union: an offer she refuses. Yet when they travel to the desert on their honeymoon, Belle relaxes as she gets to know Rafiq and they have sex in a secluded desert encampment. But their idyll is interrupted by the arrival of the rebels and Belle is injured while attempting to save Rafiq's life. As she comes around in hospital, Belle realises that the rebels have been apprehended and that Rafiq is now free to dissolve their marriage of convenience. Travelling to the Palace from the hospital, Belle is presented with the Peacock's Eye as Rafiq acknowledges his love for Belle and his intention to keep her as his wife permanently.

**APPENDIX 2: LIST OF MIDDLE ENGLISH VERSE ROMANCES
CONTAINING SARACENS¹**

Romance Title	Date of Composition	Number of Extant MS Versions	Brief Details of Saracen Elements
<i>King Horn</i>	c.1225	3	Horn fights invading Saracens.
<i>Floris and Blancheflur</i>	c.1250	4	Cross-religious relationship between Christian heroine and Saracen hero.
<i>Guy of Warwick</i> (all versions)	c.1300	7	Christians fight with Saracens.
<i>Bevis of Hampton</i>	c.1300	8	Cross-religious relationship between Christian hero and Saracen heroine.
<i>Richard Coeur de Lion</i>	c.1300	8	Christians battle against Saracens on crusade.
<i>King Alisaunder</i>	Early fourteenth century	3	Descriptions of monstrous Saracens and their religious practices. Relationship between Alexander and Candace is cross-religious, although not overtly.
<i>The King of Tars</i>	Early fourteenth century	3	Cross-religious relationship between Christian Princess and Saracen Sultan.
<i>Sir Isumbras</i>	Before 1320	9	Isumbras' wife kidnapped by invading Saracens who are later defeated.
<i>Roland and Vernagu</i>	Before 1330	1	Christians fight with Saracens and a Saracen giant, Vernagu.
<i>Sir Perceval of Galles</i>	First half of fourteenth century	1	Sultan who wishes to marry Christian woman is defeated.
<i>Libeaus Desconus</i>	c.1325-1350	6	Libeaus fights Saracen giants.
<i>Otuel a Knight</i>	Before 1330	1	Christians battle Saracens and

¹ Composition and manuscript information is drawn from J. Burke Severs, *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English 1050-1500*, Vol. 1 (New Haven: The Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1967) and the *Database of Middle English Romance*, University of York, accessed 21 Aug 2012 <<http://middleenglishromance.org.uk>>.

Romance Title	Date of Composition	Number of Extant MS Versions	Brief Details of Saracen Elements
<i>Otuel and Roland</i>	c.1330	1	Belisant, the Christian daughter of Charlemagne, is offered as prize for Saracen Otuel's conversion.
<i>Duke Roland and Sir Otuel of Spain</i>	c.1400	1	
<i>Octavian</i>	c.1350	3	Christians battle against Saracens and cross-religious relationship between Christian hero and Saracen heroine.
<i>William of Palerne</i>	c.1350-1361	1	Christians fight with Saracens.
<i>Joseph of Arimathie</i>	c.1350	1	Secretly cross-religious relationship as wife of Saracen King had already converted to Christianity in her youth.
<i>The History of the Holy Grail</i>	1420s	1	
<i>Arthur</i>	Second half of the fourteenth century	1	Christians fight with Saracens and claim their land.
<i>Siege of Milan</i>	Second half of the fourteenth century	1	Christians battle against Saracens.
<i>Le Bone Florence of Rome</i>	Late fourteenth century	1	Christians fight Saracens in the Holy Land.
<i>Emaré</i>	Late fourteenth century	1	Christians battle against Saracens and wear Saracen textiles.
<i>The Knight of Curtesy and the Fair Lady of Faguell</i>	Late fourteenth century	0	Christians fight with Saracens on crusade.
<i>Generydes</i>	Late fourteenth century	3	Description of Saracen armies and cross-religious relationship between Generydes and Clarionas, although not overt.
<i>Firumbras (Fillingham)</i>	c.1375-1400	1	Christians battle against Saracens and cross-religious relationship between Saracen princess Floripas and Christian Guy of Burgundy.
<i>Firumbras (Ashmole)</i>	c.1380	1	
<i>Sultan of Babylon</i>	Late fourteenth or early fifteenth century	1	

Romance Title	Date of Composition	Number of Extant MS Versions	Brief Details of Saracen Elements
<i>Avouying of Arthur</i>	c. 1375-1425	1	Christians fight a Sultan and claim his land.
<i>Sir Degrevant</i>	c.1385-1410	2	Fighting Saracens on crusade in the Holy Land.
<i>Ipomadon</i>	Late fourteenth to mid-fifteenth century	1	Christians fight with Saracens from India.
<i>Sir Triamour</i>	End of the fourteenth century	4	Christians fighting on crusade in the Holy Land.
<i>Sir Gowther</i>	c.1400	2	Christians battle against Saracens.
<i>Song of Roland</i>	c.1400	1	Christians fight with Saracens.
<i>Sir Torrent of Portyngale</i>	c.1400	1	Christians battle Saracens and travel to Holy Land.
<i>Alliterative Morte Arthur</i>	c.1400	1	Saracens invade England.
<i>Partonope of Blois</i>	c.1420	6	Christians fight with Saracens.
<i>Merlin</i>	1420s	1	Christians battling Saracens.
<i>Amoryus and Cleopes</i>	1449	1	Conversion of pagans to Christianity.
<i>Eger and Grime</i>	c.1450	1	Brief reference to fighting Saracens in Rhodes.
<i>Capysstranus</i>	1456-1515	0	Christians battle against Saracens.
<i>The Romauns of Partenay (Lusignan)</i>	c.1500	1	Christians fighting with Saracens in Cyprus and Armenia.
<i>The Turk and Sir Gawain</i>	c.1500	1	An apparently Saracen lord (the Turk) residing in England.

**APPENDIX 3: LIST OF SHEIKH AND DESERT ROMANCES PUBLISHED IN
BRITAIN BY MILLS & BOON, 1909-2009**

Year First Published	Author	Title	Publisher's Series (if any)	Details
1909	Stevens, E. S.	<i>The Veil: A Romance of Tunis</i>		Desert romance set in Tunisia.

1911	Stevens, E. S.	<i>The Earthen Drum</i>		Short story collection based on One Thousand and One Nights.
1911	Stevens, E. S.	<i>The Mountain of God</i>		Set Mount Carmel, Persia.
1913	Wylie, Ida	<i>The Red Mirage</i>		Desert romance set in Sidi-bel-Abbès, Algeria.
1914	Stevens, E. S.	<i>Sarah Eden</i>		Historical desert romance set in Jerusalem.

1921	Gerard, Louise	<i>A Sultan's Slave</i>		Sheikh romance set in Egypt.
1927	Williamson, Alice Muriel	<i>Sheikh Bill</i> (alternative title: <i>Bill - the Sheikh</i>)		

1930	Milton, Elizabeth	<i>Desert Quest</i>		Pseudo-sheikh romance set in Egypt.
1932	Heeley, Maureen	<i>The Desert of Lies</i>		Set in Sahara desert.
1934	Heeley, Maureen	<i>Flame of the Desert</i>		Pseudo-sheikh romance set in Cairo, Egypt.
1935	Moore, Marjorie	<i>Circles in the Sand</i>		Pseudo-sheikh romance set in Egypt.

1938	Hoy, Elizabeth	<i>Stars Over Egypt</i>		Desert romance set in El Khamira, Egypt.
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1951	Herbert, Jean	<i>Desert Locust</i>		Desert romance.
1954	Blair, Kathryn	<i>Barbary Moon</i>		Desert romance set in Morocco.
1955	Herbert, Jean	<i>The Desert's a Woman</i>		Desert romance.
1956	Kent, Pamela	<i>Desert Doorway</i>		Desert romance set in Marrakesh, Morocco.
1957	Kent, Pamela	<i>City of Palms</i>		Set in Iraq.
1958	Arbor, Jane	<i>Far Sanctuary</i>		Desert romance set in Tangier.
1958	Kent, Pamela	<i>Meet Me In Istanbul</i>		Desert romance.

1960	Hoy, Elizabeth	<i>To Win a Paradise</i>		Pseudo-sheikh romance set in North Africa.
1962	Blair, Kathryn	<i>They Met in Zanzibar</i>		Desert romance.
1962	Blair, Kathryn	<i>The Affair in Tangier</i>	Mills & Boon Romance #130	Desert romance set in Tangier.
1963	Arbor, Jane	<i>Desert Nurse</i>	Mills & Boon Romance #159	Desert romance set in Aden, Yemen.
1964	Kent, Pamela	<i>Sweet Barbary</i>		Desert romance set in Morocco.
1964	Chace, Isobel	<i>The Hospital of Fatima</i>	Mills & Boon Romance #162	Desert romance set in Tunisia.
1965	Hoy, Elizabeth	<i>Flowering Desert</i>		Desert romance set in Sidi Akbar, Tunisia.
1965	Winspear, Violet	<i>Desert Doctor</i>	Mills & Boon Romance #188	Desert romance set in Morocco.
1966	Brett, Rosalind	<i>Hotel Mirador</i>		Desert romance set in Morocco.

1967	Lane, Roumelia	<i>Rose of the Desert</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Romance</i> #246	Desert romance set in Tripoli, Libya.
1968	Kent, Pamela	<i>Desert Gold</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Romance</i> #272	Desert romance set in Bou Kairrouan, Morocco.
1968	Winspear, Violet	<i>Court of the Veils</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Romance</i> #282	Desert romance set in western Sahara desert, North Africa.
1968	Vinton, Anne	<i>Star Over Morocco</i>		Desert romance set in Morocco.
1969	Winspear, Violet	<i>Blue Jasmine</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Romance</i> #410	Pseudo-sheikh romance based on E. M. Hull's <i>The Sheik</i> set in Sidi Kebir, Algeria.
1969	Lane, Roumelia	<i>Terminus Tehran</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Romance</i> #427	Desert romance set partly in Iran.

1970	Arbor, Jane	<i>Walk Into the Wind</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Romance</i> #424	Desert romance set in Tunisia.
1970	Winspear, Violet	<i>Tawny Sands</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Romance</i> #490	Pseudo-sheikh romance set in El Amara, Morocco.
1971	Hilton, Margery	<i>The House of the Amulet</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Romance</i> #516	Pseudo-sheikh romance set in Morocco.
1972	Mather, Anne	<i>Dark Enemy</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Romance</i> #537	Desert romance set in fictional Abraham, North Africa.
1971	Hoy, Elizabeth	<i>Into a Golden Land</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Romance</i> #565	Desert romance set in Sidi bou Kef, Algeria.
1971	Arbor, Jane	<i>The Other Miss Donne</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Romance</i> #591	Desert romance set in Hassi Ai'n, Morocco.
1971	Arbor, Jane	<i>Sandflower</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Romance</i> #595	Desert romance set in fictional Tasghala, Sahara desert.
1972	Hoy, Elizabeth	<i>Immortal Flower</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Romance</i> #635	Desert romance set in Tunisia.

1972	Lane, Roumelia	<i>In the Shade of the Palms</i>	Mills & Boon Romance #716	Desert romance.
1972	Rome, Margaret	<i>Bride of the Rif</i>	Mills & Boon Romance #723	Pseudo-sheikh romance set in Morocco.
1973	Winspear, Violet	<i>Rapture of the Desert</i>	Mills & Boon Romance #750	Pseudo-sheikh romance set in El Kezar.
1973	Kent, Pamela	<i>Nile Dusk</i>	Mills & Boon Romance #751	Desert romance set in Cairo, Egypt.
1973	Kent, Pamela	<i>City of Palms</i>	Mills & Boon Romance #840	Pseudo-sheikh romance set in Baghdad.
1974	Hoy, Elizabeth	<i>Shadows on the Sand</i>		Desert romance set in Cairo, Egypt.
1974	Ashton, Elizabeth	<i>The Scent of Sandalwood</i>		Sheikh romance set in Morocco.
1974	Winspear, Violet	<i>Palace of the Pomegranate</i>	Mills & Boon Romance #887	Sheikh romance set in the Persian desert.
1974	Rome, Margaret	<i>Palace of the Hawk</i>	Mills & Boon Romance #938	
1974	Arbor, Jane	<i>Meet the Sun Halfway</i>	Mills & Boon Romance #943	Set in Morocco.
1975	Cork, Dorothy	<i>Gate of the Golden Gazelle</i>	Mills & Boon Romance #970	Desert romance set in Morocco.
1975	Thorpe, Kay	<i>The Shifting Sands</i>		Desert romance set in Algiers, North Africa.
1975	Hoy, Elizabeth	<i>Proud Citadel</i>	Mills & Boon Romance #989	Desert romance set in Morocco.
1975	Fullbrook, Gladys	<i>Egyptian Journey</i>		Desert romance set in Egypt.
1975	Stratton, Rebecca	<i>The Warm Wind of Farik</i>	Mills & Boon Romance #990	Set in Turkey, Turkish hero.
1975	Stratton, Rebecca	<i>The Goddess of Mavisu</i>		Set in Turkey, Turkish hero.
1975	Chace, Isobel	<i>The Desert Castle</i>		Desert romance, set in Amman.
1976	Cork, Dorothy	<i>The Eye of the Sun</i>	Mills & Boon Romance #1133	Desert romance set in Egypt.

1976	Hilliard, Nerina	<i>Land of the Sun</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Romance</i> #1155	Set in the Sahara desert.
1976	Ashton, Elizabeth	<i>Sanctuary in the Desert</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Romance</i> #1182	Desert romance set in North Africa.
1976	Stratton, Rebecca	<i>The Road to Gafsa</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Romance</i> #1186	Desert romance set in Tunisia.
1976	Winspear, Violet	<i>The Burning Sands</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Romance</i> #1188	Sheikh romance set in Morocco.
1977	Stratton, Rebecca	<i>The Velvet Glove</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Romance</i> #1296	Turkish hero.
1977	Leigh, Roberta	<i>Flower of the Desert</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Romance</i> #1306	Set in Persia with eastern hero.
1977	Ashton, Elizabeth	<i>Breeze from the Bosphorus</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Romance</i> #1334	Turkish hero.
1978	Lamb, Charlotte	<i>Desert Barbarian</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Romance</i> #1400	Set in North Africa.
1978	Roberts, Irene	<i>Desert Nurse</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Doctor Nurse Romance</i> #19 ¹	Desert romance set in Dhufar, North Africa.
1978	Pargeter, Margaret	<i>The Jewelled Caftan</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Romance</i> #1412	Pseudo-sheikh romance set in Morocco.
1978	Herbert, Julia	<i>Prisoner of the Harem</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Masquerade</i> #16 ²	Set in France and Algiers.
1978	Lane, Roumelia	<i>Hidden Rapture</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Romance</i> #1440	Desert romance set in Tangier.
1978	Rome, Margaret	<i>Son of Adam</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Romance</i> #1454	Desert romance set in fictional Neffe, Middle East.
1979	Lamb, Charlotte	<i>The Silken Trap</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Romance</i> #1501	Desert romance set in the Middle East.

¹ The *Romancewiki* states: ‘Mills & Boon began publishing paperback medical romances in series under the *Doctor Nurse Romance* imprint in 1977, reusing a name from the 1950s. In August 1989 the imprint’s name changed to *Medical Romance* and in October 1993 to *Love on Call*. The name of *Medical Romance* was adopted again in 1996 and since June 2007 the imprint is called simply *Medical*’ (‘Mills and Boon Medical Romance’, *Romancewiki*, accessed 20 Aug 2012 <http://www.romancewiki.com/Mills_and_Boon_Medical_Romance>).

² According to the *Romancewiki*, ‘Mills & Boon began publishing historical romances under the name *Masquerade* in 1977. In October 1993 the imprint’s name changed to *Legacy of Love*. The name *Historical Romance* was adopted in July 1996 and from June 2007 on it is called *Historical*’ (‘Mills and Boon Historical Romance’, *RomanceWiki* accessed 14 Aug 2012 <http://www.romancewiki.com/Mills_and_Boon_Historical_Romance>).

1979	Thorpe, Kay	<i>The Man from Tripoli</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Romance</i> #1525	Desert romance set in Tripoli, Libya.
1979	Winspear, Violet	<i>The Sheik's Captive</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Romance</i> #1544	Sheikh romance set in the Sahara desert.
1979	Stratton, Rebecca	<i>Close to the Heart</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Romance</i> #1546	Set in Morocco.
1979	Ashton, Elizabeth	<i>Moonlight on the Nile</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Romance</i> #1547	Desert romance set in Egypt.
1979	Mayo, Margaret	<i>Stormy Affair</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Romance</i> #1584	Set in Tunisia.

1980	Carter, Rosemary	<i>Desert Dream</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Romance</i> #1677	Desert romance set in Kalahari desert.
1980	Mather, Anne	<i>Sandstorm</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Romance</i> #1679	Sheikh romance set in fictional Xanthia, Arabein.
1980	Pargeter, Margaret	<i>The Dark Oasis</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Romance</i> #1684	Sheikh romance set in Morocco.
1980	Beatty, Betty	<i>Doctor on Board</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Doctor Nurse Romance</i> #68	Desert romance set on a cruise to North Africa.
1981	Lane, Roumelia	<i>Desert Haven</i>		Desert romance set in Bahrain.
1981	Mather, Anne	<i>Castles of Sand</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Romance</i> #1792	Sheikh romance set in fictional Murad.
1981	Ashton, Elizabeth	<i>Egyptian Honeymoon</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Romance</i> #1823	Desert romance set in Egypt.
1981	Stratton, Rebecca	<i>The Silken Cage</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Romance</i> #1824	Set in Morocco.
1981	Grey, Belinda	<i>Daughter of Isis</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Masquerade Historical Romance</i> #81	Desert romance set in Victorian-era Egypt.
1981	Jordan, Penny	<i>Falcon's Prey</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Romance</i> #1927	Sheikh romance set in Kuwait.
1982	Jordan, Penny	<i>Daughter of Hassan</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Romance</i> #1940	Sheikh romance set in fictional Gulf nation Qu'Har.

1982	Pemberton, Margaret	<i>African Enchantment</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Masquerade Historical Romance</i> #113	Historical romance set in Egypt.
1983	James, Dana	<i>Desert Flower</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Doctor Nurse Romance</i> #153	Desert romance set in Egypt.
1983	Andrews, Alex	<i>Lady of the Moon</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Masquerade Historical Romance</i> #125	Desert romance set in twelfth-century Holy Land.
1983	Mons, Daveson	<i>My Lord Kasseem</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Romance</i> #2048	Sheikh romance.
1984	Lyons, Mary	<i>Desire in the Desert</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Romance</i> #2195	Sheikh romance.
1984	Clark, Sandra	<i>Scarlet Sunday</i>		Set in Turkey.
1984	Jordan, Penny	<i>Darker Side of Desire</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Romance</i> #2290	Set in Omarah, Middle East.
1985	Marton, Sandra	<i>Rapture in the Sands</i>		Set in Morocco.
1985	Winspear, Violet	<i>Sun Lord's Woman</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Romance</i> #2433	Sheikh romance.
1985	Laffeaty, Christina	<i>The Shah of Kapoora</i>		Historical romance set in Afghanistan, 1880s.
1985	Luellen, Valentina	<i>Lord of Darkness</i>		Historical romance set during the Crusades.
1986	Wood, Sara	<i>Perfumes of Arabia</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Romance</i> #2574	Sheikh romance set in fictional Riyam.
1987	Wells, Angela	<i>Moroccan Madness</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Romance</i> #2660	Sheikh romance set in Tangier.
1987	Oldfield, Elizabeth	<i>Quicksands</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Romance</i> #2785	Sheikh romance set in Oman.
1987	Roberts, Irene	<i>Kingdom of the Sun</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Masquerade</i> #219	Historical romance set in ancient Egypt.
1988	Darcy, Emma	<i>Whirlpool of Passion</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Romance</i> #2827	Set in Cairo.
1988	Winspear, Violet	<i>A Silken Barbarity</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Romance</i> #2918	Sheikh romance.

1988	Darcy, Emma	<i>The Falcon's Mistress</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Romance</i> #2952	Sheikh romance set in fictional Bayrar.
1988	Roberts, Irene	<i>Song of the Nile</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Masquerade</i> #239	Historical romance set in ancient Egypt.
1989	Crowne, Frances	<i>Desert Doctor</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Medical Romance</i> #410	Desert romance set in Egypt.
1989	Luellen, Valentina	<i>Dark Star</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Masquerade</i> #271	Historical romance set during the Crusades.

1990	Graham, Lynne	<i>An Arabian Courtship</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Romance</i> #3195	Sheikh romance set in fictional Dharein.
1990	Mansell, Joanna	<i>Egyptian Nights</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Romance</i> #3293	Desert romance set in Egypt.
1990	Wood, Sara	<i>Desert Hostage</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Romance</i> #3350	Sheikh romance.
1990	Townend, Carol	<i>Leaves on the Wind</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Masquerade Historical</i> #300	Historical romance set in England and Cyprus, 1099.
1990	Forrester, Polly	<i>Jewel Under Siege</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Masquerade Historical</i> #306	Historical romance set in Constantinople, 1097.
1991	Daveson, Mons	<i>Desert Interlude</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Romance</i> #3403	Sheikh romance set in Egypt.
1991	Mansell, Joanna	<i>Istanbul Affair</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Romance</i> #3559	Set in Istanbul.
1991	Howard, Stephanie	<i>Dangerous Infatuation</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Romance</i> #3562	Set in a fictional Arabian Gulf.
1991	Cooper, Lisa	<i>Eastern Adventure</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Medical Romance</i> #456	Set in Tunisia.
1991	Edmonds, Janet	<i>Flight from the Harem</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Masquerade Historical</i> #313	Set in Tangier during the time of Charles II.
1992	Faith, Barbara	<i>Lion of the Desert</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Desire</i> #670	Sheikh romance set partly in fictional Rashdani.

1992	Holland, Sarah	<i>Desert Destiny</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Romance</i> #3595	Sheikh romance.
1994	Weale, Anne	<i>Turkish Delights</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Romance</i> #4042	Desert romance set in Turkey.
1992	Cresswell, Janet	<i>The Devil's Envoy</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Masquerade Historical</i> #346	Historical romance set in Istanbul.
1993	Faith, Barbara	<i>Lord of the Desert</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Special Edition</i> #824	Sheikh romance set in Kashkiri.
1993	Cresswell, Jasmine	<i>Empire of the Heart</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Masquerade Historical</i> #371	Historical romance set in Afghanistan.
1994	Brooks, Helen	<i>The Sultan's Favourite</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Romance</i> #4132	Sheikh romance.
1994	Brooks, Helen	<i>Dark Oasis</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Romance</i> #4235	Desert romance set in Morocco.
1994	Darcy, Emma	<i>The Sheikh's Revenge</i>		Set in fictional Zubani.
1994	Marton, Sandra	<i>Hostage of the Hawk</i>		Sheikh romance set in fictional Jandara.
1995	Daveson, Mons	<i>Desert Magic</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Romance</i> #4242	
1995	Taylor, Jennifer	<i>Desert Moon</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Romance</i> #4307	Desert romance set in North Africa.
1995	Sinclair, Tracy	<i>The Sultan's Wives</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Special Edition</i> #943	Sheikh romance set in fictional Sharribai.
1996	Darcy, Emma	<i>Climax of Passion</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Romance</i> #4448	Set in fictional Xabia.
1996	Graham, Lynne	<i>The Desert Bride</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Romance</i> #4498	Sheikh romance set in fictional Datar.
1996	Bianchin, Helen	<i>Desert Mistress</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Romance</i> #4513	Sheikh romance partly set in Saudi Arabia.
1996	Scott, Alexandra	<i>Desert Wedding</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Enchanted</i> #24	Desert romance.
1997	Howard, Stephanie	<i>Amber and the Sheikh</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Enchanted</i> #62	Sheikh romance.

1998	Darcy, Emma	<i>The Sheikh's Seduction</i>	Mills & Boon Presents #146	Sheikh romance.
1998	McMahon, Barbara	<i>Sheik Daddy</i>	Mills & Boon Enchanted #191	Sheikh romance.
1999	Young, Brittany	<i>The Sheik's Mistress</i>	Mills & Boon Special Edition #1211	Sheikh romance.
1999	Reid, Michelle	<i>The Mistress Bride</i>	Mills & Boon Presents #273	Sheikh romance.

2000	Fielding, Liz	<i>His Desert Rose</i>	Mills & Boon Tender Romance #3	Sheikh romance.
2000	Weston, Sophie	<i>The Sheikh's Bride</i>	Mills & Boon Enchanted #345	Sheikh romance set in Egypt.
2000	Gordon, Lucy	<i>The Sheikh's Reward</i>	Mills & Boon Enchanted #353	Sheikh romance.
2000	Leclaire, Day	<i>To Marry a Sheikh</i>	Mills & Boon Enchanted #355	Sheikh romance.
2000	Marton, Sandra	<i>Mistress of the Sheikh</i>	Mills & Boon Modern Romance #29	Sheikh romance set in fictional Quidar.
2000	McMahon, Barbara	<i>The Sheik's Solution</i>	Mills & Boon Tender Romance #41	Sheikh romance.
2000	Sellers, Alexandra	<i>Sheikh's Ransom</i>	Mills & Boon Desire #1233	Sheikh romance set in fictional Barakat Emirates.
2000	Sellers, Alexandra	<i>The Solitary Sheikh</i>	Mills & Boon Desire #1239	Sheikh romance set in fictional Barakat Emirates.
2000	Sellers, Alexandra	<i>Beloved Sheikh</i>	Mills & Boon Desire #1245	Sheikh romance set in fictional Barakat Emirates.
2000	McWilliams, Judith	<i>The Sheikh's Secret</i>	Mills & Boon Desire #1276	Sheikh romance
2000	Lovelace, Merline	<i>Lady of the Upper Kingdom</i>	Mills & Boon Historical #719	Set in Ancient Egypt.

2001	Sellers, Alexandra	<i>Sheikh's Woman</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Desire</i> 2-in-1 #2	Sheikh romance set in fictional Barakat Emirates.
2001	Sellers, Alexandra	<i>Sleeping with the Sultan</i>		Sheikh romance set in fictional Barakat Emirates.
2001	Gold, Kristi	<i>Her Ardent Sheikh</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Desire</i> 2-in-1 #11	Sheikh romance.
2001	Sellers, Alexandra	<i>The Sultan's Heir</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Desire</i> 2-in-1 #23	Sheikh romance set in fictional Barakat Emirates.
2001	Sellers, Alexandra	<i>Undercover Sultan</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Desire</i> 2-in-1 #26	Sheikh romance set in fictional Barakat Emirates.
2001	Dayton, Gail	<i>Hide-And-Sheikh</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Desire</i> 2-in-1 #29	Sheikh romance set in fictional Barakat Emirates.
2001	Diamond, Jacqueline	<i>Captured by a Sheikh</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Intrigue</i> #326	Sheikh romance.
2001	Grace, Carol	<i>Married to the Sheik</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Tender Romance</i> #71	Sheikh romance.
2001	Graham, Lynne	<i>The Arabian Mistress</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Modern Romance</i> #73	Sheikh romance set in fictional Jumar.
2001	Kendrick, Sharon	<i>Surrender to the Sheikh</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Modern Romance</i> #102	Sheikh romance set in fictional Maraban.
2001	Mallery, Susan	<i>The Sheik's Kidnapped Bride</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Special Edition</i> #1360	Sheikh romance set in fictional El Bahar.
2001	Mallery, Susan	<i>The Sheik's Arranged Marriage</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Special Edition</i> #1365	Sheikh romance set in fictional El Bahar.
2001	Mallery, Susan	<i>The Sheik's Secret Bride</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Special Edition</i> #1371	Sheikh romance set in fictional El Bahar.
2001	Porter, Jane	<i>The Sheikh's Wife</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Modern Romance</i> #118	Sheikh romance set in fictional Zwar.

2001	Sellers, Alexandra	<i>Sheikh's Temptation</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Desire</i> #1341	Sheikh romance set in fictional Parvan and neighbouring Barakat Emirates.
2001	Sellers, Alexandra	<i>Sheikh's Honour</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Desire</i> #1353	Sheikh romance set in fictional Barakat Emirates.
2002	De Vita, Sharon	<i>I Married a Sheikh</i>	<i>The Coltons</i> #3	Sheikh romance.
2002	Grace, Carol	<i>Fit for a Sheikh</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Tender Romance</i> #143	Sheikh romance.
2002	Walker, Kate	<i>Desert Affair</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Modern Romance</i> #156	Sheikh romance set in fictional Kuimar.
2002	Graham, Lynne	<i>An Arabian Marriage</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Modern Romance</i> #162	Sheikh romance set in fictional Quamar.
2002	Kendrick, Sharon	<i>Society Weddings: Promised to the Sheikh</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Modern Romance</i> #165	Sheikh romance set in fictional Quador.
2002	Herries, Anne	<i>Captive of the Harem</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Historical</i> #785	Sheikh romance set in Ottoman Empire.
2002	McMahon, Barbara	<i>The Sheikh's Proposal</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Tender Romance</i> #166	Sheikh romance.
2002	Reid, Michelle	<i>The Sheikh's Chosen Wife</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Modern Romance</i> #169	Sheikh romance set in fictional Rahman.
2002	Reid, Michelle	<i>The Arabian Love-Child</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Modern Romance</i> #234	Sheikh romance set in fictional Rahman.
2003	Herries, Anne	<i>The Sheikh</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Historical</i> #826	Sheikh romance retelling Hull's <i>The Sheik</i> , set in Morocco.
2003	Sellers, Alexandra	<i>The Playboy Sheikh</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Desire</i> 2-in-1 #43	Sheikh romance set in fictional Barakat Emirates.
2003	Cross, Caroline	<i>The Sheikh Takes a Bride</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Desire</i> 2-in-1 #52	Sheikh romance set in fictional Walburaq.

2003	Grace, Carol	<i>Taming the Sheik</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Tender Romance</i> #216	Sheikh romance.
2003	Jordan, Penny	<i>The Sheikh's Virgin Bride</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Modern Romance</i> #274	Sheikh romance set in fictional Zuran.
2003	Jordan, Penny	<i>One Night with the Sheikh</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Modern Romance</i> #290	Sheikh romance set in fictional Zuran.
2003	Lee, Miranda	<i>Sold to the Sheikh</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Modern Romance</i> #345	Sheikh romance set in fictional Dubar.
2003	Mallery, Susan	<i>The Sheikh and the Runaway Princess</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Special Edition</i> #1490	Sheikh romance set in fictional Bahania and the City of Thieves.
2003	Mallery, Susan	<i>The Sheikh and the Virgin Princess</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Special Edition</i> #1496	Sheikh romance set in fictional Bahania.
2003	Mallery, Susan	<i>The Prince and the Pregnant Princess</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Special Edition</i> #1502	Sheikh romance set in fictional Bahania.
2004	Jackson, Brenda	<i>Delaney's Desert Sheikh</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Desire 2-in-1</i> #81	Sheikh romance partly set in fictional Tahran.
2004	Gold, Kristi	<i>The Sheikh's Bidding</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Desire 2-in-1</i> #86	Sheikh romance set in fictional Barak.
2004	Gold, Kristi	<i>Expecting the Sheikh's Baby</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Desire 2-in-1</i> #103	Sheikh romance.
2004	Kendrick, Sharon	<i>The Desert Prince's Mistress</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Modern Romance</i> #355	Sheikh romance set in fictional Maraban.
2004	Porter, Jane	<i>The Sultan's Bought Bride</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Modern Romance</i> #371	Sheikh romance set in fictional Baraka.
2004	Monroe, Lucy	<i>The Sheikh's Bartered Bride</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Modern Romance</i> #399	Sheikh romance set in fictional Jawhar.
2005	McMahon, Barbara	<i>Her Desert Family</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Tender Romance</i> #326	Sheikh romance set in fictional Aboul Sari.

2005	Southwick, Teresa	<i>To Catch a Sheikh</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Tender Romance</i> #377	Sheikh romance set in fictional El Zafir.
2005	Southwick, Teresa	<i>To Kiss a Sheik</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Tender Romance</i> #383	Sheikh romance set in fictional El Zafir.
2005	Southwick, Teresa	<i>To Wed a Sheik</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Tender Romance</i> #389	Sheikh romance set in fictional El Zafir.
2005	Marion, Sandra	<i>The Sheikh's Convenient Bride</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Modern Romance</i> #435	Sheikh romance set in fictional Suliyam.
2005	Singh, Nalini	<i>Desert Warrior</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Desire 2-in-1</i> #126	Sheikh romance set in fictional Zulheina.
2005	Gold, Kristi	<i>Challenged by the Sheikh</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Desire 2-in-1</i> #127	Sheikh romance.
2005	Sellers, Alexandra	<i>Sheikh's Castaway</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Desire 2-in-1</i> #136	Sheikh romance set in fictional Bagestan, a Barakat Emirate.
2005	Sellers, Alexandra	<i>The Ice-Maiden's Sheikh</i>		Sheikh romance set in fictional Barakat Emirates.
2005	Gold, Kristi	<i>Fit for a Sheikh</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Desire 2-in-1</i> #145	Sheikh romance.
2005	Wright, Laura	<i>A Bed of Sand</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Desire 2-in-1</i> #150	Sheikh romance set in fictional Emand.
2005	Morgan, Sarah	<i>In the Sheikh's Marriage Bed</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Modern Romance</i> #444	Sheikh romance set in fictional Kazban.
2005	Stephens, Susan	<i>The Sheikh's Captive Bride</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Modern Romance</i> #453	Sheikh romance set in fictional Abadan.
2005	Jordan, Penny	<i>Possessed by the Sheikh</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Modern Romance</i> #457	Sheikh romance set in fictional Zuran.
2005	Porter, Jane	<i>The Sheikh's Virgin</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Modern Romance</i> #470	Sheikh romance set in fictional Baraka.

2005	Morey, Trish	<i>Stolen by the Sheikh</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Modern Romance</i> #495	Sheikh romance set in fictional Jebbai.
2005	Kendrick, Sharon	<i>Exposed: The Sheikh's Mistress</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Modern Romance</i> #498	Sheikh romance set in fictional Qudamah.
2005	Diamond, Jacqueline	<i>Sheikh Surrender</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Intrigue</i> #527	Sheikh romance set in fictional Alqedar.
2005	Mallery, Susan	<i>The Sheikh and the Princess in Waiting</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Special Edition</i> #1647	Sheikh romance set in fictional Bahania.
2005	Mallery, Susan	<i>The Sheikh and the Princess Bride</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Special Edition</i> #1653	Sheikh romance set in fictional Bahania.
2005	Mallery, Susan	<i>The Sheikh and the Bride who said No</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Special Edition</i> #1659	Sheikh romance set in fictional Bahania.
2005	Gold, Kristi	<i>Daring the Dynamic Sheikh</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Desire 2-in-1</i> #152	Sheikh romance set in fictional Azzril.
2005	Sellers, Alexandra	<i>The Fierce and Tender Sheikh</i>		Sheikh romance set in fictional Bagestan, part of Barakat Emirates.
2005	Weston, Sophie	<i>In the Arms of the Sheikh</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Tender Romance</i> #392	Sheikh romance.
2005	Drake, Shannon	<i>Reckless</i>		Desert romance set in nineteenth-century Egypt.
2006	Marton, Dana	<i>The Sheik's Safety</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Intrigue</i> #590	Sheikh romance set in the Middle East.
2006	Fielding, Liz	<i>The Sheikh's Guarded Heart</i>	Mills & Boon <i>New Romance</i> #4 ³	Sheikh romance set in fictional Ramal Hamrah.

³ The *Romancewiki* explains: 'Mills & Boon started the New Romance imprint in September 2006, replacing the Tender Romance imprint. It is called *new* to distinguish it from the former Mills & Boon Romance imprint which had run for more than 30 years and ended in 1996' ('Mills and Boon New Romance', *Romancewiki*, accessed 20 Aug 2012 <http://www.romancewiki.com/Mills_and_Boon_New_Romance>).

2006	Grace, Carol	<i>Falling for the Sheikh</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Tender Romance</i> #420	Sheikh romance.
2006	Graham, Lynne	<i>The Sheikh's Innocent Bride</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Modern Romance</i> #529	Sheikh romance set in fictional Dhemen.
2006	Darcy, Emma	<i>Traded to the Sheikh</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Modern Romance</i> #539	Sheikh romance set in Zanzibar.
2006	Marton, Sandra	<i>The Desert Virgin</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Modern Romance</i> #549	Desert romance set in fictional Baslaam.
2006	Swift, Sue	<i>In the Sheikh's Arms</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Modern Romance</i> #560	Sheikh romance set in fictional Adnan.
2006	Porter, Jane	<i>The Sheikh's Disobedient Bride</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Modern Romance</i> #563	Sheikh romance set in fictional Baraka and Ouaha.
2006	Jordan, Penny	<i>Prince of the Desert</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Modern Romance</i> #569	Sheikh romance set in fictional Zuran.
2006	Lee, Miranda	<i>Love-Slave to the Sheikh</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Modern Romance</i> #585	Sheikh romance set in fictional Dubar.
2006	McMahon, Barbara	<i>The Sheikh's Secret</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Tender Romance</i> #428	Sheikh romance partly set in fictional Tamarin.
2006	Morgan, Sarah	<i>The Sultan's Virgin Bride</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Modern Romance</i> #603	Sheikh romance set in fictional Tazkash.
2006	Walker, Kate	<i>At the Sheikh's Command</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Modern Romance</i> #606	Sheikh romance set in fictional Barakhara.
2006	Stephens, Susan	<i>Bedded by the Desert King</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Modern Romance</i> #612	Sheikh romance set in fictional Zaddara.
2006	Webber, Meredith	<i>Sheikh Surgeon</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Medical Romance</i> #1326	Sheikh romance set in un-named fictional nation.
2006	Wright, Laura	<i>The Sultan's Bed</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Desire 2-in-1</i> #177	Sheikh romance partly set in fictional Emand.

2007	Winstead-Jones, Linda	<i>The Sheikh and I</i>	Mills and Boon <i>Intrigue</i> #610	Sheikh romance.
2007	White, Loreth Anne	<i>A Sultan's Ransom</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Intrigue</i> #660	Sheikh romance set in fictional Hamān.
2007	Mallery, Susan	<i>The Sheikh and the Virgin Secretary</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Special Edition</i> #1777	Sheikh romance set in fictional Lucia-Serrat.
2007	Jordan, Penny	<i>Taken by the Sheikh</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Modern Romance</i> #633	Sheikh romance set in fictional Dhurahn.
2007	Kendrick, Sharon	<i>The Sheikh's English Bride</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Modern Romance</i> #642	Sheikh romance set in fictional Kharastan.
2007	Kendrick, Sharon	<i>The Sheikh's Unwilling Wife</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Modern Romance</i> #650	Sheikh romance set in fictional Kharastan.
2007	West, Annie	<i>The Sheikh's Ransomed Bride</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Modern Romance</i> #656	Sheikh romance set in fictional Q'aroum.
2007	Kendrick, Sharon	<i>The Desert King's Virgin Bride</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Modern Romance</i> #658	Sheikh romance set in fictional Kharastan.
2007	McMahon, Barbara	<i>The Nanny and the Sheikh</i>	Mills & Boon <i>New Romance</i> #26	Sheikh romance set in fictional Qu'Arim.
2007	Metcalf, Josie	<i>Sheikh Surgeon, Surprise Bride</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Medical Romance</i> #1403	Sheikh romance.
2007	Southwick, Teresa	<i>The Sheikh's Reluctant Bride</i>	Mills & Boon <i>New Romance</i> #47	Sheikh romance set in fictional Bha'Khar.
2007	Southwick, Teresa	<i>The Sheikh's Contract Bride</i>	Mills & Boon <i>New Romance</i> #60	Sheikh romance set in fictional Bha'Khar.
2007	West, Annie	<i>For the Sheikh's Pleasure</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Modern Romance</i> #684	Sheikh romance set in fictional Q'aroum.
2007	Graham, Lynne	<i>The Desert Sheikh's Captive Wife</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Modern Romance</i> #713	Sheikh romance set in fictional Bakhar.

2008	Fielding, Liz	<i>The Sheikh's Unsuitable Bride</i>	Mills & Boon <i>New Romance</i> #98	Sheikh romance set in fictional Ramal Hamrah.
2008	Gates, Olivia	<i>The Sheikh Surgeon's Proposal</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Medical</i> #1472	Sheikh romance set in fictional Damhoor.
2008	Webber, Meredith	<i>Desert Doctor, Secret Sheikh</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Medical</i> #1475	Sheikh romance set in fictional Zaheer.
2008	Gates, Olivia	<i>Desert Prince, Expectant Mother</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Medical</i> #1484	Sheikh romance set in fictional Bidalya.
2008	Webber, Meredith	<i>The Sheikh Surgeon's Baby</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Medical</i> #1487	Sheikh romance set in fictional Zaheer.
2008	Metcalf, Josie	<i>Sheikh Surgeon Claims his Bride</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Medical</i> #1509	Sheikh romance.
2008	Gates, Olivia	<i>The Desert Surgeon's Secret Son</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Medical</i> #1526	Sheikh romance.
2008	McMahon, Barbara	<i>Rescued by the Sheikh</i>	Mills & Boon <i>New Romance</i> #104	Sheikh romance set in fictional Moquansaid.
2008	Grace, Carol	<i>Her Sheikh Boss</i>	Mills & Boon <i>New Romance</i> #123	Sheikh romance set in fictional Tazzatine.
2008	Porter, Jane	<i>The Sheikh's Chosen Queen</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Modern Romance</i> #723	Sheikh romance set in fictional Sarq.
2008	Morgan, Sarah	<i>The Sheikh's Virgin Princess</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Modern Romance</i> #733	Sheikh romance set in fictional Zangrar.
2008	Morey, Trish	<i>The Sheikh's Convenient Virgin</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Modern Romance</i> #738	Sheikh romance set in fictional Jamalbad.
2008	Porter, Jane	<i>King of the Desert, Captive Bride</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Modern Romance</i> #739	Sheikh romance set in fictional Sarq.
2008	Jordan, Penny	<i>The Sheikh's Blackmailed Mistress</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Modern Romance</i> #761	Sheikh romance set in fictional Dhurahn.

2008	Stephens, Susan	<i>Desert King, Pregnant Mistress</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Modern Romance</i> #767	Sheikh romance set in fictional Q'Adar.
2008	Monroe, Lucy	<i>Hired: The Sheikh's Secretary Mistress</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Modern Romance</i> #777	Sheikh romance set in fictional Zorha.
2008	Marton, Sandra	<i>The Sheikh's Defiant Bride</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Modern Romance</i> #780	Sheikh romance set in fictional Dubbac.
2008	Shaw, Chantelle	<i>At The Sheikh's Bidding</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Modern Romance</i> #796	Sheikh romance set in fictional Qubbah.
2008	Mallery, Susan	<i>The Sheikh and the Christmas Bride</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Special Edition</i> #1898	Sheikh romance set in fictional El Deharia.
2008	Marsh, Nicola	<i>The Desert Prince's Proposal</i>	Mills & Boon <i>New Romance</i> #135	Sheikh romance set in fictional Adhara.
2008	Parv, Valerie	<i>Desert Justice</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Intrigue</i> #709	Sheikh romance set in fictional Nazaar.
2008	Creighton, Kathleen	<i>Virgin Seduction</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Spotlight</i> (<i>Romancing the Crown: Leila and Gage</i>) ⁴	Romance set in fictional Tamir with eastern woman heroine.
2008	Radley, Tessa	<i>The Desert Bride of Al Zayed</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Desire</i> 2-in-1 #262	Sheikh romance set in fictional Zayed.
2008	Winstead-Jones, Linda	<i>Secret-Agent Sheikh</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Spotlight</i> (<i>Romancing the Crown: Max and Elena</i>)	Sheikh romance set in fictional Tamir and Montebello.
2008	West, Annie	<i>The Desert King's Pregnant Bride</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Modern Romance</i> #800	Sheikh romance set in fictional Shajehar.

⁴ The *Romancewiki* reads: 'Mills & Boon launched the *Spotlight* imprint - than [sic] called *Silhouette Spotlight* - in May 2003. In March 2007 Mills & Boon discontinued the *Silhouette* nomination and the imprint's name changed to *Mills & Boon Spotlight*' ('Mills and Boon Spotlight', *Romancewiki*, accessed 20 Aug 2012 <http://www.romancewiki.com/Mills_and_Boon_Spotlight>).

2008	Lawrence, Kim	<i>Desert Prince, Defiant Virgin</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Modern Romance</i> #804	Sheikh romance set in fictional Zabrania.
2008	Marion, Sandra	<i>The Sheikh's Wayward Wife</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Modern Romance</i> #812	Sheikh romance set in fictional Al Ankhara.
2008	Jordan, Penny	<i>A Royal Bride at the Sheikh's Command</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Modern Romance</i> (unnumbered) (<i>The Royal House of Niroli</i>)	Sheikh romance set in fictional Niroli and Hadiya.
2009	Marion, Sandra	<i>The Sheikh's Rebellious Mistress</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Modern Romance</i> #827	Sheikh romance set in fictional Senahdar.
2009	Hewitt, Kate	<i>The Sheikh's Love-Child</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Modern Romance</i> #874	Sheikh romance set in fictional Biryal in the Indian Ocean.
2009	Phillips, Sabrina	<i>The Desert King's Bejewelled Bride</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Modern Romance</i> #877	Sheikh romance set in fictional Qwasir.
2009	Fielding, Liz	<i>Her Desert Dream</i>	Mills & Boon <i>New Romance 2-in-1</i> #8	Sheikh romance set in fictional Ramal Hamrah.
2009	Gates, Olivia	<i>The Desert Lord's Baby</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Desire 2-in-1</i> #280	Sheikh romance set in fictional Judar.
2009	Gates, Olivia	<i>The Desert Lord's Bride</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Desire 2-in-1</i> #286	Sheikh romance set in fictional Judar.
2009	Gates, Olivia	<i>The Desert King</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Desire 2-in-1</i> #292	Sheikh romance set in fictional Judar.
2009	Graham, Lynne	<i>Desert Prince, Bride of Innocence</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Modern Romance</i> #901	Sheikh romance set in fictional Quaram.
2009	Hardy, Kate	<i>Surrender to the Playboy Sheikh</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Modern Romance Heat</i> #29	Sheikh romance set in fictional Harrat Salma.
2009	Hewitt, Kate	<i>The Sheikh's Forbidden Virgin</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Special Releases</i> (<i>The Royal House of Karedes</i>)	Sheikh romance set in fictional Calista.

2009	Marinelli, Carol	<i>The Desert King's Housekeeper Bride</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Special Releases</i> (The Royal House of Karedes)	Sheikh romance set in fictional Calista.
2009	Kendrick, Sharon	<i>The Sheikh's Virgin Stable-Girl</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Special Releases</i> (The Royal House of Karedes)	Sheikh romance set in fictional Calista.
2009	Porter, Jane	<i>Duty, Desire and the Desert King</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Modern Romance</i> #915	Sheikh romance set in fictional Sarq.
2009	Lawrence, Kim	<i>The Sheikh's Impatient Virgin</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Modern Romance</i> #923	Sheikh romance set in fictional Zuhaymi.
2009	Mallery, Susan	<i>The Sheikh and the Pregnant Bride</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Special Edition</i> #1909	Sheikh romance set in fictional El Deharia.
2009	Mallery, Susan	<i>The Sheikh's Virgin</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Short Summer Treats</i> (short story)	Sheikh romance set in fictional Lucia-Serrat.
2009	Marinelli, Carol	<i>Secret Sheikh, Secret Baby</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Medical 2-in-1</i> #3	Sheikh romance set in fictional Zaraq.
2009	Marton, Dana	<i>Sheikh Seduction</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Intrigue</i> #799	Sheikh romance set in fictional Beharrain.
2009	Marton, Dana	<i>Sheikh Protector</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Intrigue 2-in-1</i> #2	Sheikh romance set in fictional Beharrain.
2009	Oakley, Natasha	<i>Cinderella and the Sheikh</i>	Mills & Boon <i>New Romance</i> #170	Sheikh romance set in fictional Amrah.
2009	Stephens, Susan	<i>Sheikh Boss, Hot Desert Nights</i>	Mills & Boon <i>Modern Romance Heat</i> #31	Sheikh romance set in fictional A'Qaban.

APPENDIX 4: HARLEQUIN MILLS & BOON *MODERN ROMANCE SHEIKH* TITLES 2000-2009

Author	Title	Publication Date (Britain)	Author Nationality	Heroine's Nationality	Sheikh's Nationality	Name of Sheikh's Country
Marton, Sandra	<i>Mistress of the Sheik</i>	October 2000	USA	USA	USA (mother) / Quidar	Quidar
Graham, Lynne	<i>The Arabian Mistress</i>	April 2001	UK	UK	Lebanon (mother) / Jumar	Jumar
Kendrick, Sharon	<i>Surrender to the Sheikh</i>	July 2001	UK	UK	Maraban	Maraban
Porter, Jane	<i>The Sheikh's Wife</i>	September 2001	USA	USA	Zwar	Zwar
Walker, Kate	<i>Desert Affair</i>	February 2002	UK	UK	England (mother) / Kuimar	Kuimar
Graham, Lynne	<i>An Arabian Marriage</i>	March 2002	UK	UK	France (grandmother) / Quamar	Quamar
Kendrick, Sharon	<i>Society Weddings: Promised to the Sheikh</i>	March 2002	UK	USA / Quador	Quador	Quador
Reid, Michelle	<i>The Sheikh's Chosen Wife</i>	April 2002	UK	UK	Spain (grandparent)/ Rahman	Rahman
Reid, Michelle	<i>The Arabian Love-Child</i>	December 2002	UK	UK	France (mother) / Rahman	Rahman
Jordan, Penny	<i>The Sheikh's Virgin Bride</i>	May 2003	UK	USA / Zuran	England (mother) / Zuran	Zuran
Jordan, Penny	<i>One Night With The Sheikh</i>	July 2003	UK	UK	France (grandmother) / Zuran	Zuran

Author	Title	Publication Date (Britain)	Author Nationality	Heroine's Nationality	Sheikh's Nationality	Name of Sheikh's Country
Lee, Miranda	<i>Sold to the Sheikh</i>	February 2004	AUS	AUS	Dubar	Dubar
Kendrick, Sharon	<i>The Desert Prince's Mistress</i>	March 2004	UK	UK	England (mother) / Maraban	Maraban
Porter, Jane	<i>The Sultan's Bought Bride</i>	May 2004	USA	Melio & Mejia (fictional Europe)	Baraka	Baraka
Monroe, Lucy	<i>The Sheikh's Bartered Bride</i>	August 2004	USA	USA	Jawhar	Jawhar
Marton, Sandra	<i>The Sheikh's Convenient Bride</i>	January 2005	USA	USA	USA (mother) / Suliyam	Suliyam
Morgan, Sarah	<i>In The Sheikh's Marriage Bed</i>	February 2005	UK	UK	Kazban	Kazban
Stephens, Susan	<i>The Sheikh's Captive Bride</i>	March 2005	UK	UK	England (mother) / Abadan	Abadan
Jordan, Penny	<i>Possessed by the Sheikh</i>	April 2005	UK	UK	England (mother) / Zuran	Zuran
Porter, Jane	<i>The Sheikh's Virgin</i>	May 2005	USA	UK / Baraka	Baraka	Baraka
Morey, Trish	<i>Stolen By The Sheikh</i>	August 2005	AUS	AUS	France (mother) / Jebbai	Jebbai

Author	Title	Publication Date (Britain)	Author Nationality	Heroine's Nationality	Sheikh's Nationality	Name of Sheikh's Country
Kendrick, Sharon	<i>Exposed: The Sheikh's Mistress</i>	September 2005	UK	UK	Qudamah	Qudamah
Graham, Lynne	<i>The Sheikh's Innocent Bride</i>	January 2006	UK	UK	Dhemen	Dhemen
Darcy, Emma	<i>Traded to the Sheikh</i>	February 2006	AUS	AUS	Portugal and England (great grandparents) / Zanzibar	Zanzibar
Marton, Sandra	<i>The Desert Virgin</i>	March 2006	USA	USA	Non-sheikh hero	Baslaam
Swift, Sue	<i>In the Sheikh's Arms</i>	April 2006	USA	USA	Adnan	Adnan
Porter, Jane	<i>The Sheikh's Disobedient Bride</i>	May 2006	USA	USA	England (mother) / Baraka / Ouaha	Baraka / Ouaha
Jordan, Penny	<i>Prince of The Desert</i>	June 2006	UK	UK	England (father) / Zuran	Zuran
Lee, Miranda	<i>Love-Slave To The Sheikh</i>	August 2006	AUS	AUS	England (mother) / Dubar	Dubar
Morgan, Sarah	<i>The Sultan's Virgin Bride</i>	October 2006	UK	UK	Tazkash	Tazkash
Walker, Kate	<i>At The Sheikh's Command</i>	October 2006	UK	UK	Barakhara	Barakhara
Stephens, Susan	<i>Bedded By the Desert King</i>	November 2006	UK	UK	Zaddara	Zaddara

Author	Title	Publication Date (Britain)	Author Nationality	Heroine's Nationality	Sheikh's Nationality	Name of Sheikh's Country
Jordan, Penny	<i>Taken by the Sheikh</i>	February 2007	UK	UK	Ireland (mother) / Dhurahn	Dhurahn
Kendrick, Sharon	<i>The Sheikh's English Bride</i>	March 2007	UK	UK	France (mother) / Kharastan	Kharastan
Kendrick, Sharon	<i>The Sheikh's Unwilling Wife</i>	April 2007	UK	UK	Italian (mother) / Kharastan	Kharastan
West, Annie	<i>The Sheikh's Ransomed Bride</i>	April 2007	AUS	AUS	England (great-grandmother) / Q'aroum	Q'aroum
Kendrick, Sharon	<i>The Desert King's Virgin Bride</i>	May 2007	UK	UK	Kharastan	Kharastan
West, Annie	<i>For The Sheikh's Pleasure</i>	August 2007	AUS	AUS	Q'aroum	Q'aroum
Graham, Lynne	<i>The Desert Sheikh's Captive Wife</i>	December 2007	UK	UK	Bakhar	Bakhar
Porter, Jane	<i>The Sheikh's Chosen Queen</i>	January 2008	USA	UK	Sarq	Sarq
Morgan, Sarah	<i>The Sheikh's Virgin Princess</i>	February 2008	UK	Rovina (fictional Europe)	Zangrar	Zangrar
Morey, Trish	<i>The Sheikh's Convenient Virgin</i>	March 2008	AUS	AUS	Jamalbad	Jamalbad

Author	Title	Publication Date (Britain)	Author Nationality	Heroine's Nationality	Sheikh's Nationality	Name of Sheikh's Country
Porter, Jane	<i>King Of The Desert, Captive Bride</i>	March 2008	USA	USA	Sarq	Sarq
Jordan, Penny	<i>The Sheikh's Blackmailed Mistress</i>	June 2008	UK	UK	Ireland (mother) / Dhurahn	Dhurahn
Stephens, Susan	<i>Desert King, Pregnant Mistress</i>	June 2008	UK	UK	Q'Adar	Q'Adar
Monroe, Lucy	<i>Hired: The Sheikh's Secretary Mistress</i>	August 2008	USA	USA	Zorha	Zorha
Marton, Sandra	<i>The Sheikh's Defiant Bride</i>	August 2008	USA	USA	Dubaac	Dubaac
Shaw, Chantelle	<i>At The Sheikh's Bidding</i>	October 2008	UK	UK	USA (mother) / Qubbah	Qubbah
West, Annie	<i>The Desert King's Pregnant Bride</i>	October 2008	AUS	AUS	Shahejar	Shahejar
Lawrence, Kim	<i>Desert Prince, Defiant Virgin</i>	November 2008	UK	UK	Zabrania	Zabrania
Marton, Sandra	<i>The Sheikh's Wayward Wife</i>	December 2008	USA	USA /Al Ankhara	Al Ankhara	Al Ankhara
Marton, Sandra	<i>The Sheikh's Rebellious Mistress</i>	February 2009	USA	USA	Senahdar	Senahdar

Author	Title	Publication Date (Britain)	Author Nationality	Heroine's Nationality	Sheikh's Nationality	Name of Sheikh's Country
Philips, Sabrina	<i>The Desert King's Bejewelled Bride</i>	July 2009	UK	UK	Qwasir	Qwasir
Hewitt, Kate	<i>The Sheikh's Love-Child</i>	July 2009	USA	UK	Biryal	Biryal
Graham, Lynne	<i>Desert Prince, Bride of Innocence</i>	October 2009	UK	UK	Switzerland (mother) / Quaram	Quaram
Porter, Jane	<i>Duty, Desire and the Desert King</i>	October 2009	USA	USA	Sarq	Sarq
Lawrence, Kim	<i>The Sheikh's Impatient Virgin</i>	December 2009	UK	UK	Zuhaymi	Zuhaymi / Azharim

APPENDIX 5: COMPARISON OF PLACE NAMES IN *BOEVE* AND *BEVIS OF HAMPTON*¹

Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, MS Advocates 19.2.1 (Auchinleck)	<i>Boeve</i>	London, British Library, MS Egerton 2862 (olim Sutherland/ Trentham)	Naples, Biblioteca Nazionale, MS XIII.B.29 (1450s)	Cambridge, Gonville and Caius College, MS 175/96	Manchester, Chetham's Library, MS 8009	Cambridge, University Library, MS Ff.2.38
Hamtoun [Southampton]	Haumtone	Southhamptoun	Southhamptoun	Southhamptounne	Hampton	Hamtoun
					Flaunders [Flanders, Belgium]	
					Braban [Duchy of Brabant, modern-day Belgium and the Netherlands]	
					Bretayn [Brittany]	
					Denmarke [Denmark]	
					Walis [Wales]	

¹ Modern English translations (given in square brackets) of places in all versions of *Bevis* are my own and all modern English translations of places in *Boeve*, apart from 'Retefor', 'utre mer', 'Mondoie', 'de Orient', 'Valarie', and 'Paenie', are from Weiss, *Two Anglo-Norman Romances*. Places are listed chronologically according to the order in which they appear in the Auchinleck version of *Bevis*. Where other versions mention places not in the Auchinleck *Bevis*, or give alternate references (for example, *Boeve* refers to Egypt instead of Armenia), these are shown, as far as possible, in the order in which they appear in their respective versions. Where places are mentioned more than once, either the first or the most significant reference is given.

Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, MS Advocates 19.2.1 (Auchinleck)	<i>Boeve</i>	London, British Library, MS Egerton 2862 (olim Sutherland/ Trentham)	Naples, Biblioteca Nazionale, MS XIII.B.29 (1450s)	Cambridge, Gonville and Caius College, MS 175/96	Manchester, Chetham's Library, MS 8009	Cambridge, University Library, MS Ff.2.38
					Gascon [Gascony]	
					Burgayn [Burgundy]	
					Norway	
					Pecardye [Picardy]	
Scotlonde [Scotland]	Escoce	Scotlonde	Scotlonde	Scotlonde	Scotland	Scotlonde
Almayne [Germany]	Alemaine	Almayne	Almayne	Almayne	Allmayn	Almayne
Rifoun [fictional German city]	Retefor	Repayn	Rapain	Rifoun		Refon
Ingelonde [England]	Engletere				Englond	Englond
Ermonie [Armenia]	Egipte [Egypt]	Ermonay	Ermonay	Ermonee	Armony	Armony
Dameske [Damascus]	Damascle	Damas	Damas		Damas	Damaske
Tuli [Tolouse]	utre mer [overseas]					
Ilde of Wight [Isle of Wight]		ile of Wi3t	ile of Wi3t			

Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, MS Advocates 19.2.1 (Auchinleck)	<i>Boeve</i>	London, British Library, MS Egerton 2862 (olim Sutherland/ Trentham)	Naples, Biblioteca Nazionale, MS XIII.B.29 (1450s)	Cambridge, Gonville and Caius College, MS 175/96	Manchester, Chetham's Library, MS 8009	Cambridge, University Library, MS Ff.2.38
Mombraunt [fictional kingdom]	Monbrant	Vmbraunt	Vmbraunt	Moumbrand		Mombraunt
Babiloine [Babylon]	Babiloyne	Babeloyn	Babeloyn		Babilon	
Jurisalem [Jerusalem]	Jerusalem	Ierusalem	Ierusalem	Ierusalem		Ierusalem
	Cartage [Carthage]					
	Famer [fictional city]					
Dabilent [fictional place]	chastel de Abilent [fictional castle]	Dyablent	Diabilent		Dabalent	Dyabolent
	Esclavie; Esclavonie [country of the Slavs]					
	l'Arbre Sek [Dry Tree]					

Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, MS Advocates 19.2.1 (Auchinleck)	<i>Boeve</i>	London, British Library, MS Egerton 2862 (olim Sutherland/ Trentham)	Naples, Biblioteca Nazionale, MS XIII.B.29 (1450s)	Cambridge, Gonville and Caius College, MS 175/96	Manchester, Chetham's Library, MS 8009	Cambridge, University Library, MS Ff.2.38
	Barbarie [fictional country]					
	Macedonie [Macedonia]					
	Paenie [heathen lands]					
	Pavia [Italian city]					
	Valarie [a Saracen place]					
Nazareth		Nazareth	Naftireth			
Bedlem [Bethlehem]	Bedleem	Bedlem	Bedlem			
Emauns castel [castle of Emmaus]		Emauns castel	Emauns castel			
Synaie [Sinai]		Sinary	Sinary			

Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, MS Advocates 19.2.1 (Auchinleck)	<i>Boeve</i>	London, British Library, MS Egerton 2862 (olim Sutherland/ Trentham)	Naples, Biblioteca Nazionale, MS XIII.B.29 (1450s)	Cambridge, Gonville and Caius College, MS 175/96	Manchester, Chetham's Library, MS 8009	Cambridge, University Library, MS Ff.2.38
Ynde [India]		Ynde	Ynde			Ynde
Erop [Europe]		Arabie [Arabia]	Arabie			
Aise; Asie [Asia]	Arabie [Arabia]	Assy	Assy			Assay
Egippte [Egypt]		Egippte	Egippte			
Grese [Greece]		Grese	Grese			
Tars [Tarsus]		Thare	Tars			
Sesile [Sicily]		Sesile	Sesile		Cesile	
Sesaoine [Saxony]		Sesoyn	Sessoyn			
Fris [Frisia]		Fryslond	Fris			
Sodeine [Sidon]		Sidon	Sydoyn			
Tire [Tyre]		Tire	Tire			
Aufrik [Africa]		Affryke	Aufrik			
					Myssyn [a fictional place]	

Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, MS Advocates 19.2.1 (Auchinleck)	<i>Boeve</i>	London, British Library, MS Egerton 2862 (olim Sutherland/ Trentham)	Naples, Biblioteca Nazionale, MS XIII.B.29 (1450s)	Cambridge, Gonville and Caius College, MS 175/96	Manchester, Chetham's Library, MS 8009	Cambridge, University Library, MS Ff.2.38
Coloine [Cologne]	Colonie			Coloyne	Colyn	Colene
Warwik [Warwick]						
NorthHomberlonde [Northumberland]		NorthHomberlonde	NorthHomberlonde		NorthHomberlonde	NorthHomberlonde
Poyle land [Apulia]		Poyle	Poyle		Poyle	Poyle
Calabre [Calabria]		Calabere	Calabere		Calabre	Saber londe
Toscan [Tuscany]		Tuskayn			Tuskayn	Tuskayn
Seinte Peter brige [Pont Sant'Angelo]		Petyrs brygge			seynt Petyrs brygge	seynt Petyrs brygge
Rome	Rome	Roome			Roome	Roome
Lonbardie [Lombardy]		Lumbardy			Lumbardye	Lumbardy
Province [Provence]						
Fraunce [France]	France				Fraunce	Fraunce

Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, MS Advocates 19.2.1 (Auchinleck)	<i>Boeve</i>	London, British Library, MS Egerton 2862 (olim Sutherland/ Trentham)	Naples, Biblioteca Nazionale, MS XIII.B.29 (1450s)	Cambridge, Gonville and Caius College, MS 175/96	Manchester, Chetham's Library, MS 8009	Cambridge, University Library, MS Ff.2.38
	Chastel de Dygon [a French castle]					
	Orfanie [a country]					
Mounclere [possibly Mont Clair, France]	Mondoie [possibly Mont Dore, France]	Mochalray	Malachry		Punculer	Mongeray
Hamteschire [shire of Hampton]						
Lounde [London]	Lundres	Londe	Londe	Lundone	London	London
					Cornewayle [Cornwall]	
Castel of Arondel [Arondel castle built by Bevis for his horse]	Arandel	Castel Arondel	Castel Arondel	Castel Arondel	Castel Arundel	Castel Arondel

Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, MS Advocates 19.2.1 (Auchinleck)	<i>Boeve</i>	London, British Library, MS Egerton 2862 (olim Sutherland/ Trentham)	Naples, Biblioteca Nazionale, MS XIII.B.29 (1450s)	Cambridge, Gonville and Caius College, MS 175/96	Manchester, Chetham's Library, MS 8009	Cambridge, University Library, MS Ff.2.38
	Wastrande [a place possibly in England]					
	Leycestre [Leicester]					
	Breoune [Bristol]					
	Gloucestre [Gloucester]					
	Large [a fictional city]					
Normondie [Normandy]						
Boloyne [Bologna]						
Tulete [Toledo]						

Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, MS Advocates 19.2.1 (Auchinleck)	<i>Boeve</i>	London, British Library, MS Egerton 2862 (olim Sutherland/Trentham)	Naples, Biblioteca Nazionale, MS XIII.B.29 (1450s)	Cambridge, Gonville and Caius College, MS 175/96	Manchester, Chetham's Library, MS 8009	Cambridge, University Library, MS Ff.2.38
Sein Jemes [shrine of St James, Santiago de Compostela]		Sein Jemes	Sein Jemes			Sein Jemes
Sein Gile [shrine of St Giles, St-Gilles-du-Gard, southern France]	Sen Gile	Sein Gile	Sein Gile			Sein Gile
Grikische se [Mediterranean Sea]						
	Abreford [fictional city]					
Aumberforce [a fictional city]	Civile [a city, possibly Seville, Spain]	Ambyfort	Ambyfort	Hampmyngforde	Ambyfforthe	Amforde
Nuby [Nubia]	Nubie					
	de Orient [of the East]					

Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, MS Advocates 19.2.1 (Auchinleck)	<i>Boeve</i>	London, British Library, MS Egerton 2862 (olim Sutherland/ Trentham)	Naples, Biblioteca Nazionale, MS XIII.B.29 (1450s)	Cambridge, Gonville and Caius College, MS 175/96	Manchester, Chetham's Library, MS 8009	Cambridge, University Library, MS Ff.2.38
	Aragon [Spanish region]					
	Cordes [fictional city]					
					Surry [Syria]	
Potenhithe [Putney]		Pountany	Poutenay	Poutenay	Powteneth	Pontenay
Temse [river Thames]		Temse	Temse	Tempse	Temmus	Temse
Westmenster [Westminster]				Westmynster		
Tour strete [Tower street]						
Chepe [Cheapside]		Chepe	Chepe	Chepe	Chepe	Chepe
Godes lane [Goose lane]		Goos lane	Goos lane	Gooslane	Bredstrete [Bread street]	Gose lane

Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, MS Advocates 19.2.1 (Auchinleck)	<i>Boeve</i>	London, British Library, MS Egerton 2862 (olim Sutherland/ Trentham)	Naples, Biblioteca Nazionale, MS XIII.B.29 (1450s)	Cambridge, Gonville and Caius College, MS 175/96	Manchester, Chetham's Library, MS 8009	Cambridge, University Library, MS Ff.2.38
Londagate [London gate]		Ludgate	Ludgate	Ludgate	Ludgate	Ludgate
Bowe [church of St Mary le Bow]		seynt Marye at the bowe	seynt Marye at bowe	seynt Marye bowe		seynte Marye at bowe
Londen ston [London Stone]				Lundone ston		Lundone ston
the ledene halle [Leadenhall]						
Notinghame [Nottingham]						

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