

*ELEGIT DOMUM SIBI PLACABILEM:*

CHOICE AND THE TWELFTH-CENTURY RELIGIOUS WOMAN

A DISSERTATION IN  
History  
And  
English

Presented to the Faculty of the University  
of Missouri-Kansas City in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

by  
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2015

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University of Missouri-Kansas City, 2015

ABSTRACT

This dissertation probes medieval sources to identify how and why women made transformative choices in their own lives and analyzes the consequences of those choices. The major case study investigates the life of Marie of Blois-Boulogne, a twelfth-century abbess, countess, wife, and mother. Marie experienced change and tragedy, provoking the need to make choices with religious and political ramifications. As such, her story enables us to examine decision-making in the context of controversy on the one hand and family obligations and personal ambition on the other. Relevant themes—such a child oblation, the holy veil and enclosure, legal and illegal marriage—frame Marie and create a microhistory of the world that she inhabited. Other historical women and literary characters from the eleventh through thirteenth centuries flesh out more of the discussion. These case studies and presentations fit into three body chapters that examine the power exercised by parents, complications of the enclosure, and the end of marital relationships.

Medieval chronicle accounts, charters, monastic cartularies, seals, and letters, provide the material evidence for this study. Each type and each example do more than convey raw data, however, as they elicit narratives that form and inform the subject and the reader. These narratives lend themselves to a literary

critique and examination using Hayden White's theory of emplotments. This interdisciplinary exercise makes use of four classical modes of plot structure: Tragedy, Comedy, Romance, and Satire. Within this examination, the sources are read for what they omit as much as for what they include.

My conclusions prove that women exercised choice and decision-making power that went well beyond the recognized pattern of the either/or of secular marriage or religious profession. Instead, these women's choices enabled them to realize pragmatic objectives that reinforced family goals; equally their choices reflected personal ambition and aspiration. The attainment of status, adventure, and authority reflect some of the motivations that I have identified. More often than not, these choices and their consequences elicited disapprobation from male leaders.

## APPROVAL PAGE

The faculty listed below, appointed by the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences have examined a dissertation titled “*Elegit Domum sibi Placabilem: Choice and the Twelfth-Century Religious Woman*,” presented by Linda Dorothy Brown, candidate for the Doctor of Philosophy degree, and certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

AND	<i>Anglo-Norman Dictionary</i>
BL	British Library
LPE	<i>Lives of the Princesses of England</i>
Mon Ang	<i>Monasticon Anglicanum</i>
MGH	<i>Monumenta Germaniae Historica</i>
OED	<i>Oxford English Dictionary</i>
PL	<i>Patrologia latina</i>
RHGF	<i>Recueil des historiens des Gaules et de la France</i>
VCH	<i>Victoria County History</i>

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

If there is beauty to be found in taking a very long time to complete a doctorate, it exists in the number of people who have contributed to it. My endeavors to remember everyone will fall short, but I do know where to begin. In the summer of 2003, I arranged to meet with Dr. Shona Kelly Wray about starting the program sometime in the following year. Our meeting began a little shakily as a result of my fears, but Dr. Wray encouraged me to apply and start working hard on my Latin skills! I was fortunate enough over the years to take several courses with her, spend time together talking over coffee, and circumnavigate Kalamazoo by her side. Her presence was always professional and yet utterly genuine. When Dr. Wray unexpectedly passed away in May 2012, I lost a mentor, friend, and supervisor.

My gratitude to my English supervisor, Dr. Virginia Blanton, knows no bounds. She has also been there since the beginning, teaching and pushing me to question and never remain satisfied with the obvious. Her “so what?” shapes this study and has driven me to engage deeply with the sources. Not only have I read Chaucer and medieval romances with Dr. Blanton but also experienced a lot in life alongside her. Into the void of my committee came another of my heroines, Dr. Linda Mitchell, my new history supervisor. She has proposed many of the concepts that support this dissertation. Years ago, Dr. Mitchell suggested *The Cheese and the Worms* as a model for fleshing out a life’s story, and this notion of the microhistory has situated Marie’s story within the context of her world. I am equally grateful to Dr. Mitchell for suggesting Hayden White’s theory of emplotment; it has brought the sources alive for me. A similar but different debt of gratitude goes to Dr. Kathy Krause. Her erudition and knowledge of medieval French literature and drama have shaped my approaches toward and love of the various genres presented in this dissertation. I was fortunate and honored to co-present with Dr. Krause and Dr.

Heather Tanner at the Gender and Medieval Studies Conference at the University of Winchester in 2014. Dr. Tanner's contributions to my work moreover can be felt from cover to cover, and her own encouraging words came at a timely moment for me. I would like to thank Dr. Carla Klausner, whose course on the formative period of Islamic history not only built my confidence as a returning student but also provided me with a life-changing experience. Finally, many thanks to Dr. Jennifer Frangos for stepping into the breach when needed!

Dozens of helpful and knowledgeable librarians and archivists have helped me over the years. I would like to thank especially the librarians and archivists at Miller Nichols UMKC library, the University of Kansas, the British Library, Senate House and Institute of Historical Research, Jesus and St. John's Colleges (Cambridge), and Anglia Ruskin University. My research trip to France exceeded expectation largely because of the generosity of the archivists and librarians in Lille, Amiens, and Boulogne-sur-Mer. Subsequent help has come from Aix-en-Provence. Huge thanks to my Anglia Ruskin colleagues, especially Laurie, Ian, and Kirsty for the gift of time and moral support!

Finally, I would like to thank my loving family—immediate and extended. They have kindly indulged me, ever listening and encouraging. Special thanks to Phillip, my brother, and my dear mother, Dora Brown. Cherished friends, Kristi, Christina, Annie, *et multis aliis* have played similar roles along the way. Hannah and Tristan, my dear children, have lived for many years with a mother obsessed by her studies and medieval women. I love them for their lighthearted humor in the midst of it all. In real conclusion, I would like to thank my husband, Dr. Nicholas Easton, whose own doctoral journey coincided with mine. His love, brilliance, and calm have sustained me on many a dark night of the soul.

To my grandparents  
Panagis, Despina, Clyde, and, most especially  
Elma, my dear Gran,  
Born December 15, 1916

## CHRONOLOGY

1066 - ca. 1086	Norman Invasion and Conquest of England
1093	Gunnhildr's departure from Wilton Abbey
1093-11	Anselm of Bec's archiepiscopacy
ca. 1096-98	Birth of Christina of Markyate
1125	Marriage of Matilda of Boulogne and Stephen of Blois
ca. 1126-28	Birth of Constance of France
1128	Thierry of Flanders becomes Count of Flanders
1135-1147	English Civil War
ca. 1128-36	Birth of Marie of Blois
1129	Henry of Blois assumes position as Bishop of Winchester
1135	Death of King Henry I
	Accession of Stephen of Blois
1140s	Composition of Gratian's <i>Concordia discordantium canonum</i>
1148-50	Marie relocates from St. Leonard's, Middlesex to Lillechurch Priory, Kent
1152	Death of Matilda of Boulogne
1153	Death of Eustace of Boulogne
1154	Death of Stephen of Blois
ca. 1155-1166	Christina's death
	Writing of <i>The Life of Christina of Markyate</i>
ca. 1156-58	Marie takes up her position as Abbess of Romsey
1159	Pope Alexander III succeeds Adrian IV/Anti-pope Victor IV challenges



- 1159 Death of William of Boulogne (de Warenne)
- 1160 Marriage of Marie of Blois-Boulogne and Matthew of  
Flanders/Assumption of roles as Countess and Count of Boulogne
- 1162 Papal letters to Archbishop Henri of Reims
- 1164 Death of anti-pope, Victor IV
- 1167 Papal letters to Archbishop Henri of Reims and the Bishops of Soissons,  
Amiens, and Laon
- 1168 Death of Count Thierry of Flanders  
Marie's letter to King Louis VII
- 1169-70 Dissolution of Marie and Matthew's marriage  
Marie begins residence at Sainte-Austreberte, Montreuil
- ca. 1170 Marie de France writing her *Lais*
- 1173 Death of Matthew of Boulogne  
Marie leaves Saint-Austreberte to take care of daughters
- 1176 Chrétien de Troyes writing *Cligès*
- 1177 Marie returns to Saint-Austreberte
- ca. 1177 Death of Constance of France
- ca. 1178 (-1200) *Continuatio Aquicinctina Sigeberti Gemblacensis*
- ca. 1180 Andreas Capellanus writing *De Amore*
- 1182 Death of Marie of Blois-Boulogne
- ca. 1190 Birth of Ela of Salisbury
- 1191 Death of Philip of Flanders
- ca. 1200 Birth of Matthew Paris

ca. 1220	Caesarius of Heisterbach writing the <i>Dialogue on Miracles</i>
1232	Founding of Lacock Abbey, Wiltshire
1261	Death of Ela of Salisbury
ca. 1278-79	Birth of Mary of Woodstock
1298	Promulgation of Pope Boniface VIII's <i>Periculoso</i>
ca. 1328-34	Nicholas Trivet writing his <i>Cronicles</i>

## INTRODUCTION

### *In the Beginning*

In October 1159, William, the wealthy Count of Warenne and Boulogne, died on his way home from fighting in Toulouse for his family's former enemy, the English king, Henry II (r. 1154-1189). His death occurred hundreds of miles away from England, but set off a chain reaction that would have implications for his contemporaries as well as for future generations in England and on the Continent. One person whose life irrevocably changed was William's sister, Marie. She was at that time the abbess of Romsey in Hampshire and had been for some four years.

Overnight, however, Marie, the abbess, was transformed, as the last of her family, into Marie, the heiress. The monk of Mont Saint-Michel, Robert of Torigni (d. 1186), explains how "Matthew the brother of the count of Flanders in an unprecedented event led away the abbess of Romsey, who was the daughter of King Stephen, and with her seized the county of Boulogne."<sup>1</sup> Marie's status as a veiled nun was reckoned as secondary to her worth as heir to the small but strategically significant county along the coast of modern-day France. While the sources recorded her departure from Romsey as abduction, Marie's subsequent actions as an active manager of her familial estates, her commitment to her husband and daughters, and her second departure from another nunnery call into question her portrayal as a victim.

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<sup>1</sup> Jacques-Paul Migne, *PL* (Paris, 1854), 160:492. Robert's work is a continuation of the chronicle begun by Sigeberti Gemblacensis. "Matheus filius comitis Flandrie inaudito exemplo duxit abbatissam Rummesia, que fuerat filia Stephani Regis, et cepit cum ea comitatum Boloniensem."

*So what?*

This dissertation pulls together the stories of women like Marie of Blois and other contemporary Anglo-Norman and French noblewomen who lived in the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries. My study focuses upon Marie as it situates her within the context of the period to create an interdisciplinary examination of contemporary culture, politics, and social practicalities. Alongside this approach, the dissertation turns the lens backwards to examine those responsible for recording the women's stories in the first place, focusing upon how the sources' creators position their narratives through word choice, literary devices, analyses, and commentary to deliver more than a simple historical account. In order to bind the dissertation together, my overarching line of enquiry is an appraisal of choice and decision-making in the lives of these medieval women. While noblewomen have often been re-created as pawns in the game of feudalism and inheritance, scholarship has consistently proven their agency. The purpose of this study then is not to question whether these women acted as agents but to interrogate the sources to establish their motivations, methods, and objectives.

There is no lack of research regarding choice and decision-making power for medieval women. Such studies generally have been limited seeing choice within the restrained context of marriage or religion, wherein choice boiled down to choosing a marital partner or choosing the veil.<sup>2</sup> My aim, however, is to expand how we discuss choice, so that it fleshes out questions of

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<sup>2</sup> The topic generally is discussed in the context of marital or religious status. For twelfth-century women, see for example, Michael Sheehan, "Choice of Marriage Partner in the Middle Ages: Development and Mode of Application of a Theory of Marriage," in *Marriage, Family, and Law in Medieval Europe* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press: 1997), 87-117; Dyan Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage: Sexual Abstinence in Medieval Wedlock* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993), 208-210; and a targeted look at choice for a nun and her family in Penelope D. Johnson, *Equal in Monastic Profession: Religious Women in Medieval France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 13-18.

intention, timing, and means for women. While this approach often includes issues regarding marriage or religion, it acknowledges that there is more to female choice than simply rubber-stamping what others have already decided. Consequently, the evidence often leads viewing how women re-shaped, opposed, and challenged societal and familial expectations.

As such, this dissertation questions how choices affected the women themselves, the reactions they provoked, and the narratives they inspired. Explaining the topic of choice for anyone of this period poses a number of challenges. For example, with the limited number of sources, is it possible to reconstruct narratives sufficiently to tell the story and to understand what choices were being made? Similarly, because sources such as chronicles written by monks and charters penned by clerics represent male-produced documents, are these sources too skewed by anti-female sentiment as to render them useless in ascertaining whether women chose and made decisions for themselves? Nevertheless, as an entrance into examining the women's choices, we can draw conclusions based upon what the documents say, ignore, and emphasize to arrive at answers to some of the unknowns. For the most part, all of the case studies—both historical and literary—feature women who responded to pressing conditions and behaved in ways often deemed controversial. This behavior frequently, but not always, elicited disapprobation from the writers telling the stories.

In this introductory chapter, I set out some of the major historical and cultural contexts for the period. While most of the focus is upon the twelfth century, some backward and forward context supplements it. This expansion also allows a more thorough discussion of the other case studies. Because we research, digest, and write history in light of the historiography that precedes us, I look to some of the theoretical models that have provoked and shaped modern thinking about twelfth-century women.

### *Twelfth-Century Context*

The world that Marie was born into fits many historical contexts. For example, the twelfth century represents for many historians, a renaissance of literary and philosophical ideas.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, from the 1140s onward, the century became known for its legal innovations.<sup>4</sup> Many of the writings and debates within canon or ecclesiastical law concerned issues relevant to Marie and the other women of this dissertation, including marital theory and practice, ages of consent, and the permanency of the religious vow. The monastic reform movement of the eleventh century had not ended and its advocates continued to push for consolidation of their gains.<sup>5</sup> While some of their priorities regarding simony, pluralism, and absenteeism are not central to this dissertation, other areas, such as routes to permanent religious status and the insistence upon sexual purity for clerics and religious alike, have a direct impact upon it. The influence of many of these theological and legal shifts can be felt in the vibrant and diverse literature of the twelfth century. Writers variously responded to the changing cultural landscape, accepting, challenging, and omitting the new requirements as fitted their needs. These responses inform many of the literary examinations below. The century, when viewed as a whole, embraces a noteworthy list of events, controversies, and innovations that influenced the development of medieval Europe in general and the Anglo-Norman and French realms in particular: succession crises, Crusades,

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<sup>3</sup> For a concise overview of many of the facets comprising this renaissance, see R. N. Swanson, *The Twelfth-Century Renaissance*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999).

<sup>4</sup> James Brundage discusses how the century's thinkers helped shaped canon law in particular in, James A. Brundage, *The Medieval Origins of the Legal Profession Canonists, Civilians, and Courts*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), volume 1.

<sup>5</sup> The movement attracted participants throughout Western Europe. For an overview of the reformers and their targets for reform, see the chapter on church reform in Gerd Tellenbach, *The Church in Western Europe from the Tenth to the Early Twelfth Century*, trans. Timothy Reuter, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 157-193.

high-profile assassinations, legal inventions, church councils, and literary *magnae operae* to name but a few. Somewhat remarkably, Marie of Blois can be tied to many of them directly or indirectly. Consequently, as becomes quickly apparent in the reconstruction of her life, many of the most prominent secular and religious leaders played significant roles, including Thomas Becket, the Emperor Frederick I, Louis VII, and Pope Alexander III. Likewise, events in Marie's life connect her thematically to many of the literary works and writers of her day.



*Figure 1. The cross-Channel world of Marie's day. Map by author.*

### *Secular marital status*

Much of the intellectual discourse in the mid-twelfth century weighed the advantages and disadvantages of secular marriage against spiritual marriage. Unease regarding a tradition of ancient and contemporary anti-marriage diatribes and writings facilitated the move to have secular marriage deemed a sacrament and thus soften the vitriol often evident in these writings. Moreover, “notable twelfth-century sacramentalists...devoted more attention to marriage than to

any other sacrament. It was unique, since it alone had been instituted before the Fall.”<sup>6</sup> Becoming a sacrament further legitimized ecclesiastical control over the practice, challenging traditional attitudes and assumptions.<sup>7</sup> To reinforce this takeover, the church door became the symbolic and practical venue for the bride and groom to solemnize their permanent vow to one another. They swore that the marriage was exogamous and not incestuous, that is, not one prohibited by consanguinity or affinity. Additionally, they promised that they were free to marry, not having previously contracted another marital vow, religious vow, or disease such as leprosy. Canon lawyers continued to refine and update marital theory and practice over the coming centuries, but these basic criteria were paramount at this stage.<sup>8</sup> As the Church forbade divorce, it pressed for more explicit language requiring public and free consent. For the most part the age of consent followed the Roman model of twelve for girls and fourteen for boys. Efforts to protect people from coerced marriage, while discouraging and eventually forbidding clandestine unions, influenced two recognized formulas for betrothal: the future promise to marry (*per verba de futuro*) and the present statement of wedlock (*per verba de praesenti*). The two worked as the functional basis to determine whether a couple was legally affianced and then legally wed. Such

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<sup>6</sup> Hans Boersma and Matthew Levering. *The Oxford Handbook of Sacramental Theology*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 213.

<sup>7</sup> Shalomith Shahar, *The Fourth Estate: A History of Women in the Middle Ages* (London: Methuen, 1983), 66, and Philippe Delhaye, “The Development of the Medieval Church’s Teaching on Marriage,” *Concilium* 55 (1970), 85.

<sup>8</sup> The restrictive parameters defining incest changed over time from an initial prohibition against seven degrees of kinship to the three-degree prohibition instead. Defining who was free to marry could be difficult for a number of reasons. One problematic area concerned missing spouses, so that if a woman’s husband had been missing, she was unable to marry until seven years had passed and witnesses had been actively sought to find the missing spouse. For more regarding absent spouses, see S. McDougall, *Bigamy and Christian Identity in Late Medieval Champagne* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 28-29.



promises should theoretically have only been made by individuals free to marry, that is, those free from the known impediments.

The contract written in the present tense created a legal vow to wed and signified marriage. As Brooke notes from the groom's perspective, "If he said 'I promise to take you to wife here and now' by *verba de praesenti* he was tied; perhaps not fully married till they went to bed, yet bound in a way he could not escape."<sup>9</sup> Consent *per verba futuro* reflected the promise to marry stated in the form of words before witnesses. It was in essence the engagement, but the couple was not married.<sup>10</sup> Either party could nullify it by simply demanding it or by one of the two forming a union *per verba praesenti* with another person.<sup>11</sup> For example, this formula, visible below in the circumstances regarding Christina of Markyate, made her a married woman in the opening decades of the twelfth century. However, sexual consummation following the future-tense promise equated to a valid marriage. It was in England during Anselm's legatine council of 1102 that this recognition was first made.<sup>12</sup> Necessary to both of these types of

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<sup>9</sup> Brooke, *Medieval Idea*, 138. Such definitions appeared first between 1140 with a papal decretal and the 1160 within a series of decretals by Pope Alexander III.

<sup>10</sup> Michael M. Sheehan, "The Formation and Stability of Marriage in Fourteenth-Century England: Evidence of an Ely Register," in *Marriage, Family, and Law in Medieval Europe* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press: 1997), 48, and Brooke, *Medieval Idea of Marriage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 138.

<sup>11</sup> Shannon McSheffrey, *Love and Marriage in Late Medieval London* (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1995), 4.

<sup>12</sup> Sheehan, "Marriage Theory," 124. Related to the future-tense promise and sexual consummation was the use of *sub pena nubendi* in cases where unmarried couples enjoyed on-going sexual relations. As is clear in the legislation coming out of thirteenth-century England and influencing other parts of Europe, this penalty of forcing marriage was controversial. In essence, it ran counter to the Church's efforts to promote free consent. See Sheehan, "Marriage in Conciliar and Synodal Legislation," in *Marriage, Family, and Law in Medieval Europe* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press: 1997), 81-83 and Charlotte Christensen-Nugues, "Mariage Consent et Mariage Contraint: L'Abjuration *Sub Pena Nubendi* À L'Officialité de Cerisy, 1314-1346," *Médiévales*, 40, (printemps, 2001), 101-103.

consent was the presence of witnesses who could verify the exact nature of the promise. The push toward transparency through consent simultaneously minimized (at least theoretically) the role of family and lords in the choice of marriage partners particularly for the young and widowed.<sup>13</sup>

As canon law developed in the mid-twelfth century, the major philosophical tug of war that separated theorists on the definition of legal marriage boiled down to those who promoted the necessity of free consent and those who insisted upon the necessity of sexual consummation. Writers such as the Paris theologian, Peter Lombard (d. 1160), weighed in with logic and law to formulate a theory that “promoted the significance of consent in a Christian union over consummation, and emphasized the enduring bond formed when spouses promised themselves to each other.”<sup>14</sup> In the words of James Brundage, Peter Lombard was “the most influential and successful spokesman for consensual marriage theory in the mid-twelfth century.”<sup>15</sup> Concurrently, the most significant legal innovations in ecclesiastical or canon law occurred in the mid-twelfth century when the Bolognese monk, Gratian, compiled the *Concordia discordantium canonum*, better known as the *Decretals* or *Decretum*.<sup>16</sup> For his part, Gratian differentiated

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<sup>13</sup> For a discussion that pulls together these separate legal and cultural strands, see Michael Sheehan, “Choice of Marriage Partner in the Middle Ages: Development and Mode of Application of a Theory of Marriage,” in *Marriage, Family, and Law in Medieval Europe* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press: 1997), 87-117.

<sup>14</sup> Peter Lombard’s instrumental Book 4 of the *Sententiae* translated in Jacqueline Murray, *Love, Marriage and Family in the Middle Ages: A Reader* (Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview Press, 2001), 170-181.

<sup>15</sup> James A. Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 264.

<sup>16</sup> According to Anders Winroth, “The [*Decretum*] collects thousands of authoritative statements by popes, church councils, theologians, and secular authorities. Gratian added his own comments, the *dicta*, in which he attempted to iron out the differences in opinion among the different authorities he had collected....” Anders Winroth, *Domus Gratiani*, Yale University, accessed October 27, 2015, [pantheon.yale.edu/~haw6/gratian.html](http://pantheon.yale.edu/~haw6/gratian.html). Michael Sheehan cautions

between the two types of marriage seeing the *matrimonium initiatum* [marriage begun] as separate from the *matrimonium ratum* [marriage completed] which “alone was perfect and required *copula (consummatum)*.”<sup>17</sup> This debate over consent and *copula* fits into the much larger debate over the essence of consent making marital or religious vows in general. For Marie’s marriage to Matthew of Flanders, as we shall see however, the letter of the law concerning consummation did not in the end supersede a pope’s perception of the primary illegality of their marriage.

### *Licit and illicit marriage*

Far from fixed or settled by the time of their marriage in 1160, these efforts to define valid marriage represented a continuing goal for legists. Thus working within the context of what had been achieved and debated, the man responsible for significant contributions to the theory and practice of valid marriage in the second half of the twelfth century was Pope Alexander III (r. 1159-1181). His influences on the formation of legal marital theory and practice are paralleled in time and place with his interventions in Marie’s life. Simultaneously, his papal status was itself threatened as he was fighting against the anti-pope, Victor IV (d. 1164). Before becoming Pope Alexander III, he was Cardinal Rolandus Bandinelli, and a leading legal expert committed to reshaping canon law; “in no area was his influence more marked than in the law of marriage.”<sup>18</sup> In essence, his goal was to achieve a workable approach toward marriage theory; his subsequent work reflects refinement of past writers and laws as well as his own innovations. At

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that the more popular, briefer name *Decretum* “should never mask the original implication that the volume was intended to bring divergent positions into agreement.” Sheehan, “Choice of Marriage Partner in the Middle Ages,” 92.

<sup>17</sup> Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society*, 264-266.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 332.

this crucial time in the development of marital theory, and disregarding the still accepted exercise of power by families and lords, Alexander required “only the consent of the bride and groom and reject[ed] a requirement of consent of anyone other than the bride and groom.”<sup>19</sup>

Although theoretically a spiritual impossibility, medieval couples did officially split up. The causes for dissolutions and annulments generally boiled down to the challenges and claims of pre-existing impediments. As noted above, such legal obstacles that should have prevented the marriage from being contracted in the first place. Thus, when parties entered into a marriage contract, they swore that they were legally able to marry. Establishing that there were no impediments to a marriage was no mean task. In many marriages, unintentional confusion and mistakes resulted, especially in not having properly established consanguinity or affinity. On the flipside, those wanting out of a seemingly legal marriage might exploit the loopholes of impediments to escape it.<sup>20</sup>

#### *Religious status and Canon law*

Being a bride of Christ, or *sponsa Christi*, represented one of the most impenetrable obstacles to engaging in secular marriage. In the sources, the constant descriptions linking Marie to her religious status and position as an abbess acted as reminders that Christ’s bride was off-limits. Many of these same sources reported that Marie had been abducted. As such, legists could readily believe that their efforts to strengthen the prohibitions against marrying nuns remained

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<sup>19</sup> Charles Donahue, “The Policy of Alexander the Third's Consent Theory of Marriage,” in *Proceedings of the Fourth International Congress of Medieval Canon Law* 100, no. 5 (1976): 256.

<sup>20</sup> As exploited in Eleanor of Aquitaine’s first marriage to King Louis VII of France. See Constance Brittain Bouchard, “Eleanor’s Divorce from Louis VII: The Uses of Consanguinity,” in *Eleanor of Aquitaine: Lord and Lady*, eds. Wheeler, Bonnie, and John Carmi Parsons (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 223-235.

apt and necessary if a young man could still enter a holy enclosure, abduct its abbess, and stake claim to her family inheritance. Men who dared steal one of Christ's brides could not therefore escape *anaethemae* and sanctions.<sup>21</sup> The *sponsa Christi* herself was not always assumed innocent in these illegal marriages; the extent of her involvement was of course not always clear. This question of participation plays a central role in this dissertation, as we search for answers regarding Marie's possible complicity in the marriage scheme to Matthew. Gratian addresses this theme of collusion, assembling a vast range of the possible permutations between nuns and laymen. In his *Decretum*, he cites examples from counciliar, papal, and glossator opinions about the ominous consequences awaiting both parties. In the oft-cited *Causa 27*, question one, Gratian discusses whether those who have made religious vows can contract lawful marriage.<sup>22</sup> In the variety of possibilities entertained, the resounding message that emerges is that those who have vowed religion cannot contract lawful marriages. Severe penalties awaited both laymen and clerics who had married nuns; the nuns deemed guilty of participating willingly in their own abductions did not escape punishment.

To enter into religion in the twelfth century, the ideal imagined a nun, who was of age, freely making her formal profession of virginity freely before a bishop. He then veiled her in a

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<sup>21</sup> English law codes repeatedly condemned—either outlawing outright or strictly punishing—the abducting, raping, and marrying of nuns. Early evidence comes from Aethelbert's law code in Kent. See Helen Damico and Alexandra Hennessey Olsen, *New Readings on Women in Old English Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 95. Similar sanctions can be found throughout the centuries leading up to the early Middle Ages, with Alfredian and Cnutian laws seeking to regulate and capitalize upon such unions rather than forbid them wholesale. The evolution of these laws can be found in Peter Birks, *The Life of the Law: Proceedings of the Tenth British Legal History Conference, Oxford, 1991* (London: Hambledon Press, 1993), 51, footnote 37.

<sup>22</sup> John Thomas Noonan and Augustine Thompson, *Marriage Canons from the Decretum of Gratian and the Decretals, Sext, Clementines and Extravagantes* (1993), Catholic University of America, accessed October 27, 2015, <http://faculty.cua.edu/Pennington/Canon%20Law/marriagelaw.htm>.

consecration ceremony of marriage to her heavenly bridegroom, Christ. This bishop shared center stage with the vowing woman. Penelope Johnson describes his multiple and continuing roles throughout the nun's life: father, surrogate bride-groom, and guardian.<sup>23</sup> As a veiled *sponsa Christi* she pledged the triple or full vow of poverty, obedience, and virginity, promising to remain enclosed for the duration of her life.<sup>24</sup> After some six centuries of repeated injunctions regarding enclosure came the best known in 1298 with Pope Boniface VIII's (d. 1303) bull of *Periculoso*. The pope dictated that strict enclosure was required for women religious, visitors to their houses were forbidden, and travel was to be restricted, even for abbesses, to the bare minimum.<sup>25</sup> This concept of enclosure and separation from the world continued to inspire conflict between those who wanted nuns behind walls and locked doors and those who balked at such confinement. Although it came over a century after Marie's death, *Periculoso* should not be seen as an isolated papal bull but as part of the centuries' long ideology of enclosure. One woman in this study, Mary of Woodstock, lived in the years before and after the pronouncement, and more of the context and aftermath regarding *Periculoso* is examined below in light of her life and experiences.

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<sup>23</sup> "As father and head of the family, he had questioned her suitability for the match. As Christ's representative, he had received her vows and accepted her as Christ's bride. The bishop acted symbolically as parent and as spouse for each nun [who]... might feel awe and gratitude for the figure who made her a nun, perhaps even affection [or]...negative feelings she felt toward dominant men in her family." Johnson, *Equal in Monastic Profession*, 64.

<sup>24</sup> Insistence upon strict enclosure was not new and can be traced back to the Rule for women by Caesarius of Arles. He mirrored many of Augustine's previous aims to require "consecrated virgins to remain in their homes, separate from the world." Elizabeth Makowski, *Canon Law and Cloistered Women: Periculoso and Its Commentators 1298 – 1545*, 9.

<sup>25</sup> The objective and motivation are clear, "so that [the nuns] be able to serve God more freely, wholly separated from the public and world gaze and, occasions for lasciviousness having been removed, may most diligently safeguard their hearts and bodies in complete chastity." A full translation of *Periculoso* translation can be found in Makowski, *Periculoso*, 135-136.

In addition to the implications of enclosure, the taking of religious vows affected families and communities, producing ripple effects socially and practically. Potential benefits that might have come about as a result of marital alliances were replaced by the potentialities available to those who assumed positions of power within the monastic world. Abbacies often meant that individual men and women as abbots and abbesses could accumulate land, wealth, and influence locally and further afield. The growth in the number houses and orders in the twelfth century underscores the prominence and roles associated with monasticism. For aristocratic and royal daughters who assumed leadership roles, these positions might represent a professional outlet for talent whereby they could demonstrate administrative prowess and cultural expertise.<sup>26</sup> As an abbess, the administration of personal and monastic lands, the hospitality that she would have been responsible for, and the duties and obligations associated with her role could and did bring her into contact with the wider world. As will be evident in the case studies to follow, women experienced religion in a number of ways, and while the majority of the dissertation's women entered Benedictine nunneries, at least two entered other orders. The twelfth century was still dominated by Benedictine houses, however, the Cistercians, Augustinians, and Brigittines made in-roads over the course of the next two hundred years in both England and Northern France.<sup>27</sup> Great variations existed in how strictly particular houses adhered to their order's rules, and, by the early thirteenth century, moves between houses were theoretically only possible if a monk or nun sought to join a stricter order (*ordo arctior*).<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> See for example the experiences of Héloïse discussed in Vera Petch Morton, *Guidance for Women in Twelfth-Century Convents* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2003), 50-52.

<sup>27</sup> See C. H. Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism: Forms of Religious Life in Western Europe in the Middle Ages*, 3rd ed. (Harlow, England: Longman, 2001), 20-23.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 205. Lawrence explains that it generally applied to moving into a Cistercian or Carthusian house.

*Historiographical debates: interpreting twelfth-century changes*

It is likely that no one in modern historiography has provoked more research into twelfth-century women than the controversial French researcher, Georges Duby. With the publication of *Medieval Marriage: Two Models from Twelfth-Century France* in 1978, Duby attempted to synthesize two decades of his research and contain the century's changes in marriage, inheritance, and succession within digestible, neat models.<sup>29</sup> Duby claimed that the Church's definitions of marriage as both sacramental and permanent ultimately trumped secular concerns and requirements that marriage be flexible and even dissoluble.<sup>30</sup> The controversies stimulated by his two-model proposal remain the impetus for continuing debate, research, and question-asking. Duby's assertions expanded to include blinkered, rather one-dimensional, caricatures of twelfth-century women. In *Love and Marriage in the Middle Ages*, Georges Duby examines the role of women and men within the literary tradition of *fin amour* or courtly love. Effectively, he reduces the woman within the genre to "an illusion, a sort of veil or screen...or rather simply a medium, an intermediary, the mediator."<sup>31</sup> The original French title of the study, *Mâle Moyen Age*, perhaps better reflects the *mentalité* of its author than the reality of the period or its literature.

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<sup>29</sup> In the 1960s, his groundbreaking work in his regional history of the Maçonnais put his name and methodology on the academic map. His refinement of feudalism and its two forms further established his reputation as well as his work on the three orders of medieval society. Subsequent work on the medieval rural economy showed the diversity of his research and writing interests and skills. But perhaps it was his theory on medieval marriage which has become his most influential legacy.

<sup>30</sup> Georges Duby and Elborg Forster, *Medieval Marriage: Two Models from Twelfth-Century France* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978). Duby sets out the parameters for each model, lay versus ecclesiastical, on pages 3-22.

<sup>31</sup> Georges Duby, *Love and Marriage in the Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 62.



Still, Duby's ideas have undoubtedly worked as catalysts for cultural, economic, and feminist historians to examine the contemporary sources and judge whether his models and theories are credible or not. At the core of this two-model system are the two opposing forces of Church versus nobility, each trying to control and dictate the terms over marriage. Accordingly, each side had vastly differing objectives and requirements for marriage and divorce. On the one hand, the aristocracy wanted marriage to remain flexible. Family needs, rather than those of the couple, were to dictate marriage arrangements, while age, consanguinity, consent, and consummation would not solely be used to determine a legal, valid marriage. Undesirable or unproductive marriages—that is, marriages that had not produced a male heir—should be dissolvable. On the other hand, a canonically sound marriage required the free consent of the bride and groom, but divorce was theoretically unachievable and fidelity, monogamy, and exogamy were paramount. Within Duby's development of this two-marriage model, noblewomen become little more than window-dressing in a male-dominated society in which the strict primogeniture of sons left little room for mothers, daughters, wives, and widows to matter very much.<sup>32</sup> Because lineage was inherited through the male, that is agnatic, line, those women of good lineage were on the scene to produce more male heirs. Their daughters existed so that the pattern could be repeated: with good marriages, more male heirs could be produced, and so on. Sibling rivalry, too, assumed greater importance as primogeniture replaced the older Germanic system, which had treated children equally.<sup>33</sup> Fortunately for the purposes of investigation in this study, the life of Marie of Blois provides strong arguments that flesh out

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., See especially 10-11.

<sup>33</sup> David Herlihy, "The Making of the Medieval Family: Symmetry, Structure, and Sentiment," *Journal of Family History* 8 (1983): 124.

many of Duby's claims and thus reveal their inadequacy in explaining the functions, power, roles, and experiences of medieval noblewomen.<sup>34</sup>

Since Duby's two-model theory was stated in the late 1970s, legal, economic, and social historians have helped flesh out the intricacies of inheritance and land ownership for noblewomen using sources such as the Domesday Survey (1086), royal charters, and the *Rotuli de Dominabus et Pueris et Puellis de XII Comitatus* (1185). They provide useful albeit limited inroads into understanding actual practice. Complemented by other types of sources, ranging from tomb inscriptions to literary allusions to household accounts, the medieval evidence reveals how women held, inherited, and bequeathed land. Twelfth-century modifications in landholding and inheritance were affected by more than solely the primogeniture of sons and the growing link between land tenure and service. For women this association had a clear impact. Jennifer Ward notes that it was not common for women to acquire land through land tenure and service.<sup>35</sup> Ward further expounds upon this link, confirming that from the late eleventh century through the thirteenth century, most tenures were held in fee simple, or "tenure of land by a vassal of a lord in return for service, usually knight service."<sup>36</sup> While women were not barred from knight service, and even nunneries can be found fulfilling these obligations, the overwhelming number of tenures of this kind were held by men. As such, for the most part, Ward contends that women's landholding should be seen "in the context of the family" whereby a "woman's estates comprised her *maritagium* and later her jointure, both secured at marriage, her dower, and for

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<sup>34</sup> See the article by the French historian, Sara McDougall, "The Making of Marriage in Medieval France," *Journal of Family History* 38, no. 2 (2013): 103-121. McDougall explores Duby's two-marriage model in regards to Marie of Blois.

<sup>35</sup> J. C. Ward, *Women of the English Nobility and Gentry, 1066-1500* (Manchester University Press, 1995), 88.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

some women, her inheritance, and all these had implications for her family.”<sup>37</sup> All of these terms can be variously defined, but the simplest ways of interpreting them, sees *maritagium* as a marriage gift from the bride’s family; jointure as wealth held in common between a husband and wife; and dower as the bride’s portion—often one-third of the husband’s lands—nominated for her at the marriage.<sup>38</sup> In light of the differences in landholding, however, few scholars would deny that the primogeniture of sons did not affect daughters, but it did not mean that the latter were financially disenfranchised from natal family wealth.

For the women of Marie’s generation, questions of female inheritance and female succession to power were particularly relevant. Their significance directly affected Marie’s own family in the succession crisis following King Henry I’s death in 1135. Despite the multiple oaths taken by the king’s barons, all hell broke loose regarding the succession of his daughter, the Empress Matilda (d. 1167). As the king’s only surviving legitimate child, she held, what was for many, the only clear claim to the English Crown.<sup>39</sup> Others, however, disputed her right to rule as a woman, even as they questioned the strength of the oaths taken by the barons. One of

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 85.

<sup>38</sup> None of these types of holdings was firmly set or defined in the twelfth century. Janet S. Loengard provides a useful look at basic modifications to come in “What is a Nice (Thirteenth-Century) English Woman Doing in the King’s Courts?” in *The Ties That Bind Essays in Medieval British History in Honor of Barbara Hanawalt*, eds. Linda Elizabeth Mitchell, Katherine L. French, Douglas Biggs, and Barbara Hanawalt, (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2011), 69-70. *Maritagium*, according to the thirteenth-century legal expert, Bracton, denoted a gift that was associated with marriage. It was given by the wife’s family before or after the marriage ceremony and could be given to any of the permutations of their daughter, her husband, or their future heirs. Conor McCarthy, *Marriage in Medieval England: Law, Literature, and Practice*, (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2004), 56.

<sup>39</sup> Marjorie Chibnall provides a concise appraisal of Matilda within the context of church reform and the attitudes and relationships she had with leading churchmen. Marjorie Chibnall, “The Empress Matilda and Church Reform,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 38 (December 1988): 107–30. doi:10.2307/3678969.

Matilda's main supporters became her powerful, but illegitimate, half-brother, Robert of Gloucester (d. 1147).<sup>40</sup> In the end, the rhetoric against Empress Matilda included an anti-female response as well as insults against her husband, Geoffrey de Plantagenet. Rather ironically, the man to take the English Crown in the end, Stephen of Blois, had himself a right to that crown through his mother, Adela of Blois; was married to a woman, Matilda of Boulogne, who had inherited the county of Boulogne in her own right; and was the father of Marie, who similarly inherits the county of Boulogne in her own right. As things transpired, Marie was viewed as the full and undisputed heiress of her family's inheritance, and there does not ever seem to have been any controversy as a result of her gender.<sup>41</sup> After her father's death in 1154, the inheritance had decreased in size, but that reduction was in no way connected to Marie. Rather King Henry II had stripped away most of the English holdings from Marie's brother after Stephen's death. Marie's, mother, Matilda of Boulogne, had inherited the county wealth when her father, Eustace III, died in the mid-1120s. As a result, when Marie inherited the county in 1159, her rule over the county followed the precedent already established by her mother.

#### *Sources*

The material making this dissertation possible comes from a wide range of sources. Undoubtedly, with its emphasis upon narrative, the dominant type is the medieval chronicle and

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<sup>40</sup> See part of this history in John Hudson, *The Oxford History of the Laws of England Volume II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 352.

<sup>41</sup> Logic and cultural bias regarding female inheritance judged women suitable rulers of counties but not so for a kingdom. For a contemporary example of gender-based controversy in the kingdom of Portugal, see Theresa Earenflight, *Queenship in Medieval Europe* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 161.

its shorter counterpart, the annals.<sup>42</sup> A number of the chronicle writers are contemporary to Marie, others lived in the decades to come. Similarly, as we shall see, a distinction can be made between English and Continental writers. Most of the chroniclers have attachments to monastic houses, even if they are writing in the capacity of a chancellery scribe. No clear statement of prejudice distinguishes any of these categories—contemporary/later; home/foreign; monastic/secular—however some common characteristics within each grouping can be identified. Presented alongside chronicles and annals, family histories and family-generated documents diverge at times from the historical narratives to allow us to measure to what extent genealogists are hiding or exposing family misdemeanors. For example, a prominent source that discusses Marie and Matthew within the context of his family is the *Genealogia Comitum Flandriae*. Its messages emerge as somewhat mixed but ultimately frank about the controversies created by the marriage. Acting as a counterpoise to this material comes a somewhat problematic “unpublished MS. from the reign of King John” that J. H. Round transcribed for an article about one of Marie’s kinsmen, Faramus of Boulogne.<sup>43</sup> It is the one source that has tantalizingly dangled the possibility of a dispensation for the marriage while creating some much-desired self-promotion for Faramus himself.

In addition to these “histories” the dissertation relies heavily upon epistolary material, particularly in the correspondence of churchmen. For example, the correspondence of Pope Alexander III provides its own narrative in terms of his legal, political, and personal investment in the marriage between Marie and Matthew. Other ecclesiastical letter writers include Anselm,

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<sup>42</sup> While a theoretical distinction exists between what constitutes a chronicle and what constitutes annals, which is discussed below, in practice it is not always possible to differentiate between the two based upon the title given to the accounts.

<sup>43</sup> John Horace Round, “Faramus of Boulogne” *The Genealogist*. New Series, 12, 148 (1895).

Thomas Becket, and some of the local clergy of Northern France. Calling attention to their worth as literary productions, I examine many of them in Chapter Four and highlight how they function much like epistolary novels. Letters, tangentially related to the scandal and integral to a retelling of Boulogne's county history, come from Marie's former sister-in-law, Constance of France, in her correspondence to her brother, King Louis VII. The letters highlight Constance's own plight as a repudiated wife but also provide a frame for some of Pope Alexander's letters from the time. Her plight provides a useful context for reading the one extant letter from Marie that was also written to the French king. This single letter is used to discuss the real threat to her leadership, to uncover her attempts to tighten her bond to the French king, and to express the continuing antagonism she felt for her cousin, King Henry II.

Administrative sources such as English and Continental charters, seals, and deeds have fortunately survived and offer snapshots of the business of administrative life. They provide more than the bare bones of daily transactions. Notably, they open potential lenses to ways in which Marie and others identified themselves with titles and familial associations (e.g. the daughter of King Stephen), the way other political and spiritual leaders identified them (e.g. Matthew as the Count of Boulogne or simply the son of the Count of Flanders), as well as their links with the wider community, discernible in the witness lists. Finally, due to the nature of Marie's religious vocation, a number of monastic documents are used. Frustratingly sparse, they do, however, flesh out some potential answers about the early and latter parts of Marie's life. Similarly, monastic charters and cartularies record donations, endowments, and foundations that are fundamental to the narrative itself.

The source material for this dissertation, however, extends beyond these documents and material sources. Contemporary imagery and insights come from literary sources and,

undoubtedly, their contributions add layers of possibility and depth to the main areas of examination within this study. As such, in addition to the sources named above, I have looked to a number of writers for the context that they provide, and the one whose contribution has been most significant is the twelfth-century writer, Marie de France. Her efficient delivery of social and cultural images can be seen in her collection of *lais*.<sup>44</sup> Two of Marie's *lais*, *Fresne* and *Eliduc*, have been mined for their commentary upon women in the context of tragedy and choice, religious and secular vows, and power and position. Similarly, the late twelfth-century romance, *Cligès*, by Chrétien de Troyes focuses our attention upon enclosure, forced marriage, and female power and restraint. Recognizing the value of hagiographical narratives for what they can provide about social and cultural life as well as about a particular person's legacy and reputation, I use *The Life of Christina of Markyate* to delve into the spiritual and practical implications of ending a legally contracted marriage. Finally, the collections of miracles celebrating *Notre Dame*—the Virgin Mary—shape my discussions of the practical and spiritual components of the religious enclosure. I examine stories from the *Miracles* collections of two writers in particular, Caesarius of Heisterbach and Gautier de Coinci, to discuss the enclosure's guardians and the culture surrounding the cloister.

### *Methodologies*

Medieval chroniclers, annalists, and genealogists from England and the Continent made reference to Marie's marriage to Matthew of Flanders and/or to their time as the county leaders of Boulogne. Many of these writers were contemporary to the events, while others lived in the

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<sup>44</sup> For a presentation of Marie's literary innovations in her *lai* collections, see Robert Hanning and Joan Ferrante, trans., *The Lais of Marie de France* (Durham, NC: The Labyrinth Press, 1978), 10-11 and Logan E. Whalen, *Marie de France and the Poetics of Memory* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 2008), 63.

centuries after. Several contemporary English writers, however, completely ignored the sensation. The majority of the writers, who address the issue, provided a concise account, adding brief commentaries of their own. While a few chose to provide the scantest of details, others included their own interpretations of the consequences—physical, emotional, and spiritual—attached to the scandal. This dissertation does not seek to answer *why* the marriage was included in these medieval histories but rather *how* a particular medieval writer’s personal narratives “emplot” the events of the marriage, that is, how he (the masculine pronoun is specifically chosen in this instance) imposed his interpretation and explanation onto the “facts” or real history, thereby creating a metahistory of the event. Such an approach for handling the medieval (and even antiquarian and modern) narratives is largely based upon the work of Hayden White. In his 1973 article, “Interpretation in History,” White reacts to the major nineteenth-century debates sparked by Ranke’s insistence upon the “scientific rigor of history.”<sup>45</sup> Reading like a “Who’s Who” of nineteenth-century intellectual history, White’s article parades the “four major theorists of historiography [who] rejected the myth of objectivity prevailing among Ranke’s followers.”<sup>46</sup> Setting out the arguments of these four, Hegel, Droysen, Nietzsche, and Croce, White succinctly documents how each of them classified the types of interpretations that historians have generated.<sup>47</sup> They, like White, refused to accept Ranke’s attempts to force history to conform to the exigencies and limitations imposed by science.

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<sup>45</sup> Hayden White, “Interpretation in History,” *New Literary History: A Journal of Theory and Interpretation* 4, no. 2 (1973): 283.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. This exercise produces an intriguing quaternary model from each theorist, ranging from Hegel’s Reflective historiography composed of Universal, Pragmatic, Critical, and Conceptual to Droysen’s four modes of Causal, Conditional, Psychological, and Ethical. While Nietzsche argued for the Monumental, Antiquarian, Critical, and Superhistorical approaches, Croce advocated the Romantic, Idealist, Positivist, and Critical.



The continued distillations by modern theorists have resolved the “problem of history’s epistemological status in two ways.”<sup>48</sup> One group has largely taken a positivistic view, arguing that “historians explain past events only insofar as they succeed in identifying the laws of causation governing the processes in which the events occur.”<sup>49</sup> The other group—whose perspective is adopted for the interpretation of sources in this dissertation—espoused a “more literary tack” where a narrativist approach could unearth “the story which lies buried within or behind the events and [tell] it in a way that an ordinarily educated man [or woman] would understand.”<sup>50</sup> Moving ever closer to his own model of emplotment, White next examines the more radical views of those he labels “critics of historiography as a discipline” who argue that historical accounts are *nothing but interpretations*.<sup>51</sup> Their twentieth-century front man, Claude Lévi-Strauss, viewed the historian as the channel by which historical “facts” were constituted and selected, then subjected to the imposition of verbal structure, never resulting in “History” but always “history-for...history written in the interest of some infra-scientific aim or vision.”<sup>52</sup>

Such an indispensable role for the historian as narrator ties in with the conceptions propounded by Northrop Frye and R. G. Collingwood, and here represents a bridge in theme and approach to those of Hayden White himself. Frye and Collingwood assigned the function of “explanation” to the historian whereby Frye could point to the romantic, comic, and tragic historical myths produced by the historian. White’s extension of Frye’s work in particular led him to insist that a historian’s interpretation could be seen as endowing the sequence of events

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 286.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> White’s emphasis. Ibid., 287.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 288.

with a plot-structure. Figuring history as a “story of a particular kind,” the historian then “emplots the story as a Tragedy, a Comedy, or a Romance.” To these three modes of emplotment, White later adds Satire.<sup>53</sup>

Not abandoning these modes of emplotment, White has since 1973 expanded and updated his discourse on interpretation in historiography. In his book, *The Content of the Form* (1987), emplotment continues to define how historians explain and interpret the real history and events of their stories. White looks at the relationship in the West between historiography and literature in which the perceived difference between the two is based upon what are “real” versus “imaginary” events.<sup>54</sup> He develops this discussion into a frank acknowledgement of the shared attributes of narrative historiography, literature, and myth that signify “distillates of the historical experience of a people, a group, a culture.”<sup>55</sup> By recognizing this coalescence of historiography, literature, and myth, I concentrate less attention on the “factual” elements in the sources and focus more attention on the motives and the resulting interpretation of the writers who impose themselves onto the template of Marie’s story.

Finally, my repeated use of the word “story,” especially in reference to Marie’s life requires some explanation itself, and Paul Ricoeur’s examination of the roles and functions assumed by the historian may facilitate it. Ricoeur’s ideas form part of White’s examination of how a chronicle becomes a story. For the purposes of this dissertation, Ricoeur’s focus upon plot within historical narrative in many ways fleshes out my reliance upon the word “story.” He names two dimensions to the narrative: chronological and non-chronological. The former, “the

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 307.

<sup>54</sup> Hayden White, *The Content of Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore; London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 44.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 44-45.

episodic dimension, characterizes the story made out of events;” the latter, the configurational dimension controls how the “plot construes significant wholes out of scattered events.”<sup>56</sup> According to Ricoeur: “The plot...places us at the crossing point of temporality and narrativity: to be historical, an event must be more than a singular occurrence, a unique happening. It receives its definition from its contribution to the development of a plot.”<sup>57</sup> For White, and crucial to my approach, the event cannot “be inserted into a story wherever the writer wishes.”<sup>58</sup> Instead that event must develop the larger plot. With this limit in mind, a basic understanding of plot and its component parts is elemental to the stories being framed by the medieval writers: in essence, the individual parts are in many ways as noteworthy as the whole.

While White’s theories of emplotment work well for the narratives regarding Marie’s story, they do not adequately account for the silence that resonates within some of the contemporary chroniclers in regards to her and her marriage to Matthew. In an effort to draw attention to this void, I look to the work of the Marxist theorist, Pierre Macherey. His emphasis upon the unspoken, or *le non-dit*, provides a useful platform for analyzing textual silences. According to Macherey, “Either all around or in its wake the explicit requires the implicit: for in order to say anything, there are other things *which must not be said*.”<sup>59</sup> That is, for anything to be said, others things must be left unsaid. Similarly, the *non-dit* itself accentuates through omission, and such voids must themselves be questioned and analyzed. Macherey, in prefacing the

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<sup>56</sup> Paul Ricoeur, “Narrative Time,” *Critical Inquiry* 7, no. 1 (1980): 171. Cited in White, *Content of Form*, 51.

<sup>57</sup> Ricoeur, “Narrative Time,” 178. Cited in White, *Content of Form*, 51.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>59</sup> Pierre Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production*, trans. Geoffrey Wall (London: Routledge, Kegan, and Paul, 1978), 85. “L’explicite veut un implicite, tout autour ou a sa suite; car pour parvenir à dire quelque chose, il y en a d’autres *qu’il ne faut pas dire*.” P. Macherey, *Pour Une Théorie De La Production Littéraire* (Paris: F. Maspero), 183.

statement above, pinpoints the necessity of the unspoken, “That is why it seems useful and legitimate to ask of every production what it tacitly implies, what it does not say.”<sup>60</sup> The application of this task fits well when questioning why some medieval writers, who were contemporary to Marie and Matthew, wrote about Henry II, Romsey Abbey, the leadership of Boulogne and/or the dispute between its count and the English Crown, yet remained silent on the topic of the marriage itself. In one case, two chroniclers associated with Saint Albans Abbey treated the marriage in contradictory ways: the contemporary omitted it, while his successor not only included it but massaged and embellished the details with his own interpretations and commentary, even finding the means for self-aggrandizement in his choice of anecdotes and vocabulary.<sup>61</sup> With the absences and unspoken in mind, discussion will form around medieval writers who would be expected to include an account of the marriage but apparently chose or were encouraged not to include any reference to the union between Abbess Marie and the second son of the Count of Flanders.

This dissertation simultaneously employs both a macro and micro-historical view of the context and sources. That is, it seeks to re-create Marie’s story as a microhistory set within the context of the larger socio-political narrative. In an attempt to define microhistory, I look to the characteristics set out in “Historians Who Love Too Much: Reflections on Microhistory and Biography.”<sup>62</sup> Stroking the lock of Noah Webster’s hair in Amherst College Library provoked Jill Lepore’s reflective, thoughtful discussion of how, if possible, to differentiate between

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<sup>60</sup> “C’est pourquoi il semble bénéfique, et légitime, de se demander à propos de toute production ce qu’elle implique tacitement : sans le dire.” Machery, *Pour Une Théorie*, 184.

<sup>61</sup> See Chapter Four below.

<sup>62</sup> Jill Lepore, “Special Essays - Historians Who Love Too Much: Reflections on Microhistory and Biography,” *Journal of American History* 88, no. 1 (2001): 129-144.

biography, a well-known, popular genre of nonfiction, and microhistory, a story about a smaller something or less important someone that is fit into its larger context. Part of her exercise looks back at the genre and the authors who have produced innovative works within it.

In terms of microhistory, Carlo Ginzburg trailblazed in 1976 with his study of a Renaissance Italian miller, Menocchio, a hard-working man with heretical views.<sup>63</sup> Not a subject generally seen as researchable nor one as palatable to the lay reader, Ginzburg's microhistory, *The Cheese and the Worms*, accomplished both. It was made possible by trial records from two separate cases against the miller. Further documentary evidence was found to shed light upon his business, family, and reading preferences. Ginzburg openly admits how lucky his find was and how rare the opportunity exists "to reconstruct a fragment of what is usually called 'the culture of the lower classes.'"<sup>64</sup> This recognition of Menocchio's relative unimportance only partially explains why Ginzburg's study was considered microhistory and not biography. In order to explore this question more thoroughly, Lepore also examines other well-known microhistories and their scholar-authors such as Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, Robert Darnton, and Natalie Zemon Davis.<sup>65</sup> Such works caught the attention not solely of the academic world but also more generally that of the reading public.

Lepore gleaned a number of potential criteria from her reflective exercise for differentiating between the biography and microhistory. While certain characteristics are shared between the writers of each genre, the microhistorian generally takes a wider view of their

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<sup>63</sup> C. Ginzburg, J. Tedeschi, and A. C. Tedeschi, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980).

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, xiii-xiv.

<sup>65</sup> Lepore, "Historians Who Love Too Much," 132.

subject.<sup>66</sup> This criterion is visible in many of the subtitles of the works named above. For example, Ginzburg subtitled his work, *The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller*. In his awareness of the cultural substance from which the miller must be constructed, Ginzburg, like other microhistorians, may be viewed as “keen to evoke a period, a *mentalité*, a problem” that requires attention to the social and cultural histories running alongside the main narrative.<sup>67</sup> This narrative need not be confined to telling the life story of an individual, however, as evident in Robert Darnton’s *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History*.<sup>68</sup> Not mentioned by Lepore but working similarly in support of this criterion is Dava Sobel’s study, *Longitude*, where the scientific quest shares the stage with the human subject—John Harrison—of the book’s subtitle, *The True Story of a Lone Genius Who Solved the Greatest Scientific Problem of His Time*.<sup>69</sup> The genre thus stretches to accommodate these more focused studies that still manage to include the larger social and cultural landscape surrounding their subject.

Finally, and most relevant to my treatment of Marie of Blois-Boulogne is Lepore’s teasing out of intentions and motives within the genre. She returns to the original contrast between biography and microhistory, writing,

If biography is largely founded on a belief in the singularity and significance of an individual's life and his contribution to history, microhistory is founded upon almost the

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<sup>66</sup> Lepore never fully achieves a definition for each genre that would satisfy everyone; however, she does arrive at a good general statement to help differentiate their respective aims: “[Not] all biographers but most microhistorians try to answer important historical—and historiographical—questions, even if their arguments, slippery as eels, are difficult to fish out of the oceans of story (as anyone who has tried teaching those books knows only too well.” *Ibid.*, 133.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> R. Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York: Basic Books, 1984).

<sup>69</sup> Dava Sobel, *Longitude: The True Story of a Lone Genius Who Solved the Greatest Scientific Problem of His Time* (New York: Walker Publishing, 1995).

opposite assumption: however singular a person's life may be, the value of examining it lies not in its uniqueness, but in its exemplariness, in how that individual's life serves as an allegory for broader issues affecting the culture as a whole.... If the subjects of microhistories, however extraordinary, are not valued for their unique contributions to history, they are often people whose incompletely documented lives point historians toward a single question shrouded in mystery....<sup>70</sup>

Lepore's observations beg commentary about how this dissertation puts this approach into practice. Marie's life was not utterly unique; however, it cannot be considered strictly conventional either: other women and men left religious vocations to marry, leaving themselves open to potentially ignominious legacies. Nevertheless the act of departing the monastery and marrying (in itself considered apostasy) was not the norm: the majority of religious remained vowed and resident in a religious house for the duration of their lives. Similarly, most royal daughters represented important potential marriage partners but most did not find themselves as the sole heiresses of their family's landed wealth. Finally, while some religious did in fact live in more than one religious house during their lifetimes, few moved in and out of five different houses. Nevertheless, it is not Marie's veiled, married, or social status that justifies this study. Rather its significance emerges when the events of Marie's life—before, during, and after the scandal—can be viewed against the backdrop of the Anglo-Norman world. In other words, its worth emerges as the micro is extracted from the macro and a re-assembling of the *mentalité* that surrounded Marie can be formed. This study abounds with problems and mysteries, some of which translate into difficult and potentially impossible-to-answer questions: Did Marie willingly marry Matthew? What were the practicalities involved when an abbess left her nuns and nunnery? Did society at large—that is, non-religious/non-clerical people—consider the marriage a scandal? And ultimately, what value do the individual emplotments of Marie's hold in our

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<sup>70</sup> Lepore, "Historians Who Love Too Much," 133.

understanding of the social (gender and status), cultural (religion and literature), and economic (inheritance) histories of the Anglo-Norman world and of the emplotters themselves?

In order to respond to these questions; to create a microhistory for Marie's world; and to analyze the varied emplotments of Marie, the following chapters divide thematically based upon much of the context provided in this introduction. Chapter One discusses the complex interplay between free consent and child oblation. The overarching themes of canon law, parental power, and personal ambition inform this discussion as does the element of choice. Further investigation forces us to juxtapose the disparity between the choices made for girls by parents and others with the choices that the women made for themselves later in life as adults. These themes carry through into the Chapter Two; although its emphasis shifts to examine the physical space and cultural ideology of enclosure. As such, this chapter seeks to unravel some of the veil's practical and symbolic potential and its ability to provide careers for women of high status. The chapter similarly explores the architectural space of the religious house and the efforts by its human and divine guardians to protect its inmates. The enclosure's ambiguous meanings are further explored with regard to women like Ela, the Countess of Salisbury, and continue through discussions of the idyllic symbolism of the enclosed garden, or *hortus conclusus*. Using the fictional character, Fenice, from Chrétien de Troyes's *Cligès*, I move away from the religious enclosure to examine the parallels that emerge from the notion of secular enclosure. As a whole, the chapter reveals the complexities involved in the move to enforce the strict enclosure of religious women and the resulting gendered anxieties that emerge.

The case studies in this dissertation enable the direction that Chapter Three takes, as it veers slightly but not fully away from the religious life to emphasize the sacrament of marriage as realized in the twelfth century. The mid-twelfth century in particular represented a time of



enormous legal and cultural changes that influenced the interpretations and practice of marital unions. Emphasis upon the indissolubility of marriage required those who wanted out of a marriage to employ increasingly innovative ways to do so. Regardless of the prohibitions against divorce, medieval women and men did leave marriages with and without legal sanction. This chapter consequently presents a number of examples from contemporary literature and history to demonstrate how marriages ended. In addition to the dissolution of Marie's marriage to Matthew, other examples involve Constance of France and characters from the lai, *Eliduc*, and introduce repudiation, separation, remarriage, and widowhood into the discussion. Using these women alongside the heroine, Christina, from the *Life of Christina of Markyate* enables us to explore further the legal, practical, and spiritual facets to ending a marital union.

To conclude our contextualizing of Marie's world, Chapter Four, the final body chapter, reverses the direction of our gaze, encouraging us to move beyond the subjects of the medieval sources to the creators of the sources. We interrogate and scrutinize their vocabulary, emphases, and silences to determine how they chose to frame their interpreted historical narratives. This chapter relies upon Hayden White's quaternary approach for understanding the modes of emplotment—Romance, Comedy, Tragedy, and Satire—and, to a lesser extent, upon the work of the French theorist, Pierre Machery for his work on the *non-dit*.

In all of the following chapters, the role played by language is a crucial one, and the significance of word choice becomes particularly obvious in Chapter Four. Throughout the dissertation, the basic format that I have followed presents original Latin or Old French in a footnote and the English translation in the body of the text. At times, I have deviated from this formula when using common words and phrases, such as *sponsa Christi*, when relying upon the original language to emphasize a particular point, such as *eligire* [to choose], and when framing

the chapter titles. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own. In translating from the chronicles, letters, and other sources, my approach has been to present a translation that reflects the original meaning and is still readable and pleasant-sounding to the modern reader.

CHAPTER ONE—*UT TE AB INFANTIA SPONSAM SIBI ELIGERET*: RELIGIOUS STATUS  
AND IDEALIZED IDENTITIES<sup>1</sup>

Fear mixed with simmering reproach feature in the first of two letters written by the Archbishop of Canterbury to a nun at Wilton Abbey in the early 1090s. In the archbishop's estimation, the woman's misguided choices left her teetering on the brink of damnation: she had chosen to leave the nunnery in order to marry one of the new lords of the North of England. By returning to the enclosure, veil, and habit, however, the nun could redeem herself and avoid the scandal that was brewing because of her departure. Despite his censure and warning, the nun chose not to return. In a second letter, the churchman's tone darkened considerably, as he condemned the former nun more forcefully for sinking ever deeper into her sin and further insulting her heavenly bridegroom. In one of his more kindhearted moments, nevertheless, the archbishop reminded the veiled nun that she was chosen as Christ's bride from her infancy. As such, in the eyes of the archbishop, the religious identity she assumed during her childhood should see her through until death.

The woman in question was Gunnhildr (*circa* mid-1060s to early 1100s), a daughter of the last Anglo-Saxon king, Harold Godwinson (d. 1066). After residing at Wilton Abbey, a ninth-century foundation in the royal city of Winchester, for the majority of her life, she left to marry one of the Conqueror's men who had been made Lord of Richmond. Gunnhildr's

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<sup>1</sup> "That from your infancy he chose you as his bride" As translated in Rhona Beare, "Anselm's Letters to Gunhild, Daughter of King Harold," *Prudentia* 28, no. 2 (1996), 31. Sancti Anselmi, *Sancti Anselmi Cantuariensis Archiepiscopi Opera Omnia*, ed. F.S. Schmitt, (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1949), 4:47 letter 169.

correspondent was Anselm of Bec (d. 1109), recently installed as the Archbishop of Canterbury (r. 1093-1109). A number of concerns, visible in the letters and obvious from Gunnhildr's actions, parallel similar ones in the life of Marie of Blois. For example, an adult nun leaves her convent to marry; a churchman opposes her departure and subsequent marriage; and a grown woman abandons the religious status of her childhood. In order then to discuss the avenues to religious status in a young girl's life, this first chapter examines the complex interplay between childhood and choice. It begins with Gunnhildr and the decisions that shaped her future in the closing decade of the eleventh century.

For both Gunnhildr and Marie, religious identity likely began with the practice of child oblation. The well-known Christian concept of oblation or sacrifice assumed a different component as a parent sacrificed a child to the service of God. In order to understand child oblation then, it is necessary to situate it within the larger examination of medieval parental power, and thence to ascertain what it meant to become a *sponsa Christi* as a result of such parental choice. The chapter provides a presentation of child oblation, explaining the medieval practice and its historical and scriptural bases. Part of this discussion covers the legal efforts that were intended to codify the practice and thus minimize a number of its abuses. In contrast to this more clinical approach to understanding religious identity for medieval women, the discussion moves on to the idealized *sponsa Christi*. There was no lack of contemporary commentary about who and what she was, and a variety of literary and theological writings envisaged her, both physically and spiritually. Modelled and refashioned over time, inspiration came from both the Old and New Testaments of the Bible. The sensual and amorous scriptures of the Song of Songs provided the basis for the spiritual marriage between the *monialis* or nun and her heavenly bridegroom. Furthermore the cult of Mary or Marianism drew from the Gospel accounts of

Jesus's mother, exalting and extolling her virtues. In time the Blessed Virgin Mary was shaped into the archetypal ideal *sponsa Christi*.

Pulling together then the perfect bride of Christ and the child oblate, we also examine the later experiences of another royal daughter, Mary of Woodstock (d. 1332). Regardless of the controversy and misgivings that child oblation provoked—including objections from unenthusiastic monastic leaders about receiving children into their houses—and the legal efforts to proscribe it, the practice of child oblation did continue after the twelfth century. Some religious house leaders recruited heavily to attract the children of the powerful. This was the experience for the royal daughter, Mary of Woodstock, who received the veil at Amesbury Abbey at a young age. The role that she was expected to step into demanded much of her, particularly in reference to modesty, devotion, and obedience. During and after Mary's life, however, she would be accused of failing to adhere to these expectations, for allegations of immodesty were made in medieval and later narratives about her life as an adult nun. This not unique association between child oblation and worldly grown-up choices forms a part of our discussion of Aelred of Rievaulx's "Nun of Watton" story. The controversy over whether a child oblate could ever claim a strong sense of vocation influences our discussion of Mary of Woodstock. A caution about the sources nevertheless is offered in light of her family's debt problems and her brother, Edward II's (d. 1327) unsuccessful and abbreviated reign. Mary similarly serves as a litmus test to determine whether the legal efforts to require free consent in religious vowing—that represent a legal hallmark of the mid-twelfth century—had succeeded in shaping the practice by the 1280s when Mary became a child oblate.

While Mary enjoyed the company of her large family both inside and outside the nunnery, both Gunnhildr and Marie found themselves effectively orphaned by circumstances.

This *topos* of the lone or orphaned girl—still resonant in our own popular culture—shaped the plot and direction of many medieval stories, including a *lai* by one of the twelfth century’s best known writers, Marie de France. The less-than-straightforward story, *Fresne*, highlights many of this chapter’s themes. As a contemporary literary work, it fleshes out some of the questions regarding the pitfalls of parental power; the cultural, social, and legal complexities of vows; and the often nebulous separation between religious and secular status. *Fresne*’s own indeterminate social standing informs our discussion of the quasi-status affecting to one extent or another all of the medieval women in this dissertation. This confusion, as becomes evident from the case studies and discussion, was often a product of the conflict between the choices made for girls and the choices they made for themselves later in life. Thus drawing together the experiences of Gunnhildr, Mary of Woodstock, Marie of Blois, and the fictional character *Fresne*, I seek to demonstrate how the taking on of religious identity, as a *sponsa Christi*, did not represent a uniform or even necessarily permanent status as envisaged and promoted by reformers and theologians. Rather a fluidity of identity operates in each of these case studies, combining with individual choice to create different and reimagined versions of these women.

*You were chosen from your infancy*

Gunnhildr, a royal daughter of a defeated king, represents a powerful example of the potential conflict between the status chosen for a girl during her childhood and the identity and status she might choose later in life. The major sources that recount Gunnhildr’s controversial choices come in two letters written by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Anselm of Bec. In addition to providing a perspective on Gunnhildr’s story, the letters also show a churchman wrestling to define contemporary notions of religious status. His tenure as the primate of England had begun less than thirty years after the initial Norman invasion, and the repercussions of that military and

political takeover still affected the fabric of daily life throughout the country. Perhaps few people could have imagined that English monasticism would become a hostage of the Conquest, and yet, that is exactly what happened as a result of the power struggle between King Harold Godwinson and William of Normandy (d. 1087). The turbulence and violence of the Conquest in 1066, and the harrying that followed, prompted families to see the nunnery as a place of refuge for girls and women. This exiling of sorts was well-documented by a number of biographers and chroniclers, who describe the brutality of the Norman invaders and the reactions it provoked. For example, the early twelfth-century monk and biographer, Eadmer, explained,

When the great Duke William first conquered this land, many of his men...began to do violence not only to the possession of the conquered but also where opportunity offered to their women, married and unmarried alike, with shameful licentiousness. There upon a number of women anticipating this and fearing for their own virtue betook themselves to convents of Sisters and taking the veil protected themselves in their company from such infamy.<sup>2</sup>

In Eadmer's description we find that women themselves sought the refuge of the nunnery and took the veil as added insurance against physical and sexual violence. Regardless of whose decision it was, inevitably at some point, questions would be asked about the status of these women: who should be required to stay, who should be obliged to leave, and who should make these choices? The catalyst for addressing these questions came as a result of the more practical one regarding the marriageability of veiled girls and women who were putatively off-limits.

The task of confronting these issues fell upon Anselm's predecessor, Archbishop of Canterbury, Lanfranc (r. 1070-1089). One documented occasion came in the decade after the

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<sup>2</sup> Eadmer, *Eadmer's History of Recent Events in England*, trans. Geoffrey Bosanquet (London: Cresset Press, 1964), 129.

Battle of Hastings, when Lanfranc received a letter from Bishop G., soliciting guidance regarding women in his diocese.<sup>3</sup> Lanfranc succinctly instructed him,

Nuns...who have been neither professed nor presented at the altar are to be sent away at once without change of status, until their desire to remain in religion is examined more carefully. As to those who as you tell me fled to a monastery not for love of the religious life but for fear of the French, if they can prove that this was so by the unambiguous witness of nuns better than they, let them be granted unrestricted leave to depart. This is the king's policy and our own.<sup>4</sup>

Lanfranc considered political and practical factors alongside theological ones. Fearful of overstating the Norman-induced destruction but unable to ignore it, he used the war to explain why some girls and women took refuge in a nunnery. Just as significantly, he could not overlook the role that marriage would play in the new Anglo-Norman realm. If suitable noble Anglo-Saxon women were available, then his objection to such marital alliances could be fraught with diplomatic and practical problems. Asserting that his pronouncement had been vetted by King William himself, Lanfranc confirmed that he had not created this formula on his own. In a separate letter, the archbishop proffered a litmus test to the Bishop of Durham for determining religious status. In his letter, the archbishop relied upon a precedent from the seventh-century Sixth Council of Toledo to determine status as secular or religious based upon public acknowledgement of one's clothing. Lanfranc wrote, "The holy Fathers do not permit those who wear the monastic habit for several days in public to return subsequently to secular life *on any*

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<sup>3</sup>Archbishop of Canterbury Lanfranc, V. Helen Clover, and Margaret T. Gibson eds., *The Letters of Lanfranc, Archbishop of Canterbury* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 166-167. The editors Clover and Gibson date this letter within a twelve-year span from 1077 through 1089. There is some controversy as to the identity of Bishop G. Clover and Gibson named him as Gundulf, bishop of Rochester, while Elisabeth van Houts says that they have "wrongly identified" him and he was actually Bishop Geoffrey of Coutances. Elisabeth M. C. van Houts, *The Normans in Europe* (Manchester University Press, 2000), 129. Richard Sharpe presents a full discussion of the identity debate in Richard Sharpe, "King Harold's Daughter," in *The Haskins Society Journal: Studies in Medieval History* 19 (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2008), 15.

<sup>4</sup> Lanfranc, *Letters*, 166-167.



*pretext.*”<sup>5</sup> Some thirty years after the fact, Anselm applied a similar, but not verbatim, interpretation of the interplay between religious status and monastic habit.

Anselm’s fundamentalist approach toward spiritual identity more than once provoked frustration and conflict from the new Norman monarchs of England. When confronting politically sensitive issues, the archbishop worked to uphold and refine theological regulations in accordance with the reform efforts as well as to minimize public scandal. As it transpired, Anselm wrestled with two high-profile cases within the first seven years of his archiepiscopacy; both involved royal daughters: Gunnhildr, daughter of King Harold, as we have already seen, and her fellow Wilton Abbey resident, Matilda (d. 1118), daughter of King Malcolm and Queen Margaret of Scotland. Our interest is predominantly with Gunnhildr, whose dramatic departure from Wilton Abbey is less well known and studied than Matilda’s similar departure from that house.

Anselm wrote at least two letters to Gunnhildr.<sup>6</sup> Evident in both is his resolve to avoid scandal, primarily to safeguard against individual and communal damnation.<sup>7</sup> Inherent to his arguments and to the medieval notion of scandal was another public concern, *infamia*, whose

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<sup>5</sup> Archbishop of Canterbury Lanfranc, V. Helen Clover, and Margaret T. Gibson, *The Letters of Lanfranc, Archbishop of Canterbury* (Oxford: Clarendon Press; New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 143. Emphasis my own.

<sup>6</sup> Generally referred to as Letter 168 and Letter 169. In addition to Anselm’s letters to Gunnhildr, the other documentary evidence about Gunnhildr’s time as a nun at Wilton Abbey appears in William of Malmesbury’s *Vita Wulfstani*. This *Life* of the eleventh-century bishop of Worcester recounts a miracle when Gunnhildr was cured of an eye affliction and offers an additional look at Wilton Abbey and its approach to receiving visitors to its precincts.

<sup>7</sup> Medieval scandal involved more than public outrage over a person’s transgressions. The Latin, *scandalum*, was derived from the Greek *σκάνδαλον* and retained the same meaning that can be found in the New Testament. It turned upon whether one’s misconduct had caused a moral lapse in others. As such signified what we might call a stumbling block by effecting more serious spiritual harm than mere wrongdoing.

stigma resulted from the “public knowledge that a person had behaved disgracefully.”<sup>8</sup> Sexual misconduct or even its suggestion constituted a major component of both infamy and scandal, and when a religious man or woman threatened their spiritual status by engaging in carnal acts, the medieval Church—often through the efforts of churchmen writing letters—attempted to control the damage. Anselm’s interventions took into account the prohibitions in both tradition and law against the abduction and/or marrying of a nun. Such an offense carried with it penalties and punishments that never fully eradicated the crime. Worse still were those unions in which the nun had been complicit.

Anselm’s first letter was probably written in December 1093, the same month and year as his candidacy, and addressed to a woman whom Anselm describes as his sister and daughter.<sup>9</sup> The intent of the letters is to chastise a runaway nun for her departure from the nunnery to marry. This nun was Gunnhildr who left Wilton Abbey to marry the Lord of Richmond, Alan Rufus (d. ca. 1093). On a more personal level, they convey some details about the friendship and past history of the correspondents. Anselm and Gunnhildr had met at least once and spoken together. His own itinerary for 1093 shows he was in Winchester for Easter (14 April) of that year, providing an opportunity when the two of them could have met at Gunnhildr’s nunnery of Wilton and spoken in person.<sup>10</sup> The archbishop refers to Gunnhildr’s previous correspondence as “the sweetest letters” and then credits himself with abundant perspicacity, “I could recognize that

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<sup>8</sup> James Brundage, “Legal Ethics: A Medieval Ghost Story,” in R. M. Karras, J. Kaye, and E. A. Matter, eds., *Law and the Illicit in Medieval Europe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 52.

<sup>9</sup> André Wilmart, “La destinataire de la lettre de S. Anselme sur l’état et les voeux de religion” *Revue Benedictine*, 37, (1926): 331-334 and “Une lettre inédite de S. Anselm à une moniale inconstante.” *Revue Benedictine*, 40, (1928): 319-332.

<sup>10</sup> Walter Fröhlich, *The Letters of Saint Anselm of Canterbury* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1990), 1:337.

you did not mean to reject the religious life, the habit of which you wore; I hoped that you would behave as you promised in accordance with God's will."<sup>11</sup> What we can ascertain directly from the letters about Gunnhildr as a person is not insubstantial. Details and descriptions as sumptuous as those in an epistolary novel, Anselm's letters generously furnish details about Gunnhildr's admission into the religious life, lineage as Harold's daughter, abbatial ambitions for the future, and characteristics as a person. The insinuation is that Gunnhildr was a child oblate or at least young girl upon her entrance into religion.<sup>12</sup> Anselm moreover calls her the daughter of a king and queen, and Gunnhildr is said to have been promised an abbacy that never materialized. The implication of warmth is evident, and Anselm seems to have genuinely admired her and enjoyed their time together. In the first letter, he bemoans the fact that she has exchanged her nunnery, her religious habit, and Wessex for a carnal relationship, "worldly clothes," and the North. In the second letter, Anselm revels in the turn of events, noting that Gunnhildr's lover/husband Alan Rufus died soon after the elopement. Anselm, convinced that she is no longer a virgin, offers her the alternative of being Christ's *chaste* bride.

Narrowing down to his intended message, the archbishop takes up one of his favorite themes: representations of the divine union between a bride of God and the heavenly

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<sup>11</sup> "*Dulcissimas litteras*" in Anselm *Sancti Anselmi*, 47; Beare, "Anselm's Letters to Gunhild," 31.

<sup>12</sup> Gunnhildr received the matronymic, Gunnhildr, in honor of her aunt, one of Harold's three sisters—Gytha (or Eadgyth, later known as Queen Edith), Gunnhildr, and Aelfgifu. Gunnhildr, sister to Harold, has been linked to the religious life, although she apparently never lived in a convent. A small lead plaque given to the church of Saint Donatius in Bruges describes how she had taken "a vow of chastity and refused marriage to many noble princes." Whether it was this family connection which encouraged placing the niece, the younger Gunnhildr, into Wilton can only be proposed as a possibility. See Emma Mason, *The House of Godwine* (London: Hambledon and London, 2003), 183, and Frank Barlow, *The Godwins: The Rise and Fall of a Noble Dynasty* (Harlow: Longman, 2002), 120.

bridegroom. Moving from analogy to analogy between secular and spiritual marriage, Anselm highlights the pleasures of the flesh for Gunnhildr, contrasting a man's embraces with those of Christ. His constant allusions to her spiritual union with the divine leave no doubt that Anselm viewed Gunnhildr as a fully pledged *sponsa Christi*. The next point that Anselm makes is perhaps one of the most important for our purposes:

For it is impossible that you can be saved in any way unless you return to the habit and intention which you have cast aside. For although you were not consecrated by a bishop and did not make a profession in his presence, yet this alone is a manifest and undeniable profession, that you have, publicly and in private, worn the habit of the holy intention, through which, in the sight of everyone, you have declared yourself dedicated to God, just as much as if you had made your profession.<sup>13</sup>

Anselm clarifies Gunnhildr's status as a religious woman based solely upon her habit and her intention at the time of wearing it. Before Anselm finishes his first letter, he instructs Gunnhildr to return to the royal marriage-chamber and abandon the earthly one. This paralleling of language and imagery goes a step further with the command to "cast aside and trample on the worldly clothes you have put on, and wear once more the habit of Christ's bride.... For Christ will not recognize you, except in the habit by which publicly and privately you showed that you were his bride."<sup>14</sup> Anselm departs subtly yet tellingly from Lanfranc's earlier formula concerning those who must continue in the religious life. Anselm's emphasis deviated from the public display of the habit to the private moment when intention—demonstrated by assuming the veil

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<sup>13</sup> Anselm's letter 168 is translated in Beare, "Anselm's Letters to Gunhild," 29. Sharon Elkins translates the passage similarly but with emphasis upon current practice: "For you are therefore without excuse if you desert the holy proposition which long ago you professed by habit and conversion of life even if you have not recited the now customary profession and have not been consecrated by the bishop." Sharon K. Elkins, *Holy Women of Twelfth-Century England* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 5.

<sup>14</sup> Beare, "Anselm's Letters to Gunhild," 30 letter 168.

and habit—transformed a person from secular to religious. The archbishop spelled it out clearly for Gunnhildr,

Nowadays the profession and consecration of monastic life is common, but previously many thousands of men and women, professing that intention by the habit alone, achieved its loftiness and crown. And people who in those times put on the habit without actual profession and consecration, and then cast it aside, were considered apostate.

These words pointedly offer a snapshot of monastic history as Anselm describes the shift—during Gunnhildr’s lifetime—from a casual entrance into a nunnery to a formal profession before a bishop. As such he constructs a spiritual threshold that was crossed in monastic history for those who would commit to that life. Some assume that Gunnhildr entered Wilton as a refugee from war and, perhaps, as a result of her mother’s death.<sup>15</sup> For Anselm, Gunnhildr was the chosen bride of Christ: “ut te ab infantia sponsam sibi eligeret...,” a child oblate or a girl entering a nunnery for safety.<sup>16</sup> In either case Anselm underscored her real status as a bride of God, which coincided with her entrance into the religious world and her assumption of its habit.

Clothing designated the special status of the nun. Reinforcing her call to holiness, the notion of the holy nun or *sanctimonialis* became identifiable publicly. Religious status was “visibly reinforced in the community’s consciousness by the clothing worn by religious women. Nuns wore habits and veils that were unique to their status as professed people.”<sup>17</sup> Such is the assessment of Penelope Johnson in her comparative examination of female and male religious. In this appraisal, she situates the *sanctimonialis* within the social fabric of medieval culture as

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<sup>15</sup> This is the opinion of Stephanie Hollis. See Stephanie Hollis “Wilton as a Centre of Learning,” in *Writing the Wilton Women: Goscelin's Legend of Edith and Liber Confortatorius*, ed. Stephanie Hollis and W. R. Barnes (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004), 321.

<sup>16</sup> *Anselmi*, 47. Beare translates this phrase as “that from your infancy he chose you as his bride” Beare, “Anselm's Letters to Gunhild,” 31.

<sup>17</sup> Johnson, *Equal in Monastic Profession*, 235.

identified and identifiable by her veil. Moreover the veil not only showcased her status as professed but also advertised her commitment to sexual purity. To take the gendered implications further, unlike the monk's habit, the nun's veil, was the "outward sign of inward chastity for the professed woman."<sup>18</sup> This observable substantiation of her status did not, however, ascribe her to the public domain. The gender disparity between male and female religious—public versus private persona—has been explored by Leonie Hicks in her chapter on monastic clothing. In reference to religion in medieval Normandy, she writes,

The nun's habit was an extension of religious space. In contrast, the public exposure of the monk's head through the tonsure, especially if he was also a priest engaged in parish duties, showed his availability as a conduit for the sacraments. The cloister as a means of enclosure was symbolically represented by the nun's habit. This garment enclosed her body and helped to keep it a suitably chaste vessel, as befitted a bride of Christ.<sup>19</sup>

This observation reinforces Johnson's comments and coincides with Anselm's assessment of Gunnhildr. She had enjoyed a private marriage to Christ, manifested by wearing her habit away from the public gaze. This spiritual union was destroyed when Gunnhildr removed herself from this private, enclosed space, and thus subjected herself to spiritual danger and eternal damnation. Likewise Gunnhildr left herself vulnerable to gossip and rumor.<sup>20</sup>

Anselm's first hopes for Gunnhildr to live as a chaste bride of Christ were dashed when she replaced the deceased Alan Rufus with his brother and heir, Alan Niger (d. ca. 1098). To punctuate his disgust for *this* liaison, Anselm unloaded his venomous wit, creating puns that foretold what awaited Gunnhildr with Alan Niger (the Black). Gunnhildr's religious habit remains a key component of this admonition:

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 236.

<sup>19</sup> L. V. Hicks, *Religious Life in Normandy, 1050-1300: Space, Gender and Social Pressure* (Boydell Press, 2007), 30-31.

<sup>20</sup> Beare, "Anselm's Letters to Gunhild," 33-34.

Why are you not afraid that because of you God may kill Count Alan Niger by a similar death, or—what is worse—if you are united with him God may condemn him with you by eternal death? Oh, would that he be black to you and you black to him in love so that he may not be black to you nor you black to him in condemnation!... You will do Christ such great injury and insult if you cast off the robe and the emblems, by which for many years you bore witness to all those who saw you inside and outside that you were marked out for him....<sup>21</sup>

Blaming Gunnhildr effectively for the first Alan's death, Anselm heaps guilt upon her, not relinquishing her from her status as veiled.<sup>22</sup>

The parallels between Gunnhildr and Marie are substantial and resonate throughout this dissertation, not the least being the political implications for both women in regards to their veiling and unveiling. War was probably the catalyst for both girls' initial veilings, and they both aspired to positions of authority. Similarly, because Gunnhildr and Marie were daughters of kings whose dynastic claim to the throne had been lost, having them veiled inside the religious enclosure minimized their political potential. For the new respective kings, William II and Henry II, they could rest fairly certain that both women were unlikely to engage in secular marriages that might result in dangerous unions. Out of the nunnery, Gunnhildr and her alliance with the Lords Richmond did indeed pose a credible threat to William II, especially in light of the continuing northern discontent. Emma Mason's conjecture about the land held by Gunnhildr's mother, Edith Swan-neck, may hold part of the answer as to Gunnhildr's choice to marry the two

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<sup>21</sup> Fröhlich, *Letters of Saint Anselm*, 2:71.

<sup>22</sup> Whatever Gunnhildr's ultimate fate, Alan Niger—the brother and heir—is recorded as dying in 1098 and being succeeded by another brother, Stephen. See K.S.B. Keats-Rohan, *Domesday People. 1. Domesday Book* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 1999), 128.

brothers, the Lords of Richmond.<sup>23</sup> Various theories have been put forward regarding her future life, including the possibility of her also having children and heirs.<sup>24</sup>

When Gunnhildr had the opportunity to choose her future direction in life, she clearly disappointed the archbishop, provoking his scorn and descriptions of her damnation. While we cannot hear Gunnhildr and understand her motivations for leaving Wilton and moving to the North, we can surmise that she chose this path for a number of reasons. Landed family interests, political ambitions with the Counts of Richmond, bitterness at not having received the promised abbacy, and even romantic love reflect some of the possibilities put forward by modern scholars.<sup>25</sup> Regardless of her exact motivations, Gunnhildr chose, what we have to assume was in her estimation, the best option. Given the circumstances of her father's defeat and death and the ambiguity of her role at Wilton Abbey, Gunnhildr likely believed that the secular world held greater potential, a perspective influenced by family lands and the strength that her identity held in the North. Anselm's assessment of Gunnhildr's status fully removed the element of choice from her. In his words, she was herself chosen. His reading similarly underscores parental power, stating that she was reared to the religious habit and life.

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<sup>23</sup> A number of scholars have offered conjectures and evidence regarding the identity of Gunnhildr's mother. The two main contenders remain Harold's hand-fast wife, Edith Swan-Neck (variously referred to as Edith the Fair, Editha, Edgiva, and Eadgifu) or his legitimate wife, Ealdgyth, daughter of the Earl of Mercia, Aelfgar. Richard Sharpe has provided as concise outline of the support for each woman. See Sharpe, 20-22 footnotes 81-9. While Rhoda Beare and others argue in favor of Aldgyth of Mercia as the stronger contender for Gunnhildr's mother, others believe it was probably Edith Swan-Neck. Emma Mason convincingly argues this line, building her case upon the evidence showing that estates previously held by Edith the Fair "were held after the Norman Conquest by Alan the Red, lord of Richmond...." Mason, *The House of Godwine*, 139.

<sup>24</sup> See for example, Sharpe, "King Harold's Daughter," 1-27.

<sup>25</sup> For example, see R. W. Southern, *Saint Anselm and His Biographer; a Study of Monastic Life and Thought, 1059-C.1130* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 185 and Mason, *House of Godwine*, 139.



*All the Days of Her Life*

Parental power represented the driving force of strict child oblation in medieval monasticism. The act of oblation or sacrificing was more generally understood as the decision made by an individual to relinquish worldly attachments, ambitions, and desires in order to serve God. By adding the concept of the sacrifice of a child, parents took the initiative and made this choice for their children, thus opening the door to complications. These complications predated the legal innovations of the mid-twelfth century and became increasingly mooted in terms of free consent and individual choice. Regardless of any misgivings, at the time of Marie of Blois' birth in the 1120s/30s, the practice of child oblation remained a viable option for parents in England and on the Continent. While it had undoubtedly evolved from its scriptural antecedents, two quintessential images from the Old Testament continued to resonate with its defenders. The first image depicted Isaac's potential human sacrifice of his much-loved son, Jacob. Poised with knife in hand, ready to strike, Isaac demonstrated unquestioning obedience to God. For his part, Jacob enacted perfect filial obedience to his earthly father. The second, less sinister but equally emotive, image came from the story of the spiritual sacrifice of the previously "barren" mother, Hannah, giving back the gift of her much-desired son, Samuel. While God spared Jacob's life, providing a ram caught in the thicket, Samuel's oblation was realized as Hannah gave her weaned son back to God for "all the days of his life."<sup>26</sup> Both of these scenes illustrate the essentials of child oblation: parents willing to sacrifice that which was most precious; a son acquiescing to his father's command, and a mother's promise to bind her son to God

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<sup>26</sup> See Genesis 22:1-14 and I Samuel 1:28. The last verse of the chapter provides the wording regarding the permanence of the vow: *Idcirco et ego commodavi eum Domino cunctis diebus quibus fuerit accommodatus Domino. Therefore I also have lent him to the Lord all the days of his life, he shall be lent to the Lord.* Vulgate and translation from <http://www.latinvulgate.com/>

permanently. Likewise the New Testament itself turns upon the conceit of child oblation in the story of Jesus, as the ultimate sacrifice for humanity and the spiritual death that Christianity demands of its followers. Pauline writings, moreover, sanctioned paternal power over daughters, advocating the right to choose their future roles and status.<sup>27</sup> The association between virginity and Christian dedication went on to influence patristic writers, who in general defined a clear preference for the virginal state whereby chastity was conflated with holiness.<sup>28</sup>

Such scriptural exemplars for child oblation would themselves go on to shape early monasticism. In his late sixth-century *Rule*, Benedict (d. mid-sixth century) instructed noble parents how to offer their young sons to the monastery, endeavoring to prescribe a straightforward process.<sup>29</sup> The sacrifice or oblation was to be made without ambiguity or false expectations, which called for parents to “wrap the petition and the boy’s hand in the altar cloth and so offer him.”<sup>30</sup> The child himself was to not to be deceived regarding a future inheritance; a donation could be given by the parents “in favour of the monastery which [took] charge of their

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<sup>27</sup> I Corinthians 7:36-38 Paul endows fathers with great power to decide between the marital or virginal state for their daughters, giving preference to the latter.

<sup>28</sup> Also used were *virgines sanctae, sponsae Christi, puellae et virgins Christi*, and *membra Christo dicata*. René Metz, *La Consécration Des Vierges Dans L'église Romaine : Étude D'histoire De La Liturgie* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1954), 53.

<sup>29</sup> While *Rule for Nuns* of Caesarius of Arles represents an earlier set of guidelines, it does not specifically dictate how girls were to be given to the convent. Girls were expected to reside in the religious house but should be six or seven years old and already literate and obedient. Caesarius specifically prohibited the raising or educating of children. (Rule 7). For a discussion of Caesarius’s *Rule* and attitudes toward oblates, see A. Malnory, *Saint Cesaire Eveque D'arles (503-543)* (Paris, 1894), 263-66.

<sup>30</sup> Canon G. A. Simon, *Commentary for Benedictine Oblates: On the Rule of St. Benedict*, trans. Leonard J. Doyle. (Collegeville, MN: St. John's Abbey Press, 1950), 435. See Chapter 59 of the *Rule*. Benedict, *The Rule of Saint Benedict*, ed. and trans. Bruce L. Venarde (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 193-194.

boy” but he would not directly benefit from it.<sup>31</sup> He could not later demand his inheritance, and from that moment onward, he was a monk. No period of novitiate was necessary. For a poor boy, the oblation was similarly made but in the presence of witnesses.<sup>32</sup>

Benedict provided a route whereby parents could make the ultimate sacrifice, and monasteries could receive innocent, teachable members. In his *Rule*, he did not stipulate whether children should have the final say, nor did he set age restrictions on the reception or profession.<sup>33</sup> Subsequent abuses, however, provoked monastic officials and legal experts alike to question the suitability and practicality of child oblation. It was evident that some families used the practice for practical, as opposed to spiritual, reasons.<sup>34</sup> Equally vexing, children had no say in their future. In a pragmatic move, age restrictions were implemented to prevent the immediate profession of those too young to decide for themselves and for those not in favor of a religious vocation. Refinements and reforms rapidly began from the mid-seventh century, when the Council of Toledo in 655 first restricted the practice, noting “that a child could not be given against his will after his tenth year.”<sup>35</sup> By the ninth century, the right for an oblate to choose whether to stay in the monastery upon reaching the age of reason was in writing, though few houses seem to have followed this guideline.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 437.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 435.

<sup>33</sup> P. Deroux, *Les Origines De L'oblature Bénédictine: Étude Historique* (Vienne: Abbaye Saint-Martin de Ligugé, 1927), 15.

<sup>34</sup> See John Boswell, *The Kindness of Strangers : The Abandonment of Children in Western Europe from Late Antiquity to the Renaissance* (London: Penguin, 1988), 228-55.

<sup>35</sup> John Doran, "Oblation or Obligation? A Canonical Ambiguity?," in *The Church and Childhood* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1994), 129.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. 132-33. The age of reason was seven; the age of consent twelve for girls, and fourteen for boys. In the 1150s, the commentator Roland distinguished beyond the pubescent and pre-pubescent, seeing too a separation among seven-year-olds between the *doli capaces* (those

We are given a rare depiction of the scene of separation between parent and child in the account penned by Orderic Vitalis, the late eleventh-century monk and (auto-)biographer.

Leaving his natal home in England, Orderic received a new home, identity, and vocation in Normandy. His oft-cited account emphasizes both the worst and the best of the experience:

So, weeping, [my father] gave me, a weeping child, into the care of the monk Reginald, and sent me away into exile for love of thee [God] and never saw me again. And I, a mere boy, did not presume to oppose my father's wishes, but obeyed him willingly in all things ... And so, a boy of ten, I crossed the English Channel and came into Normandy as an exile, unknown to all, knowing no one. Like Joseph in Egypt, I heard a language which I did not understand. But thou didst suffer me through thy grace to find nothing but kindness and friendship among strangers. I was received as an oblate monk in the abbey of Saint-Évroul by the venerable Abbot Mainer in the eleventh year of my age and was tonsured as a clerk on Sunday, 21 September. In place of my English name, the name Vitalis was given me.<sup>37</sup>

The impact of such separations was addressed in future canon law codes. In 1140 Gratian considered discussion of a child's commitment to vows and the implication of those vows worthy of significant commentary. His areas of interest, mirrored in the decretals attributed to Gregory IX in the next century, focused on age and consent.<sup>38</sup> For example, *Causa XXII*, presented the age of consent—fourteen for boys—when vows should be taken. Similarly Gregory IX in his *Decretales* quoted from Pope Alexander III that “nobody should be professed

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capable of deliberate action, that is those truly gifted with reason) and the others. See also Berend, “La Subversion Invisible,” 128.

<sup>37</sup> As cited in John Balnaves, “Bernard of Morlaix: The Literature of Complaint, the Latin Tradition and the Twelfth-Century ‘Renaissance’” (PhD thesis Australian National University, 1997), 26, accessed October 26, 2015, <http://hdl.handle.net/1885/47692>. Original from Ordericus Vitalis, *Historia ecclesiastica*, PL 188:982-983. Translation from Marjorie Chibnall, *Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis: Vol 6, Books Ll, 12 and 13* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 555-57.

<sup>38</sup> Doran notes, “The first decretal in this section was a canon of the Council of Mainz of 813 which simply stated that nobody was to be given the tonsure unless he was of legitimate age and was willing to receive it.” John Doran, “Oblation or Obligation? A Canonical Ambiguity?,” in *The Church and Childhood* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1994), 134.

without a probationary year or before he had reached fourteen years of age [and] (e)ven after profession a man was free to leave a house within three days without prejudice.”<sup>39</sup> These references suggest a connection between the ability to make meaningful oaths and being of age, reflecting both the gravity of the religious vow and the importance of informed consent. As noted above, for girls, this age of consent was generally seen as twelve—both for marital and religious vows. The conversation included Gratian’s *Causa XXII* and the *Decretales* of Gregory IX in which both settled on fourteen as the age of consent for boys.<sup>40</sup> For girls, Gratian’s *Causa XX, questio II* examines parental power over a commitment to the religious life. Accordingly, if voluntarily professed before the age of twelve, a girl could be removed by parents within a year of the vow.<sup>41</sup> However, any excess over a “year and a day” made the vow binding. If she was of more advanced age, her vow was beyond parental control.<sup>42</sup> Consequently, parents played a significant but not exclusive role in determining the future direction of their daughters’ lives. In the following section, the impact made by Marie’s parents similarly shaped her early life and resulted in the status that she assumed as a religious.

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<sup>39</sup> Both examples given in *Ibid.*, 133 and 135. It is important to remember that neither Gratian’s nor Gregory’s decretals were definitive. Additions made by the *paleae* reflect on-going commentary and modes of interpretation. With respect to the irrevocability of child oblation, see Berend, “La Subversion Invisible,” 123-36.

<sup>40</sup> Gregory quoted Alexander III deciding that “nobody should be professed without a probationary year or before he had reached fourteen years of age of age [and] (e)ven after profession a man was free to leave a house within three days without prejudice.” Both examples given in Doran, “Oblation or Obligation?,” 133 and 135. It is important to remember that neither Gratian’s nor Gregory’s decretals were definitive. Additions made by the *paleae* reflect on-going commentary and modes of interpretation. With respect to the irrevocability of child oblation, see Nora Berend, “La Subversion Invisible: La Disparition De L’oblation Irrévocable Des Enfants Dans Le Droit Canon.” *Médiévales* 26 (Printemps 1994):123-136.

<sup>41</sup> *Decretum Magistri Gratiani*, C. XX, q.ii, c 4 accessed October 27, 2015, [http://geschichte.digitale-sammlungen.de/decretum-gratiani/kapitel/dc\\_chapter\\_2\\_2529](http://geschichte.digitale-sammlungen.de/decretum-gratiani/kapitel/dc_chapter_2_2529).

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

*From childhood admitted into the religious habit*

From childhood until her death, Marie repeatedly appears in a range of administrative, monastic, and epistolary documents.<sup>43</sup> Such inclusion challenges modern allegations that medieval women are invisible in medieval documentary sources. While Marie's inclusion in these sources can partially be explained by the scandalous nature of her abduction from Romsey Abbey and subsequent marriage to Matthew of Flanders, her numerous administrative roles in and outside the nunnery also account for her presence. Due to the number of moves she made during her lifetime, she accordingly appears in sources created in Brittany, France, Boulogne, Normandy, and the Low Countries. Taken as a whole, Marie assumes a number of identities within the sources: in most that are related to Marie's early life, she is identified as *filia Stephani regis Anglia* or *Anglorum* (the daughter of Stephen, the King of England/the English); those referring to her time at Romsey name her as *abbatissa* (abbess); and those from her married years in Boulogne use the title of *comitissa* (countess) and *uxor Matthaei* (Matthew's wife). Chroniclers who wrote about the scandal consistently describe her premarital status as *abbatissa*, *sanctimonialis* (holy nun), *velata* (veiled), or *sponsa Christi*, and use forms of the word *raptus* (snatched/taken) to explain her change in status after she departed from Romsey Abbey. Genealogies associated with relevant families provide pertinent details regarding Marie and Matthew. Letters portray various episodes in Marie's life in which a number of high-profile people were directly and indirectly involved. That the entirety of Marie's life was experienced in the limelight, it is not too outrageous to claim. In presenting more of Marie's biography, this chapter begins by presenting evidence about her childhood, follows her moves into and out of

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<sup>43</sup> These sources provide the substance for Marie's life story in this and subsequent chapters.

three religious houses on both sides of the Channel, and ends with her near her family in England with the worst of the civil war behind them.

Like so many twelfth-century individuals, we do not know with any certainty when Marie was born. Estimates range from 1125 to 1136, with the latter year generally given in more popular genealogies.<sup>44</sup> Precision in noting her birthplace is equally problematic, but most sources point to Blois as the likely venue.<sup>45</sup> Marie was one of at least five children born to Queen Matilda of Boulogne and King Stephen of Blois. Two of Marie's siblings, Matilda and Baldwin, died in infancy.<sup>46</sup> Marie's surviving brothers, Eustace and William, played significant roles in her life's story, and each brother in turn served as Count of Boulogne. As for Marie, her parents looked to religion for her future, as evidence indicates that she was a child oblate. The *Genealogia Comitum Flandriae* specifically states that she was "from childhood admitted into the religious habit."<sup>47</sup>

There is no reason to doubt the claim made by the Flemish genealogy about Marie's early religious life. Finding where she was first placed is, however, more problematic. Our only real clue comes from the Breton cartularies and histories of Saint-Sulpice-la-Forêt, a religious house for both monks and nuns established in 1112 by Raoul de la Futaye, one of Robert d'Abrissel's

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<sup>44</sup> See, for example, Alison Weir, *Britain's Royal Families: The Complete Genealogy*, New ed. (London: Pimlico, 2002), 53. More recently, the year 1125 has been given in Carla Rossi Bellotto, *Marie De France et Les Érudits De Cantorbéry* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2009), 107.

<sup>45</sup> For example, Blois is given as place of Marie's birth in S. P. Thompson, "Mary, suo jure countess of Boulogne (d. 1182)," *DNB*, (Oxford University Press, 2004) accessed October 26, 2015, <http://www.oxforddnb.com>.

<sup>46</sup> "The Cartulary of Holy Trinity, Aldgate London Record Society 7," ed. G.A.J. Hodgett, (London, 1971), 3, footnote 14, accessed 22 October 2015, also at <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/london-record-soc/vol7/>.

<sup>47</sup> "Pueritia habitu religionis initiate." Olivier Vredius, *Genealogia comitum Flandriae a Balduino Ferreo usque ad Philippum IV* (Bruges, 1642), 414.

followers.<sup>48</sup> D'Abrissel is best known as the founder of Fontevrault in France. As a double-monastery, Fontevrault and its daughter houses followed the Benedictine Rule, were led by abbesses, but were under papal rather than episcopal control.<sup>49</sup> Saint-Sulpice followed in this tradition and in time sponsored daughter houses in both France and England.<sup>50</sup> Pinpointing any firm evidence for when and if Marie was at Saint-Sulpice is complicated, however, by inconsistencies in both contemporary and antiquarian descriptions. For example, Breton records from the *Ecclesia Redonensis* refer to Marie, the daughter of the English king Stephen, as abbess by 1124—impossibly early—but within the same source her name appears with some regularity from the mid-1140s.<sup>51</sup> For example, Marie, the abbess, is named in the 1145 transaction to secure the church of Ercé-en-la-Mée for her abbey, and in the next year when Pope Eugene III put Saint Sulpice under his protection.<sup>52</sup> In other documents, Marie is similarly referred to as the daughter of Stephen, the English king, and as abbess.

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<sup>48</sup> Bruce L. Venarde, *Women's Monasticism and Medieval Society: Nunneries in France and England, 890-1215* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), 65.

<sup>49</sup> Venarde, *Women's Monasticism*, 64 and 119.

<sup>50</sup> For more discussion of the Saint-Sulpice-la-Forêt, see Mary Martin McLaughlin and Bonnie Wheeler, *The Letters of Heloise and Abelard: A Translation of their Collected Correspondence and Related Writings*, (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), 338 and JoAnn McNamara, *Sisters in Arms* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 292-293.

<sup>51</sup> *Gallia Christiana*, 16 vols, (Farnborough, Hants: Gregg, 1970) reprint of 1715-1865 Paris ed. 14:787.

<sup>52</sup> Amédée Guillotin de Corson, *Pouillé Historique de L'Archevêché de Rennes*, 8 vols, (Rennes, 1881), 2:311. See also *Gallia Christiana*, 14:787. Within the early years of the next decade during Marie's adolescence, the bishop of Rennes made several churches in his diocese submissive to St. Sulpice. By this point, as Dom Lobineau notes, the nuns at Mary's abbey had dependencies in the dioceses of Nantes, Rennes, Vannes, Quimper, & Saint Malo. Dom Gui Alexis Lobineau, *Histoire de Bretagne Composée sur les Titres et les Auteurs Originaux* (Paris, 1707), 2:151 and 299.



For historian, Judith Everard, however, the woman named in the documents was “categorically not Mary, the daughter of King Stephen...”<sup>53</sup> In essence for Everard, the dating problems in the abbey’s cartulary fully dismiss Marie of Blois as a possible contender. Her assertion is furthered strengthened by problems visible in the *Necrologie* of Saint-Sulpice, which gives Marie’s date of death as 6 May 1159.<sup>54</sup> Undoubtedly knotty, substantial evidence does nevertheless connect Marie to Saint-Sulpice: the cartulary documents clearly name Marie as the daughter of the English king, Stephen.<sup>55</sup> This detail should not be dismissed out of hand because of the dates provided in the documents. Mis-recording or mis-copying the original years accurately may have skewed the facts and the nunnery may have wanted to be associated with a royal daughter, even if she were a very young girl. Another association between Brittany and Marie’s family exists as a result of one of Stephen’s pre-marital liaisons. Details are lacking, but apparently from Stephen’s long-term association with the woman known as Damette, a daughter was born. According to Judith Everard, the local Breton nobleman, Hervé de Leon, married the illegitimate daughter of Stephen of Blois.<sup>56</sup> Further confirmation of the two men’s affinity can be

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<sup>53</sup> Judith Everard, “The early abbesses of Saint-Sulpice-la-forêt from English sources,” in J. Quaghebeur, S. Soleil, and H. Guillotel, *Le Pouvoir Et La Foi Au Moyen Âge En Bretagne Et Dans L'europe De L'ouest: Mélanges En Mémoire Du Professeur Hubert Guillotel* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2010), 110.

<sup>54</sup> Corson, *Pouillé Historique de L'Archevêché de Rennes*, 2:311.

<sup>55</sup> The evidence connecting Marie to Saint Sulpice continues below. Although not discussed, it is worth noting that Henry II bequeathed 100 marks of silver to Saint Sulpice in 1182, the year of Marie’s death. His reasons for doing so may have had nothing to do with her. Léopold Delisle, *Recueil des actes d'Henri II: Roi D'Angleterre et Duc de Normandie* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1920), 2:219-220.

<sup>56</sup> Judith Everard, *Brittany and the Angevins: Province and Empire 1158-1203* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 11. Everard cites *Willelmi Malmesbiriensis monachi: Historia novella*, K. R. Potter, trans. (London: Nelson, 1955), 31.

found in the *Gesta Stephani*, which names Hervé as “the son-in-law of the king.”<sup>57</sup> The marriage between Hervé and Stephen’s daughter, often named as Sybille, took place *circa* 1139 around the same time that Stephen endowed Hervé with “the earldom of Wiltshire and the honour of Eye.”<sup>58</sup> Marie’s birth in the late 1120s or early 1130s represents a strong fit as far as timing and potentially coincides with this marriage, creating yet another connection between Marie and the area. Having Marie far enough away from the epicenter of the war—and not in Plantagenet lands in France—but still accessible to the family in England were presumably priorities at this time. Travel between Brittany and England was common and can be visualized in literature of the period.<sup>59</sup>

Another link between Marie and the Breton house of Saint-Sulpice can be found in the next phase of her life. In the 1140s, Marie, with young religious women from Saint-Sulpice, entered the Benedictine nunnery of Stratford-le-Bow or more correctly St. Leonard’s Priory in Middlesex.<sup>60</sup> A possible reason for the choice of Stratford—in lieu of more prestigious, royal houses—may be partially explained by Queen Matilda’s priorities at this time. The manors comprising the Honour of Boulogne were densely located in the counties of Middlesex and Essex, and, as John Carmi Parsons has pointed out, she patronized “Holy Trinity Aldgate, burying two of her children there, and taking its prior as her confessor.”<sup>61</sup> Aldgate had good

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<sup>57</sup> “[G]ener regis.” Richard C. Sewell, ed., *Gesta Stephani, regis Anglorum...* (London, 1846), 74.

<sup>58</sup> Everard, *Brittany*, 16.

<sup>59</sup> Such voyages, for example, feature in Marie de France’s *lais*, including *Eliduc*. Other stories told and retold—*Tristan and Iseult*, many of the Arthurian adventures, and Chaucer’s *Franklin’s Tale*—similarly feature this passage between the two coasts.

<sup>60</sup> *Mon Ang*, 6:378-382. David Knowles, and R. Neville Hadcock. *Medieval Religious Houses England and Wales* 1953 (London: Longman, 1971), 255.

<sup>61</sup> John Carmi Parsons, “‘Never Was a Body Buried in England with Such Solemnity and Honour’: The Burials and Posthumous Commemorations of English Queens to 1500,” in *Queens*

access to both Middlesex and Essex, by way of two major Roman roads.<sup>62</sup> The Queen's patronage and participation were significant in these areas and can be found in a number of foundations and activities in the county of Essex, including the Cressing Temple Barns (Figure 2), Castle Hedingham (Figure 4), and the Cistercian abbey in Coggeshall.



*Figure 2 Cressing Temple Barns in Essex. Photograph by author.*

Travel between the east of present-day London, most especially at Aldgate, and Essex would have taken her within easy reach of her only surviving daughter, a daughter who had apparently grown up across the Channel. Political and military changes also may have prompted the decision to bring Marie to England around the time of Robert of Gloucester's death in 1147.

While the exact date when Marie and her companions arrived in Middlesex is unclear, their short duration at Stratford is made manifestly plain. Sources report that a rupture developed ostensibly

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*and Queenship in Medieval Europe: Proceedings of a Conference Held at King's College London, April 1995*, ed. Anne J. Duggan (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1997), 330.

<sup>62</sup> *Roman Britain, Historical Map and Guide of Roman Britain*, text by S. Esmonde Cleary 5th edition (Southampton: Ordnance Survey, 2001).

as a result of the overly restrictive lifestyle imposed on the Breton nuns at Stratford.<sup>63</sup> Whether this accusation is correct or concocted to throw a negative light on the royal family, the charter evidence verifies discord at Stratford and Marie's parents intervening.<sup>64</sup> They indeed took practical steps to end the problems, setting their daughter and her companions up elsewhere. Archbishop Theobald oversaw the formal removal of Marie and her company in the early 1150s, possibly as early as 1148; the sisters of Stratford were obliged to release the manor of Lillechurch (initially given to support Marie).<sup>65</sup>

Unknown to anyone at the time were the implications of Queen Matilda's involvement in the life of her son, Eustace, Marie's elder brother. A chief concern for her in 1140 had been engineering a promising match for him. Matilda negotiated heavily with the French court for a union between Eustace and Constance of France, who was both sister to the future King Louis VII (d. 1180) and daughter to the then reigning King Louis VI *le gros* (d. 1137) and Queen Adelaide (d. 1154). Conditions in England at the time were such that the young Constance could have reasonably expected to be queen someday as a result of her marriage to Eustace. The timing was propitious for both families: a friendship with Constance's brother, Louis VII, could bolster Stephen's position on the English throne and return the duchy of Normandy to English control, while providing Louis with a more palatable man than Geoffrey Plantagenet to pay him homage for Normandy.<sup>66</sup> At the time of the marriage negotiations, Eustace's prospects were

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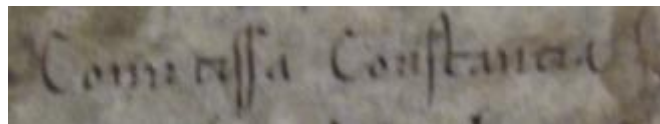
<sup>63</sup> See the charter evidence in Dugdale, *Mon Ang*, 4:381-383.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> Dugdale, *Mon Ang*, 4:381. William Page, ed., *The VCH of Kent* (Folkestone, Eng.: Published for the University of London, Institute of Historical Research, 1974), 2:145-146. Avrom Saltman, *Theobald Archbishop of Canterbury* (London: Athlone Press, 1956), 379-80 provides a transcription of the transaction.

<sup>66</sup> Jean Dunbabin describes the tangle of interests and the implications of Plantagenet control of the Duchy of Normandy in Jean Dunbabin "Henry II and Louis VII" in *Henry II: New*

undetermined but certainly bright. Not only was there the possibility of the English throne itself but also the county of Boulogne. The agreement included Constance's move to England to live with her in-laws in 1140 or so, with the marriage occurring the following year. By the beginning of 1147, Eustace was named Boulogne's count and Constance its countess.<sup>67</sup> Over the course of Constance's life, she adopted a number of titles; at this time, however, she styled herself as the Countess of Boulogne (Figure 3). Almost twenty years later, this assumption of land and title would have serious implications for Marie's future, but for the moment, her brother and new sister-in-law engaged in the business of secular politics, while she continued to live the life of a religious.



*Figure 3 Constance, Countess of Boulogne, Nuns/3b. Jesus College, Cambridge. 1152-1153. By permission of the Master and Fellows of Jesus College, Cambridge. Photograph by author.*

Thus from the end of the 1140s, Marie was on the same side of the Channel as most of her family and set up as the prioress of the new house of Lillechurch or Higham. This priory is recorded as being established as a daughter house to Saint-Sulpice-la-Forêt and possibly adds yet another piece of evidence connecting Marie with the Breton house.<sup>68</sup> The process to extricate Marie from Stratford required a complicated land and property swap, effected by Stephen and Matilda, involving the manor at Lillechurch, William of Ypres' manor of Faversham, and the

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*Interpretations*, eds. Christopher Harper-Bill and Nicholas Vincent (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell, 2007), 48,

<sup>67</sup> Tanner, *Families*, 9.

<sup>68</sup> Knowles, *Religious Houses*, 254. Sharon Elkins believes that evidence is inconclusive as to whether Lillechurch was in fact a daughter house of St. Sulpice. *Holy Women of Twelfth-Century England* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 189 footnote 25.

foundation of a new royal monastery and burial church at Faversham.<sup>69</sup> This elaborate set of exchanges took years to resolve.<sup>70</sup> The first abbot at Faversham, Clarembald (d. after 1172), acted as a witness to the original trade and played an important role in Queen Matilda's contributions to the church in Faversham over the coming years. The chronicler Gervase of Canterbury (d. ca. 1210) notes that the Queen was in residence in Canterbury some ten miles away during the early phases of construction in Faversham.<sup>71</sup> Thus this new house could also ensure a convenient site to have Marie, providing close proximity to her mother. Judith Everard arrives at the same conclusion concerning mother and daughter, noting that Matilda "deliberately arranged for Mary to reside near her and also near the planned dynastic mausoleum at Faversham abbey."<sup>72</sup> The Priory of Lillechurch was itself well-situated geographically and financially, holding "land in Higham, Shorne, and the Hoo Peninsula, in addition to its income from the Higham Ferry."<sup>73</sup> This ferry ran to Essex, functioning as "a highway for traffic of all sorts between East Anglia, Kent, and the Continent."<sup>74</sup> This healthily endowed priory endured and expanded over the coming centuries, flourishing until its demise in the early 1520s.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Richard Eales, "Local Loyalties in Norman England: Kent in Stephen's Reign," in *Anglo-Norman Studies VIII: Proceedings of the Battle Conference, 1985*, ed. R. A. Brown (Woodbridge, Suffolk, Boydell Press, 1986), 105.

<sup>70</sup> See *Chartulary of St. John, Colchestser* (Roxburghe Club, 1897), 525.

<sup>71</sup> Eales, "Local Loyalties," 105.

<sup>72</sup> Judith Everard, "The Abbey of Saint-Sulpice-La-Forêt and Royal Patronage in England, 1154-1259," *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 47 (2003): 116.

<sup>73</sup> C.R. Bull, *Higham Priory, Local History Pamphlet No. 17*, (Kent County Library Gravesham Division, 1983).

<sup>74</sup> A. F. Allen, "Higham Priory" in *Archaeologia Cantiana*, 80 (1965):192.

<sup>75</sup> "Houses of Benedictine nuns: The priory of Higham or Littlechurch," *VCH Kent* 2:145-146. Its demise arrived some two decades before the Dissolution to help fund the stalled foundation of Saint John's College Cambridge.

It is evident that Marie's family did not neglect Lillechurch after its establishment. The charters in Dugdale's *Monasticon Anglicanum* provide evidence of strong family influence and involvement in this new priory. For example, a charter given by "William earl of Boulogne...informs us that a fresh donation of the lands at Lillechurch to Mary and her nuns, upon the establishment of the new foundation, was made in frank-almoigne by the king; and that other charters were given in confirmation by Matilda, Eustace, and himself."<sup>76</sup> These charters postdate previous ones made by other family members. As for Marie, two undated deeds held at St John's College, Cambridge, attest to her firm commitment to Lillechurch.<sup>77</sup> In total the deeds have three attached seals—two identify Marie as *filia regis Stephani* [the daughter of King Stephen].<sup>78</sup> The deeds not only document her providing the priory with land but also underscore her relationships with other religious women. One of the witness lists includes seven men, reflecting a range of secular and religious positions, "and the holy nuns, Juliana, Ereburga, Ermelina, and many others."<sup>79</sup> Not unique but certainly rare, this inclusion of nuns may convey Marie's own desire to incorporate women alongside men in the official business of the everyday. Records from Lillechurch, as given in the *VCH Kent* and other sources, record the first woman, Juliana, as the next prioress of the house.<sup>80</sup> Lillechurch Priory undoubtedly provided Marie—

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<sup>76</sup> Dugdale, *Mon Ang* 4: 382.

<sup>77</sup> Grants to Lillechurch Priory, Deeds D46.58 and D46.27. St. John's College, Cambridge. Varying dates have been assigned to them but given the names of the nuns in particular who witnessed one of the deeds, it is my opinion that they postdate Marie's time in the house. Tanner, *Families*, 203, footnote 108 and *Dictionary of National Biography*, 'Mary of Blois' in which S. Thompson states that they date from 1155-1158.

<sup>78</sup> "*Et sanctimonialibus, Juliana, ereburga and ermelina & multis aliis.*" See my analysis and discussion of the seals and deeds in Chapter Four below.

<sup>79</sup> Grant to Lillechurch Priory, D46.27.

<sup>80</sup> *VCH Kent*, 2: 145-146.

who was probably in her mid-to-late teens at this time—with the opportunities of running a humble yet vibrant religious house. Its proximity to London, links by water and road to Essex and the Continent, and overall financial health would have taught her the business of religion. Having her family involved in its affairs also meant that Marie could look to them for advice and practical help if they were needed.

*Extrapolating the ideal*

We do not know how Marie perceived herself and her religious status. We do know, however, that during her life a rich lexicon existed to describe the brides of Christ. The language we use today to discuss religious women and men is woefully lacking when compared to Medieval Latin and its varied forms. In addition to the terms generally used in this dissertation, *sponsa Christi* and *sanctimonialis*, other titles existed for girls, single women, and widows who vowed themselves to God, including *virgines sacrae*, *virgines sanctae*, *sponsae Dei*, *ancillae Dei*, *famulae Dei*, *Christo maritatae*, *De virginibus velandis*, and *monialis*.<sup>81</sup> These descriptions date from the early centuries of Christianity through the Middle Ages.<sup>82</sup> While variations existed as to the nature of vows and living arrangements, by and large the status of a religious woman required sexual purity, obedience to a rule (and the person in charge of overseeing it), and an outward, public demonstration of this status (such as a veil, mantel, or habit). As such, the twelfth-century monastic identity had not sprung up fully formed overnight but had been formed over a history of some eight hundred years of individual and communal ascetic traditions. More

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<sup>81</sup> Holy virgins, consecrated virgins, brides of God, handmaidens of God, servants of God, married to Christ, veiled virgins, and nuns.

<sup>82</sup> See for example, Metz, *La Consécration*, 46, 52, 91, and 107.



recent monastic reformers, through their efforts to more fully proscribe the religious life through clothing and enclosure, sustained and reiterated its continuing association with sexual purity.

Imagery regarding the ideal religious woman harkened back to scripture in both the Old and New Testaments. Antecedents for the bride of Christ emerged rich with metaphors and allusions; particularly influential were the love passages from the Song of Songs.<sup>83</sup>

One is my dove, my perfect one is but one, she is the only one of her mother, the chosen of her that bore her. The daughters saw her, and declared her most blessed: the queens and concubines, and they praised her.<sup>84</sup>

Such passages supported more than the idealized image of a veiled nun, as advocates of the growing Cult of Mary—or Marianism or Mariology—co-opted them alongside the new (and revisited) exegeses on the Song of Songs. Emerging in this new set of interpretations was the message of being *electa*, or chosen, as visible in the verse above, reinforcing and promoting a special identity of the bride of Christ. Being chosen also tied in with the chosen mother of Christ himself, Mary, as made clear in the archangel’s speech to her at the Annunciation.<sup>85</sup>

Within her cult, Mary assumed new duties and a more complex persona in the twelfth century. She came to characterize, somewhat paradoxically, the perfect (that is, completed) *sponsa Christi*. Mary’s self-identification as the *ancilla Dei*, helped cement this association.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Though part of the theological reading of the Song of Songs since Gregory the Great, this interpretation becomes popular among eleventh-century reformers. E. Ann Matter has tracked changes regarding exegesis of the Song of Songs, and calls the twelfth century “the most fertile period of Christian commentary.” E. Ann Matter, *The Voice of My Beloved* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1990), 38.

<sup>84</sup> Una est columba mea perfecta mea una est matris suae electa genetrici suae viderunt illam filiae et beatissimam praedicaverunt reginae et concubinae et laudaverunt eam. Song of Songs 6:8.

<sup>85</sup> Luke 1:26-38.

<sup>86</sup> The tradition in the Christian commentaries on the Song of Songs was to interpret the bridegroom as Christ and the bride as the Church or the individual soul ... but it was not until the first half of the twelfth century that commentators interpreted the whole work, rather than just

Simultaneously, the changing face of monasticism “required (and inspired) a body of monastic love literature which is noticeably different...in its incorporation of feminine imagery and in its preferred symbolism of God’s love for humankind by the love between a man and a woman—a symbolism explicitly derived from the Song of Songs.”<sup>87</sup> The link then between Marianism, the Song of Songs, and the ideal religious woman boiled down to the spiritual marriage which united a pure (virginal or chaste) girl or woman with her heavenly bridegroom. This spiritual marriage incorporated its own symbols of fidelity. In his study of the consecration ceremony for religious virgins, René Metz calls attention again and again to its accoutrements. Tracing the ceremony over the centuries, Metz focuses much attention on the first pontifical made by Bishop Guillaume Durand of Mende in the late thirteenth century and stresses the parallels between the ceremony of profession and the nuptial ceremony for a secular bride. In discussing these symbols, he notes, “The tradition of the wedding band as well as the placing of the crown was part of, at this time, the liturgy of marriage....Which is why we willingly allow that the liturgist...was inspired by the ritual of marriage.”<sup>88</sup> Consummation of the marriage would occur when the bride was welcomed into heaven itself. For her remaining time on earth, she was ensconced in the protective folds of her veil and cloister walls where she would serve her heavenly bridegroom through prayer and personal devotion.

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parts of it to refer to Christ and Mary. Penny Schine Gold, *The Lady and the Virgin* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1987), 57.

<sup>87</sup> Ann W. Astell, *The Song of Songs in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell, 1990), 9.

<sup>88</sup> Metz, *La Consécration*, 207. “La tradition de l’anneau aussi bien que l’imposition de la couronne, faisaient partie, à cette époque, de la liturgie du mariage ... Voilà pourquoi nous admettrions volontiers que le liturgiste ... s’est inspiré du rituel du mariage.” Despite some assertions by other scholars regarding the use of the wedding band in the ceremony dating only from the end of the twelfth century, Metz notes its use from the Romano-Germanic Pontifical around 950 (compiled in Mayence). See also Metz, 221.

One of the most widely used terms, *sanctimonialis*, upgraded the more mundane one, *monialis*, from a nun to a holy nun. This gendered layer of linguistic complexity did not exist for the tonsured monk; that is, he was simply *monachus* and no *sanctus* was added. This disparity in language can be interpreted in a number of ways, including the need to recognize the perceived weakness of veiled women, who were confronted with greater spiritual challenges. As such, the medieval understanding of this weakness was not patently negative. Penelope Johnson has written on this linguistic distinction, juxtaposing the monk's assumed spiritual advantages with the nun's handicaps. She writes, "Nuns inspired an inflated esteem because they were believed to be overcoming greater natural odds than were their male counterparts... The nun therefore was due greater honor than the monk [which] found expression in language."<sup>89</sup> This interpretation boils down to the scriptural tenet "where much is given, much is required" and other New Testament ideals. For humanity in general, the notion of the Prodigal Son illustrates the precept; Jesus's writing or drawing in the sand to stop the stoning of the "woman caught in adultery" highlights the principle for women in particular.

Johnson's appraisal fits in well with the explanation provided by Peter Abelard (d. 1142), the twelfth-century monk, thinker, and one-time husband to the Abbess Héloïse (d. 1163/4). After much praising of women for their contributions to the Christian faith, Abelard offered his own etymology for *sanctimonialis* to Héloïse,

Moreover, the religious life of women alone is marked out with the name of sanctity when they are called *sanctimoniales* from *sanctimonia*, that is, "sanctity." Because the female gender is the weaker, their strength is more pleasing to God and is more perfect according to the word of God himself by which he encouraged the weakness of the

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<sup>89</sup> Johnson, *Equal in Monastic Profession*, 235. Johnson provides a full discussion of terminology and its gendered implications.

apostle to the crown of victory, saying “My grace is enough for you, for my strength is at its best in weakness.”<sup>90</sup>

Abelard’s blending of New Testament theology with contemporary assumptions about women’s inadequacies calls into doubt how realistically a religious woman might ever achieve a level of spiritual maturity recognizably holy to her male counterparts and overseers. Regardless of the extra grace available to women that Abelard extolled, many medieval writers and theologians viewed women and purity as incompatible bedfellows. Accordingly, veiled women, though espoused to the Heavenly Bridegroom, would in time reveal their true nature: physical and moral weakness manifested through sensuality and lust.

#### *Choosing the better part: Mary of Woodstock*

One royal daughter who attracted condemnation—for the choices she is reported to have made as a nun—was Mary of Woodstock. The annals of Worcester record that Mary, the fourth daughter of King Edward I (d. 1307) and Queen Eleanor of Castile (d.1291), was born in 1279 at Woodstock.<sup>91</sup> Mary’s surviving siblings experienced the lives that marriage, position, and wealth afforded them. As for Mary, however, by the time she was four years old, correspondence was well underway between King Edward and the Abbess of Fontevault. Their letters attest to ongoing negotiations regarding Mary’s future. The abbess quite adamantly insisted upon assurances from the king that Mary would be sent to Fontevault.<sup>92</sup> In the end, Mary was sent to Amesbury Abbey in Wiltshire, a Fontevraultine daughter house. The decision made by Mary’s

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<sup>90</sup> Quoted and translated in Morton, *Guidance*, 76-77. In addition to relying upon scripture, he also looked to the fourth-century bishop, Ambrose, whose work *About Paradise* explains how the inadequacies of women originated in the Garden of Eden.

<sup>91</sup> Henry Richards Luard, *Annales Monastici* (London, 1864), 4:476.

<sup>92</sup> Mary Anne Everett Green, *Lives of the Princesses of England from the Norman Conquest* (London, 1857), 2:406.

parents to choose the religious life for their daughter and the choice of Amesbury Abbey in particular can be traced to the determined influence of two women: Mary's grandmother, the dowager Eleanor of Provence, and the abbess of Fontevrault, Marguerite de Pocey.<sup>93</sup>

In the letters between the king and the abbess, Edward comes across as a not-terribly-enthusiastic father about the prospects being suggested for the future of his daughter. His attempts to procrastinate, by reporting that Mary was living with his mother, Eleanor of Provence, finally gave way to the more conciliatory assurance that eventually Mary “will be yours.”<sup>94</sup> The abbess's response, which amounted to a veiled threat in the event that Edward reneged, leaves the reader in no doubt regarding her earnestness, “We are in great fear and in great doubt lest our devotion to you should grow cold, and lest we should complain of you to the sweet Jesus Christ, our Creator.”<sup>95</sup> True to his word, Edward saw his daughter—six or seven years old at the time—receive the veil in an elaborate ceremony on Assumption Day, August 15, 1285 with thirteen noble companions, and enter Amesbury, daughter house of Fontevrault.<sup>96</sup> Mary Anne Everett Green notes that the girls were pledged “unalterably to the life thus selected for them, long before they were of age to choose for themselves.”<sup>97</sup> Although neither the king

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<sup>93</sup> This abbess, presumably Marguerite de Pocey, was rather new on the job at this stage, having succeeded Isabeau d'Avoir in the June of the previous year. S. Poignant, *L'abbaye De Fontevrault Et Les Filles De Louis XV* (Paris:Nouvelles Éditions Latines, 1966), 254.

<sup>94</sup> “*Erit vestra.*” In Louis-Georges-Oudard Feudrix Bréquigny, M. de, *Lettres De Rois, Reines Et Autres Personages Des Cours De France Et D'angleterre: Depuis Louis VII Jusqu'a Henri IV*, Champollion-Figeac, Jacques-Joseph, M. ed., (Paris, 1839), 317-18, letters 243, no. 7 and, 436-437, letter 329.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 316-317. Everett Green, *LPE*, 2:407.

<sup>96</sup> *Annales Wigornia in Annales Monastici*, 4:491.

<sup>97</sup> Everett Green, *LPE*, 2:410. Accounts and documentation of her life do not indicate whether she confirmed the vows when she reached the age of twelve. Wardrobe accounts indicate that the king himself offered the rings of gold and sapphire. Members of the royal family also left gifts on the altar, and Princess Mary herself “gave an additional offering of a gem-studded clasp, in

nor the queen had been in favor of the profession, “at the insistence of the queen-mother” Eleanor of Provence, Mary was offered as a young child to make her religious profession.<sup>98</sup> The queen mother had a long-standing association with Amesbury that had brought the house many benefits and exemptions, much of which occurred when Eleanor of Provence had been taken ill and was healed at the abbey years previous to the ceremonies of consecration. According to at least two sources, she herself took vows the next year in 1286 at Amesbury.<sup>99</sup> It is worth noting the two semantic distinctions this short entry of 1286 makes between the young girl and her grandmother. Firstly, Eleanor of Provence took both the sacred veil and the nun’s habit, while her granddaughter, Mary, received only the sacred veil. Secondly, while Eleanor *suscepit* the veil and habit, Mary *acceperat* the veil. The two related verbs suggest two different levels of participation in the activity. They are both formed from the root, *capio* [to take or seize], but

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honour of her consecration.” The description from the Jewel Roll, 13 Edw. I is given as footnote 3.

<sup>98</sup> “ad instantiam matris regis” Thomas of Walsingham and Henry Thomas Riley, *Historia Anglicana*, (London, 1863), 1:26. *Annales Dunstaplia in Annales Monastici*, 3:326 discusses Eleanor’s vow and refers to Mary’s previous profession. Because Mary fits into the network of a powerful family, parts of her story appear in studies regarding other family members. For example, to view Mary within the context of her identity as granddaughter and daughter, see respectively Margaret Howell, *Eleanor of Provence: Queenship in Thirteenth-Century England* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 300-302 and John Carmi Parsons, *Eleanor of Castile: Queen and Society in Thirteenth-Century England* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1995), 37-38 and 41.

<sup>99</sup> “Eodem anno, in festo Paschae, Alienora regina, mater regis Edwardi, suscepit habitum monialiem et sacrum velamen apud Hambrisbury; ubi filia ejusdem domini regis Edwardi similiter sacrum velamen acceperat anno praecedenti.” Luard, *Annales Monastici*, 3:326. Nicholas Trivet similarly describes the Queen Mother taking the veil at Amesbury in his N. Trivet and T. Hog, *Annales Sex Regum Angliae, Qui a Comitibus Andegavensibus Originem Traxerunt* (London, 1845), 312 “Alienora regina Angliae, mater regis Edwardi, spreto saeculo apud Ambresburiam induit habitum monacharum.” *Eleanor the queen of England, mother of King Edward, despite her age assumed the habit of nuns.*

their prefixes create distinctions between undertaking and receiving.<sup>100</sup> In other words, Eleanor undertook the habit and veil, while Mary received the veil. In Mary's position as a child oblate, she is not fully recognized as a nun but only as a receiving novice.

The presence of Mary's grandmother undoubtedly smoothed the transition for her and might have been a fundamental reason why Mary herself entered Amesbury. In time Mary was joined by her cousin and later her much younger half-sister. More remarkably, beyond being surrounded by kinswomen, Mary may also have had her nurse with her at the monastery. From a grant recorded in the *Cartulaire de Loders*, we can see that Hélène de Gorges, who acted as nurse to Edward I's daughters, was present at Amesbury in June 1288, when Mary would have been about ten years old.<sup>101</sup> Her presence there has led some to speculate that girls in Mary's position may have made the transition to monastic life more easily if able to have their nurse or a close female relative with them in their childhood. Regardless of his earlier reservations, Edward I played an important role in the history of Amesbury, providing generously to its upkeep and continuing wealth.<sup>102</sup> He also made frequent visits there; between 1281 and 1291, there are seven recorded visits by the king to the abbey, five of those occurring after Mary's entrance.<sup>103</sup> After 1291, the year of the deaths of the queen and queen-mother, the young adolescent Mary was

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<sup>100</sup> For example, the definitions in the *Oxford Latin Dictionary* underscore these distinctions. *Accipio* suggests receiving, acquiring, and accepting; *suscipio* (*succipio*) on the other hand denotes taking, undertaking, and adopting.

<sup>101</sup> Hélène [Elena] de Gorges' name appears in reference to the donation she made to the Abbey of Montebourg. While the charter was made in the presence of Mary's elder sister, Joanna of Acres, it also notes the presence of 'et aliarum filiarum domini Regis Edwardi.' Dom Leon Guilloreau, *Cartulaire de Loders*, (Évreux: Imprimerie de L'Eure, 1908), 32. Having one's nurse may have alleviated some of the problems associated with young child oblates.

<sup>102</sup> Dom Leon Guilloreau, "Marie de Woodstock; une fille d'Édouard 1<sup>er</sup>, moniale à Amesbury," *Revue Mabillon*, 9 (1914), 350.

<sup>103</sup> *VCH Wiltshire*, 3:247

joined by her cousin, Eleanora of Bretagne, whose veiling took place in November.<sup>104</sup> Eleanora eventually moved on to the French mother house and in 1304 became its abbess, serving in that role for some thirty-eight years.<sup>105</sup> In the year of Edward's death, Mary's infant half-sister, Eleanora, was sent to Amesbury apparently with the intention of following in the religious footsteps of her elder sibling; she died at the age of five, however, well before any profession could be made.<sup>106</sup>

Although never an abbess, Mary did hold the position of Visitor, which probably suited her quite well with her penchant for travel.<sup>107</sup> Evidence supports an active role for Mary in the politics and well-being of the abbey, notably in her intervention during the controversial election of the prioress c. 1316.<sup>108</sup> To the benefit of her house, Mary also participated as a patroness to Nicholas Trivet in the composition of his vernacular world history, *Cronicles*. This Anglo-

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> P. Clément, *Une Abesse De Fontevrault Au XVIIe Siècle: Gabrielle De Rochechouart De Mortemart Par Pierre Clément* (Didier, 1869), 354.

<sup>106</sup> Everett Green, *LPE*, 2:435.

<sup>107</sup> Details regarding some of Mary's travels, particularly when the Wardrobe accounts can verify the dates and expenditures, can be found in Everett Green, *LPE*, 2: 424-426. Letters between Mary and her brother, Edward, are discussed in J. S. Hamilton, "The Character of Edward II: The Letters of Edward of Caernarfon Reconsidered" in *The Reign of Edward II: New Perspectives*, 16. In this discussion, we see Edward, the future Edward II, giving Mary a greyhound. Another chapter in the collection, Alison Marshall discusses Mary's frequent family visits in "Childhood and Household of Edward II's Half-Brothers" and discloses more of the details of Mary's frequent travels, 202. Ruth J. Dean, *Nicholas Trevet, Historian* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 343 briefly describes Mary's role as deputy to the abbess of Fontevrault in her capacity as visitor. For a concise overview of Mary within this context, see Virginia Blanton, "'...the quene in Amysbery, a nunne in whyght clothys and blak...': Guinevere's Asceticism and Penance in Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur*," *Arthuriana* 20, 1 (spring 2010): 56-57, accessed December 28, 2015, <https://muse.jhu.edu/>.

<sup>108</sup> For Mary's letter to her brother about the controversial election see M. A. E. Green, *Letters of Royal and Illustrious Ladies of Great Britain: From the Commencement of the Twelfth Century to the Close of the Reign of Queen Mary* (H. Colburn, 1846), 60-63.



Norman French work begins with a dedication to Mary, describing her as choosing the better part, that is the religious life as opposed to a secular one, in imitation of Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus.<sup>109</sup> This claim stands in stark contrast to Mary's memorial in the *VCH Wiltshire* that sums up her life as "spiritually unedifying, devoted, as it was to travel, junketing, and dicing."<sup>110</sup>

While such a summation of a woman's life could be ascribed to a passionate chronicler with an axe to grind against Mary's father or brother, or even against Amesbury, it rather reflects a Victorian assessment of a young woman who travelled, socialized, and gambled.<sup>111</sup> By scrutinizing the household accounts used to determine Mary's whereabouts, her expenditures, and companions, we generally see that she is often travelling. The majority of her travels are undertaken en route to or alongside members of her family.<sup>112</sup> Added to such damning critiques for a bride of Christ are later allegations of her sexual affair with the husband of one of her nieces.<sup>113</sup> Such an accusation could have been true in light of Mary's frequent travels outside of

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<sup>109</sup> From Luke 10:42 "optimam partem elegit ispi Maria que no auferetur ab ea." "Mary hath chosen the best part, which shall not be taken away from her." The Anglo-Norman and later Middle English versions of the chronicle are discussed in Laura Barefield, "Lineage and Women's Patronage: Mary of Woodstock and Nicholas Trevet's *Les Cronicles*" *MedievalFeminist Forum*, 33, no. 1 (2002), 26.

<sup>110</sup> *VCH Wiltshire*, 3:247.

<sup>111</sup> The *VCH* reference above cites Mary Anne Everett Green's chapter on Mary as its source.

<sup>112</sup> See footnote 106 above for some details regarding the family visits Mary made.

<sup>113</sup> While a trail of household accounts certainly testifies to Mary's love of luxuries and subsequent indebtedness, a later source alleges an affair between Mary and her niece, Joan of Bar's husband, John de Warenne. Details provided in Dean, *Nicholas Trevet, Historian*, 343 footnote 1: "To the bishop of St. Asaph. Mandate to absolve John de Warenne, earl of Surrey and Strathearn, lord of Bromfield and Yal, from the excommunication which he has incurred by intermarrying with Joan, daughter of Henry, count of Barre, whose mother's sister he had carnally known. A penance is to be enjoined, and as to the marriage, canonical action is to be taken."

the nunnery. John de Warenne, the man in question, however, made this confession after Mary's death and used it in the hope of exiting a marriage he despised.<sup>114</sup> Part of his desire to exit the marriage was based upon another of his sexual affairs with another woman, Maud de Nerford.<sup>115</sup>

The mixed legacy of her life aside, Mary, whose profession was made early—too early according to canon law—remained a nun until her death at the age of fifty-four or so years.<sup>116</sup> The initial compromise of allowing Mary's veiling might have included having her live nearby—at Amesbury—rather than across the Channel at the mother house, Fontevrault. The colorful catalog of Mary's choices, which have garnered considerable attention over the centuries, depict a woman with a close affinity to her natal family. In addition to seeking opportunities to visit and travel with members of her family, Mary—like her parents and brother—clearly engaged in extravagant and debt-inducing spending. Given the dire tragedy of her brother, Edward II's (d. 1327), reign disparaging assessments of her entire family would not be remarkable. When taken as a whole, Mary's choices reflect a woman who—regardless of her religious status—sought out the pleasures, luxuries, and travel that secular women might pursue. Considering that her life as a nun was lived in the days both before and after the issuing of *Periculoso* further highlights the perceived outrageousness of her priorities.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Details regarding John de Warenne's marriage to Joan of Bar can be found in F. Royston Fairbank, "The Last Earl of Warenne and Surrey and the Distribution of his Possessions," *The Yorkshire Archaeological Journal*, 19 (1907): 198-200. See also Ward, *Women of the English Nobility*, 66-67.

<sup>115</sup> Fairbank, "The Last Earl," 198.

<sup>116</sup> The documentary evidence ends in 1332 with a document from the Close Rolls regarding the payment of an annual rent to the hospital of Saint-Giles in Wilton. Guilloureau, "Marie de Woodstock," 359.

<sup>117</sup> See Valerie Spear, *Leadership in Medieval English Nunneries* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2005), 156 for a look at the post-*Periculoso* mixing of pilgrimage travel of secular women and religious women based upon Chaucer's Wife of Bath, Prioress, and *The Tale of Beryn*.

Despite Nicholas Trivet's well-chosen flattery about Mary "optimam partem elegit," she actually had little say in the initial decision made for her to take the veil. Her choices then were confined to a proscribed set of options as a religious woman living at the end of the thirteenth century. As a royal daughter at the time, however, she might have fully enjoyed the amusements and travel that were available to her siblings. As it was, her pursuit of these adventures stigmatized and memorialized her as a religious with a long list of "vices." When scrutinized, however, *Periculoso* specifies that its audience of nuns was made for those who had "by free choice...vowed their chastity."<sup>118</sup> As such, one might argue that the lack of choice for Mary that initially put her into the cloister, should have relieved her from this command to "remain perpetually cloistered." The evidence taken as a whole suggests a woman with a love of travel, a number of on-going debts, and an overall loyalty to her nunnery. Thus from what we might ascertain from the distinctions that exist in these multiple accounts, if Mary had any choice, it was probably to try to have the best of both (the religious and secular) worlds.

### *Le Fresne*

Parental—in this case, maternal—power over a child's fate leads to a number of life-directing twists and turns in the eponymously named *lai*, *Le Fresne*, by Marie de France.<sup>119</sup> Throughout the story, the heroine remains at the mercy of other people, who must make the right decision in order to safeguard Fresne. While this summation may seem to suggest a simplistic

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<sup>118</sup> Makowski has provided a translation of *Periculoso* in her appendices in *Canon Law and Cloistered Women*, 135.

<sup>119</sup> All citations for Marie de France's *lais* come from three versions: an Anglo-Norman French (based on the thirteenth-century manuscript Harley 978), a modern French translation, and an English translation. Laurence Harf-Lancner, trans., *Lais de Marie de France*, (Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 1990) and Robert Hanning and Joan Ferrante, trans., *The Lais of Marie de France* (Durham, NC: The Labyrinth Press, 1978).

tale of a girl without agency, it in fact hides the true qualities of the heroine and the complex nature of her character. Indeed in the *lai*, she journeys physically, spiritually, and emotionally, and these transitions parallel her moves from natal to adoptive home, from childhood to womanhood; from lover to wedded wife. Significantly, they also present a potentially uncomfortable blending of the carnal and charitable—that eventually leads her to an uncanonical marriage to her lover.

In *Le Fresne*, a proud, judgmental lady shames a new mother of twins, declaiming that such pregnancies occur as a result of infidelity. Having made much of the scandal, the proud lady herself becomes pregnant. The revelation of twins at the delivery overwhelms her as she realizes the implications of her twin daughters. In her desperation to escape her own calumny, the new mother temporarily contemplates murdering one of the twins but is dissuaded by the women attending her. A plan is devised by the *dameisele*, a young noblewoman attending her, who explains, “Madame...stop your moaning/that is doing no good!/Give me one of the babies/and I will rid you of her/I will leave her to be found at the door of a monastery, where I will carry her safe and sound.”<sup>120</sup> The first of many choices must be made at this point, and the mother appoints one of the twin girls for the abandonment. As the mother ritually prepares her daughter for the separation, she envelopes the baby in “a linen garment...soft and under an embroidered silk robe from Constantinople” and attaches “a band of pure gold” tied around the baby’s wrist.<sup>121</sup> These choices affirm the girl’s noble status, even as they furnish her with the necessary

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<sup>120</sup> Lines 107-109, 113-116. “Dame’, fet ele, ‘ne valt rien./Laissez cest duel, si ferez bien!/L’un des enfanz me bailliez ca!/ ... /A un mustier la geterai,/tut sein e salf l’i porterai./ Alcuns prozdum la trovera,/se Deu plest, nurrir la fera.”

<sup>121</sup> Lines 121, 123, 125 129. “Bon cheinsil ... gentil e desus un paile roé ... de Costentinoble” and “un gros anel de fin or.” The paile roé de Costantinoble was a silk brocade. It was well-known as a cloth *de luxe*. The Anglo-Norman dictionary notes it as, “brocade, rich silk cloth,” a “silk mantle,” and a “roundel-patterned silk.” See *AND* <http://www.anglo-norman.net/>.

accoutrements for whatever destiny awaits her. The cloth has the potential to fulfill a number of purposes for the girl, depending upon the fate that awaits her: it can swaddle her for travel, veil her for marriage—spiritual or secular, or shroud her for death. The exoticism of the brocade silk from Constantinople predicts a journey into the wonder-filled unknown, even as the wedding band, which is made of an ounce of the finest gold, will feature in whatever marital status awaits her.

The *dameisele* relieves the mother of the baby, expunging the past with every step she takes. Eventually she finds herself in a town, and the solid architecture of an abbey draws her onward to a convent of nuns who are led by their abbess. Finding the entrance to the convent, she is confident that the baby will receive protection and kindness. The word, *l'us*, that Marie de France consistently employs for a door, represents a portal through which change and transformation can occur.<sup>122</sup> For the baby, soon to be known as Fresne, *l'us* will not only symbolize a physical door for her entrance into the nunnery but also a conduit of two-way movement, resulting in a loosely defined culture of enclosure that is neither prison nor tomb. The *dameisele* then spots an ash tree whose trunk has branched out into four limbs where the baby can be safely ensconced. Laying the baby in the ash tree's nest, the young woman's role is fulfilled; the baby's next protector, the guardian of the nunnery itself, takes up the role. Going about his duties and upon opening the abbey door, the *portier* spots the baby draped in her

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<sup>122</sup> Marie de France uses this noun in other works as well, for example in *Guigemar*, lines 673-676 and elsewhere in *Le Fresne*, at the moment in lines 181-182 when the porter is on the brink of finding the baby: “Chandeiles, lampes alumina,/les seins sona e l'us ovri.” Marie's word choice reflects the language of her day and was used by contemporary authors such as Chrétien de Troyes, although in its alternate form of *l'uis*. This form is where the modern, *huis*, derives. All of these terms can be traced back to the Latin, *ostium*, that represented a doorway, mouth of a river, or bodily orifice. See K. Bartsch and L. Wiese, *Chrestomathie De L'ancien Français (VIIIe-XVe Siècles) Accompagné D'une Grammaire Et D'un Glossaire* (Leipzig: F.C.W. Vogel, 1913), 433. According to the *OED*, *Ostium* itself probably derived from the Sanskrit for 'lips.'

beautiful cloth upon a branch of the ash tree.<sup>123</sup> He takes the infant to his daughter, who has recently given birth, so that the child can be properly fed, warmed, and bathed.

The *portier* reveals his discovery to the abbess. She swears him to secrecy and adopts the baby as her niece. A ceremony initiates the baby into the security of the abbey by the abbess—who has already been credited as guarding over her nuns.<sup>124</sup> Not needing a priest or male cleric, she assumes a role outside her religious authority by baptizing the baby herself. She christens the infant, Fresne, in honor of the sheltering ash tree. By this stage then, Fresne’s destiny has been shaped by the interventions of her mother, the *dameisele*, the *portier*, and the abbess. Separated from her natal family and now an orphaned girl, Fresne’s life depends upon the choices, actions, and attitudes of others. Given the chance now to die or live, Fresne grows up in the maternal space that hides and encloses her but is neither stifling nor oppressive: “The lady passed the child as her niece and hid her there for a long time, raising her within the enclosure of the convent.”<sup>125</sup> Vocabulary such as *celee*, *clos*, and *nurrie* emphasizes these assertions (hidden, enclosed, and nurtured/brought up). There is no controversy about her bringing a newborn baby into the abbey. Fresne, at the age of seven, begins her education under the tutelage of her abbess-aunt. The text not only underscores the girl’s beauty but also her healthy size. As an abandoned child, this statement of spiritual and physical health means that infant mortality is no longer a threat. As Fresne thrives, her natural beauty accordingly blossoms. In the hagiographical and religious romance tradition we might now expect Fresne to become a bride of Christ, so that her beauty

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<sup>123</sup> Lines 181-183: “Cette nuit-la, il se lève tôt,/allume chandelles et lampes,/sonne les cloches et ouvre la porte.”

<sup>124</sup> Line 154.

<sup>125</sup> Lines 231-234: “La dame la tint pur sa niece/Issi fu celee grant piece/dedenz le clos de l’abeïe/fu la dameisele nurrie.”

would be matched by her growing piety. Marie de France, however, has other plans for her heroine, a heroine of indeterminate status.

This is not a tale of child oblation regardless of the fact that Fresne came into the religious enclosure as a young child. Taking religious vows is never part of the narrative, but being of uncertain parentage and unknown birth, makes secular marriage vows to a nobleman improbable.<sup>126</sup> This does not prevent the *seigneurs du pays* [local noblemen] from taking an interest in the abbess's niece and coming to the abbey to visit. Exactly midway through the *lai*, Marie de France has constructed yet another set of crossroads for the heroine: a love affair with one of the area's wealthiest lords, Gurun. This affair underscores the sensual, unvirginal in Fresne, for which Marie de France makes no apologies and offers no theological excuses. Being raised inside the nunnery has not extinguished or diminished her sexual identity. In time, worried about disclosure as well as a potential pregnancy, however, Gurun urges to Fresne to leave the abbey and live with him. This intersection in her life is the first in which Fresne holds the power to choose for herself. Going with this man would remove her from the safety of her female space; although it would still not clarify her status. In essence, Fresne's choice simply separates her from the only world she has known. Revealing her gullibility, she accepts Gurun's promises of undying love and faithful protection.<sup>127</sup> In the ritual she enacts for this departure, Fresne

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<sup>126</sup> While the porter and his daughter had earlier conjectured in lines 208-210 that Fresne was of noble birth—based upon the silk cloth and gold band—her lineage remains a mystery and thus her noble birth accounts for little as the story unfolds.

<sup>127</sup> Lines 295-298.

gathers her few precious belongings from the chest that comes to symbolize her past, present, and future.<sup>128</sup>

Fresne then passes over the abbey threshold to live with the lord, leaving behind the sacred space of her youth for the secular world of her womanhood. In his household, she is admired and loved by all.<sup>129</sup> Without recognized noble birth, however, she is not, according to the lord's vassals, suitable for marriage with Gurun. They urge him instead to seek out a lady of "noble naissance." Their arguments against Fresne hold the threat for Gurun of losing everything and not having an heir as a result of their relationship. Thus, a young woman of Fresne's age is found, who arrives with her family for the nuptials. Even as the household grieves their losing Fresne to someone else, Fresne herself demonstrates Griselda-like virtues, voluntarily preparing the bedchamber for her lover's new bride. The existing bed covering does not meet her expectations, so Fresne re-covers the bed using her own *paille roé*. It is this act that allows the fiancée's (and her own) mother to understand who this beautiful young woman truly is. Fresne's replacement, the young woman chosen for Gurun's bride is of course, Fresne's twin sister, Coldre, the hazel tree.

This uncovering of the truth reverses the *lai*'s hidden and undisclosed truths. Hiding Fresne and choosing her hiding places have marked the narrative from the moment of her birth. This emphasis upon the undisclosed is mirrored in the safeguarding of Fresne's coffer that contains her birthright. Uncovering the truth occurs after the marriage vows have been said by Coldre and Gurun but before the marriage is consummated. The mother repents and confesses,

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<sup>128</sup> Lines 313-316. "La meschine bien les guarda;/ en us cofre les enferm. Le cofre fist od sei porter,/nel volt laisser ne ubliër." The young woman carefully kept her objects locked in a coffer that she carefully took with her.

<sup>129</sup> Lines 320-322.



revealing all to her husband and daughters. Waiting until the next morning, the unconsummated marriage is annulled. Fresne becomes Gurun's new bride, as she exits her indeterminate status to enter noble status as a married woman.

Passing into and out of sacred and secular space provides Fresne with the means to develop personally, leaving her vulnerable, yet resilient in the end. Neither wholly religious nor wholly lay, Fresne exhibits equally the medieval virtue of *caritas* (charity) in her generosity and the recognized vice of *carnalitas* (carnality, sensuality) in the role she assumes with Gurun. Paradoxically, Fresne's identity and success are derived from her humility. As such, Marie de France has refused to portray Fresne as a straightforward character, denying her even the easy classification as religious or secular. Although not veiled or professed, Fresne freely demonstrates the Christian ideals of humility, charity, and forgiveness; not fully secular, she assumes a sensual, amorous role. Further blurring of lines occurs more than once as traditional and canonical boundaries are crossed and thus threatened: an abbess baptizing the baby, a first marriage annulled without just cause, and remarriage for Gurun. Marie de France, in this *lai* as in others, fleshes out both male and female characters who must make choices that affect themselves and others. The mother, *dameisele*, *portier* and his nursing daughter, abbess, lover face decisions that propel the narrative onward. Any one of these characters could have derailed Fresne's future security and life had they acted differently. Significantly, Marie de France may have given one of the most challenging decisions to Gurun. His dilemma with respect to his rule and future heir resembles the place in which Marie of Blois eventually finds herself in the following chapter. As such, Fresne's departure from the sacred into the secular in combination with Gurun's dramatic decision to ensure proper governance of his lands prefigure in many ways the discussion to come regarding the Abbess Marie in 1160.

### *Conclusion*

Medieval spiritual and secular writers regularly pronounced on the lives of women, framing their judgments in terms of choice and directions. Anselm of Bec explained that Gunnhildr had been chosen by God as his own and that her parents had reared her to this vocation. Marie of Blois, we are told, was initiated into the religious habit in childhood, leaving us to understand that she entered religion early in life. Coupled with the documents attaching her to Saint-Sulpice in Rennes, we can be reasonably certain of her status as a child oblate. The timing of her entrance into religion underscores a continuing trend by parents to use the nunnery to protect their daughters during times of turbulence and warfare. While Mary of Woodstock entered into Amesbury Abbey without the impetus of war, she did so as a very young girl at the insistence of her grandmother. Nicholas Trivet depicted her religious status in terms of her having chosen the better part. Correspondence between her father, Edward I, and the abbess of Fontevrault, however, verifies that Mary had had no part in this decision.

Parental power had suffered major challenges by legists who sought to minimize it in preference to free consent. Much of the contemporary literature regarding free consent dealt squarely with vows, meaning that lifelong promises to religious or secular marriage remained subject to the desires or at least the approval of the person or people involved. Such legal interventions then might have fully eradicated child oblation in light of the concerns regarding the lack of consent that plagued the practice. It was not solely vows that parental power might control, however. The *lai, Fresne*, by Marie de France showcased the dangers involved when parents had too much power over the lives of their children. Fresne's mother contemplated infanticide but yielded to the lighter sentence of abandonment when she found herself shamed by giving birth to twins. Fresne, subject to the whims and decisions of others, appears to be without

agency as her destiny is shaped by her mother, the *dameisele*, the porter, the abbess, the Lord Gurun, and the area noblemen. Similarly, on the surface, she appears as a self-effacing, naïve young woman with little worldly knowledge. Marie de France, however, did not create a one-dimensional character in Fresne. As the *lai* progresses, we find Fresne's physical beauty and health matched by her passion and sensuality. Before the dénouement, Fresne's fate builds inescapably towards one of potential servitude if not concubinage. Once again, the mother holds the key to Fresne's future life. The mother's confession is itself made possible by Fresne's concern for others. In the end, Fresne asserts herself in a Christ-like manner, demonstrating the Gospel lessons of the paradoxes of humility and power. As such, Fresne, who had no power to choose, in the end finds the means to choosing her future direction.

Reading *Fresne* alongside the historical women in this chapter immediately challenges the assumptions of Duby's "*mâle moyen âge*." Marie de France did not give Fresne all of the advantages of life including a loving and supportive family. Rather she has reduced her character to the extremes of vulnerability, the girl abandoned and alone. Fresne like Gunnhildr, especially, makes use of the constraints and obstacles in her way. Fresne, moreover, finds power, recognition, and status through the virtues of self-sacrifice and kindness. We might imagine that Marie de France herself is challenging the glorification of the raw pursuit of power through male aggression and competition. As such, a new discourse of power emerges from this narrative, giving credibility to alternative routes to success. The crafting of such challenges within the writings of Marie de France similarly contradicts Duby's assertions regarding the role of women in the courtly literature of the twelfth century. Marie's *lais* flesh her female characters as more than "an illusion, a sort of veil or screen...or rather simply a medium, an intermediary, the

mediator.”<sup>130</sup> The journeys of Marie’s heroines may be different than the male heroes of romance, but realization of objectives is no less celebrated.

Just as the intervention of parents influenced Fresne’s life, Marie of Blois’ life was similarly affected by King Stephen and Queen Matilda’s response to the dangers and turmoil of the 1130s and 1140s. Their desire to protect Marie led them to seek refuge for her. We have seen already the involvement that the queen took in the lives of her children. Questions remain, but the evidence for Marie’s residence at Saint-Sulpice-la-Forêt is compelling. Living in Brittany at the time would have provided her with a location not directly involved with English, Norman, or Boulonnais politics. Once Marie arrived in England in the late 1140s, the choice of religious houses in England corresponded with the queen’s own activities in Middlesex and Essex and then later in Kent. Once at Lillechurch, Marie assumed the role of prioress to a group of nuns from Brittany in a house with excellent transport links and a vibrant connection to its locale. Marie’s parents and brothers patronized and supported the priory in a number of ways.

In this chapter, Marie has appeared as a child oblate, and there is no reason to suppose that her status was meant to be temporary. Becoming a prioress as an older adolescent or young woman consolidated her commitment to a religious life. That her parents had intervened in the foundation of Lillechurch Priory further solidified Marie’s role as a religious. As such, the experiences of Marie and Mary of Woodstock clearly do not represent the child oblation described by Orderic Vitalis, in which a child leaves family entirely to live out the rest of his days in the monastery. Rather, Marie and Mary lived double lives in which the gates of the religious enclosure had not closed firmly behind them.

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<sup>130</sup> Georges Duby, *Love and Marriage in the Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 62.

Despite the proximity Marie enjoyed with her family and the interactions they played in each other's lives, in time, everything changed. The next chapter moves us closer to seeing Marie, like Gunnhildr and Fresne, without family and in a position to choose the future direction of her life.

## CHAPTER TWO—*N'ONQUES NE FU TENUE ANCLOSE*: DARING THE ENCLOSURE<sup>1</sup>

The prior and writer, Caesarius of Heisterbach (d. 1240), penned the well-known story of the sacristan of a convent, who

[W]as tempted by a clerk and agreed to meet him after Compline. But when she was trying to pass through the door of the chapel, she saw Christ standing in the arch, with hands outspread, as though upon the cross. She ran to another doorway and to another and to another, but in each she found the crucifix.<sup>2</sup> Then, coming to herself, she recognized her sin and flung herself before an image of the Virgin to ask pardon. The image turned away its face; then, as the trembling nun redoubled her entreaties, stretched out its arm and dealt her a buffet saying: “Foolish one, whither wouldst thou go? Return to thy dorter.” And so powerful was the Virgin’s blow that the nun was knocked down thereby and lay unconscious upon the floor of the chapel until morning.<sup>3</sup>

Reminiscent of a nightmare in which there is no escape, this religious equivalent of *huis clos* nonetheless rescued her from infidelity and punishment. A lesson regarding the protective, if excessive, nature of her enclosure was forcefully illustrated in order to prevent the sacristan and other brides of Christ from exiting its doors and fulfilling their lusts. Human vigilance and human architecture had failed, whereas a strongminded and strapping Virgin Mother and her

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<sup>1</sup> “She was never kept enclosed.” Line 6642 of *Cligès* by Chrétien de Troyes. For this discussion, I use two editions of the romance: Chrétien de Troyes, *The Complete Romances of Chrétien De Troyes*, trans. David Staines (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990) and Chrétien de Troyes, *Cligès*, ed. Wendelin Foerster (Halle, 1884).

<sup>2</sup> This story is partially recounted and translated by Eileen Power, *Medieval English Nunneries: C.1275 to 1535* (1922; repr. New York: Biblo and Tannen, 1988), 622-3. The original Latin version can be found in Joseph Strange, *Caesarii Heisterbacensis Monachi Ordinis Cisterciensis Dialogus Miraculorum. Textum ... Recognovit Josephus Strange*. (Cologne, 1851) 2: 41-42.

<sup>3</sup> Caesarius notes, “Licet gravis esset alapha, prorsus tamen a tentatione per illam fuit liberate. Durus morbus duram requirit medicinam.” Power explains and translates, “‘Although the buffet was hard,’ writes Caesarius, conscious perhaps that the Virgin had acted with less than her wonted gentleness, ‘she was utterly delivered from temptation by it. A grievous ill requires a grievous remedy.’” Power, *Medieval English Nunneries*, 623, footnote 1.

crucified son successfully and repeatedly prevented the sacristan's exit from the enclosure. Monastic records indicate a common concern over the upkeep of walls, keys, and doors, and architectural advances continued to provide for ever stronger, higher, and thicker monastery walls. Popular literary allusions, however, portrayed and emphasized their vulnerability. Because supervision of the nunnery's keys generally fell to the sacristan of the house, she held a job of trust in which total obedience to the rule of the house and its abbess was crucial. As such, the sacristan oversaw the basic administration of its security. If she acted foolishly, as described by the Virgin Mary, the entire community's spiritual and physical safety was threatened. Consequently, such literary inventions sounded the cry loudly: architectural impediments could not prevent the violation of the religious veil and enclosure. Notably, these narratives focus more attention on the women within the enclosure seeking liberation than on those outside the nunnery gates trying to break in, a theme that resonates equally for male and female monastics within the *Miracles*.

This chapter incorporates movement into and out of the nunnery in its examination of the enclosure. Religious women are naturally part of this discussion, but the theme is expanded to include secular women and secular enclosure. The chapter relies on anecdotal evidence regarding women as characters in literary works of the period as well as administrative, chronicle, and genealogical evidence for twelfth- and thirteenth-century women in England and northern France. Obvious in many of the literary productions, women challenged the constructed architectural enclosure of the nunnery as well as the woven fabric enclosure of the holy veil and habit. Conversely, some women, like Ela of Salisbury, went to extraordinary lengths to construct the enclosure and embrace the veil. Ela's efforts not only highlight her own religious journey but also furnish the context regarding family foundations. Other women such as Marie of Blois rose

to the office of abbess but later departed from both nunnery and veil. This portion of her biography recalls that of Gunnhildr's departure from Wilton Abbey, as it reveals more of the complications and controversy involved in leaving religious status. It is not, however, a straightforward religious for-or-against examination of the enclosure: some women, such as the literary character, Fenice, experienced a complicated relationship with secular enclosure. As the heroine of the romance, *Cligés*, Fenice relied upon and simultaneously battled against the impositions of her imprisonments. What ultimately emerges from these discussions is a set of mixed images and messages regarding the enclosure. Consequently, we can see that enclosure as a concept and practice—and the freedom from it—did not remain static and unmalleable, despite efforts to impose fixed regulations. Instead, it was highly contextualized by individual circumstances, geography, and personality.

The intermingling of enclosure and restraint that characterizes many of Fenice's experiences stand in stark contrast to the affirming and liberating imagery of the *hortus conclusus*, an ideal emerging from scriptural references to the enclosed garden.<sup>4</sup> This private and munificent horticultural refuge embodied the best of heavenly bounty, beauty, and serenity. Alongside the sensual lovemaking suggested between bride and groom in the Song of Songs, briefly discussed in Chapter One, this paradisiac landscape became part of the discourse of the twelfth century in the recruiting of women and men into the religious life. The *hortus conclusus* was often discussed alongside the *porta clausa* or closed door of the Old Testament that had been shut by the prideful sin of Eve and subsequently opened by the humble piety of the Virgin Mary.

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<sup>4</sup> See footnote 85 below.



Worlds away from the serenity of the *hortus conclusus*, we can find friction recorded in the episcopal visitation registers of religious houses in thirteenth-century England and Normandy. While not only wrongdoing was recorded, particular infringements of the house rules were often noted. Continued recalcitrance meant repeat visits were made with varying degrees of episcopal success recorded. One area particularly troublesome to the archbishops was the keeping of personal property inside locked coffers by nuns. As such, a twist on the theme of enclosure emerges as nuns enclosed and locked away what they deemed worthy of protecting. Similarly, attempts by religious inmates to exit the enclosure—generally temporarily—elicited frequent disapproval and punishment. These discussions as well as one regarding religious vows and obedience operate throughout the chapter to underscore recurring tensions between male leadership and female religious.

This theme culminates in this study with efforts by the last pope of the thirteenth century, Boniface VIII. Fed up with the need for constant reiteration of the rules and justification of strict female enclosure, he issued a stark, no-nonsense decree in 1298. His *Periculoso* was meant as the final word on the matter. Returning to this document—which was discussed in the introduction and in reference to Mary of Woodstock—we begin this chapter by briefly reprising *Periculoso* as a reminder of its place in our microhistory of the Anglo-Norman world. Similarly, it provides a useful context for understanding the entire chapter as well as for framing this period of female monasticism within a climate that was often hostile and accusatory.

### *Guarding the Enclosure*

Because not only religious women wore veils in medieval societies, the physical enclosure of the nunnery more than the holy veil became the most culturally significant form of containment imposed upon nuns. Pope Boniface VIII's 1298 bull of *Periculoso* sought to

reinforce and impose this cultural restraint without loopholes. As Elizabeth Makowski explains, this decree “was the first papal legislation to require strict enclosure of nuns of every order throughout the Latin Church.”<sup>5</sup> Boniface and his decree fit into a long history of such pronouncements, as dozens of similar attempts had been made over the preceding millennium to restrict the movements of virgins and religious women dedicated to Christ. For example, in the *Regula ad moniales*, Caesarius of Arles (d. 542) had completely prohibited leaving the monastery and given the abbess total control over its keys and doors. The rule clearly stipulated that the nunnery entrance could never be opened “without her permission.”<sup>6</sup> Gauging the success of Boniface’s *Periculoso*, Makowski includes the various interested parties:

In sum, although *Periculoso* was accepted early, and some might even say eagerly, by the English episcopacy, its enforcement remained a difficult if not impossible matter. Faced with opposition from the nuns themselves, as well as from their secular patrons and beneficiaries, local ordinaries seem to have been willing to temper the strict regulation of *Periculoso*. In part, they did so by superimposing existing provincial legislation upon the decree.

This resistance complicates the issue further. The enclosure of women was not unknown in the secular world, nevertheless it had become, for many reformers, the hallmark of the religious life. By and large, implicit to the enclosing, protective environment of the nunnery was the conservation of *integritas* or intactness of virginity for maidens, the assurance of marital fidelity for wives, and the conservation of chastity for widows.

For those women of any marital status who sought entrance into the religious life, crossing the threshold into the enclosure ostensibly constituted a complete break with family, wealth, and self-will. This transition was reinforced by her triple vows of chastity, poverty, and

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<sup>5</sup> Elizabeth Makowski, *A Pernicious Sort of Woman: Quasi-Religious Women and Canon Lawyers in the Later Middle Ages* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 1.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

obedience. Mirroring her crossing over from the temporal world into the eternal one, the closing of the nunnery gate symbolized her exit from the secular world into the sacred. Even in this symbolic death from the world, the *Regula Monachorum* admonished,

[L]et your convent become your tomb: where you will be dead and buried with Christ...Finally, the thing that is most frightening to the one lying in a burial mound is the grave robber who sneaks in at night to steal precious treasure...Therefore the tomb is watched over by a bishop whom God installed as the primary guardian in His vineyard. It is guarded by a resident priest who discharges his duty on the premises; so that no one enters recklessly nor tries to weaken the tomb.”<sup>7</sup>

In addition to her death, this *Regula* imagines a cloistered woman submitting to the power and protection of both bishop and priest who must safeguard her treasured virginity. Such messages of death, protection, and submission to male oversight continued over the centuries to inform and shape a medieval culture of enclosure.

#### *The Enclosure's Guardians*

Conspicuously absent are these priests and bishop in the following literary representations regarding the zealous Virgin Mother and her diligent care over enclosed women. Obvious in many of the medieval narratives in which she assumes a protecting role—such as Caesarius's sacristan story—Mary understood the nunnery door as a barrier preserving a nun's purity as well as a passage leading to ignominy and scandal. Literary allusions from didactic works such as the *Miracles de Nostre Dame* (*Miracles of the Virgin Mother*) confirm the role that containment played in the safe and effective administration of the monastic life. Testing a woman's acceptance of her enclosure is a common theme in the miracle stories. Doors, allowing

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<sup>7</sup> From the *Regula Monachorum* ascribed to Jerome (perhaps mistakenly) as quoted in Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg, *Forgetful of Their Sex: Female Sanctity and Society, ca. 500-1100* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 140. Translation by Sara Richards, see page 457, footnote 50.

both ingress and egress, gauge the faithfulness of nuns and abbesses to their heavenly bridegroom.

One of the best known writers and poets of this genre was the monk, Gautier de Coinci (d. 1236). He had scaled the monastic ladder over time to become prior of the abbey Vic-sur-Aisne near Soissons and wrote prolifically.<sup>8</sup> His stories often portray a jealous, no-nonsense Virgin Mother who takes vows of virginity seriously and uses whatever tactics necessary to remind nuns of their promises to her son, Christ. Several of Gautier's *Miracles* examine an elopement theme in which the nunnery's perimeter and architecture feature prominently. Overtones of his contemporary, Caesarius of Heisterbach, whose sacristan escape story opened this chapter, can be heard within these portrayals. Both writers underscored the inadequacy of architectural hardware within nunneries and the superiority of the Virgin Mary to protect her daughters. These *Miracles* collections circulated throughout Europe and continued into the following centuries to be told and retold. A unifying feature that marks many of the narratives is their emphasis upon the security or lack of security operating in and around nunneries.

In one of the *Miracles*, "D'une nonain qui vaut pechier, mais Nostre Dame l'en delivra," or "Of the nun who wanted to sin, but was delivered by Our Lady," emphasis is not given to the inadequacy of this hardware but to the wholesale lack of restrictions governing traveling and leaving the nunnery.<sup>9</sup> To accentuate a nun's own role in guarding her virginity and salvation, Gautier de Coinci plotted one route that would lead to sure destruction; it begins with an innocent and temporary visit to friends outside the confines of the abbey. The miracle's title

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<sup>8</sup> Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, "Gautier de Coinci, *Miracles* of the Virgin Mary," in *Medieval Hagiography: An Anthology*, ed. Thomas Head (New York: Routledge, 2001), 627.

<sup>9</sup> Gautier de Coinci, *Vierge et merveille: Les miracles de Notre-Dame narratifs de Moyen Age*, trans. Pierre Kunstmann (Paris: Union Générale d'Éditions, 1981), 106-117.

steadfastly calls attention to the nun's complicity in her ordeal but more crucially to the role played by the Virgin Mary who intervenes and demonstrates her own beneficence, wisdom, and strength. Early on in the story, the reader is informed of the nun's physical and spiritual characteristics: she is beautiful, well-born, and pious.<sup>10</sup> Much like the Old Testament, Job, the nun displays a piety that arouses the jealous interest of the devil. He, as her arch-enemy, watches her carefully and lays a trap in which to snare her.<sup>11</sup> He can effect his evil designs when she exposes a chink in her devotion as the nun foolishly leaves the nunnery to visit friends. Ready to pounce, the devil takes advantage of her departure and incites lust in the heart of a nobleman whom she meets while away from the cloister.<sup>12</sup> The nun does not escape blame, however, as she and her lover quickly arrange for her permanent departure from the cloister to join him; this change will potentially remake her, transforming her from *sponsa Christi* to secular married as well as from *meschine* [maiden] to *dame*.<sup>13</sup>

Moving well beyond the claustrophobia of the nunnery interior depicted in Caesarius of Heisterbach's miracle tale, Gautier's propels the reader into the bowels of hell; this change of setting occurs through the device of the nun's dream on the night of her proposed elopement. Gautier enlists the language of secular literature in order to construct the nun's "*aventure*."<sup>14</sup> The

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<sup>10</sup> Lines 9-11. "Laiens avoit une meschine/Qui mout estoit de franche orinne/Et qui mout ert religeuse."

<sup>11</sup> Lines 15-16. "Grant envie li anemis./Tant l'espia qa'a ses amis."

<sup>12</sup> Lines 18-26. "Un haut home de la contree/De sa biautesi enflamma/Que si desveement l'ama/Por un petitn'issoit dou senz./Li dyables, qui en maint sens/Seit tez affaires asproier,/Tant li fist doner et proier/Son fort corage li ploia./Par messages tant li proia."

<sup>13</sup> Lines 27-35. "Et par biaus dons tant l'asailli/Que riens forslius ne li failli./Leur affaire si atemperent/Que jor assisent et nomerent/Qu'en emblee l'en venroit querre,/Si l'enporteroit en sa terre/Et se l'esposeroit a fame,/Si seroit s'amie et sa dame."

<sup>14</sup> Line 42. "Endormi soi par aventure."

nature of this perverted romance nevertheless translates into a sojourn in hell that lasts for ninety-two lines during which the nun and reader experience the smells, sounds, and sights of a putrefied, gaseous, and deviant underworld.<sup>15</sup> A mutant menagerie of oversized megafauna, composed of bloated and abnormal toads, vermin, snakes, lizards, and adders, surrounds her.<sup>16</sup> As two devils taunt the nun with her imminent damnation, the nun twice invokes the “Douce dame sainte Marie” for aid, only to be ignored and then rebuked as someone completely unknown to her.<sup>17</sup> Fed up with the nun’s supplications, the Virgin Mary tells her, “Leave me alone.... You are neither my servant nor my friend. Call for help from the one you were going to abandon me for.... He will certainly save you from danger, the one for whom you loosed yourself from me and from my son.”<sup>18</sup> As the devils begin to drag the nun into the pit of vermin and reptiles, they are, however, abruptly stopped by the Virgin Mary. Recognizing the nun’s previous devotion to her, she “extended her hand without delay and pulled her [the nun] from the abyss.”<sup>19</sup>

*Notre Dame* then delivers a sermon that expounds upon the nun’s consecrated status, the eternal damnation of a degraded body; and the need to pursue the narrow path of chastity.<sup>20</sup>

When the nun awakes from her nightmare, she is immediately met by her lover’s messengers who have arrived to accompany her away from the nunnery. They do not find the excited would-

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<sup>15</sup> Lines 43-135.

<sup>16</sup> Lines 64-67. “Gros et enflés comme porciaus./Mout a vermine la dedens:/Serpens i a a agus denz,/Grans laisardes et grans culuevres.”

<sup>17</sup> Lines 89-105.

<sup>18</sup> Lines 124-132. “ – Laisse m’ester! fait Nostre Dame./Niez ne m’ancele ne m’amie./Celui por cui m’as deguerpie/Huche qu’il te viengne secorre!/Je ne te doi mie rescorre./Car n’iez mais moie, ainçois iez sieue./Or viengne a toi, si te resqueue!/Jeter te viengne de peril/Cilz por cui lais moi et mon fil!”

<sup>19</sup> Lines 138-142. “Et se li dist: ‘Souffrir ne puis/Qu’en ce puis ci soies perie/Por ce que tu m’as tant servie’/Sa main li tent sanz nul delai,/Si l’a saichie fors dou lai.”

<sup>20</sup> Lines 146-175.

be escapee nun whom they expected, but rather a devoted, fervent bride of Christ who exhorts them, “Flee! Flee! Enemies of God! I do not want another friend nor another husband other than he who is called the king of kings and God. He is my friend and my spouse. I no longer desire to marry another; my heart relies only upon him. Flee from here!”<sup>21</sup> The lesson is learned, and returning to her cloister, the nun resolves that she cannot “frequently leave her abbey nor go to enjoy herself to the houses of her friends....”<sup>22</sup> All female religious similarly play a role in the dénouement, as Gautier—as the narrator of the miracle—informs them that as the spouses and servants of the noble Lord, they should not act like this nun.<sup>23</sup> Both the Virgin’s sermon and the closing remarks underscore the link between the nun’s vow of virginity and the *security* of the enclosed environment to which she has been unfaithful. The vulnerability of the nunnery and its rule are effectively exposed as the power of the Virgin Mother is itself celebrated in retaining the integrity of her daughters is celebrated.

A similar account by one of the best-known abbots of the twelfth century, Aelred of Rievaulx (d. 1167), features a nun who succeeds in outsmarting the vigilance of Watton’s architecture, but falls prey to her own licentiousness. Watton Priory became one of the early Gilbertine houses of England.<sup>24</sup> Recounted as a true event, the “Nun of Watton” questions human

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<sup>21</sup> Lines 181-188. “Fuiez! fuiez! Dieu anemi!/Ne vel, fait ele, nul ami/Ne nul mari se celui non/Qui rois de rois et Diex a non./Mes amis est et mes espoz;/N’ai mais talent qu’autre j’espoz./Mes cuers a lui s’est apuiez;/Fuiez de ci! fuiez! fuiez!”

<sup>22</sup> Lines 199-201. “Bien voit none ne pooit mie/Sovent issir de s’abbeye/N’aler jüer a sez amis.” Significantly, the miracle does not call for the strict enclosure of religious women.

<sup>23</sup> Lines 215-217: “Au haut seigneru, au haut espoz/Qui sanz taster vainne ne poze/Seit et perçoit quanqu’ele penssent” informs the reader that the noble spouse after all knows and perceives all that they think and do.

<sup>24</sup> Both Rievaulx and Watton were Yorkshire houses. As abbot of the Cistercian Rievaulx, Aelred likely looked down on Watton as inferior in its commitment to purity. Its founder, Gilbert of Sempringham, had early on petitioned to create Watton as a Cistercian house. Like Ela’s

efforts to protect and oversee the nunnery and, more subtly, voices concern over age and child oblation. Aelred's messages are mixed in the end as is his hesitant praise for the nuns who acted as the guardians of their own enclosure and, by extension, of their honor. The young nun at the heart of the account had become an oblate at Watton at the uncanonically young age of four. This detail, while not emphasized, is noted nonetheless. One evening she arranges a rendezvous with her lover, who is probably a monk within the double monastery. Before describing the ramifications of their future trysts, Aelred launches into a tirade of recriminations against those in charge of her protection and the physical means of that protection. Perhaps rhetorically directed at the Gilbertine's founder, Saint Gilbert, Aelred questions,

Where, father, was your most diligent concern for the maintenance of discipline then? Where then were your many ingenious devices for eliminating occasions of sin? Where then was that care so prudent, so cautious, so perspicacious, and that supervision so strict in regard to every door, every window, every corner, that it seemed to deny access even to evil spirits? One girl made a mockery of all of your efforts, father, because "except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain."<sup>25</sup>

This lack of diligence and the secret trysts of the nun and monk lead to an unwanted pregnancy.

Learning of the young nun's behavior and pregnancy, the other nuns beat and chain her, obsessing over the possibility of public disclosure and the inevitable scandal it would provoke.

Aelred, treading a fine line between admiring and reproaching their actions, explains that the other nuns lamented, "fearing for their honor, worried that the sin of one would be imputed to all.

It was as if they had already exposed themselves to ridicule in the eyes of everyone...."<sup>26</sup> Their

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attempts with Lacock, Gilbert failed. For a presentation of this shared history and the future direction of the Gilbertines, see Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism*, 225.

<sup>25</sup> Boswell, *The Kindness of Strangers*, 453. Quotation from Psalms 126:1 Douay-Rheims. This set of questions may also contain a barb against the newly formed Gilbertine or Sempringham order. As a Cistercian abbot, Aelred likely viewed the Gilbertine communities of nuns and monks as asking for problems.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 454.



fears led them to extract serious vengeance against the gallivanting monk. Tricked by a veiled monk, he is delivered to the enraged nuns who take him to his former lover, whom they force to cut off his penis. As a final reinforcement of her transgression, the severed member is thrust into her mouth, in imitation of the punishment for traitors. After this gruesome ordeal, while the still-imprisoned nun slept, though still imprisoned, divine intervention obliterated all sign of her advanced pregnancy. Subjected to a thorough and humiliating inspection by the other nuns who “felt her belly...squeezed her breasts...[and]ran their fingers over every joint, exploring everything, [they] found no sign of childbirth, no indication even of pregnancy.”<sup>27</sup>

Aelred’s reported motives for relating the story are two-fold: to provide the details to those who were dear to him but perhaps more poignantly “to deprive the hostile of any advantage and so as not to keep quiet about the glory of Christ.”<sup>28</sup> The nuns undoubtedly acted as the major guardians of their own physical space; resorting to barbaric means, they proved their fidelity to the enclosure and to their vows as the brides of Christ. Aelred’s narrative highlights the disparity of choices that religious women made regarding the nunnery enclosure. The Nun of Watton herself had entered the nunnery at the age of four, reinforcing twelfth-century anxieties over child oblation. Like so many of the narratives that feature in this dissertation, what is written may say more about the writer than the subject itself. There is a significant possibility that Aelred’s “Nun of Watton” represents a snipe at Gilbert of Sempringham and the system that developed in this new order. Politicking between various factions similarly becomes evident in many of the thirteenth-century visitation reports. The following discussion then highlights the role of the

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 457.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 458. In footnote 60 of this same page, Boswell adds the clarification: “Either the enemies of virtue in general, or those hostile to the Gilbertine order and seeking a scandal such as this to discredit it.”

enclosure within the reports; how institutions and individuals fought for the dominance to rule over particular religious houses; and, most tellingly, how the inmates exhibited defiance and initiative when challenged by male authority.

*Male Overseers of the Enclosure*

Chapter 33 of Benedict's Rule, "Whether Monks Should Have Any Private Property" leaves no doubt about the association between personal possessions and the likelihood of sin:

This vice in particular should be torn out at the roots in the monastery: no one should presume to give or receive anything without the abbot's permission, or have any private property, nothing at all, no book or tablets or stylus, but absolutely nothing, since the brothers my [sic] not have either their bodies or their will under their own control. . . . If anyone is caught indulging in this most wicked vice, let him be warned once, then a second time; if he does not amend, let him undergo correction.<sup>29</sup>

Not all religious, however, complied with this exacting demand. For some the enclosed communal space of the religious house likely heightened their need for privacy and secrecy. Just as Marie de France's Fresne kept her own beloved coffer in the abbey, so too did a number of thirteenth-century religious women. For Fresne, the coffer had not only contained her personal belongings but also represented the symbol of her past and the key to realizing fully her real identity. We know about these coffers in thirteenth-century nunneries from the evidence recorded in the visitation registers of Eudes of Rouen (d. 1269) and John Pecham of Canterbury (d. 1292). They each conducted regular visits to the religious houses in their archdioceses and left records behind of their findings. The need to use the visitation registers with caution has already been raised by scholars such as J. H. Lynch and Valerie Spears. In her study, *Leadership in Medieval English Nunneries*, Spears lists some of the provisos to keep in mind, including the fact that not all visits were recorded, the nature and limitations of the formulaic writing involved,

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<sup>29</sup> Benedict, *The Rule of Saint Benedict*, 123.

and the inconsistency in the actual recording process.<sup>30</sup> The reports do, however, provide a glimpse into religious life that we would not otherwise have.

Archbishop Eudes's registers from Normandy recorded numerous infringements of the Benedictine Rule in both male and female houses.<sup>31</sup> They confirm the wanderings of inmates outside of the religious enclosure as well as lapses in monastic obedience with respect to personal and private property, particularly their use of locked trunks and coffer. Eudes's insistence upon transparency, or disclosure, of property can be read as a reversal of monastic insistence upon enclosure. The enclosed became the encloser, seeking to hide away and protect her belongings. Such belongings might have included very personal items of clothing, jewelry, and reading material. This parody of enclosure, when challenged, demanded that these signifiers of individual identity be eliminated. One nunnery that particularly vexed Eudes was the Benedictine Abbey of Montivilliers. A number of battles ensued between the archbishop and nuns, including a potentially uncanonical election of the abbess in 1256 and a bitter tug-of-war over Eudes's visitation rights. Eudes also fought recurrent battles with the nuns at Montivilliers over their locked coffer. The archbishop was ignored when he absolutely forbade the nuns to have keys in the first instance. Besting him again and again, the nuns prompted him to write with frustration in 1262,

[K]eys should be confiscated, as we had ordered before, and that the abbess should punish for a grave fault, and as disobedient, all who should be unwilling to hand over their keys at her request; indeed, we understood that when the abbess asked them to give her their keys, some of them did not care to do so for two to three days, until they had removed their things and had hidden what they did not wish the abbess to see, and for this

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<sup>30</sup> Spear, *Leadership*, 43. Spear blends in Lynch's ideas with her own in this discussion

<sup>31</sup> Although not the purpose of this dissertation, it is worth noting that much of what is here discussed regarding nuns applied similarly to monks.

reason we ordered such nuns to be punished as disobedient and as possessors of property.<sup>32</sup>

In their battle against the archbishop then, the nuns won a small but significant victory, as they managed to stall and prevaricate when ordered to unlock coffers and produce keys. In the end, however, Eudes won the war when he eventually managed to wrest visitation rights over the house.<sup>33</sup>

Conflicts concerning keys, locks, and privacy affected other houses. Consequently, the archbishops confronted locked rooms, secular folk wandering in, eating, and living alongside the religious, and the most egregious of all, nuns leaving the cloister. Adam J. Davis has pointed out in his study of Eudes, whom he refers to as the “holy bureaucrat” that in “the archbishop’s eyes, the dangers for a religious woman venturing beyond the protective walls of her cloister were even greater than for a religious man.”<sup>34</sup> These infringements were not unique to Normandy, and Archbishop John Pecham of Canterbury reported similar ones. He specifically instructed the nuns of Godstow, who were situated uncomfortably close to the scholars of Oxford, that they were not to be found in a guest hall or any chamber or house without the cloister, unless with the abbess or prioress, “And if any do the contrary, we desire her to be separated from the convent, until she has shown her innocence perfectly. And because she is disobedient to our ordinances, she shall be shut up in a chamber for five days in penance.”<sup>35</sup> John Pecham’s fears of scandal and impropriety are matched by the meting out of punishment alongside the expectations of changed

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<sup>32</sup> Odo Rigaldus, Sydney M. Brown, and Jeremy Francis O’Sullivan, *The Register of Eudes of Rouen* (Columbia University Press, 1964), 490-491.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Adam Jeffrey Davis, *The Holy Bureaucrat: Eudes Rigaud and Religious Reform in Thirteenth-Century Normandy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006), 77.

<sup>35</sup> J. Peckham and C. T. Martin, *Registrum Epistolarum Fratris Johannis Peckham: Archiepiscopi Cantuariensis* (London, 1885), 393.

behavior. While no visitation records exist for Romsey during Marie's abbacy, we know from later accounts that the abbey's situation within the town resulted in problems. As discussed below, nuns utilized the parish church door to make their way out of the monastic precincts.

### *Family and the Enclosure*

As noted in Chapter One, the founding of Lillechurch for Marie and her companions came at a time of relative calm for the family during the late 1140s/early 1150s. The next series of events, however, dashed any hopes for stability. In the spring of 1152, the first calamity hit when Marie's mother, Queen Matilda, died at Castle Hedingham in Essex.<sup>36</sup>



*Figure 4 Castle Hedingham in Essex. Photograph by author.*

It is impossible to gauge the full emotional and practical impact of her loss. In the end Eustace neither sat on the English throne nor served as the duke of Normandy. The early optimism in the

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<sup>36</sup> David Crouch, *The Normans: The History of a Dynasty* (London: Hambledon, 2002), 275.

marital alliance between Eustace and Constance of France became nothing more than a memory when Eustace died the following year. This spate of tragedies continued, and the King himself died only months later in October 1154, less than year after his concord with Henry of Anjou. The deaths and their rapidity undoubtedly unsettled the remaining members of the family. For Constance, the impact was immediate and severe. As a childless widow, she would have had few reasons to remain in England, especially after her father-in-law's death. She departed for the Continent and within months was remarried to the ambitious Raymond V, count of Toulouse. Queen Matilda's building project in the abbey church of Faversham was put to immediate use as her own body and the bodies of her son and husband were interred there.<sup>37</sup> Concurrently the English throne passed to Henry of Anjou, who rewarded Stephen and Matilda's last remaining son, William, with gifts of land.<sup>38</sup> William had earlier inherited the county of Boulogne when Eustace died and could now count himself wealthy despite his family's concessions to Henry. As her brother's fortunes increased and as her family members were laid to rest in Kent, Marie prepared to move again, leaving Kent and the priory of Lillechurch.

King Stephen and Queen Matilda's decision to establish Lillechurch Priory for Marie may smack of the overzealous parenting of a spoiled child, but it actually sits comfortably within the pattern of foundations by royal and aristocratic families. Vera Morton comments on female foundations in the introduction to *Guidance for Women in Twelfth-Century Convents*. She examines their place in twelfth-century society, "Convents were often both founded and

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<sup>37</sup> J. Stevenson, *The Church Historians of England: Pt. 1. The Chronicles of John and Richard of Hexham. The Chronicle of Holyrood. The Chronicle of Melrose. Jordan Fantosme's Chronicle. Documents Respecting Canterbury and Winchester* (London, 1856), 29. J. A. Giles and chronicle Anglo-Saxon, *The Venerable Bede's Ecclesiastical History of England, Also the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, with Notes*, Ed. By J.A. Giles (London, 1847), 507.

<sup>38</sup> For a description and map regarding William's lands and estates, see Edmund King, *English Monarchs: King Stephen* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 282-286.

patronised by the families of the leading women in them. The income from a property might be devoted, for instance, to supporting a succession of female members of a family in a nunnery over the generations.”<sup>39</sup> We have already seen the impact an important family might have on a religious house in the evidence regarding Mary of Woodstock and her family in the history of Amesbury Abbey. Their active participation with the house translated into multi-generational entrances and continuing patronage. Moreover it brought greater prestige to the legacy of Robert D’Arbrissel’s vision for Fontevrault and its daughter houses. The founding of religious houses by leading families often resulted in a family’s direct involvement in monastic life and the intermingling of interests and concerns between house and family. It also enabled families to oversee a monastery’s business interests and its potential to generate wealth.<sup>40</sup> In the following example of the Countess of Salisbury and her founding of an Augustinian house for women, all of these elements coalesce. Her story further demonstrates the permeability that existed between the religious and secular worlds for many medieval women.

#### *The Family Foundation of Lacock Abbey*

In the mid-1230s in the county of Wiltshire, the foundation of Lacock Abbey involved female and male members over several generations. Lacock’s foundress, Ela of Salisbury, in time became a nun at Lacock and later its abbess. Well before Lacock’s founding, Ela had married William Longespee (Longsword), the illegitimate brother of King Richard I. Together they had at least seven children and were heavily involved in local affairs. For example, at the

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<sup>39</sup> Morton, *Guidance*, 6.

<sup>40</sup> Somewhat ironically, at least part of Marie’s maintenance to live at St. Leonard’s in Stratford had come from Lillechurch manor, the future home of Lillechurch Priory where she would become prioress.

foundation-laying ceremony of Salisbury Cathedral, they each laid a cornerstone.<sup>41</sup> Ela's duties and roles in the county were amplified by the fact that her husband was absent for much of their married life. When William died in 1226, Ela was well-prepared and trained for the work ahead of her.

At the time of her widowhood, Ela was probably close to forty years of age. Instead of retiring to a nunnery, however, she immediately campaigned for the county office of sheriff for herself. This office, one rarely allowed to women, had been variously held by male members of her family.<sup>42</sup> Acting quickly, she performed homage to Henry III and then, as Christine Owens reports, paid him 500 marks "for the privilege of holding the powerful, lucrative and highly political public office of sheriff of Wiltshire."<sup>43</sup> Ela apparently took her shrieval duties very seriously, serving in this capacity twice in 1227-1228 and 1231-1237.<sup>44</sup> It was during the second of these tenures that Ela formally set the wheels in motion to found a religious house. Ela's plans to establish an abbey for women and priory for men was part of a grand design:

[She] was directed in visions (*per revelationes*) that she shall build a monastery in honour of S. Mary and S. Bernard, in the meadow called Snails' Mead, near Lacock. Accordingly on the 16<sup>th</sup> April, 1232, she founded two monasteries in one day, in the morning of that of Lacock, in which holy canonesses might dwell continually and most devoutly serving God, and in the afternoon the Priory of Hinton of the Carthusian Order.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> W. L. Bowles and J. G. Nichols, *Annals and Antiquities of Lacock Abbey: In the County of Wilts* (London, 1835), 125-126.

<sup>42</sup> Christine Owens, "Noblewomen and Political Activity," in *Women in Medieval Western European Culture*, ed. Linda E. Mitchell (New York: Garland Publishing, 1999), 209 and Jennifer C. Ward, "Ela, suo jure countess of Salisbury (*b.* in or after 1190, *d.* 1261)," *DNB*, (Oxford University Press, 2004) accessed October 26, 2015, <http://www.oxforddnb.com>.

<sup>43</sup> Owens, "Noblewomen and Political Activity," 209.

<sup>44</sup> Ward provides a useful explanation of the time and of a legal dispute over the castle at Salisbury in J. C. Ward, *Women of the English Nobility and Gentry, 1066-1500* (Manchester University Press, 1995), 201-202.

<sup>45</sup> Much of Ela's family history was recorded in the so-called *Book of Lacock*, forming part of the British Museum manuscript, Cotton Vit. A. VIII. Portions of Lacock's early history were lost in



While some doubt has been expressed concerning the single-day, two foundations story, it does not detract from Ela's role in establishing two significant monastic houses.<sup>46</sup>



*Figure 5 The Cloister at Lacock Abbey, Wiltshire. Photograph by author.*

Ela's original desire that Lacock Abbey be a Cistercian house was never realized as a result of Cîteaux's reluctance to admit any further convents into the Order.<sup>47</sup> Nevertheless Ela had a particular set of priorities for the houses, visible in her choice that the neither house be established as Benedictine. This decision would influence their day-to-day operations and the sort of candidates they would attract. The Carthusians and Cistercians represented orders of protest against the excesses of wealth and comfort that had developed over the centuries within

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the 1731 fire which damaged and destroyed part of the Cotton collection of the British Museum. Restorations to the so-called Book of Lacock, however, were made and can be found in Dugdale, *Monasticon* and in *Bowles and Nichols, Annals and Antiquities*, 171. Its appendix provides the transcript of the Book of Lacock. For the passage relating to Ela's vision and the founding history, see Appendix, page iii.

<sup>46</sup> E.D.T. et al Foxcroft, "The Carthusian Priory of Hinton," in *Proceedings of the Bath Natural History and Antiquarian Field Club* (Bath, 1893), 295.

<sup>47</sup> *VCH Wiltshire*, 3:303.

the Benedictine movement. While the Carthusians attempted to meld the hermitic and coenobitic traditions, the Cistercians wanted to re-create the original Benedictine rule in their houses.<sup>48</sup> The *VCH Wiltshire* describes the foundation timeline of Lacock Abbey: “The first steps towards its realization were taken in 1229, when, having obtained the consent of the rector of the parish, Ela gave her manor of Lacock...to God and the Blessed Mary and Saint Bernard in free alms, for the building there of an abbey of nuns to be called *locus beate Marie*.”<sup>49</sup> Charter evidence for this period demonstrates Ela’s devotion to Lacock from its inception but also to continuing her duties as sheriff of Wiltshire and countess of Salisbury. For example, as Margaret Wade Labarge reports, in 1234 “the king heard a case between Countess Ela as sheriff of Wiltshire and the abbess of Romsey over their claims to hold the pleas of the hundred court at Whorwelsdon.”<sup>50</sup> Similarly, Ela appears as part of the administrative life of lands held by her as Countess of Salisbury.<sup>51</sup>

When Ela did enter Lacock Abbey as a nun in 1238, she relinquished some of her involvement in secular affairs. Years earlier, Edmund Rich (the future St. Edmund of Canterbury) had apparently encouraged this decision.<sup>52</sup> The next step for Ela came by 1240, when she became Lacock’s abbess. According to the *VCH*, “She ruled the abbey until 31

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<sup>48</sup> For useful overviews of each order, see Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism*, 156-160 and 172-195.

<sup>49</sup> *VCH Wiltshire*, 3:303 and 306.

<sup>50</sup> *Curia regis Rolls, 17-21 Henry III*, 15 (London: H. M. Stationer Office, 1972), no. 1070, 240-241. Cited in M. W. Labarge, *A Medieval Miscellany* (Carleton University Press, 1997), 70. The decision allowed the abbess to retain “Romsey’s rights over less important matters where felony did not apply and there was no king’s writ.”

<sup>51</sup> For example, see H. C. M. Lyte and Office Great Britain. Public Record, *Patent Rolls of the Reign of Henry III: 1232-1247*, (London: H.M. Stationery Office, 1906), 1906:37.

<sup>52</sup> He was not only influential in Ela’s spiritual life and the local politics of Salisbury but was also Treasurer of Salisbury Cathedral. *Bowles and Nichols, Annals and Antiquities*, 201.

December 1257, when she resigned her office in favour of Beatrice of Kent. On 24 August (the feast of St. Bartholomew) 1261 she died, and was buried with due honour in the church of the convent she had founded.”<sup>53</sup> In the year before she died, she was the object of grants and concessions made by the Crown to Lacock.<sup>54</sup> During her abbacy, Ela’s name became nearly synonymous with Lacock Abbey, and she acted strongly and often on its behalf, particularly with obtaining royal endowments and privileges.<sup>55</sup>

Lacock Abbey’s status as a family foundation was taken seriously. Two of Ela’s granddaughters, Catharine and Lorica, in time took the veil there. Her eldest son, William, worked alongside his mother to endow the abbey with lands in Wiltshire and Gloucestershire.<sup>56</sup> Richard, her second son, witnessed at least one charter for the abbey while his mother was still living and was buried there at his death.<sup>57</sup> Her fourth son, Nicholas, is recorded by 1290 as the Rector of Lacock. His heart and that of another son, Stephen, are also buried at the abbey.<sup>58</sup> Ela had truly succeeded in establishing a house “for the souls of all her family, past, present, and future.”<sup>59</sup> Lacock’s foundation charter makes clear Ela’s intention of creating a house that would be closely tied to her family.<sup>60</sup> Even after the Dissolution, the sale of Lacock Abbey to private ownership,

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<sup>53</sup> *VCH Wiltshire*, 3:303-316.

<sup>54</sup> H. C. Maxwell Sir Lyte, Charles G. Crump, and Office Great Britain. Public Record, *Calendar of the Charter Rolls Preserved in the Public Record Office Prepared under the Superintendence of the Deputy Keeper of the Records* (London, 1906), 2:25 and 29.

<sup>55</sup> See the Appendix for detail on Ela’s achievements for Lacock Abbey, which probably include a mid-thirteenth-century elegant psalter.

<sup>56</sup> Jennifer C. Ward, *Women in England in the Middle Ages* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2006), 154.

<sup>57</sup> Bowles and Nichols, *Annals and Antiquities*, 154.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 157-58.

<sup>59</sup> Ward, *Women in England in the Middle Ages*, 154.

<sup>60</sup> See the foundation charter given in Dugdale, *Monasticon*, 6:502.

and the imposition of a family home, Lacock's cloister, warming room, dormitory, and kitchen remain as architectural reminders of the Augustinian house (Figure 5).<sup>61</sup>

In Ela's choices regarding the orders of both Lacock Abbey and Hinton Priory, we see a woman who viewed the religious life as one of spiritual devotion in which she could continue to exercise her administrative abilities. Consequently, by engaging with the secular world, she could promote the abbey and its interests. This permeability permitted her (and her family) to participate in religious and secular spheres. Nevertheless, the fact that she transitioned from countess to nun and then abbess and that two of her granddaughters were veiled at Lacock underscores the centrality of the enclosure for Ela as a defined institution. Her quest then to achieve this family legacy promoted purer interpretations of the monastic life even as it supported the religious house as enclosed, sacred space.

Ela received praise from the often grudging chronicler, Matthew Paris (d. 1259). She indeed emerges as one of the few women in his copious writings to receive his unequivocal admiration and praise. Matthew's admiration for Ela, however, did not result from her impressive administrative talents or even her contributions to Lacock Abbey but rather from a spiritual prowess that enabled her not to act like a woman. Ela, like Marie, experienced a number of family tragedies, including rumors of her husband's death leading up to the actual moment when he died. At the time of her bereavement and widowhood, Ela, as we have seen, took up the reins of secular power and displayed tenacity in achieving the office of sheriff and holding on to this position. While Matthew Paris tells us much of this story, it is later in Ela's life that he reports her ability to be a good mother while not actually acting like a woman. Matthew explains how Ela experienced a vision of the martyrdom of her son, William II (d. 1250), while on

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<sup>61</sup> Nikolaus Pevsner and Bridget Cherry *Wiltshire* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976) 286-289.

crusade. “[W]hen she later heard news of the great disaster, [Ela] prostrated herself in memory of her vision, praising God that she, an unworthy sinner, had been privileged to be the mother of a son thus given the crown of martyrdom.”<sup>62</sup> It is not the vision that most impresses the writer but rather Ela’s reaction to the disturbing news. Matthew extols “the constancy of a non-womanish woman, astounded at the maternal piety of such a great lady, not breaking down into words of lugubrious complaint but rather more readily exulting with spiritual joy.”<sup>63</sup> Matthew memorialized Ela because of her non-womanly reactions, spirituality, and behavior. Mimicking the renowned mothers of antiquity who displayed their hardiness when their sons were sacrificed for glorious causes, Matthew’s Ela must not only accept fate, but also draw strength from and celebrate the outcome. To punctuate this trait in Ela, Matthew moreover has Ela deliver, what might be deemed, “the Canticle of Ela” reminiscent of the Blessed Virgin Mary’s *Magnificat* and incorporating the language of Ambrose’s *Exultet*: “O Lord my Jesus Christ, thanks to you, of whom from my body—that of an unworthy sinner—you created by your great will my son, whom you have deigned to ransom with the martyr’s crown. I sincerely hope, that this same protection will quickly lead to the summit of the heavenly country.”<sup>64</sup> As we shall see in Chapter Four below, Matthew Paris creates a full narrative concerning Marie of Blois. The words and images he chooses to discuss Marie, however, stand in stark contrast to the praise offered to Ela.

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<sup>62</sup> Matthew Paris and Henry Richards Luard, *Matthaei Parisiensis, Monachi Sancti Albani Chronica Majora* (London: Longman, 1872), 5:173. Quoted and translated in Labarge, *A Medieval Miscellany*, 71-72.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid. From Paris and Luard, *Matthaei Parisiensis*, 5:150-154, and 173, Matthew writes, “...non muliebrem in muliere laudantes constantiam, in ipsa mirabantur matronalem et maternam pietatem....”

<sup>64</sup> Paris and Luard, *Matthaei Parisiensis*, 5:173: O domine mi Jesu Christe, gratias Tibi ago, Qui de corpore mei, indignae peccatricis, talem ac tantum voluisti filium procreari, quem tam manifesti martyrii cronoa dignatus es redemire. Spero utique, quod ipsius patrociniio citius ad culmen caelestis patriae promovebor.”

## *Romsey Abbey*

After the deaths of her parents and brother, Marie departed Kent to travel southwest into Hampshire, and become abbess of one England's most prestigious houses, Romsey Abbey (Figure 6).



*Figure 6 Sites of Marie's English Religious Houses. Map by author.*

Her promotion to this ancient Wessex foundation occurred sometime after 1155, when the previous abbess, Matilda, had died.<sup>65</sup> To piece together the chronology of Marie's arrival at Romsey, local Hampshire historian, Judy Walker, has relied upon Henry II's charters and has concluded that Marie arrived at Romsey sometime between spring 1156 and spring 1158.<sup>66</sup> To explain why she made the move to Romsey, Walker notes that the abbey's ambitious building plans may have prompted the search for a high-status abbess.<sup>67</sup> The gains worked both ways, and for Henry's part, he may have promoted her as a candidate for the abbess of Romsey in light of

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<sup>65</sup> Luard, *Annales Monastici*, 2:55.

<sup>66</sup> Judy Walker, *Romsey Abbey through the Centuries* (Romsey: Romsey Abbey, 1999), Appendix 5, xvii.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

what she could bring to the position.<sup>68</sup> For Marie's part, it may have been a canny political move to live closer to her uncle Henry. We know that the new king, Henry II, took an active interest in Marie, referring to her in a charter as my kinswoman, *cognate mee*, and made a number of grants to Romsey at this time.<sup>69</sup> Another family connection to Romsey existed for Marie in her maternal family; both her grandmother, Mary, and great-aunt, Matilda of Scotland, had resided there.<sup>70</sup> Whatever the motivation, as abbess of Romsey, Marie was now in charge of an esteemed Anglo-Saxon house. Its wealth was not inconsiderable: "By Domesday Romsey had boasted three mills in its two manors (*Infra* and *Extra*) and a rent sizeable enough to make it one of the twenty wealthiest monastic houses from the Anglo-Saxon period. Marie, as its abbess, was in charge of administering these two manors. Since the 1140s, Romsey's abbesses had additionally received rents from twelve properties in Winchester."<sup>71</sup> The abbey moreover enjoyed a strong connection with the town of Romsey.

By this point, the twenty-something year old abbess had lived in four separate monastic houses; her assumption of power as abbess of a prestigious and wealthy house marked the

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<sup>68</sup> Opinions vary concerning the building works at Romsey. In 1872, Reverend Edward Berthon attributed to Marie "the chief part, and the completion of the Romanesque portion" of the abbey church. A century later, architectural historian, M. F. Hearn, noted how Marie's departure "can only have interrupted all but the most basic activities in the nunnery and probably accounts for the awkward cessation of work on the fragmentary nave for another two decades." In 2001 however, archaeologist, Ian Scott, supported an "early twelfth-century date for the start of the work on the Norman abbey...on stylistic grounds." M. F. Hearn, "Romsey Abbey: A Progenitor of the English National Tradition in Architecture" *Gesta* 14, (1975): 40. Ian R. Scott, "Romsey Abbey: Benedictine Nunnery and Parish Church," in *Monastic Archaeology: Papers on the Study of Medieval Monasteries*, ed. Graham Keevill, Michael Aston, and Teresa Anne Hall (Oxford: Oxbow, 2001), 150.

<sup>69</sup> *Calendar of Charter Rolls* (London, 1906), 2:103-105.

<sup>70</sup> Lisa Hilton, *Queens Consort: England's Medieval Queens* (London: Phoenix, 2009), 88.

<sup>71</sup> Frank Barlow, *Winchester in the Early Middle Ages: an edition and discussion of the Winton Domesday*, ed. Martin Biddle (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976), 356. As such, the modest rents can be traced in the records to the decade before Marie's arrival.

pinnacle of her religious career. One might assume such an appointment as a lifelong placement. The abbey was well-situated for someone of Marie's status, providing her and visitors with easy access to London and the port cities; it lay not far from the Winchester-Southampton road, and was more or less equidistant between the royal New Forest and Winchester. The reality for Marie was to be far from a settled existence there, however, and within a handful of years, she was not only on the other side of the Channel but also a countess, wife, and mother.

Marie's time at Romsey Abbey ended because of events that occurred over three hundred miles away. The impetus for this change was the death of her one surviving brother, William. It meant that Marie's own status had been changed as she was not solely the child oblate who had risen to the office of abbess; she had overnight become the family heiress. Her brother's death came after the siege of Toulouse in 1159. Ironically William died in the campaign launched by his family's former rival, Henry II against Constance, his former sister-in-law, in her new role as countess of Toulouse. Sources indicate that William did not die on the battlefield but on the return back to England, when he succumbed to an illness that may have been dysentery.<sup>72</sup> His death left another childless widow, the English heiress, Isabel de Warenne. Unlike Constance, Isabel had not departed from her home and family to marry William. Like Constance, Isabel's next marriage was quickly arranged by the reigning monarch. Initially, Henry II sought to marry Isabel to his brother, William, but consanguinity disallowed this marriage. So in the end, Isabel married Hamelin (the illegitimate son of Geoffrey Plantagenet), a kinsman, not blood related, which allowed Henry to keep his grasp on her sizable land holdings.<sup>73</sup> Henry II reacted in other

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<sup>72</sup> John D. Hosler, *Henry II: A Medieval Soldier at War, 1147-1189* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 59 and Crouch, *The Normans*, 281.

<sup>73</sup> See Elisabeth van Houts, "Changes of Aristocratic Identity: Remarriage and Remembrance in Europe 900-1200," in *Memory and Commemoration in Medieval Culture*, ed. E. Brenner, M. Franklin-Brown, and M. Cohen (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate Publishing, Limited, 2013), 234-35.



equally predictable ways to William's death, quickly dispersing his English holdings. Heather Tanner explains, "William's vast estates, excluding Boulogne and Lens, escheated to Henry upon his death as he and Isabel had no children."<sup>74</sup>

William's death in 1159 prompted immediate questions over the future of the counties of Lens and Boulogne. The improbable had occurred in Stephen and Matilda's family of five children, and the inheritance devolved to the last surviving child. Her religious status, however, should have removed her from such earthly concerns; as a Benedictine nun, Marie ought to have been removed totally from family wealth and inheritance. The status of *sponsa Christi* had not successfully thwarted ambitious designs by ambitious men from viewing her as valuable to current political ends, neither had it prevented her from inheriting the county of Boulogne. Chronicle accounts, most especially but not exclusively from Continental houses, record that Henry II formed a quick alliance with the second son of the Count of Flanders, Matthew. Those writers who reported this arrangement generally condemn it as a scheme to "abduct" the abbess of Romsey and force her into a marriage with Matthew. For example, the monk of Mont Saint Michel, Robert of Torigni, explains how "Matthew the brother of the count of Flanders in an unheard of event led away the abbess of Romsey, who was the daughter of King Stephen, and with her seized the county of Boulogne."<sup>75</sup> Deciphering Marie's role and choices at this crucial moment in her life constitutes a major goal in this dissertation, as the degree of her complicity is examined.

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<sup>74</sup> Tanner, *Families*, 203.

<sup>75</sup> Migne, *PL*, 160:492. "Matheus filius comitis Flandrie inaudito exemplo duxit abbatissam Rummesia, que fuerat filia Stephani Regis, et cepit cum ea comitatum Boloniensem."

### *Religious vows and obedience*

Obedience underpinned the religious life, and was one of its major tenets.<sup>76</sup> For abbesses like Ela and Marie, it was crucial to command obedience from subordinates to ensure the smooth operating of the house. From the thirteenth century, an abbatial vow of obedience defined the relationship between monastic and episcopal leaders. In the twelfth century, however, the presence or absence of this promise has been the source of some debate.<sup>77</sup> Thus when Marie became Romsey's abbess *circa* 1155, she may not have made an oath of fidelity to the Bishop of Winchester, in whose diocese the abbey was situated, but no doubt the obligation of obedience to him would have been inherent in the blessing he gave her. The man in the Episcopal seat at the time was none other than her powerful uncle, Henry of Blois, Stephen's younger brother and one of the wealthiest and most politically astute leaders in England. This kinship introduces another element into the complexity of understanding Marie's role in the marriage arrangements, especially as no extant sources speak to Henry's opinions or reactions to his niece's departure from Romsey or her marriage.

The steps to electing an abbess can be found from nunneries of the period where records detail how the nuns chose their leaders. The process was clearly meant to be transparent and fair, allowing the members to elect a woman who would administrate fairly, bring prominence to the

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<sup>76</sup> *De Oboedentia* is the subject of Chapter Five of the *Regula Monachorum* and demands "voluntatem propriam deserentes" or the abandonment of self-will. See Eduard Woelfflin, *Benedicti Regula Monachorum. Recensuit Eduardus Woelfflin* (Lipsiae, 1895), 15.

<sup>77</sup> The trail to unraveling whether it was required or not is a long and circuitous one that has led modern scholars to different conclusions. See Giles Constable, "Abbatial Profession in Normandy and England in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries, with Particular Attention to Bec," in *Ins Wasser Geworfen Und Ozeane Durchquert: Festschrift Für Knut Wolfgang Nörr*, ed. M. Ascheri and K.W. Nörr (Weimar: Böhlau, 2003). See other references given in footnote 11 in Steven Vanderputten, *Reform, Conflict, and the Shaping of Corporate Identities: Collected Studies on Benedictine Monasticism, 1050-1150* (Zurich: Lit Verlag, 2013), 85.

house, and ensure its spiritual and physical survival through intelligent leadership. The process varied according to the house's order and status. While most Benedictine houses were under the authority of the bishop, there were exceptions where exemptions—generally established in their foundation charters—put them directly under papal control.<sup>78</sup>

The visitation reports of Eudes, bishop of Rouen, records a useful example of an abbess's election at the monastery of Bival in 1248.<sup>79</sup> A vacancy existed at this house because the previous abbess had resigned, not died, on 7 August.<sup>80</sup> The resignation coincided with and was influenced by the archbishop's presence at Bival, who was able to approve their desire for an election to be held the next day. Eudes carried on with his visitations to nearby houses, as the nuns convened the next day for the election. By 9 August, the prioress wrote Eudes to notify him of the name of their new leader, Marguerite of Aunay, who had been selected by three sisters, delegated by the community with that task. His response, penned the same day, repeats verbatim much of the prioress's letter, concluding with his approving and confirming "both the manner of the election and the elected person...."<sup>81</sup> Eudes's next statement underscores the centrality of obedience to the functioning of a religious house,

We...strongly enjoin all of you to obey and submit to the said Marguerite as is properly due an abbess, and we commit the administration of the temporalities of the abbey to her. And be it known that if any shall be disobedient or rebellious, we shall punish them in such a manner that the punishment of one shall be a terror to the rest.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Johnson, *Equal in Monastic Profession*, 62-63. Odo Rigaldus, Sydney Brown, and Jeremiah Francis O'Sullivan, *The Register of Eudes of Rouen* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964), xxviii.

<sup>79</sup> Odo, *Register of Eudes*, 6. The register does not record the reason for the resignation.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

The election of an abbess could have an enormous impact on the direction and cohesion of a community. Obedience to an abbess and its relationship to private and sincere piety form the theme of another letter from Anselm of Bec to Abbess Eulalia and her nuns at Shaftesbury. Three extant missives depict a degree of simmering strife at Shaftesbury, and the archbishop emphasizes the obedience owed to one's superior and the recognition of sinful behavior, even in the smallest of deeds. He admonishes the nuns to "display obedience, not to the eye but in the inmost heart," adding,

In whatever secluded place you may be, be certain and have no doubt at all that each one of you has her own angel who sees and notes every thought and action and reports it to God the judge. I advise you therefore, dearest daughters, that both in secret and in public each one should so guard all the movements of her heart and body as if she sees her guardian angel present to her bodily eyes.<sup>83</sup>

This guardian angel acts as an episcopal deputy to ensure correct behavior and thinking from Christ's virgins. Whatever the nature of the strife at Shaftesbury, Eulalia may have experienced an unwelcome reception and greeting to her appointment as abbess *ca.* 1074. Most likely the first Norman abbess there, Eulalia did serve as Shaftesbury's abbess for some thirty-two years.<sup>84</sup> Obedience to a female leader was only part of the requirement, however; the expectation was, of course, that the abbess would then submit to the male leaders overseeing her. Such obedience, as punctuated in the *Regula Monachorum*, assumed these gendered connotations even as it prefigured a nun's death and entombment. In addition to the letters that churchmen wrote to women like Gunnhildr and Eulalia, the visitation records of religious houses furnish insights into how male leaders exercised or attempted to exercise their control over female religious.

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<sup>83</sup> Fröhlich, *Letters of Saint Anselm*, 3:167-168.

<sup>84</sup> Eulalia appears to have restored lost lands and privileges to Shaftesbury through her interventions with William I. See John Chandler, *A Higher Reality: The History of Shaftesbury's Royal Nunnery*, (Salisbury: Hobnob Press, 2003), 44-47.

Another clear division can be discerned in this second chapter. Whereas in Chapter one, a distinct disconnect separated the realities of the child oblation with the glamor of the “*electa*” depicted in the love poetry of the Song of Songs, so too the restraints imposed by obedience and the enclosure of walls and veils contrasted with the lavish imagery of the enclosed garden, or the *hortus conclusus*, illustrated in these same biblical passages.

*The hortus conclusus and porta clausa*

The *Song of Songs* provided the initial conceit of this *hortus conclusus* alongside the sealed fountain, “My sister, my spouse, is a garden enclosed, a garden enclosed, a fountain sealed up.”<sup>85</sup> To this imagery of love and sensuality are added the visual and olfactory elements of the garden as a list of fruits, spices, and fragrant plants combine to provide “all the chief perfumes.”<sup>86</sup> Developing elsewhere, this enclosed paradise became aligned with the shut gate prophesied by Ezekiel, the gate or door to salvation eventually opened through Mary.<sup>87</sup> Of the scriptural significance of the enclosed garden, Kenneth Bleeth has explained, “The locked gate is a standard motif in pictorial representations of the *hortus conclusus*, a feature doubtless influenced by the *porta clausa* of Ezekiel 44: 1-2, a common Old Testament type of the Virgin. The gate of the *hortus conclusus*, open only to Christ at his Incarnation and Birth, is sometimes contrasted with the gate of Eden, open to Satan, and to Adam and Eve when they leave

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<sup>85</sup> “*Hortus conclusus soror mea sponsa hortus conclusus fons signatus.*” Song of Songs: 4: 12. Douay-Rheims Bible version as translation. See Coyle’s discussion of the patristic use of the Song of Songs in K. C. Kelly, *Performing Virginity and Testing Chastity in the Middle Ages* (London: Routledge, 2000), 24.

<sup>86</sup> Song of Songs: 4: 13-14.

<sup>87</sup> Ezekiel 44:1-2 And he brought me back to the way of the gate of the outward sanctuary, which looked towards the east: and it was shut. And the Lord said to me: This gate shall be shut, it shall not be opened, and no man shall pass through it: because the Lord the God of Israel hath entered in by it, and it shall be shut.

paradise....”<sup>88</sup> Mary, as this perfect channel, set the standards by which her daughters—the earthly brides of Christ—could strive to emulate her purity while trying to suppress their natural inclinations and flaws as the Daughters of Eve.

Images of the enclosed garden abound in the literature of the Middle Ages as does the language describing the beloved as the bride and sister. The seal, recast as the medieval convent door, allowed the bride of Christ to enter the cocoon of the cloister and enjoy protection within it, safeguarded by a variety of wardens. The enclosed garden and sacred seal, however, became more than literary conceits. They existed in the practical expression of the cloistered garth or yard of the medieval monastery.<sup>89</sup> Enclosed and landscaped (that is, designed), this space was meant for the nuns or monks of the house. The cloister by definition existed for these inmates and was considered off limits to most visitors.<sup>90</sup> While the history of medieval gardens remains mostly elusive, research has unearthed some clues as to the role and development of gardens in the monasteries of England.

Pre-Conquest monastic gardens appear to have been functional in nature in the provisioning of food, wine, and medicinal and culinary herbs. The Norman presence, however, resulted in the importing of garden design and inspiration from France and especially Norman Sicily.<sup>91</sup> Their influence inspired greater sophistication and formality:

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<sup>88</sup> Kenneth A. Bleeth, “The Image of Paradise in the *Merchant's Tale*,” in *The Learned and the Lewed: Studies in Chaucer and Medieval Literature*, eds. Larry Dean Benson and Bartlett Jere Whiting (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974), 58.

<sup>89</sup> The garth itself acts as a linguistic bridge between the Latin cloister and the Anglo-Saxon and Nordic forms *gard* and *garð-r*. *OED* entries for garth, garden, and yard show these shared forms and can be seen in the French form, *jardin*.

<sup>90</sup> See the infringements of this sacred space reported in Odo Rigaldus, *The Register of Eudes of Rouen*, 13-14.

<sup>91</sup> Nicholas J. Easton, “The Development of Elite Landscapes in Tudor Essex,” (PhD Thesis Institute of Historical Research, University of London, 2012), 142.

Monastic gardens were formal and enclosed, either with hedges or fences. They were often divided into quarters by paths, with beds containing flowers, small shrubs or clipped evergreens. The surrounding fences were dressed with climbers, roses and honeysuckle being particular favourites, with turf benches arranged to take advantage of the scents.<sup>92</sup>

As such, this post-Conquest garden was not meant for practical use. Instead it assumed spiritual and sensational qualities that fitted in with its scriptural descriptions and meanings.

This paradise likewise contained a gendered component even as it came to play an important devotional role. Fiona Griffiths situates her study of the *Hortus deliciarum* in *The Garden of Delights: Reform and Renaissance for Women in the Twelfth Century* within the context of female spirituality and imagery. She describes the *hortus conclusus*, as “equally appropriate for monks and nuns. However, it held particular significance for religious women, since the enclosed garden of the Song of Songs was most frequently used to denote virginity.”<sup>93</sup> Further, she sees the garden of the monastic cloister as a place where “the professed religious...could devote herself to contemplation of God.”<sup>94</sup> The sensual, aesthetic, and developmental combined in this use of the enclosure.<sup>95</sup> In the following discussion of the romance by Chrétien de Troyes, the garden of delights assumes overtones of paradise within the context of adulterous love. The story’s use of the enclosed garden moreover, alongside its strong reliance upon enclosure, blends and blurs the boundaries between the sacred and profane, as the genre itself blends and blurs into what might be described as a secular hagiographic romance.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid, 142.

<sup>93</sup> Fiona J. Griffiths, *Garden of Delights: Reform and Renaissance for Women in the Twelfth Century*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 137.

<sup>94</sup> Griffiths, *Garden*, 138.

<sup>95</sup> According to Easton’s “Development of Elite Landscapes,” the monastic garden influenced the design of secular gardens in England, 143.

<sup>96</sup> While literary critics such as Sarah Kay have looked at the hagiographic elements of *Cligès*, I have not seen other scholars describe Chrétien de Troyes’s work in this way. See Sarah Kay,

Although its title refers to the hero of the story, Cligès, the plot fully concerns its heroine, Fenice.

*Entombing a secular saint*

Chrétien de Troyes indeed succeeded in turning the hybrid of the hagiographic romance inside out in his depiction of Fenice in the romance, *Cligès*. Its meandering narrative “tells the story of two pairs of lovers: that of naïve Alixandre, heir to the Greek empire, and innocent Soredamors; then that of their far more knowing son Cligès and his equally worldly lady Fenice.”<sup>97</sup> The two halves are linked by the truce between Alixandre and his brother, Alis, who breaks the terms of the accord that had forbidden him from ever marrying. Alis’s chosen bride is Fenice, the daughter of the emperor of Germany; of her name we are given to understand that “the Phoenix is the most beautiful of all birds—and at a given time there can be no more than one—so, I think, Fenice’s beauty knew no equal.”<sup>98</sup> The exquisite Fenice, however, despises Alis and the thought of being married to him. Hiding her feelings, she initially divulges them only to her trusted nurse.<sup>99</sup> As a result of this intended marriage, Cligès, as the son of Alixandre and Soredamors, is effectively disinherited but remains a faithful servant to his Uncle Alis. In time, however, Fenice and Cligès learn of their passionate love for one another, inspiring a series of

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“Courts, Clerks, and Courtly Love,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance*, ed. Roberta L. Krueger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 81-96.

<sup>97</sup> S. Gaunt, *Love and Death in Medieval French and Occitan Courtly Literature: Martyrs to Love* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 129.

<sup>98</sup> Staines, 120. Foerster, lines 2727-2732: “Car si con Fenix, li oisiaus,/Est sor toz austres li plus biaux,/N’estre n’an puet que uns ansamble:/Aussi Fenice, ce me sanble,/N’ot de biauté nule paroille.”

<sup>99</sup> Staines, 124-126.



schemes and strategies whereby she can escape the confines of her marriage without the ignominy of “the blonde Iseult and Tristan.”<sup>100</sup>

Chrétien’s romance of some 6,600 lines contrasts the mechanistic coldness of forced marriage with the passion and devotion of *fin amour*. His narrative moreover melds elements of the *romanz* [romance] with the influential genre of hagiography. For its heroine, Fenice, the theme of enclosure anchors her to the plotline from start to finish. Although Fenice is freed from constraint by the end, she lives through most of the romance as the victim of family, strangers, and enemies whose strategies repeatedly enclose her. In light of Chrétien’s blending of romance and hagiography, Fenice as a character, often mimics the virgin martyrs in the steadfast loyalty she proves to her beloved through a series of trials and tribulations and the undying love that she exhibits for him. Like the virgin martyrs, Fenice creatively and supernaturally succeeds in avoiding the consummation of an unwanted marital alliance.

The overriding clausturation that this forced marriage evokes becomes the driving force of the narrative, and the preservation of Fenice’s virginity within it, determines much of the romance’s dialogue and action. This storyline merges with Fenice’s other goal: to be with Cligès, the real heir to the throne. In order to realize both objectives, Fenice solicits the help of a mother figure, her nurse Thessala. The nurse’s supernatural interventions resemble those of the Virgin Mary of the *Miracles* and enable Fenice to remain faithful to her beloved. Thessala uses her knowledge of magic to concoct a potion (not one like Tristan and Iseult drank) that allows Fenice protection from her husband, Alis.<sup>101</sup> Accordingly, “she could be as secure as if there were a wall between” them as he “would take his pleasure in his sleep...believing fully that when he enjoyed

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<sup>100</sup> Staines, 151-152. Foerster, lines 5313-5314: “...come d’Iseut la blonde/Et de Tristan...”

<sup>101</sup> Staines., 125.

her, he was awake. He would never imagine his joy was but a dream.”<sup>102</sup> Fenice’s integrity, safeguarded by this magical barrier, kept her marriage unconsummated, allowing Fenice to stay true to Cligès and prevent an unwanted pregnancy that could have deprived him from his rightful rule and inheritance.<sup>103</sup>

Cligès, however, leaves Fenice to enjoy his quests and adventures, travelling from Constantinople to King Arthur’s court in Britain. By contrast Fenice’s world stagnates and shrinks, as she remains and exists within the interiors of palaces and of her own mind. In time, a triumphant Cligès returns, and he concocts a scheme to be united with Fenice: she will feign death using more of Thessala’s magic. Once dead, others can then entomb her and remove her from her husband. Fenice, anticipating her impending enclosure, instructs Cligès to apply all his “efforts to the design of the bier and the tomb so that I do not suffocate to death.”<sup>104</sup> The plan proceeds well enough until three Sicilian physicians arrive. The master of the trio wagers with his own life that Fenice is not dead, recalling Solomon’s wife who “hated him so much that she deceived him by feigning death.”<sup>105</sup> Guaranteeing Emperor Alis that they can make his wife speak, they lock themselves in with Fenice, resorting to increasingly salacious and vicious

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 126. Foerster, lines 3205-3216: “Qu’aussi n’i puisse estre a seür/Con s’antre aus deus avoit un mur ;/’...Car quant il dormira formant,/Avra de vos joie en dormant/Et cuidera tot antreset,/Que an veillant sa joie an et,/Ne ja rien n’an tandra a songe,/Ne a fantosme n’a mançonge./Einsi a vos se deduire,/Qu’an dormant veillier cuidera.”

<sup>103</sup> Staines, 126.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 152. Foerster, lines 5340-5341: “Et la sepouture et la biere,/Que je n’i muire ne estaingne.”

<sup>105</sup> Staines, 158. Foerster, lines 5876-5877: “Que sa fame tant le haï,/Qu’an guise de mort le traï.” For a discussion of the gendered implications of Fenice’s torture, see Karen Anouschka Lurkhur, “Redefining Gender Through the Arena of the Male Body: The Reception of Thomas’s Tristran in the Old French ‘Le Chevalier de la Charette’ and the Old Icelandic ‘Saga Af Tristran Ok Isodd,’” (PhD Dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2009), 60-65, accessed December 21, 2015, Proquest Dissertations & Theses.

torture. Flogging her back until it streams with blood and pouring molten lead through her palms, the physicians are on the verge of grilling Fenice “when more than a thousand ladies separated from the other people” and looked through a crack in the door at the tortures. Fenice’s rescue comes as the women batter down the door, only to find Fenice entirely naked. After replacing her shroud, the women “hurled the physicians out the windows down into the center of the courtyard.” The narrator tells us, “All three had their necks and ribs, arms and legs broken. No ladies ever behaved better.”<sup>106</sup>

Regardless of the women’s behavior and bravery, Fenice’s rescue does not lead to her liberation. Instead the claustrophobic ordeal of entombment awaits her body. The chosen tomb is a sacred one intended for the “body of a saint” and guarded by knights.<sup>107</sup> Eventually moved to a secure tower with concealed doors, Fenice is cut off from the outside world. Her incarceration becomes a living death; Fenice explains that for “fifteen full months I have not seen moonlight or sunlight.”<sup>108</sup> Her reward comes in the *hortus conclusus* found for her and Cligès where they fully enjoy the fruits of their love. The text stresses not only the walls that surround them but the bounty of the plants and trees in their garden. Fenice’s full liberation from the bonds of her despised marriage comes, and the story itself turns full circle as her husband’s original sin of oath-breaking leads to his own death. Cligès returns to Constantinople and assumes his rightful place as emperor. As such, he can enjoy a happy and enduring marriage with his liberated wife, who has remained virginal and unsullied. No mention has been made of Cligès’s sexual status.

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<sup>106</sup> Staines, 160. Foerster, lines 6046-6050: “Par les fenestres contre val/Les ont anmi la cort lancierz,/Si qu’a toz trois ont depeciez/Cos et costez et braz et james;/Ains miauz ne firent nules dames.”

<sup>107</sup> Staines, 161. Foerster, lines: 6092: “Qu’an i meist se cors saint non.”

<sup>108</sup> Staines, 164. Foerster, lines 6363-6366: “Plus a de quinze mois antiers./S’estre poïst, mout volantiers/M’an istroie la fors au jor,/Qu’anclose sui an ceste tor.”

Chrétien de Troyes' co-opting of the hagiographic tradition enabled him to play with and twist the trope of enclosure for his character, Fenice. As such, this secular virgin martyr must endure the traditional trials associated with the virgin martyrs of hagiography, including torture and "death." Chrétien's own consciousness of the implications of enclosure to his story becomes evident when at the end, he writes that Fenice "was never kept in seclusion as empresses from that time on have been."<sup>109</sup> The *Ancien Français* [Old French]—as given as the chapter title, *N'onques ne fu tenue anclose*—emphasizes the concept of being *enclosed* to stress its role in the romance as well as to contrast Fenice's future with that of succeeding empresses. In the end, the heroine's enclosure has facilitated her own deliverance, while the deception she played upon her husband has caused other women to be "*com an prison*."<sup>110</sup> As such the entire romance leads to the *purdah* to come for eastern empresses. Chrétien's readership might have easily substituted it with the *purdah* of women in religious houses in their own society and time. Finally, the romance's repeated insistence that it is not like Tristan and Iseult's further highlights individual choice for Fenice and for Cligès. While the former couple became victims of the magic potion that they unknowingly drank, the latter couple remains in control of their behavior and passions. As such, it became a difference between a loss of choice and its full exercise.

#### *Taking an Abbess out of the Enclosure*

Just as Fenice's enclosures and entombments separated her from society, the religious and secular veil represented a barrier, separating its female wearer from the dangers and gaze of the external world. Similarly, it protected the outsider from the veiled woman whose female

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<sup>109</sup> Staines, 169. Foerster, lines 6762-6764: "Onques ne fu tenue anclose/Si come ont puis esté tenues/Celes qu'après li sont venues."

<sup>110</sup> Line 6772. Staines, 169: "As though imprisoned."

sensuality could never truly be eradicated, regardless of her status. For the religious woman, it took on particular relevance; and the holy veil became a surrogate cloister to ensconce and safeguard her physically and spiritually. Already by the fourth century, the veil was used as a synecdoche of the religious woman and her sexual purity.<sup>111</sup> Thus when a woman like Marie no longer wore the holy veil of a nun, she had either failed to respect the vows that had led to her veiling or had been failed by the veil's power to protect her religious and virginal status. Seeing Marie as the veiled abbess of Romsey is complicated by the sparseness of records from this period. We can confidently state, however, that architectural, theological, and/or cultural constraints proved ineffectual to retain the abbess in 1160.

One might argue that Marie fits the label of a runaway religious for the period between 1240 and the Dissolution as used by F. Donald Logan in his *Runaway Religious in Medieval England*.<sup>112</sup> According to Logan, runaways were “those men and women who had taken vows to lead the religious life as monks, canons, friars or nuns and who without dispensation left that life and returned to the world. In doing so they usually abandoned the religious habit, the outward sign of their inner commitment.”<sup>113</sup> Not knowing Marie's role in the abduction, however, obscures her unambiguous inclusion within this group. Becoming a runaway religious was increasingly equated with “apostasy from religion,” that is, a renunciation of one's status.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> A fascination with the veil preoccupied many of the patristic writers. Tertullian, Jerome, Augustine, Ambrose, and later the Anglo-Saxon bishop, Aldhelm, and many others penned works in which the adornment featured in their respective arguments regarding female sanctity, female sexuality, and Christian service. As the superiority of virginity over marriage won the day, the veil became a symbol of this victory, especially in reference to the evolving status of the *sponsa Christi*.

<sup>112</sup> F. Donald Logan, *Runaway Religious in Medieval England, C.1240-1540* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>114</sup> Logan, *Runaway Religious*, 10.

Because apostasy required that the person be a professed religious, one without the other did not constitute the crime of apostasy. The religious who ran away and married was considered apostate and excommunication was imposed. If abduction was involved or suspected, the abducted religious (generally a woman) was excommunicated only *if* she had been complicit in the marriage.<sup>115</sup> So Marie, if party to the elopement and marriage, managed with one *coup de main* to shatter her vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience. Logan's period postdates the years of Marie's life but highlights the fact that a century after Marie's departure, efforts to return runaway religious to their monasteries had become more organized and systematic, and the automatic penalty for the apostate was excommunication.<sup>116</sup> At the heart of the policy of return were some basic assumptions: once a religious, always a religious; punishment was practiced as a "curative"; and reconciliation was always to be extended to the runaway.<sup>117</sup> In re-telling Marie's story, excommunication and the accompanying determination of fault constitute a major point of my discussion. Unlike many scholars, I do not believe that Marie was initially excommunicated, but I also do not subscribe to the belief that there was a dispensation for the marriage.<sup>118</sup>

When Marie was first appointed as Romsey's new abbess, the religious life was all that she had known. Her parents, King Stephen of Blois and Queen Matilda of Boulogne, had opted for this path presumably in order to save their daughter from the escalating civil war. Given that

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<sup>115</sup> The majority of antiquarian and modern sources include Marie, not only Matthew, as excommunicant as a result of the marriage. For information about marriage, apostasy, and excommunication, see Elizabeth Makowski, *A Pernicious Sort of Woman: Quasi-Religious Women and Canon Lawyers in the Later Middle Ages* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 90, particularly footnote 1.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 121. This became practice after 1298.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 121-122.

<sup>118</sup> Both topics and my interpretations are presented within the dissertation.

Marie remained veiled even after the worst of the fighting, Stephen and Matilda's choice of status for their daughter was likely meant to be a permanent one. Whether they had ever discussed the possibility of her leaving the religious life if family commitments necessitated, we will never know. When viewed against the family histories and experiences regarding loyalty and/or what was perceived to be most efficacious in particular circumstances, Marie may well have been brought up with the notion of family first. Not only had Stephen usurped the throne, undoing three oaths of fidelity to his cousin the Empress Matilda, but so too had Eustace broken away to go his own way after the agreements between the Plantagenets and his father.<sup>119</sup> Queen Matilda had continuously proven her abilities for maverick and brave reactions during the war and was no stranger to meeting the unpredictable with practical, no-nonsense solutions. Evidence suggests that William may have been involved in an unsuccessful plot to assassinate Henry II.<sup>120</sup> This was a family that neither avoided nor feared controversy. As such, the legacy that Marie's family had passed on to her may well have prepared her to adjust to the unexpected.

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<sup>119</sup> See Dunbabin, "Henry II and Louis VII," 48-49.

<sup>120</sup> Tanner, *Families*, 199.



*Figure 7 Romsey Abbey parish church. Photograph by author.*

### *Breaching the walls of Romsey Abbey*

Women from the historical and literary narratives in this dissertation demonstrate that nunnery enclosures were breached by the religious women themselves and by the outsiders who wanted to enter. Fresne's entrance into and exit out of the abbey were accomplished with effort, but the obstacles were not insurmountable. Similarly, Gunnhildr left her long-time place at Wilton Abbey. Conjecture has led to the possibility that her relationship with Alan Rufus and subsequent departure from Wilton occurred when he visited the abbey with the intention of meeting another inmate, Matilda of Scotland.<sup>121</sup> Regardless of how they met, Gunnhildr was able to escape the monastic precincts easily enough, it appears. Mostly surrounded by water, Wilton's setting within the landscape did not frustrate the plans. Egress did not necessarily mean a complete departure from the monastery, as demonstrated in the story of the Nun of Watton and

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<sup>121</sup> Southern, *Saint Anselm and His Biographer*, 184-85.



her clerical lover. They successfully arranged secret trysts that led in time to the unwanted pregnancy. For Marie, many of the records stipulate an abduction accomplished through force. While our knowledge of the architectural history of Romsey Abbey cannot fully discount or fully support this assertion, it does allow us—as a result of numerous excavations and the scholarship they have inspired—to speculate about its layout and potential routes of ingress and egress through monastic buildings.

By keeping in mind the possibility of Marie’s willingness to leave Romsey in spite of the contemporary abduction claim, my goal here is to scrutinize the most expedient ways whereby Marie might have departed the abbey in the mid-twelfth century. I want to preface my analysis of each route, and thus offer an early summation of my findings, by stating that however her departure was effected, any physical boundaries to prevent it were notional at best in 1160. No architectural impediments could have kept her inside if she had wanted to leave or if force had been used to extract her.

Much of what we know about Romsey’s design comes from twentieth-century archaeological excavations of the abbey and the town of Romsey itself. These digs confirm that the abbey and town have long shared a symbiotic relationship. Ian R. Scott’s most recent study of Romsey underscores this symbiosis, informing his approach and methodology. According to Scott, we can understand the abbey’s architecture and design only by recognizing “the dynamics of the relationship between the town and abbey which has always been close.”<sup>122</sup> He emphasizes that “the abbey church survives today because it was purchased by the town in 1545 to serve as

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<sup>122</sup> Ian R. Scott, “Romsey Abbey: Benedictine Nunnery and Parish Church,” in *Monastic Archaeology: Papers on the Study of Medieval Monasteries*, ed. Graham Keevill, Michael Aston, and Teresa Anne Hall (Oxford: Oxbow, 2001), 150.

its parish church.”<sup>123</sup> Figure 7 provides a glimpse of the imposing figure that remains central to the town of Romsey still today. Piecing together the abbey’s and town’s shared and separate histories is, however, complicated by a lack of documentary evidence. The abbey’s recognized foundation date of 907 has been questioned by a number of scholars who believe that a collegiate minster church at Romsey may predate this foundation year.<sup>124</sup> If a minster did predate the religious house, this may partially explain the interactions between Romsey, the town, and Romsey, the nunnery. Regardless of the sequence of events, the town and abbey have co-developed architecturally and economically.

This relationship between abbey and town influenced and continues to influence the locality’s history and identity. Consequently, nuns and parishioners shared the sacred space of the church: the abbey’s monastic church was dedicated to Saints Mary and Aethelflaeda and the parish church of St Lawrence occupied the northern aisle of the nave.<sup>125</sup> This area for the laity to worship meant that access into and out of the church could be achieved through a northern door.<sup>126</sup> Once again, a clear-cut conjecture is nevertheless impossible concerning this route of egress because the establishment date of St Lawrence’s is not known. While documentary evidence can be verified only back to the mid-thirteenth century, circumstantial evidence does provide support of an earlier foundation “as early as 1130.”<sup>127</sup> This date sits well with the

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 158.

<sup>125</sup> See Appendix A for a plan of the abbey and parish church.

<sup>126</sup> Henry George Downing Liveing, *Records of Romsey Abbey: An Account of the Benedictine House of Nuns, with Notes on the Parish Church and Town (A.D. 907-1588)*, Abridged ed. (Winchester: Warren and son, ltd., 1912), 218.

<sup>127</sup> I. R. Scott, *Romsey Abbey : Report on the Excavations 1973-1991* (Southampton: Hampshire Field Club & Archaeological Society, 1996), 91. Scott explains that documentary evidence for St Lawrence can only be traced back to 1321. A thirteenth-century deed, however, “refers to Adam, a canon of Romsey” and there is another reference from later in the century to a prebend “of the

Abbey's overall building expansions and renovations, which are believed to have occurred during the first four decades of the twelfth century.<sup>128</sup> This possible date may then allow for a plausible exit route for Marie; it was apparently the route of choice for the late-fourteenth-century nuns who used this door to go into town.<sup>129</sup>

Another route that must be explored lies through the separate quarters in which Marie might have resided. Archaeological and documentary evidence for the Abbey reveals a potential site for where she might have lived apart from her nuns but alongside her household. Living in *The Records of Romsey Abbey* provides a description of the "Chabbey's lodging" (i.e. Abbess's lodgings), explaining that "it may be assumed that her separate apartments stood to the west of the frater, and the chief rooms would seem to have been upstairs."<sup>130</sup> Scott adds that her lodging had a chapel [St. Peter's], kitchen, stable, granary, and a barn.<sup>131</sup> An abbess, whose lodgings had easy access to the outer court of the abbey and included outbuildings, would have had no problem in leaving without undue notice. Similarly, an outsider could have gained entrance to this area without attracting much notice. Tantalizing as this evidence is, however, this set of apartments and rooms was not necessarily in existence in the mid-twelfth century.<sup>132</sup> The more

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Church of St Lawrence the greater in the House or Church of the Monastery of Romsey. Liveing also makes mention of the presence of presbyters and clericuli from the twelfth century. Liveing, *Records of Romsey Abbey*, 125.

<sup>128</sup> See the detailed discussion that Scott provides in Scott, *Romsey Abbey*, 45.

<sup>129</sup> Liveing, *Records of Romsey Abbey*, 218.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>131</sup> Scott, 76.

<sup>132</sup> Archaeological evidence from England in general can neither confirm nor rule out the possibility that Romsey Abbey included separate abbatial housing in the mid-twelfth century or even later. This lack of precision in dating is visible in the three volumes of Anthony Emery, *Greater Medieval Houses of England and Wales 1300-1500* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996-2006).

probable housing scenario at Romsey in 1160 for Marie is one in which she did not reside in a separate area but alongside the nuns at the northwest side of the cloister.

Situating Marie with the nuns complicates the abduction scenario, leading to a distinct lack of privacy and opportunities for a woman to be secreted away from the nunnery precincts. Reflecting back on Gunnhildr's elopement from Wilton Abbey some sixty years earlier demonstrates, however, that women did leave or were taken from religious houses, regardless of the houses' position in the landscape or even their architectural obstacles. Our understanding of Gunnhildr's story is that, regardless of Wilton's architecture, design, and landscape, she left voluntarily and willingly from Wilton. For Marie, we can surmise that her departure from Romsey Abbey was probably accomplished with little effort, but equally it probably did not take place in the dead of night while Marie and her nuns slept. When Marie left Romsey, it is likely that she was not alone; rather, she would have been accompanied by those who had served and cared for her. Recognizing that Marie began her life as a religious while still a young girl strengthens the theory that she might have been accompanied by a nurse at some point. In 1160, when her time at Romsey ended, however, she was likely in her twenties, so more realistically she had a servant who attended her.<sup>133</sup>

A third possibility is that Marie was not at Romsey at all when the event occurred. While she could have been in any number of locations, one obvious possibility was that she was in

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<sup>133</sup> As earlier discussed, Mary of Woodstock appears to have had her nurse with her at Amesbury. The presence of a household or *familiae* probably existed for Marie, even if it was not the full household that later abbesses would have maintained for themselves. Abbesses increasingly kept and often later paid for their own household staff. For a discussion of later medieval abbesses and their households and associated expenses, see Marilyn Oliva, *The Convent and the Community in Late Medieval England Female Monasteries in the Diocese of Norwich, 1350-1540* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 1998), 81-82.

Winchester. Not only did she hold the rental properties there by this time, but also her uncle, Henry of Blois, had returned from his exile at Cluny. No documentary evidence links him with the marital plans or indicates what his reactions to them were. It is not, however, difficult to imagine his support for his niece to become the Countess of Boulogne. Henry had proven himself pragmatic and resilient in his reactions to changing circumstances during the civil war (as well as canny in financial and political affairs), and he might have urged just such an approach for Marie. In light of William of Blois' death in 1159—the spark that ignited this entire drama—and Henry's own negative treatment at the hands of the new young king, Henry may have seen England as an inhospitable place for Marie to remain.

The existing evidence regarding Romsey's layout in 1160 diminishes, though does not fully erase, the likelihood of forced abduction. Undoubtedly a few armed men could easily have threatened whatever security the nunnery boasted at the time, but the abbey was neither isolated nor remote. Instead, it existed as part of Romsey's town and culture. As such, the townspeople, merchants, and parishioners would have known of the abduction and reacted to this breach of their peace and integrity. Similarly, Romsey Abbey's records would have reported a crime of violence against it, and appealed to the Crown for reparations of some kind. If help was not forthcoming from secular authority, the nunnery could have gone to the papal legate, Theobald of Canterbury. Theobald, as the pope's man in England and as the Archbishop of Canterbury, had settled affairs a decade earlier in the establishment of Lillechurch Priory for Marie and her Breton companions. Theobald had not always enjoyed tranquil relations with Marie's royal father, but on his deathbed it was Theobald whom Stephen designated as regent.<sup>134</sup> In the days

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<sup>134</sup> Crouch, *The Normans*, 278. The new king, Henry II, took his time in coming to England; during which time, Theobald oversaw the running of the kingdom.

before he fell ill and died, Stephen had also met with Count Thierry of Flanders.<sup>135</sup> Within five years of this meeting, Stephen's only surviving daughter, Marie, would be wed to Thierry's second son, Matthew.

### *Conclusion*

The enclosure, manifested as physical space and cultural ideology, provoked a variety of responses from medieval women. Its protective yet restricting qualities translated into refuge or prison. Just as the women in Chapter One reversed or modified decisions made for them by parents and others, so those women fought or sought the enclosure in response to the actions or advice of others. Ela of Salisbury's family foundation of Lacock Abbey created an enclosure that responded to her desires for spiritual integrity and rigor. The primary motivation purportedly came from her spiritual advisor, Edmund of Canterbury. While Ela's choices may have received this inspiration from him and others, we cannot rule out the possibility that Ela used the enclosure to safeguard her personal and family interests. Obviously, Ela took her vows further than the more typical widow-vowess of the Middle Ages; that is, she took full vows as a nun rather than the simple vow of chastity for vowesses. Because Lacock Abbey was a family foundation, however, it meant that Ela continued to rely upon her secular connections and reputation to nurture the abbey, which in turn benefitted her family. Ela's "break" with the secular life of a countess was not so much relinquished as redeployed in her religious life. As we shall see in the following chapter, Marie of Blois—soon to be temporarily recognized as Marie of Boulogne—similarly reassigned the skills she had acquired as an abbess in her new secular role as countess. Thus the two women's lives act as mirror images of one another in their administrative history.

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<sup>135</sup> Tanner, *Families*, 199.

A wide array of security measures and guardians existed to ensure the sanctity and physical integrity of the enclosure itself and of the *sanctimoniales* inside. This chapter did not concentrate so much on the actual hardware of the nunnery, as on the various ways that people interacted with it. For example, the chapter began with a story about a sacristan who had charge of the nunnery's keys and responsibility over its closed doors. When her own spiritual and physical safety and reputation were threatened by the vice of lasciviousness, the honor and security of the nunnery's other inmates were similarly jeopardized. These themes of security, doors, human temptation, and eternal damnation resound in the *Miracles de Notre Dame* collections of the period. Writers such as Gautier de Coinci popularized narratives that celebrated the strength and steadfast love of the Virgin Mother, whose role it had become to keep her daughters, the *sponsae Christi*, safe within the holy enclosure. Her love often translated as tough love, but her message came across indisputably clear: deceive my son, and damn your soul for all eternity. From some thirty years after Gautier's death until near the end of the thirteenth century, records exist for the visitation records for Eudes of Rouen and John Pecham. Each archbishop's register reveals the continuing efforts by these guardians of the enclosure to ensure that nuns stayed inside. Opposition to the interference of these male overseers came steadily, especially when abbesses held special papal exemptions and privileges. At the heart of many of the conflicts was the insistence that nuns not secrete away their personal belongings, particularly when locked in personal coffer, and that they adhere to the rules regarding leaving the nunnery precincts and allowing family members into the cloister.

Finally, Fenice of Chrétien de Troyes' *Cligès*, submitted to a long sequence of enclosures including forced marriage, pseudo-death and burial, a long sojourn in a sealed tower, and the *hortus conclusus*. Regardless of the devices and designs made possible by other characters,

Fenice never assumes a passive role. The reader understands throughout the romance exactly what she thinks and plans for her own life and for her loved ones. In other words, Fenice does not blindly submit to these tortures; she clearly communicates her displeasures and her willingness or refusal to endure more. In the end, her sacrifices, not the knightly prowess of her lover, Cligès, ensure a positive dénouement. Much is made of her ultimate refusal to submit to being “*anclose*” ever again. Chrétien burdened Fenice, however, with responsibility for the imposition of enclosure on future empresses.

The intended purdah of all female religious, as envisaged in the late thirteenth-century bull, *Periculoso*, opened the chapter and has subsequently shaped its content. Nevertheless, the papal bull’s strident tones did not apply to monks, solely to nuns, isolating them for strict enclosure. The writers of the decree keenly put all their efforts into eradicating loopholes and abuses. Within a short period of time, however, its detractors protested vehemently against the bull. Many of these detractors were English religious women and abbesses, and thus forced by the severity of these protests, male overseers ultimately and conveniently found creative ways to sidestep and ignore *Periculoso*.<sup>136</sup>

Childhood choices and the enclosure remain important themes in the following body chapter as it follows Marie into the next phase of her life. Her departure from Romsey allowed her to realize the true potential of her role as the Countess of Boulogne as well as a wife and mother. As such, the chapter’s emphasis upon marriage moves the discussion of choice into new, yet related, territory. All of the women in the chapter experience changes in status that shifted between married and religious. In all of the examples, the changes were controversial, either

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<sup>136</sup> Makowski, *Periculoso*, 113-116.



because they contradicted canon law or were deemed inappropriate by spiritual leaders of the day. In most instances, the women chose these shifts in status for themselves.

CHAPTER THREE--*NON EST HONESTUM UT UXOR DEBEAT...SUO MANERE*: WOMEN AND MARITAL CHOICE <sup>1</sup>

Cardinal Rolandus Bandinelli, under his papal identity as Alexander III (r. 1159-1180), wrote to the Archbishop of Reims in 1174 about a woman whom they both knew. Each man understood that the woman's husband had decisively cut her off nine years earlier, when he had publicly repudiated her. While the pope's letter describes that the husband chose a life of depravity and destruction, he also explains that his own exhortations to the husband, as well as those of his representatives, had fallen on deaf ears. Frustrated by both partners in the marriage, the pope—as partially noted in the chapter title—projects himself as a man intent upon correct marital practice and promulgating his strong legal opinions on the matter. His letter to the Archbishop of Reims, who was also the woman's brother, appealed for his help “because it is neither meet nor decent that a wife should be without her husband in this manner.”<sup>2</sup> That the pope's efforts failed, and looked likely to continue failing, rankled his legal sensibilities and challenged his spiritual authority. We have only thus far discussed the woman, Constance of France, in reference to her first husband's family and, especially, her former sister-in-law, Marie of Blois. Within this chapter on marriage and choice, however, Constance's role as the Countess of Toulouse and her time as a repudiated and liberated wife support our understanding of choice and consequence. Similarly, Alexander III's interfering, as we shall also see, was not limited to Constance's marital situation, and he heavily embroiled himself in Marie and Matthew's marriage and consequently, their ability to lead the county of Boulogne. Much of what we know about the pope's actions and attitudes comes from his prolific letter writing. While we look at a

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<sup>1</sup> *RHGF*, 15:942, letter 370. “It is not decent that a wife should be in this manner” excerpted from Pope Alexander III's letter.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* “[Q]uia non est conveniens vel honestum, ut uxor debeat sine viro suo manere.”

number of the complexities involved in medieval marriage, our aim is to examine the ways that marriages ended for couples in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in England and France.

As the chapter highlights the circuitous and varied routes leading to the conclusion of a marriage, we find that the labels of repudiation, widowhood, and even divorce were often used to facilitate other ends. The focus of the chapter remains on the women in these failed, abandoned, or dissolved marriages who managed the ensuing changes, whether the end had been provoked by their choosing, their husband's, or some other force's. Providing a distinct contrast to the theme of abandoning a religious vow to marry, we look to the *Life of Christina of Markyate*. Its narrative recounts the story of the heroine, a young woman, who renounces marital vows in order to become a *sponsa Christi*. Her endeavors to sever her marital ties and preserve her virginity recall Fenice's goals and subsequent enclosures. Their ultimate aims, however, differ in significant ways: one seeks the pleasures associated with love and sensuality and the exercise of proper inheritance and rule while, the other pursues the delights of holy virginity and the exercise of spiritual devotion. Similarly, while tension in both accounts surrounds the breaking of a valid marital promise, neither Cligès nor the *Life of Christina of Markyate* expends much moral energy on justifying the eventual dissolution of the promise. The breaking of a fully consummated marriage in the *lai*, *Eliduc*, by Marie de France, does not provoke any commentary about its legality or even about its appropriateness. In this story, Marie de France creates a functional *ménage à trois* that straddles the boundaries of propriety, legitimacy, and religious/social status, even as it confronts divorce, bigamy, and remarriage.

All of these case studies thus highlight unexpected implications and consequences. While some anxiety shapes the narratives regarding the unprovoked and unjustified dissolution to betrothals and full marriages, this anxiety does not apparently justify that the couples remain

married. Similarly, even as the noise of parental, familial, and even papal objections might or might not be part of the narrative, such interference was easily drowned out as couples either individually or jointly arranged to sever their marital vows.

Marie of Boulogne's biography concludes this chapter, at the point when she once again reverts to Marie of Blois. The evidence concerning her life, and the lives of the other historical and literary women, leads us back to the context of choice, pragmatism, and the explicit and indirect messages regarding female identity. This next phase of Marie's life focuses our attention on what marriage—like or unlike the cloister—could provide for her. It questions how a former abbess might re-create and re-direct her identity, talents, and experiences as a countess. The paucity of records for Marie's time as countess means that we must reach this topic indirectly. Consequently, evidence regarding Marie's former sister-in-law, Constance, supplements this discussion. The two women, as contemporaries, experienced a range of duties and responsibilities as countesses. Both women's names appear (granting and confirming) in charters and both women left behind at least one letter from this period in their lives. Like Constance, Marie finished her life as a woman of indeterminate status whose marriage had been effectively ended by circumstances that were not of her choosing. We begin by reprising Marie's abduction from Romsey Abbey and the immediate fallout of Henry II and Matthew's actions.

#### *Enmity and reconciliation*

Before Thomas Becket became the Archbishop of Canterbury (r. 1162-1170), he served as Chancellor of England. Well before the days of his contest of wills with Henry II, Thomas is recorded as the most outspoken critic of the plan to abduct Marie from Romsey and have her marry Matthew of Flanders. A number of writers explain that Thomas's vocal protests initiated an ongoing enmity between him and Matthew of Flanders that would last for years to come. Two

of those narratives originate with a Thomas Becket biographer, Herbert of Bosham (d. ca. 1194), and chronicler, Matthew Paris (d. 1259). In addition to Thomas Becket's disapproval of the marriage, a substantial number of churchmen, particularly in the local dioceses connected to Boulogne, condemned the union. Their opposition was not based solely upon Matthew's abduction of and marriage to an abbess but also upon Matthew's treatment of the priests in Boulogne itself. The most significant, vocal, and enduring opposition came from the one man who could potentially do the most to destroy the marriage, Pope Alexander III. As the self-appointed champion of Marie's religious vows, he fought for almost a decade to have her marital vow dissolved. At the heart of his campaign was the goal to return Marie to the religious life, nevertheless more secular motivations can also be discerned.

Thomas Becket's much-publicized condemnation of Marie and Matthew's marriage in 1160 remained an open sore. Becoming the Archbishop of Canterbury in 1161, Thomas remained a stalwart enemy of Matthew's. No insinuation of indignation against Marie is evident from any of the chronicles or biographies that record the breach with Matthew. The enmity that existed between the two men influenced Becket's itinerary when escaping Henry II in 1164, so that when Thomas made his way into France, he was forced to steer clear of Boulogne in light of the continuing hatred that Matthew felt toward him.<sup>3</sup> He was not alone, however, in his opposition to Marie and Matthew's marital alliance; his condemnation represents the first of many voices to be raised against the marriage and couple. For the majority of writers who took

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<sup>3</sup> The details of this early part of Thomas Becket's exile can be found in the *Tractatus de Vita et passione beati Thomae* of the *Quadrilogus Vita Beati Thomae, martyris et archiepiscopi Cantuariensis* in James Craigie Robertson, *Materials for the History of Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury* (London, 1879) 4:332-333.

an interest in the marriage, the union was clearly illicit. Despite isolated claims of a dispensation, the marriage continued to be opposed by most clerical writers over the coming decades.<sup>4</sup>

Writings from the surrounding areas not only condemned the union but also highlighted the purported pain and sorrow it caused Matthew's family, who were shocked and scandalized by news of the marriage. For example one such condemnation appears in the addenda to Sigebert de Gembloux's writings. The unknown monk of Afflighem explains that in 1160 Matthew took as his wife the abducted abbess with the objective of obtaining the county of Boulogne.<sup>5</sup> The chronicler continues to explain the marriage's aftermath: for this reason, he was excommunicated by Samson, Archbishop of Reims, and his suffragans from all churches while his father Thierry and brother, Philippe, rose up against him and took the castle of Lens.<sup>6</sup> In this account, Marie is named only as the abducted abbess who is the key to Boulogne for Matthew, and is not excommunicated alongside her abductor. Accounts of the family strain caused by the marriage commonly appear. Lambert of Watrelos (d. 1170), a canon at Cambrai, paints a bleak picture in which Matthew's selfish plot to make the "accursed marriage" created a sorrow that "could not be borne in [his father's] chest."<sup>7</sup> The Afflighem account also reported family strife; its tone and language are particularly striking: "War and hostile dissension between father and

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<sup>4</sup> The main evidence regarding a dispensation comes from one of Marie's maternal kinsman, Faramus of Boulogne. He claimed a role in helping facilitate this right to marry. Faramus's purported role and how it fits in to the emplotting of Marie's story are discussed in Chapter Four.

<sup>5</sup> *RHGF*, 13:277 *Ex Auctario Affligemens*: Per "eam [Marie] optinet comitatum Boloniensem"

<sup>6</sup> Migne, *PL*, 160:299-300. "Obiit Willelmus filius Stephani Regis Anglie, comes Bolonie et dapifer Regis Anglie, sine herede Matheus vero filius Theoderici comitis Flandrie, filiam Staphni Regis Anglorum abbatissam raptam de monasterio ubi erat Deo sacrata per violentiam Regis Anglorum, ducit uxorem, et per eam optinet comitatum Boloniensem. Qua de causa a Sansone Remorum archiepiscopo et ab ejus suffraganeis omnibus episcopis excommunicatus est, et a patre suo Theoderico et fratre Philippo propter castellum Lens, quod adversus eos jure hereditario repetebat, nimium injuriatus. "

<sup>7</sup> *RHGF*, 13:517. See footnote 9 below.

son, between brother and brother were roused.”<sup>8</sup> This account adds the information about the confiscation of the castle of Lens by Thierry and Philippe.<sup>9</sup> While much is made of this family friction, documentary evidence from charters and letters verifies a quickly mended breach and full reconciliation within the family.<sup>10</sup>

While Lambert of Watrelos was eager to furnish the painful details of family strife, he was also quick to corroborate this mended breach and describes a convening *magnatorum* in 1161 called by Nicholas, Bishop of Cambrai.<sup>11</sup> Their purpose for meeting is not made explicitly clear but in attendance were Samson, Archbishop of Reims, two local area bishops, Matthew and his brother Philip who are both referred to as counts, their father, Thierry, “with several barons of eminence.”<sup>12</sup> Heather Tanner believes the bishop of Cambrai himself facilitated the moment of reconciliation between Matthew and his father.<sup>13</sup> Laura Napran, in her article, “Marriage and Excommunication: the Comital House of Flanders,” concentrates on the reception afforded to Matthew by the area’s leading ecclesiastical authorities; she further notes the attendance of a number of prominent churchmen, including the Archbishop of Reims and the Bishops of Laon and Noyon.<sup>14</sup> Napran argues that Matthew could no longer be viewed as excommunicate at the

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<sup>8</sup> *RHGF*, 13:277. *Ex Auctario Affligemensi*: “bella et seditioes inimicus inter patrem et filium, inter fratrem et fratrem concitavit.”

<sup>9</sup> *RHGF*, 13:517. “Quam ob rem moestitia pater excites, in folio armis non segniter insurrexit, quoniam nuptias execrabiles filium fecisse noesto pectore ferre non aequanimiter poterat.”

<sup>10</sup> Lilles Archives départementales du Nord, 10H 43/697. As a witness to one of his father’s charters in 1162, Matthew and Philip are referred to as “filiorum meorum [my sons]” and Matthew is identified as the count of Boulogne.

<sup>11</sup> *RHGF*, 13:518.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* “Cum nonnullis praeclaris Baronibus.”

<sup>13</sup> Tanner, *Families*, 203.

<sup>14</sup> Laura Napran, “Marriage and Excommunication: The Comital House of Flanders,” in *Exile in the Middle Ages*, eds. Laura Napran and Elisabeth van Houts (Turnout: Brepols, 2004), 77.

time and still found “in the company of such an august assembling of bishops.”<sup>15</sup> Her point is a valid one but one that should be taken a step further. Not only was the Archbishop of Reims in attendance, but it was he, Samson, who had originally excommunicated Matthew. As such, the meeting itself may have been the pivotal moment when Matthew was accepted by the leaders who mattered most to the success of his marriage to Marie.

Thus within a year or so after the marriage, Matthew could count himself *persona grata* within his locale and family, but the pope’s disapproving view remained unchanged. Not only had Matthew married an abbess, but he had also announced his arrival in Boulogne in a dramatic and, according to the pope, an unsavory fashion. We read Alexander III’s versions of events in his letter, dated December 10, 1162, to the new Archbishop of Reims, Henri, the brother of King Louis VII. According to the pope, “Matthew, the son of the Count of Flanders had removed our beloved sons, the abbots of Saint Maria and Saint Ulmar from their churches and replaced them with secular canons” leading to Milo’s promulgation of excommunication against him and against the secular canons themselves.<sup>16</sup> The letter was written from Tours, where the pope was at that time residing, to explain that the newly elected Milo II of Th rouanne had excommunicated Matthew.<sup>17</sup> Eight days later, Alexander wrote a second letter to Archbishop Henri that resounds with frustration about Matthew, a man who continually thumbed his nose at spiritual authority and got away with the unthinkable.<sup>18</sup> The letter opens with a recitation of Matthew’s major sin: his marriage to a nun and abbess dedicated to God that had put Matthew’s

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<sup>15</sup> Napran, *Marriage and Excommunication*, 77.

<sup>16</sup> *RHGF*, 15:788, letter 62. See Appendix C for the script of the two 1162 letters.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* Henri’s recent installation as archbishop and his being the brother of the French king played a role in the pope’s frequent correspondence with him. See Appendix C for the script of the two 1162 letters.

<sup>18</sup> *RHGF*, 15:788, letter 63.



soul in peril. Once again the onus is upon Matthew, not Marie; she is simply not named as one of the excommunicated. The letter then resurrects the familiar theme of Matthew's mistreatment of the abbots both sustaining and intensifying the ire against Matthew's wickedness, as the language escalates to describe Matthew's removal of the abbots in terms of having "violently ejected" them.<sup>19</sup>

The second letter also brought Thierry, the Count of Flanders and Matthew's father, into the spotlight. The pope clearly did not rejoice over the prodigal son's return into the family fold, writing the archbishop, Henri, "We command...that you impress upon the aforementioned count [Thierry] as far as possible, that he in no regard foster him [Matthew] in this wickedness, but as much as he is able himself, not delay to correct him regarding this matter."<sup>20</sup> The "matters" were Matthew's marriage to Marie and his disregard of the subsequent interdiction placed upon

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<sup>19</sup> Scholars have drawn different conclusions regarding these two letters. For example, D'Hauttefeuille and Green interpret that the original excommunications as promulgated by Samson and/or Milo were accompanied by a sweeping interdict of the county's churches. Auguste d'Hauttefeuille and Louis Bénard, *Histoire De Boulogne-Sur-Mer* (Boulogne-sur-Mer, 1860), 78 and Everett Green, *LPE*, 1:199. In their narratives in *Les Comtes de Boulogne*, however, Ganneron and Lefebvre believe that Matthew may have demanded a marital blessing from the clerics at St. Maria and St. Ulmar. Their refusal to comply prompted their ejection and replacement, at which point "Milon ... et Samson ... après avoir blâmé la conduit du comte, le sommèrent inutilement de se séparer de l'abbesse Marie; devant sa résistance, ils se trouvèrent dans la nécessité de frapper le coupable d'excommunication." ["Milo and Samson, having condemned the count's conduct, unsuccessfully commanded him to separate himself from the abbess Marie; in the face of such refusal, they found themselves forced to hit him with a charge of excommunication."] Whatever the root cause Matthew appears to have been excommunicated by one if not two local clergy. See François Ganneron and François A. Lefebvre, *Les Comtes De Boulogne (Manuscrit De 1640)* (Boulogne-sur-Mer, 1891), 177.

<sup>20</sup> *RHGF*, 15: 788-789. While Laura Napran also discusses this letter, she interprets the reference to the "aforementioned count" as referring to Matthew, emphasizing that the Pope must have forgiven him by this stage. Given that the pope has categorically not forgiven Matthew confirms that it is Thierry rather than Matthew who is being mentioned. Napran, *Marriage and Excommunication*, 78.

Boulogne.<sup>21</sup> Alexander III wanted Henri to remain firm in regards to Matthew, while Thierry was to be instructed in the proper correction of his son. The charters discussed above confirm that father and son had indeed healed their breach by this stage, and while Napran's theory regarding Matthew's status may apply to his local bishops, the pope tenaciously held onto his condemnation of the son of the Count of Flanders.<sup>22</sup> The pope, it seemed, was not going to relent in his campaign to undo the illicit marriage between Matthew and Marie.

The interference of churchmen at this time in their marriage and leadership of Boulogne included men like Bishop Milo II, who was apparently content to forgive and move on. Others, like the pope himself, were not so easily persuaded to allow the marriage to stand, whereas the Archbishop of Reims, Henri of France, appears to have let the side down in the pope's estimation. Such disparity of approach and opinion inform the following narrative of Christina of Markyate. In addition to her experiences in challenging parental power and embracing fully the religious enclosure, Christina fought a number of churchmen and others to end the legal marriage she had been pressured into accepting.

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<sup>21</sup> Napran, 78. She continues, "He would have been unlikely to proffer this acknowledgement if Matthew was still excommunicate for his marriage, as his title of Count depended on the recognition that he was legally married to Countess Marie."

<sup>22</sup> *RHGF*, 15: 788-789. "Quia igitur nos in eo sumus loco, disponente Domino, constitute ut et prava corrigere, et ea studeamus quae sunt praecitata Domino solidare, fraternitatem tuam per apostolic scripta mandamus quatenus praedictum comitem studeas diligentius commonere, ut illum in nequitia ista nulla ratione confoveat, sed eum, quantum in se est, quantocius super hoc corrigere non postponat..." "Because therefore we have come together in this place, ordained by the Lord, so to correct the wicked, even as we strive to strengthen those things which are pleasing to the Lord, we command your brotherhood by our papal writings that you impress upon the aforementioned count [Thierry] as far as possible, that he in no regard foster him [Matthew] in this wickedness, but as much as he is able himself that he not delay to correct him regarding this matter."

*Sacramentum coniugii divina sancitum institutione non posse solvi*<sup>23</sup>

The Prior of Huntingdon here lectures the young woman, Theodora, that “the sacrament of marriage which has been sanctioned by divine law, cannot be dissolved....” His words were meant not only to emphasize the sanctity and indissolubility of marriage but also to affirm parental decision-making power and thus demand Theodora’s filial submission.<sup>24</sup> Little did the prior or Theodora’s parents and husband know that a protracted and bitter fight was about to ensue. For Theodora, the right to choose disobedience was fully connected to her right to obey her promise to be Christ’s virginal bride. A seeming *impasse* results from this wrangling over rights: parental, spousal, and filial. This standoff leads in turn to the intertwining within the narrative of violent beatings, attempted rapes, and secular and religious vows.

These themes and the events they inspire form a large part of *The Life of Christina of Markyate*. It describes a young woman, originally baptized as Theodora, who renames herself, Christina, in imitation of Christ.<sup>25</sup> Her name change introduces the special mark of being “chosen as a servant of God” before her birth.<sup>26</sup> The narrative account of her life represents the earliest literary production used in this dissertation. Christina was born in the late eleventh century, living until about 1155-1160 when the *Life* was completed, and the possibility exists that it may

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<sup>23</sup> “The sacrament of marriage, which has been sanctioned by divine law, cannot be dissolved....” from C. H. Talbot, ed. and trans., *The Life of Christina of Markyate: A Twelfth Century Recluse* (1959; repr. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 60-61.

<sup>24</sup> The Prior continues in his speech to extol the two commandments “about obedience to parents and faithfulness in marriage....” Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. The narrative’s slight digression about Christina in her mother’s womb recalls the concept of being specially designated while still *in utero* as described in Jeremiah 1:5, “Before I formed thee in the bowels of thy mother, I knew thee: and before thou camest forth out of the womb, I sanctified thee....”

include material directly dictated by Christina.<sup>27</sup> Like many of the women in this dissertation, Christina satisfies the criteria for both of the first two chapters: she fights against parental power by choosing a direction in total opposition to their plans; she also experiences a complicated relationship with enclosure as protection and restraint and the religious veil as a symbol of purity. While these characteristics inform the following discussion of Christina, they are not the dominant theme. Instead our focus is upon how the *Life* depicts Christina's experiences as a married woman and her efforts to break her secular marital vow and exchange it for a spiritual one to Christ. Like the other women of this chapter as well, Christina's experience of secular marriage was far from straightforward.

Christina's betrothal was formulated in an unconventional manner. As becomes quickly apparent in *The Life of Christina of Markyate*, churchmen are not all virtuous. Consequently, the first sexual assault on Christina, after she has made her vows to become Christ's bride, comes from a bishop. Ralph Flambard (d. 1128), the Bishop of Durham, trapped Christina in his room intent upon having sex with her, with or without her consent. Christina, however, devises a scheme that not only saves her virginity but also allows her to take an oath assuring Ralph that she is not deceiving him.<sup>28</sup> This scheme against Ralph, however, backfires, spurring him to seek revenge "by depriving Christina of her virginity, either by himself or by someone else..."<sup>29</sup> The

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<sup>27</sup> Douglas Gray, "Christina of Markyate: The Literary Background," in *Christina of Markyate: A Twelfth-Century Holy Woman*, ed. S. Fanous and H. Leyser (London: Routledge, 2005), 16-17.

<sup>28</sup> Talbot, *Life: A Twelfth-Century Recluse*, 42-43. Her biographer proudly recounts her actions, "She glanced towards the door and saw that, though it was closed, it was not bolted. And she said to him: 'Allow me to bolt the door: for even if we have no fear of God, at least we should take precautions that no man should catch us in this act.' He demanded an oath from her that she would not deceive him.... And she swore to him. And so being released, she darted out of the room and bolting the door firmly from the outside, hurried quickly home."

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

man he chooses is the nobleman, Burthred. Christina's parents, Autti and Beatrix, happily accept Burthred's proposal of marriage to Christina. When she resists, however, her parents move from ridiculing Christina's vow of virginity to bribing her with gifts to enlisting the help of one of her friends, Helisen, to convince her.<sup>30</sup> The narrative assumes a vagueness and claim of ignorance but concedes that ultimately Christina "with so many exerting pressure on her from all sides...yielded (at least in word), and on that very day Burthred was betrothed to her."<sup>31</sup>

Forced into this marriage, Christina's fight to end it takes over the plot of the *Life*. It becomes not merely a fight against Burthred but even more so against her parents. Autti and Beatrix in their turn respond with absolute brutality to achieve their goals of Christina's marriage and submission. In the end, their weapon of choice is her deflowering, likely achieved through rape, by any and all means necessary. This competition of wills largely pits Autti and Beatrix on one side, Christina on the other, and Burthred dithering between the two. Burthred's attempts to consummate the marriage are three times foiled by Christina as she springs away with agility and hides magically, unseen "between the wall and hangings."<sup>32</sup> Initially desiring to marry Christina, Burthred later agrees to release her from the vow, only to be bribed back into it by her parents.<sup>33</sup> Autti and Beatrix in turn assume increasingly evil and sinister roles: beating, neglecting, and rejecting their daughter, as their tactics become erratic and hateful.<sup>34</sup> Christina's inflexibility provokes further family discord, leading her to flee first to the anchoress, Alfwen, with whom

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 44-45.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 46-47.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 52-53.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 51-69. Initially Christina tries to persuade Burthred to accept a chaste marriage. Not interested in this compromise, he agrees to end the marriage. Christina's parents, however, intervene, and Burthred reinstates his marital claims on Christina.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 72-75.

she lives “hidden out of sight in a very dark chamber hardly large enough, on account of its size, to house her” for two years.<sup>35</sup>

Burthred’s final capitulation comes, not because of Christina’s protests, but because of a “terrifying vision” when Mary, the mother of God appears to him “harshly reproaching him for his needless persecution of the sacred maiden.”<sup>36</sup> In many ways, Mary plays a more central and active part in Christina’s safety and success than Christ does. Mary stakes a claim to Christina not yet discussed in this dissertation in reference to choice. Although the Virgin Mary assumes a pivotal role in the *Nostre Dame Miracles* collections, she usually serves as the protector and defender. In the *Life of Christina of Markyate*, however, the Virgin Mary becomes the one in charge of making choices about the girls and women. In one of Christina’s visions, the “Virgin of Virgins” appears to her and spells things out clearly, explaining, “And be assured that I have chosen you from your father’s house.”<sup>37</sup> In fact, all of the references to choice take on a slightly skewed aspect in the *Life*. For example, the formula that Anselm employed when writing Gunnhildr that “from your infancy he [Christ] chose you for his bride” is recast in the *Life* where Christina instead asserts that “from my infancy, I have chosen chastity.”<sup>38</sup> Moving from the passive to the active, Christina becomes the agent of her own destiny, not simply one of the elected. Although this identification as *electa* also forms part of Christina’s identity; both the

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 92-93. Christina’s refuge with Alfwen is the first of many enclosed and hidden spaces that she inhabits until her eventual liberation from the marriage and through the acceptance of her choices.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 79. “Et scito quod elegit e de domo patris....”

<sup>38</sup> See page 41 above: “Te ab infantia sponsam sibi eligeret....” Talbot, *Life: A Twelfth-Century Recluse*, 61: “Elegerim ab infancia castitatem.”

anonymous narrator of the *Life* and the Virgin Mary describe her as chosen as the servant of God and spouse of the most high.<sup>39</sup>

After Burthred's agreement to release Christina from her vow, the *Life* follows her through the torments of her necessary enclosures in order to escape detection and preserve her virginity. Unlike Chrétien's heroine, Fenice, Christina's goal is not to be united with her human lover but to become a bride of Christ and enjoy spiritual passions. By the end, the narrative, has done more than demonstrate how Christina escaped her marriage, it has also underscored her power to make choices and celebrated her cunning in the face of danger. Temptation becomes an unexpected theme during her trials of hiding from one place to another. Christina's decision to reside temporarily with an unnamed cleric invokes a spiritual test for both the cleric and Christina as they become consumed with lust for one another. Though the Gospels recount Christ's own temptations, the female hagiographies were generally reluctant to ascribe "carnal desire" to their saints, as Virginia Blanton has noted. Having locating only two in the genre that have allowed such admissions, she writes, "Both narratives are similar in that a devil instigates the desire; desire in these lives is not innate to the female saint."<sup>40</sup> Blanton then describes part of Christina's remedy against her sinful urges by subjugating her flesh through "long fastings, little food, and that only of raw herbs, a measure of water to drink, nights spent without sleep, harsh scourging."<sup>41</sup> Her torments end only when Christ comes to her "in the guise of a small child...and remained with her a whole day...."<sup>42</sup> As such, this deliverance arrives when she assumes the role

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 35 and 117.

<sup>40</sup> Virginia Blanton, "Chaste Marriage, Sexual Desire, and Christian Martyrdom in *La Vie Sainte Audrée*," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 19, no. 1 (2010): 103. These examples come from the lives of Christina and Justina of Antioch

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> *Life*, 119.

of a virgin mother. This one scene represents in essence her sole display of maternal tenderness within the narrative.

Circumstances eventually enable Christina to be free from fear as she makes her profession before Alexander (d. 1148), Bishop of Lincoln, leading to her time as a known anchoress at Markyate. Her fame builds so that a community of nuns gathers around Christina, at which point they and she, as their prioress, are consolidated together into the Priory at Markyate.<sup>43</sup> The Christina of Markyate who has emerged from the narrative is a determined, intelligent, passionate woman who utterly renounces secular marriage and its trappings. Her forceful disobedience against parents and, at times, against clerical authority further complicates the messages regarding marital and religious vows as well as the notion of obedience toward the authority of spiritual leaders.

#### *Guilheluëc's Choice*

Such issues do not significantly affect the main heroine of Marie de France's *lai*, commonly known as *Eliduc* but called *Guilheluëc ha Guilliadun* within the *lai* itself.<sup>44</sup> The tale recounts how a man's sins of commission and omission lead to his having two wives. For the purposes of this examination of marital dissolution, this *lai* is used to look at the interplay between marital and religious vows, especially when the former is dissolved in order to pave the way for the latter. It is also used as another lens on contemporary legal issues such as *raptus* and

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<sup>43</sup> See Stephanie Hollis and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, "St Albans and Women's Monasticism: Lives and Their Foundations in Christina's World," in *Christina of Markyate: A Twelfth-Century Holy Woman*, ed. S. Fanous and H. Leyser (London: Routledge, 2005), 42.

<sup>44</sup> All citations for Marie de France's *lais* come from three versions: an Anglo-Norman French (based on the thirteenth-century manuscript Harley 978), a modern French translation, and an English translation. Laurence Harf-Lancner, trans., *Lais de Marie de France*, (Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 1990) and Robert Hanning and Joan Ferrante, trans., *The Lais of Marie de France* (Durham, NC: The Labyrinth Press, 1978).



bigamy. The brevity and conciseness that Marie has used in crafting her *lais* reflects the musical nature of the genre, her proficiency in Anglo-Norman, and, as I will argue below, her ability to play with Latin and English double-entendre when choosing the lexicon for pivotal scenes. Marie, as the architect of this narrative, asserts her linguistic control over what is purported to be a pre-existing plot.<sup>45</sup> Within the first twenty-six lines, Marie informs the reader of her reasons for changing the title, explaining that whereas it used to be *Eliduc*, it is now “Guilheluëc and Guilliadun, because the women are indeed the heroines of the adventure that gave birth to the *lai*.”<sup>46</sup> While Marie treats with the clichés of the genre—romantic love, marital unions, infidelity, and sexual attraction—the ways in which she inverts and, at times, subverts them allows for a multi-layered approach in reading her work. For our purposes, heightened attention will be paid to the parallel themes operating in the *lai* and in the life of Marie of Boulogne, including *raptus*, bigamy, dissolving marital vows, and religious vows for both husband and wife.

The *lai* itself is bookmarked by claims of bigamy. At one end, the narrative introduces the characters, noting it is named for Eliduc’s two wives.<sup>47</sup> At the other end, the *lai* finishes with a rather unconventional *ménage à trois*: Guilheluëc and Guilliadun living together in the nunnery

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<sup>45</sup> See lines 23-25. Other scholars discuss Marie’s control over language in different contexts. See Diane Watt, *Medieval Women’s Writing: Works by and for Women in England, 1100-1500* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007), 59, and R. Howard Bloch, *The Anonymous Marie de France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 51.

<sup>46</sup> Lines 23 and 25-26. “Guilheluëc ha Guilliadun/...kar des dames est avenue l’aventure dunt li *lais* fu.” In Marie’s canon of writing, it has continued for the most part to be known by its former title, *Eliduc*, and not by the new title, that Marie ascribes to it in line 20. Jane Chance explains in a parenthetical that the title, *Eliduc* was not changed in the manuscript that she consulted in her study of the *lai* in Jane Chance, *Literary Subversions of Medieval Women* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 55. Chance discusses the thirteenth-century Anglo-Norman Harley 978; see her footnote 42, page 151, for more information.

<sup>47</sup> Lines 21-22. “D’eles dous a li *lais* a nun/ Guilheluëc ha Guilliadun.”

as religious sisters praying for the soul of their former husband, Eliduc.<sup>48</sup> For his part, he has in turn taken religious vows and prays for his former wives.<sup>49</sup> Each of the three has lived with the other at some time in their lives, bound to each other by marital and religious vows. In the end, the religious vows permanently sever the previous marital vows forged between Guildeluëc and Eliduc and between Guilliadun and Eliduc. These new vows, however, permanently bind the women together.

Marie de France's rendition of the *lai* immediately introduces the impending dilemma that torments Eliduc and leads to these complications. The reader first finds praise for him as a knight: happily married and enjoying the respect of his peers and of his lord, the King of Brittany. This harmony and these relationships are all challenged in the course of the narrative as Eliduc's peers become increasingly jealous of his privileged status, and, in time, Eliduc is dismissed by his lord. Abroad in England, Eliduc develops a secret passion for another woman, rupturing the mutual love and respect that he and Guildeluëc had enjoyed. His new *amie*, Guilliadun, is the daughter of his new (temporary) lord, the King of Logres, whom Eliduc meets in a series of cross-Channel quests, provoked by his self-imposed banishment. As Eliduc sets out from his home, he makes a promise of fidelity to his wife, the grieving Guildeluëc; he entrusts her to the care of his vassals and leaves.<sup>50</sup> Immediately arrived in Logres, Eliduc's martial skills bring him glory and his strict code of honor quickly gains notice and respect. For all Eliduc's nobility and honor, however, the *lai* never allows the reader to forget that he has pledged fidelity to his wife, Guildeluëc, and now hides a secret from his new friend, Guilliadun.

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<sup>48</sup> Lines 1171-1173.

<sup>49</sup> See lines 1171-1173: "Deu preiouent pur lur ami/qu'il li feïst bone merci,/e il pur eles repreiot."

<sup>50</sup> Lines 66-74 and 80-88.

Once Eliduc has proven his mettle in England, his former lord in Brittany recalls him, apologizing for ever believing the gossip of Eliduc's contumacious behavior. The king begs for Eliduc's return to aid him at his time of great need. Torn by his vows of loyalty to his former lord and his unspoken love for Guilliadun, Eliduc decides to return to Brittany, aid his lord, and return to fetch his beloved. Overseeing the plans for this complicated itinerary, Eliduc finally accomplishes the first task, helping his lord to return order to the kingdom. His recall to Brittany also means a return to Guildeluëc, his faithful and momentarily joyous wife. Her happiness is short-lived, as it becomes increasingly obvious that her husband does not relish their reunion. The second part of Eliduc's plan means that their time together is abbreviated by his return to Logres and to Guilliadun. Once back in England, the chamberlain and Eliduc execute a plan to extract Guilliadun from her home and whisk her away to Brittany. No mention is made of what will await them upon their arrival. Nor is any mention is made of Guildeluëc.

Given the spectrum of definitions and interpretations regarding *raptus*, it remained and remains a subjective exercise to determine if and when the act was committed.<sup>51</sup> Similar difficulties exist in establishing if victims colluded in their own *raptus*. These lingering questions inform much of this dissertation as it strives to shed light on the *raptus* of Marie of Blois. As we continue to examine the evidence regarding Marie's role in the abduction from Romsey, for Guilliadun, there is no doubt that she participated alongside Eliduc in her own secret departure from Logres. When Eliduc surreptitiously took Guilliadun from her home and family, he (regardless of Guilliadun's willingness) committed a crime against his lord. The narrative makes

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<sup>51</sup> See the next section for a discussion of the confusion surrounding *raptus*.

much of concealment and the necessary maneuvers to accomplish the scheme.<sup>52</sup> Whispers, hiding, and disguise all feature in the escape. Once en route, a smooth Channel crossing abruptly ends just as their boat nears the harbor.<sup>53</sup> Their terror leads to the moment of disclosure when one of the frightened men reveals Eliduc's marital status thus accusing him of causing the catastrophe by plotting bigamy with another woman. The sailor's solution, however, is not to jettison Eliduc, but Guilliadun! In the end, the irate Eliduc throws the mouthy sailor overboard and pilots the vessel into port himself.

Before, during, and after the *raptus*, no mention is made of Guilliadun's parental home or future. Only Eliduc, his chamberlain, and the reader are privy to all of the details. As such, Guilliadun cannot be considered fully complicit in the scheme. She understands that Eliduc loves her and that she reciprocates. Of his wife and home, she has been entirely ignorant. As the wall of silence guarding the mouths of Eliduc's men is hastily rebuilt after the sailor is thrown overboard, the plot itself is seemingly derailed: one of the three main characters, Guilliadun, is also silenced by the catastrophic faint that she suffers upon learning the truth. The faint so resembles death that plans are discussed for her burial. No potion was necessary for this semi-death, as it had been for Fenice. Eliduc however cannot bear to lose her yet to a burial, so her body is placed in a hermit's chapel where he can go to visit her.

From this point on in the narrative, Marie de France's re-telling of the *lai* showcases Guildeluëc's, not Eliduc's, qualities of prowess, bravery, and sacrifice. We are not treated to a pantomime of female handwringing and tears, rather we witness a woman solving and

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<sup>52</sup> As one example of Guilliadun's participation, in line 796 we read that she hides her face behind a "drap de seie," the cloth recalls Fresne's silk cloth. From start to finish, the *raptus* takes up some 150 lines.

<sup>53</sup> Sixty lines of description portray the severity of the storm and the sailors' terrified supplications to the saints Nicholas, Clement, and the Virgin Mother for their safety.

unravelling the mystery of her husband's coldness and all-consuming sadness. Similarly, she displays a methodical *savoir-faire* and heartfelt kindness, as she finds the unorthodox means of reviving her husband's *amie* from her deathlike state.<sup>54</sup> Guilliadun's resuscitation provides the means for the two women to understand the position and status of the other. Choice supported by disclosure and knowledge characterize the women at this point. Each of the three main characters faces moral dilemmas that force them to choose and decide the course of action that will affect them personally as well as the other two.<sup>55</sup> The women could easily have been depicted as victims or bitter rivals, given the set of circumstances with which they must contend. Guilliadun has in essence been duped into abandoning her home and family to seal her love for Eliduc, while Guildeluëc could be seen as an abandoned wife facing the stigma of repudiation and perhaps destitution. Rejecting this miserable plot line, Marie de France instead presents Guildeluëc with the means to construct a different *dénouement* and legacy. After reviving Guilliadun, Guildeluëc, whose own heart suffers for her husband's anguish, takes Guilliadun home with her. At this decisive moment, Guildeluëc announces that she wants to restore her husband's freedom by taking the veil.

In pausing to look at the abduction question in terms of Marie of Blois, we can see that colluding in the *raptus* might have represented pragmatic decision-making in operation.

Marrying Matthew of Flanders would enable Marie to fulfill family obligations to Boulogne

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<sup>54</sup> Watching one weasel heal another with a flower, Guildeluëc uses the same flower to revive Guilliadun, lines 1032-1065.

<sup>55</sup> For example, Eliduc—like most male protagonists in the romance genre—is placed in a difficult position vis à vis his lord. Accusations of infidelity from jealous rivals provoked Eliduc to quest in search of fame and fortune elsewhere, in this case, across the sea in England. Once he has proven his worth, Eliduc is confronted with romantic love for another woman, after pledging his fidelity to his wife upon his departure. Choosing to spend time with the young woman, Guilliadun, the knight instigates the problems to come, resulting in what appears to be an impasse for all three characters. It is thus Eliduc's actions that provide the impetus for choice.

while continuing to wield authority. Similar possibilities open up to Guildeluëc through her willingness to release her husband from their marriage and to take religious vows. In so describing her intentions, Marie de France plays with a multilingual lexicon while reinforcing the potency of Guildeluëc's volition and authority. When Guildeluëc presents the plan to Guilliadun, she states, "From all claims I wish to absolve him/And thus I will have my head veiled."<sup>56</sup> Within this statement of some twelve words in the original, Guildeluëc twice chooses words—*vueil* and *veler*—that conflate veiling and desire.<sup>57</sup> The *lai*'s audience becomes witness to Guildeluëc's assertion of her desires and her choice to be veiled. Similarly, when she adds the word, *chief*, to the lines, Marie in one word, reinforces the fact that Guildeluëc is not choosing to become a simple nun in a religious house but instead electing herself as its head, principal, or leader: that is, its abbess.<sup>58</sup> In the end, she becomes the religious head over the younger wife, Guilliadun. As such, Marie de France twists the notion of self-sacrifice. Reminiscent of Fresne's surrendering of her own happiness to achieve the best for others, Marie's message is far from

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<sup>56</sup> Lines 1100-1101. This is my more literal translation of: "Del tut le vueil quite clamer,/e si ferai mun chief veler." The Hanning and Ferrante English translation, however, reads, "I want to make him completely free, and I shall take the veil." Hanning and Ferrante, *Lais*, 226.

<sup>57</sup> The related forms for both the adverb *vueil* (willingly) and the verb, *veler* (to be veiled) visually and vocally relate to one another both in Anglo-Norman and Latin. For a listing of their forms, see the *AND* <http://www.anglo-norman.net/>. See also the conjugations for the Latin verb *volo* and the declined form of *vela*. The *OED* provides the following etymology for veil: "Anglo-Norman and Old Northern French *veile* (*veille*) or *veil* (*veyl*), = Old French *voile* (*voille*) and *voil* < Latin *vēla* (neuter plural, taken as feminine singular) and *vēlum* sail, curtain, veil." "veil, n.1". *OED Online*. September 2015. Oxford University Press, accessed October 21, 2015, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/221919>.

<sup>58</sup> Similarly, the double meaning of *chief* lends itself not only to meaning the head but also the principal or leader. This usage also moved into Middle English by the next century. *OED Online*. September 2015. Oxford University Press, accessed October 21, 2015, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/31580>.

clear-cut. It does, however, suggest that women could use the tool of apparent self-abnegation to realize their objectives and arrive at self-directed choices.

No one could seriously label Guildeluëc a repudiated wife, as the text reinforces the dignity and power behind her choices. She carved out a future that provided her with authority and purpose. Regardless of her spiritual devotion, however, Guildeluëc does break her marital vows, an act that would not have been allowed, given that Eliduc was in pursuit of another marriage. In other words, for Guildeluëc to break her marital vows legally with Eliduc, he too would have had to take religious vows. At this time in legal history, while there was still ongoing debate about leaving a marriage for religion, Eliduc was treading on thin ice in his remarriage to Guilliadun.<sup>59</sup> Whether or not twelfth-century readers and audiences would have fully appreciated these transgressions of canon law, the inclusion of them in this *lai* and in Fresne likely signals that Marie de France herself understood the controversy they might attract. The same veil of uncertainty exists in reference to the people involved with Marie's departure from Romsey and her subsequent marriage.

#### *Unheard of?*

Consequently, even for the then political leader Thomas Becket, it is difficult to discern whether he truly disapproved of Marie's abduction, given the stature and veneration that he quickly assumed *postmortem*. Others, however, do seem genuinely outraged for the fact that "one of their own" was so egregiously treated by a warring second son of a count. As we have seen, Robert of Torigni (d. 1186), the monk of Mont Saint Michel, described Matthew's

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<sup>59</sup> See the helpful discussion of the legalities of Eliduc's second marriage in Sharon Kinoshita and Peggy McCracken *Marie de France: A Critical Companion* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2012), 88-89. Similar legal difficulties existed for Matthew of Boulogne in the discussions regarding his remarriage to Aliénor of Vermandois.

abduction of an abbess as *inaudito*. This notion of the unheard of conjures up images of “Why never!” when the unbelievable occurs. His outrage gains strength as he explains the reason for the abduction: to seize the county of Boulogne.<sup>60</sup> “His tutting disapproval is meek in comparison with other commentators, however, who introduce the notion of *raptus* and even of violence into the mix.”<sup>61</sup> Three late-twelfth and early thirteenth-century annals and chronicles from the Low Countries emphasize the wickedness of the plot within the context of canon law: “abbatisam raptam de monasterio,” “de monasterio ubi erat Deo consecrata raptam,” and “contra fas legum...dedit uxorem [a Matheo].”<sup>62</sup> Others heap further accusations on to the wrongdoers, explaining that the marriage was effected “per violentiam Regis Anglorum.”<sup>63</sup> The first two examples, and others using the term *raptus*, cannot be read as clear-cut examples of rape or even forced abduction, however. The mid-twelfth-century legists continued to grapple with refining and applying the term. Because it came from Roman law, *raptus* remained and would remain for some time a term applicable to different crimes at different times. As James Brundage explains, “In the ancient Roman law, *raptus* consisted in the abduction and sequestration of a woman against the will of the person under whose authority she lived. Sexual intercourse was not a

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<sup>60</sup> Migne, *PL*, 160:492 : “Matheus filius comitis Flandrie inaudito exemplo duxit abbatissam Rummesia, que fuerat filia Stephani Regis, et cepit cum ea comitatum Boloniensem.” They read, “the kidnapped abbess from the monastery,” “snatched from the monastery where she was consecrated to God,” and “against the divine law of laws given as wife to Matthew.”

<sup>61</sup> Linda D. Brown, “*Inaudito exemplo*: the Abduction of Romsey’s Abbess,” *Historical Reflections/Réflexions Historiques* 42, no.1 (forthcoming).

<sup>62</sup> *MGH SS*, 6: 409, 397, and 404. These references originate in the collections known as *Sigiberti Continuatio Aquicinctina*, *Sigiberti Auctarium Aquicinense* and *Auctoro Affligemenses*. Both the *Aquicinctina* and *Aquicinense* accounts appear as appendages to the writings of Sigebert of Gembloux (d. 1112) and while they contain similar information, their entries differ in fundamental ways. For example, the former apports blame to both Henry II and Matthew, whereas the latter only implicates Matthew.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:409. “By violence of the English king.”



necessary element of ancient *raptus*.”<sup>64</sup> But part of the evolution of the word for the twelfth century canonists was its movement from being understood as a crime against property as one “of violence against the person.”<sup>65</sup> In trying to decipher use of the term *raptus* in reference to Marie, the temptation is to visualize Henry’s men *per violentiam* abducting her from Romsey and spiriting her away to a vessel docked in Southampton, ready for the voyage to Boulogne. Henry’s plotting over Marie fits in well with his numerous strategies to reintegrate the royal demesne.”<sup>66</sup> And while Boulogne remained outside his direct control, it represented territory over which he desired as much indirect control as possible.<sup>67</sup> Additionally, its practical and ceremonial ties to Flanders and France transformed the tiny county into a strategically sensitive area that demanded a count friendly and preferably indebted to the English Crown.

Modern scholars have examined the implications of what it meant to be an abducted religious woman in the Middle Ages, but complications immediately arise from linguistic inconsistencies, legal definitions, and cultural assumptions. For the period from the late thirteenth century until the Dissolution, Eileen Power has offered a one-size-fits-all assessment of this potential crime. In Power’s estimation, “all abductions were in reality elopements.”<sup>68</sup> F.

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<sup>64</sup> James Brundage, “Rape and Marriage in the Medieval Canon Law,” in *Sex, Law and Marriage in the Middle Ages*. (Hampshire: Variorum, 1993), reprinted 1998, viii, 63.

<sup>65</sup> Brundage, viii, 66.

<sup>66</sup> G. J. White, *Restoration and Reform, 1153-1165: Restoration from Civil War in England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 115.

<sup>67</sup> Boulogne represented the closest landing point across the Channel.

<sup>68</sup> Eileen Power, *Medieval English Nunneries: c.1275 to 1535* (1922; repr. New York: Biblo and Tannen, 1988), 440. In reference the late thirteenth century onwards, Power nevertheless believed that the data supported the notion that the woman’s willingness was necessary for such abductions to succeed, otherwise “few men would have been bold enough to ravish a *Sponsa Dei*. Sometimes a bishop was led to suppose that a nun had been carried away against her will, but he always found out in the end that she had been in the plot....”

Donald Logan resumed Power's line of reasoning in *Runaway Religious*, similarly concluding, "Nothing has appeared in the preparation of this study to contradict this judgement."<sup>69</sup> However, more recent work by Caroline Dunn complicates the discussion while offering some useful findings. In her study, *Stolen Women Medieval England: Rape, Abduction, and Adultery, 1100–1500*, Dunn, like Power and Logan, does see that abduction was used by couples with the hope of it leading to legal marriage. Dunn, however, has isolated the problematic vocabulary of *raptus* in order to piece together the routes to these desired marriages as well as to determine when *raptus* was not part of a shared plan between a woman and man. Approaching the labyrinthine complexities of "stealing women," Dunn attempts "to untangle these interlocking wrongs by explaining which cases of *raptus* should be classified as sexual rape and which are forced or consensual abduction, in addition to clarifying why some cases must remain ambiguous."<sup>70</sup> Our interests in Marie's abduction coincide with Dunn's reference to "forced or consensual abduction." Dunn has amassed nine different terms in abduction cases that predate 1285, thus reflecting language that came after Marie's exit from Romsey in 1160.<sup>71</sup> The most commonly used words included forms of *abduxit/abductione*.<sup>72</sup> In the mid-twelfth century when Gratian was compiling the *Decretum*, his endeavors included the meanings and applications of *raptus*. Of these endeavors, Dunn notes, "In Gratian's synthesis, both rape and abduction were subsumed under the umbrella of *raptus*, a conflation of offences bound together more closely than they had

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<sup>69</sup> Logan, *Runaway Religious*, 85.

<sup>70</sup> Dunn, *Stolen Women Medieval England: Rape, Abduction, and Adultery, 1100–1500* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 18.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>72</sup> See *Ibid.*, 27. Table 1.2 "The Language of Abduction Before 1285." *Abduxit* is the past tense third-person singular verb form, and *abductione* is the ablative singular.

been in ancient Rome.”<sup>73</sup> Gratian’s reliance on Roman law deviated so that he “tolerated marriage between an abductor and his victim, provided that the woman and her family acquiesced” in lieu of the capital punishment of Roman law.<sup>74</sup> Most useful for our purposes are the ways that couples utilized this toleration of marriage to realize their goals when the case was one of consensual abduction.

Couples could and did take advantage of abduction laws in order to marry one another. It is no surprise, then, that laws governing abduction changed over time to take such fictions into account.<sup>75</sup> Often legislation regarding the abduction of already-married women pertained to the abduction of nuns, who were the brides of Christ. Many of these legal adjustments responded to the fact that women and men often went to extraordinary lengths to marry a person who was, for a number of reasons, off-limits to them. Case studies that demonstrate such strategies force us to recognize the difficulties of using contemporary administrative or historical documents to determine motive and intention when dealing with *raptus*. For us, the question remains whether Marie colluded in her own abduction. In moving closer to an answer, understanding how Marie’s life changed and did not change when she left Romsey for Boulogne fills in some of the gaps about her new role.

### *Being a Countess*

In her study of *Noblewomen, Aristocracy, and Power in the Twelfth-Century Anglo-Norman Realm*, Susan M. Johns devotes an entire chapter to the various functions associated

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> These changes are visible in the Statutes of Westminster I and II that prohibited the taking of a maiden with or without her consent and the later proviso that if a “married woman, maid, or other” failed to prosecute her ravishment, the Crown could step in and sue.” This second set of statutes also included punishment of “those who abducted willing nuns.” Dunn, *Stolen*, 39.

with countesses at the time.<sup>76</sup> Charters constitute her main source of evidence to discuss the five major case studies in the chapter. The evidence she gleans from the records confirms a variety of duties and activities that twelfth-century countesses performed in the running of county lands. Cartularies and chronicles provide evidence for holding court and participating in military affairs.<sup>77</sup> Life cycle, too, affected the degree of participation, and the chapter as a whole confirms that countesses' roles "were magnified when women entered the stage of the life cycle which gave them most access to land in their own right—widowhood."<sup>78</sup> The real marker for women that prompted greater "participation in public affairs" was marriage, however. For Marie, then, this transition from abbess to countess meant that as countess, a more public-facing identity was not only possible but necessary. Being visible and active in Boulonnais affairs was crucial in light of the months of uncertainty that had plagued the county after William's death in October 1159. Marie, as the daughter of Matilda of Boulogne, moreover, had large shoes to fill.

Conversely, outside of the county, Marie's identity was more difficult to alter. Striking in most of the medieval chronicle accounts regarding Marie is the constant reminder of her premarital status as *quondam abbatissa Romesia* [formerly the Abbess of Romsey]; few if any of the chronicle writers ever refer to her as *uxor Mathei* [wife of Matthew]. Marie is confident and clear, however, in her self-styling as *comitissa Boloniensis* [the Countess of Boulogne].<sup>79</sup> Although marriage did expose Marie to a more public role, the transition to becoming a married countess did not substantially change her identity as significantly as might be imagined. Undoubtedly moving from a virginal community of nuns to a married comital household carried

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<sup>76</sup> Johns, *Noblewomen, Aristocracy, and Power*, 53-80.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 60 and 69.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>79</sup> As evident in the letter discussed below and in the Chapter Four.

with its place/title-specific changes. As discussed nevertheless in Chapter Three, Marie's administrating over two manors, a house of nuns, hospitality to travelling dignitaries, and relations with the town and people of Romsey had prepared her for many of the responsibilities in Boulogne.

Despite the rocky start to her marriage to Matthew, life for this twelfth-century countess was not extraordinary in her personal life or in her public life. Early in the nine-year marriage, Marie gave birth to two daughters, Ida and Matilda. No evidence points to dissatisfaction in the county itself. Matthew's creative maneuvering around the ecclesiastical censures allowed daily religious life to proceed as normal. In general, charter, genealogical, and antiquarian sources portray Boulogne, as a vibrant county at the time of their rule. Moreover we are told by the French antiquarian, de Rosny, that Marie's presence in the county, realized through her marriage to Matthew, pleased the *seigneurs boulonnais*.<sup>80</sup>

In their own new neighborhood, therefore, it appears that the couple's assumption of comital power was indeed welcomed. Regardless of Matthew's early struggle with the churches of St. Marie and St. Ulmar in May 1161, Matthew confirmed a charter detailing the rights and privileges of the church of St. Ulmar, its abbots, and its monks as first made by Marie's grandfather, Eustace III, in 1112.<sup>81</sup> Similarly concessions and grants were made to the Abbeys of Clairmarais and of Samer around the same time.<sup>82</sup> As such it would be difficult to argue that Matthew and Marie met with hostility from the locals. Fences were also mended between

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<sup>80</sup> "Lords or nobles of Boulogne." Joseph Hector de la Gorgue de Rosny, *Histoire Du Boulonnais* (Amiens, 1869), 2:70.

<sup>81</sup> Étienne Baluze, *Histoire généalogique de la Maison d'Auvergne: justifiée par chartres, titres, histoires anciennes et autres preuves authentiques* (Paris, 1698), 2:137-138. Alphonse Wauters, *Table chronologique des chartes et diplômes* (Brussels, 1869), 2: 396.

<sup>82</sup> Ganneron and Lefebvre, 178.

Matthew and Milo II, bishop of Thérouanne and author of Matthew's second excommunication, when in 1165 Marie and Matthew facilitated "thanks to their diplomatic efforts" a donation of land to the lepers' hospital.<sup>83</sup> The confirmation was witnessed by Milo himself, Matthew, and Marie. All of this mending of fences nevertheless begs the question about the *raptus* that had occurred in 1160 and thus instigated the beginning of their time as the county leaders. Rather than arriving in Boulogne contrite and humble, the couple storm in as the count and countess, and a string of activity follows: Matthew's ejection of the clergy, donations to needed causes, and attendance at high-level local meetings. As such, Marie and Matthew create a united front, not shying away from the onus of the abduction and illegal marriage but instead employing it and reinscribing it in their favor.

Over the course of the nine-year marriage, Marie gave birth to two daughters, Ida (d. 1216) and Matilda (d. 1210), who were born in rapid succession. The dates generally given for their births are 1161 and 1162. Their names reflected Marie's maternal ancestry: Ida, the name of her great-grandmother, and Matilda, the name of her mother as well as her sister who died in infancy. Neither of Marie's brothers and their wives had had children, so we do not know how naming would have operated in their families. We can see, however, that Marie deliberately chose names for her daughters that looked back to her maternal roots. Marie herself had been named for her own mother's mother. The lack of female names, such as Adela, Agnes, Eleanor, coming from her father's Blois side of the family may indicate that there was not a strong connection between Marie and them.

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid.: "Thanks to their diplomatic efforts." Olivarius Vredius, *Genealogia Comitum Flandriæ, a Baulduino Ferreo Usque Ad Philippum IV. Hisp. Regem. Variis Sigillorum Figuris Representata, Etc* (Bruges, 1642), 221.

It is unfortunate that most of the contemporary and antiquarian writers who took an interest in the history of the county during the years of Marie and Matthew's time as the countess and count devoted their attention to the scandal, papal disapproval, and Matthew's negative relationships. As such, there is little surviving chronicle evidence for their years as the county's leaders. The charters that do survive, as noted above, largely demonstrate activity and reconciliation in the county and environs. Many of the activities ascribed to countesses of the period by Johns are evident in the experiences of Marie's former sister-in-law, Constance of France as Countess of Toulouse, from about 1155 to 1165.<sup>84</sup> Evidence for Constance's involvement and duties as countess outweighs what has survived for Marie. Most of this evidence comes from her time as Countess of Toulouse, although three charters also survive from her time as Countess of Boulogne.

#### *Constance, Two Times a Countess*

As a royal daughter who went on to become a countess, Constance shares much in common with her sister-in-law, Marie of Blois. For some ten years, Constance was married to Marie's elder brother, Eustace. The two women's lives intersected on a number of occasions over the coming decades, some of them not especially pleasant. Constance's betrothal to Eustace occurred in 1140. At this time, he was putative heir to the English throne. His potential for greatness existed, but the marital arrangement nevertheless held its share of risks coming as it did, at a time of great conflict within England. No time was lost in both solemnizing the union and in bringing the adolescent French girl to England by February of the next year, 1141, to live within the royal household with her future in-laws.

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<sup>84</sup> Susan M. Johns' study of noblewomen and aristocratic women in the Anglo-Norman realm devotes an entire chapter to the functions and role of a countess. Some of her research sits alongside the material on Constance. Johns, *Noblewomen*, 53-80.

Eustace's parents, Stephen and, especially, Matilda, had negotiated heavily with the French royal house to form the betrothal. While years later the question of Constance's dowry became the impetus for change, our only known reference to financial negotiations comes from antiquarian sources. Agnes Strickland's account of the alliance states that Matilda did not receive a dowry from the French king but instead paid a large sum of money.<sup>85</sup> Her allegation can be traced to the early eighteenth-century writer, James Tyrrell, who gives a rather extended discussion of the worthwhile nature of the "transaction." When these negotiations were underway, Eustace's prospects were undetermined but certainly bright with the possibility of inheriting the county of Boulogne and the much bigger prize, the English throne itself. The former became a reality, when by the beginning of the year 1147, Eustace was named the Count of Boulogne.

As the dust of the civil war began to settle in the late 1140s, but before the final negotiations between Stephen and Henry of Anjou, the family was able to enjoy some relative calm. This peace was illusory, however. We can find charter evidence reflecting the impact of the tragedies that the family encountered in a short space of time. In three charters dating between August 1153 and October 1154, the now-widowed Constance granted rights to a house of nuns in Cambridge, a nunnery that became the Priory of Saint Radegund in Cambridge (Figure 8).<sup>86</sup> Preserved today at Jesus College, Cambridge, these charters show the grant and two

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<sup>85</sup> Agnes Strickland and Elizabeth Strickland, *Lives of the Queens of England* (London, 1851), 1:272-273. The continued chronicle of Florence of Worcester explains, "The betrothal took place abroad in the month of February, in the presence of the queen-mother of England and a great number of English nobles there assembled." *The Chronicle of Florence of Worcester with the Two Continuations* (London, 1854), 275.

<sup>86</sup> Arthur Gray, *The Priory of Saint Radegund, Cambridge* (Cambridge, 1898), 11. As Arthur Gray notes in his study of the priory, "Cambridge was among the towns usually assigned in dower to the Queens of England and other ladies of the royal family.... Except in the case of Constance the settlement seems always to have been for life." Its location is potentially



confirmations for special land and fishing rights. By this time, not only was Eustace dead but so too was Constance's mother-in-law, who had died the previous year at Castle Hedingham in Essex. The charter was made "for the soul of my husband Count Eustace and the soul of Queen Matilda"<sup>87</sup>

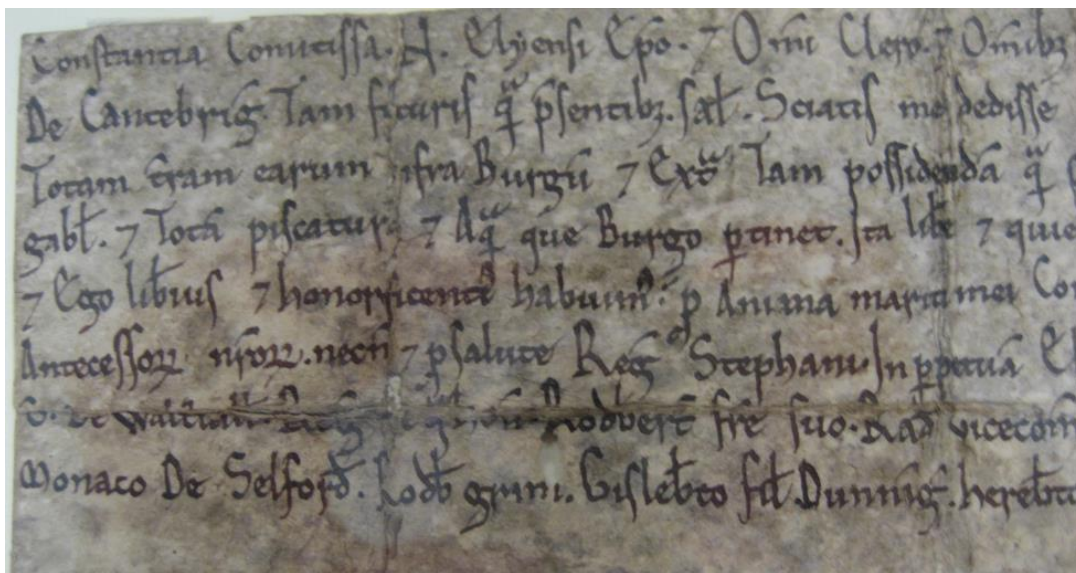


Figure 8 Charter from Constance, Countess of Boulogne, to Saint Radegund's Priory. Nuns/3a. Jesus College, Cambridge. 1152-1153. By permission of the Master and Fellows of Jesus College, Cambridge. Photograph by author.

Whether Constance's link to this priory is based solely in its proximity to land that might have been part of her dower (the fee-farm of Cambridge) or whether its titular saint, Radegund herself inspired the association is not clear. Elisabeth van Houts suspects that Constance identified with the sixth-century Frankish saint in her choice to patronize the priory.<sup>88</sup> Because

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significant to understanding what arrangements may have been settled concerning her dower. Saint Radegund's is located near the fee-farm at Cambridge. It would be logical to assume that this fee-farm had been given or promised to Constance in right of dower.

<sup>87</sup> Gray, *Saint Radegund*, 75: "Pro anima marita mei Comitis Eustacii et pro anima Matilde Regine."

<sup>88</sup> Elisabeth M. C. van Houts, "Nuns and Goldsmiths: The Foundation and Early Benefactors of St Radegund's Priory," in *Church and City, 1000-1500: Essays in Honour of Christopher*

the charters stipulate only that Constance was conceding rights to a group of nuns, without actually giving a name to their houses, van Houts believes that Constance might have played a role in the actual naming of the priory. She defends this supposition, noting Constance's French upbringing and her subsequent status as a childless widow would have meant that she knew about the saint and might have been drawn to Radegund, the patron saint of widows. Concerning Constance's vulnerability at the time, van Houts states that the young countess "was very much left to herself, in the not very enviable position of a widow in her late twenties without children, and she must have contemplated entering a nunnery somewhere herself."<sup>89</sup> Constance's religious vows would have to wait for the moment; her widowhood itself was short-lived.

Constance's new life was to be the wife of Raymond V, Count of Toulouse and St. Giles, a man probably ten years her junior. By the time of Constance's departure, deaths, births, and alliances had altered the face of England and much of France: Queen Matilda of Boulogne, her son Eustace, and husband, Stephen, were dead; Henry II was the new King of England, married to Eleanor of Aquitaine; they already could boast heirs; Constance was married to Raymond of Toulouse; and the county of Boulogne was in the hands of Eustace's younger brother, William de Warenne.

Constance's marriage to Count Raymond started off with great fanfare and festivity, and procreation was not a problem for the new couple, who had five or six children, including three sons. Their eldest, Raymond, was himself temporarily heir to the French throne until the future birth of Philip-Augustus, born to Louis VII's third wife, Adela of Champagne. For her part, as countess, Constance led an active life witnessing, initiating, and confirming a number of charters

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*Brooke*, ed. D. Abulafia, M. J. Franklin, and M. Rubin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 75-77.

<sup>89</sup> Elisabeth van Houts, "Nuns and Goldsmiths," 76-77.

alone and with her husband. For example, in October 1160, Raymond sold to the cathedral Chapter in Nîmes, swamp lands near Fontcouverte; we are informed that Constance, who accompanied him in all his travels, confirmed and underwrote this sale.<sup>90</sup> Constance's role in Raymond's personal and political life thus appeared to be a vital one. As the sister of the French king, she also played the part of mediator when tempers flared and regional interests were in conflict. For example in 1163, she wrote the king regarding the peace between the Counts of Toulouse and Trencavel, in which she implored Louis to release hostages so that they might seal their alliance.<sup>91</sup>

One of Constance's most remarkable experiences came in the summer of 1165: she attended and participated at a council of enormous significance to ecclesiastical and secular politics, Christian theology, and future crusades. This forum, the Council of Lombers, pitted Cathar leaders against the Bishops of Lombers and Albi, resulting in a frank and at times vocal exchange of beliefs, interpretations, and accusations between orthodox and heterodox representatives. M. D. Costen evaluates the political significance of Constance's presence at the council by cataloguing the list of clerical and monastic leaders in attendance, including "six bishops, eight abbots, the provosts of Toulouse and Alibi and the archdeacons of Narbonne and Agde."<sup>92</sup> He states, however, "Probably more important was the presence of Constance of

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<sup>90</sup> Claude de Vic, Joseph Vaissète, and Ernest Roschach, *Histoire générale de Languedoc avec des notes et les pièces justificatives*, ed. Edouard Dulaurier (Paris, 1872), 3: 812 : "Constance...qui l'accompagnoit dans tous ses voyages, confirma cette vente & la souscrivit." Constance who accompanied him on all his travels, confirm this sale and underwrote it. This volume of the *Histoire générale de Languedoc* provides charter references for Constance's reign as the Countess of Toulouse; see especially 3:812-814.

<sup>91</sup> Claude de Vic, *Histoire Générale De Languedoc*, 841. Original Latin transcription in A. Du Chesne and F. Du Chesne, *Historiae Francorum Scriptores Coetanei* (Paris, 1641), 4:814.

<sup>92</sup> M. D. Costen, *The Cathars and the Albigensian Crusade* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 103.

Toulouse and the Trencavel Viscount of Albit and Béziers.... These councils were essentially attempts to persuade the secular rulers to put their weight behind the Church by showing them how dangerous and wrong the heresy was.”<sup>93</sup> In the end, the Council condemned the heretics, with Constance adding her name and agreement to the document of condemnation.<sup>94</sup>

Within weeks of the council, however, Constance’s life had irrevocably transformed as local politics had changed, and Raymond relied less and less upon the French throne. In essence, the Count reassigned his allegiances, shifted his priorities, and loosed himself of what he perceived were encumbrances. Before this change, however, Constance had been a countess who engaged fully in the life of the county. During her ten years in Toulouse, she had also given birth to four or five babies, revealing that she had managed her official duties alongside her pregnancies, periods of confinement, and maternal duties. Moreover she had the responsibility of representing Toulouse at one of the most significant ecclesiastical councils of the period in determining the theological bases and future of Catharism.

*Constance: Raymond’s expendable wife*

One result of Raymond’s shifting allegiances was his repudiation of Constance and remarriage to a woman of local importance.<sup>95</sup> Constance wrote at least three letters to her brother, Louis VII, as a result of Raymond’s actions. They recount her plight, one of apparent desperation. In the third of those letters, she describes the depths to which she had been reduced.

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> *RHGF*, 14:430.

<sup>95</sup> Raymond remarried into another political alliance, this time with Richilde (d. 1208), the widow of the Count of Provence and the Emperor Frederick’s niece. According to the French historian, Hélène Débax, it was Paschal III who annulled Raymond’s marriage to Constance. Laurent Macé, *Les comtes de Toulouse et leur entourage: XIIe-XIIIe siècles: rivalités, alliances et jeux de pouvoir* (Paris: Privat, 2003), 59-60. Hélène Débax, “Stratégies Matrimoniales Des Comtes De Toulouse (850-1270),” *Annales du Midi*. 100, no. 182 (1988): 143.

Repudiated by Raymond, Constance fled to the house of a certain knight because “she had neither food for herself nor for her servants.” She later writes her brother, the king, “If your promises are soon accomplished, they will render me a happy woman, from the miserable one that I have been for such a long time.”<sup>96</sup> Constance did make her way to her brother’s court, arriving some time before the birth of her nephew, Philippe-Auguste, who was born in August of 1165. Serving as his godmother, Constance was remembered in a letter of congratulations sent to Louis VII by the people of Toulouse in which they congratulate him on the birth of his son and heir, also beseeching him “that he should return his sister (to us) without delay.”<sup>97</sup> Fitting the timeline of events together reveals that Constance was herself pregnant with the last of the couple’s sons, Baldwin. His birth came shortly after Constance arrived in Paris. In the end, irrespective of Raymond’s personal feelings for Constance, it is apparent that his new marriage to Richilde mirrored his distancing from Louis VII; his abandoning of Alexander III in lieu of the new anti-pope, Paschal III (d. 1168); and his stronger ties to the Emperor Frederick. Whatever his motivations, the family was torn apart.<sup>98</sup>

Constance and Marie had been raised to rule and had been taught how to operate in their royal and aristocratic spheres. Significantly, they learned from the same woman, Queen Matilda of Boulogne, Marie’s mother and Constance’s first mother-in-law. The Countess-Queen

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<sup>96</sup> *RHGF*, 16:126.

<sup>97</sup> Original Latin transcription in Duchesne, *Historiae Francorum Scriptores Coetanei*, 4:814: “Sororem vestram sine mora nobis remittatis”

<sup>98</sup> Years later after Raymond V’s death in 1194, Constance’s youngest son, Baldwin, left Paris for Toulouse. The new count, his brother Raymond VI, however, refused to accept him as a legitimate sibling, until Baldwin had proven his case. This was only accomplished after he had secured the testimonies “des principaux barons et prélats du royaume” [of the leading barons and prelates of the kingdom] at which point, the count reluctantly accepted Baldwin as his brother. This episode suggests that Constance had had no contact with her other children after her return to Paris. Moline de Saint-Yon, *Histoire des Comtes de Toulouse* (Paris, 1859), 2:505.

apparently taught them how to adjust to the unexpected and fulfill the necessary roles that the unexpected demanded of them. Rather ironically, it was Constance's repudiation from her husband in Toulouse that paved the way for Alexander III to succeed in his campaign against Marie and Matthew in Boulogne.

*Constance: The Means to an End*

The next news relating to Constance and her situation came in the late summer of 1168; this is the first known connection between Pope Alexander III and Constance's repudiation and displacement. Composing at least two pertinent letters on the same day—one to Constance's other brother, Henri archbishop of Reims and the second to the bishops of Soissons, Amiens, and Laon—the pope managed to concoct a scheme that would seemingly champion Constance's cause and remove Marie and Matthew from Boulogne.<sup>99</sup> In what may be interpreted as a change of tack, the pope resurrected Constance's dower from the 1140, claiming it entitled her to the county of Boulogne. According to the letter to the bishops, "Eustace formerly son of King Stephen took her [Constance] as his legitimate wife and granted her the county of Boulogne in dower, and further confirmed it as originally recorded, inasmuch is the custom."<sup>100</sup> This allegation of recording it and having legal documents to prove Constance's claim emerges too in the pope's letter to Henri. This time the assertion notes the existence of witnesses to the record of her dower.<sup>101</sup> The pope makes clear his intention of making use of what was granted in dower to force Matthew and Marie out of Boulogne.<sup>102</sup> Significantly, in this letter the pope threatens to

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<sup>99</sup> The transcription of these two letters (231 and 232) is given in *RHGF* 15:866-867. See Appendix D for copies of each letter.

<sup>100</sup> *RHGF*, 15:866-67.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*: "In instrumento dotalitii sui testes conscripti sunt."

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*: "*Concessum in dotalitium.*"

excommunicate the count *and the countess* and to impose an interdiction upon the county, if they do not comply within three months. This is the first instance of Marie's inclusion in the threat of excommunication, a significant change in language that scholarship to date has not taken account of in the papal language. Much is made of Marie's religious status, as she is referred to as the "former abbess" and as "the nun." The pope also highlighted how previous attempts to settle things had been ignored. The letter specified that Marie and Matthew must leave the county to avoid the punishments. In essence, Alexander used the threat of excommunication against them and interdiction against the county if the couple did not return Constance's dower lands.

Different possibilities for the dissolution of the marriage exist and have been defended by others, but Alexander's determination and frustration in 1168 appear to have prompted him to real action against the couple.<sup>103</sup> What impact it had is impossible to say, but 1168 was also a year of enormous change in Matthew's natal family. His father, Count Thierry of Flanders died and his brother Philip formally assumed the comital title of Flanders.<sup>104</sup> In essence the pope's threat of excommunication and interdiction against the couple and county appear to have stirred Marie and Matthew into action.

Probably not coincidentally, Marie wrote an important letter to Constance's older brother, King Louis VII, in this same year. The letter does not broach the topic of the dower claim; rather it offers intelligence to the king regarding the intrigues being orchestrated by the English king,

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<sup>103</sup> This interpretation as to motivation does not take into account an explanation given by the antiquarian Pierre Oudegherst who recounts Matthew's shaming at the marriage of his sister, Margaret, by the Emperor Frederick. According to Oudegherst, the Emperor recalled the pain that the Count Thierry had experienced as a result of his son's sins, which led to his untimely death. Pierre d'Oudegherst, *Les chroniques et annales de Flandres: contenant les ... exploits des forestiers, et comtes de Flandres, et les ... choses memorables advenues audict Flandres, depuis l'an de ... Jesus Christ VI C et XX. Jusques à L'an M.CCCLXXVI. nouvellement composées ... par P. D'Oudegherst* (Anvers, Belgium, 1571), 137-138.

<sup>104</sup> *RHGF*, 12:422,

Henry II, who was the enemy of both Marie and Louis. Using her position as Countess of Boulogne, she had entertained ambassadors sent by Henry II to the Emperor Frederick Barbarossa. Probing them for information, she learned of an alliance between the two leaders. While the following chapter examines this document in more detail, it is worth presenting an excerpt from the letter here:

[And] well I perceived from their words that the English king ceases not, day nor night, to devise mischief against you. Wherefore I thought it fitting to send to your grace, and to give you the necessary forewarning, that you may take counsel with your wise men, and act as is fitting, lest the impetuous presumption of the fraudulent king should inflict violent injury upon you. Fare you well.<sup>105</sup>

This letter of 125 words yields a surprising amount of information about Marie. For instance, as countess of Boulogne, hospitality was essential to her role, and she has clearly provided a stopover to travelling diplomats as a matter of course. In this occasion, she entertained ambassadors sent by Henry II to the Emperor Frederick Barbarossa. Probing them for information, she learned of an alliance between the two leaders. Marie's determined tone in warning the king is matched by an unbridled hatred of Henry II. Despite Henry's fourteen years on the English throne, Marie remains implacably opposed to him and his rule. The fact that she labels Henry as *fraudenti* moreover underscores her antipathy for the man. We might surmise that Matthew's abandoning of Henry and his support for Henry the Younger was inspired by Marie's scorn. The wounds of her family's disgrace had not healed. Neither of her brothers sat the English throne. The same could be said for Marie, herself; as the last heir of King Stephen,

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<sup>105</sup> *RHGF*, 16:144: “[Et] bene ex verbis eorum attendi quod Rex Angliae malum vestrum perquirere nocte dieque non cessat. Quare dilectioni vestrae mandare duxi congruum, et vos praemunire attendi necessarium, ut consiliuim cum vestris sapientibus ineatis, et quod aptius inuenietur faciatis, ne fraudulenti Regis impetuosa praesumptio vobis molestiam violenter conferat. Valet.” Translation from Mary Anne Everett Wood Green, *Letters of Royal and Illustrious Ladies of Great Britain*, (London, 1846), 11-13.



she might have believed that she should be England's monarch instead of the fraudulent, and clearly scheming, Plantagenet. As for her own role at the time, it is obvious that she plays an active role in the larger political happenings of the Anglo-Norman world and that she provides hospitality to visitors of this status. The actual writing of the letter and its timing, however, may reveal a potential vulnerability or weakness for the countess, who is seeking friendship or an intervention from the French king.

*Marie, quondam comitissa boloniensis*

With or without Louis' interventions, Marie's marriage to Matthew was officially ended in 1169. At this point, Marie moved to the last of the five different religious house of her life, the Abbey of Sainte-Austreberte in nearby Montreuil (Figure 9). This house was an eighth-century foundation and a royal domain of the French Crown. Since 1160 Sainte-Austreberte had received privileges directly from Pope Alexander III.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Denis de Sainte-Marthe and Barthélemy Hauréau, *Gallia Christiana, in Provincias Ecclesiasticas Distributa: Qua Series Et Historia Archiepiscoporum, Episcoporum Et Abbatum Franciæ Vicinarumque Ditionum Ab Origine Ecclesiarum Ab Nostra Tempora Deducitur, & Probatur Ex Authenticis Instrumentis Ad Calcem Appositis* (Paris, 1751), 10:1319. Since the end of the nineteenth century, this assertion regarding the 1160 privileges has been disputed by some. The most outspoken critic, Daniel Haigneré, abbot and archivist who wrote prolifically on local history, provides his assessment of the mistakes made by previous historians regarding the abbey's papal privileges. See Daniel Haigneré, "Une bulle inédite du Pape Alexandre III pour l'abbaye de Sainte-Austreberte de Montreuil (26 mai 1170)" in *Le Cabinet historique de l'Artois et de la Picardie* 17 (1892/3), 24.



Figure 9 Sites where Marie probably lived 1) St-Sulpice-la-Forêt (Brittany); 2) Stratford at Bow (St. Leonard's Middlesex); 3) Lillechurch (Higham) Priory; 4) Romsey Abbey; 5) Boulogne; 6) Abbey of Sainte-Austreberte (Montreuil). Map by author.

When viewed in isolation, a noblewoman's move to a religious house does not seem particularly significant. Marie's move should instead be seen as part of a larger whole that provided future safeguarding of the rights and status of the entire family. The terms of the compromise between the formerly married couple and the pope were elaborate. Marie's two daughters, Ida and Matilda, received papal and then political legitimization.<sup>107</sup> Alexander III

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<sup>107</sup> Alexander III provided quick legitimization to the daughters. See D' Hauttefeuille and Bénard, *Histoire De Boulogne-Sur-Mer*, 82. Political legitimization also was given to the daughters. While English antiquarian sources such as Sandford's seventeenth genealogical work on the monarchs of Great Britain tells us that "her children were legitimated by Parliament, An. 1189" Francis Lancaster Herald Sandford, Francis Books with M. S. notes by Francis Hargrave Hargrave, and Samuel Stebbing, *A Genealogical History of the Kings and Queens of England ... Continued to This Time, With ... Additions and Annotations ... By S. Stebbing. Ms. Notes [by F. Hargrave]* (London, 1707), 44. French sources indicate that it was the *parlement de Paris* which legitimated the girls in that same year. Ganneron and Lefebvre, *Les Comtes De Boulogne*, 42.

granted Marie's new home, the Abbey of Sainte-Austreberte, papal protection in 1170.<sup>108</sup>

Matthew himself was allowed to continue as the Count of Boulogne, holding the title, until his death, through his daughters.

After the dissolution of the marriage, in a flurry of separate charters, Matthew rearranged affairs especially where concerned with religious houses and churches. Fighting in support of the Henry the Younger, Matthew was killed by a crossbow at the siege of the castle of Driencourt.<sup>109</sup> Not long satisfied with having only the Continental lands secured through Marie, by the end of the 1160s, Matthew and his brother Philip, the Count of Flanders, had joined ranks with the Young Henry. A pretty promise of lands in England and a stipend of £1000 from the son of Henry II were secured in exchange for their loyalty.<sup>110</sup> The chronicler, Roger of Wendover, states that Philip, in the immediate days after Matthew's death, was so distraught that he left off fighting and returned home.<sup>111</sup>

Matthew's death also changed affairs for his and Marie's daughters, Ida and Matilda. The girls would still have been quite young at the time, probably only eleven and twelve years old. Initially, the girls were put under the guardianship of their uncle, Philip Count of Flanders.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Auguste Braquehay, *Essai historique sur l'abbaye royale de Sainte-Austreberte à Montreuil-Sur-Mer* (Abbeville, 1895), 22. See Haigneré, "Une bulle inédite," 28-29.

<sup>109</sup> W. Stubbs and Office Great Britain. Public Record, *The Historical Works of Gervase of Canterbury: The Chronicle of the Reigns of Stephen, Henry II, and Richard I. - V. 2. The Minor Works Comprising the Gesta Regum with Its Continuation, the Actus Pontificum, and the Mappa Mundi* (London, 1879), 246.

<sup>110</sup> Roger Hoveden, *The Annals of Roger de Hoveden. Comprising the History of England and of Other Countries of Europe from AD 732 to AD 1201*, trans. Henry T. Riley (London, 1853), 367. James Craigie Robertson, *Materials for the History of Thomas Becket Archbishop of Canterbury* (London, 1881), 4:73-74.

<sup>111</sup> Roger of Wendover's *Flowers of History*, trans. By J.A. Giles, (London, 1849), 1:24. Also found in *Ex Genealogia Comitum Flandriae*, 414.

<sup>112</sup> Henri Malo, *Un grand feudataire, Renaud de Dammartin et la coalition de Bouvines: contribution à l'étude du regne De Philippe-Auguste* (Paris, 1898), 14. Pierre had also left a

Temporarily, Philip handed the reins of power to another brother, Pierre, former Bishop of Cambrai, but upon Pierre's death in 1176, the elder daughter Ida became Countess of Boulogne in her own right. As her daughters were clearly in need of some stability after the string of unsettling events, Marie took the decision to exit the nunnery again. In this way, she is said to have acted as their tutor, "to complete their upbringing."<sup>113</sup> We might see it in a more straightforward fashion that Marie chose to leave Sainte-Austreberte to continue mothering Ida and Matilda, and to ensure that they understood the duties and responsibilities of running the County of Boulogne. Equally we can surmise that the county itself was in need of her leadership. Philip's priorities lay elsewhere during the 1170s, making two journeys to the Holy Land. The chronicler, Roger of Hoveden, reported that the "Count of Flanders was intending to go to Jerusalem in order to make himself king there."<sup>114</sup> Philip likely had his eye on Egypt.<sup>115</sup> Thus we might contextualize Marie's activities at this point as a widow, who was administrating her lands and guiding her heirs in the responsibilities and duties of being a countess. As for Alexander III, we can only speculate as to whether he knew or cared about Marie's second departure from the religious house. Motivated by family ties and obligations, Marie's choice had been temporary, and by 1177, she was living once again inside the nunnery gates of Sainte-Austreberte.

Even after the dissolution of the marriage, Matthew referred to Marie as "uxor mea" in a charter, dated August 8, 1173, which provided support for the Abbey of Saint-Josse. In the document, Marie is clearly identified as his wife. Significantly, Marie is also described as the

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religious vow, abandoning his investiture as bishop not only to govern Boulogne but also to marry; this departure is discussed in detail in Chapter Four. *Annals of Roger de Hoveden*, 369.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.: "Pour achever leur éducation."

<sup>114</sup> See Bernard Hamilton, *The Leper King and his Heirs: Baldwin IV and the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 120.

<sup>115</sup> Hamilton, *Leper King*, 124.

countess, and it is stated that she approved the concessions even as Matthew's daughters also consented to them.<sup>116</sup> No linguistic qualifiers such as *quondam* [formerly] describe Marie's status as his wife or as countess, although both identifications had been ostensibly removed when their marriage had officially ended in 1169-70. Matthew's gifts to Saint-Josse included an endowment of rents from land in England "in villa mea de Notorne."<sup>117</sup> The agreement was witnessed by some twenty people including Matthew's brother, Philip, and Marie's kinsman, Faramus.<sup>118</sup> Why Matthew should present Marie as his wife in this charter is puzzling, to say the least, particularly as a number of the witnesses are churchmen. My conjecture about why Matthew called Marie his wife takes account of the chronology of events in 1173 and the wording of the charter. As noted above, a number of chroniclers provided details concerning Matthew's fatal wounding at the siege of Driencourt. Additionally, the chronicler Ralph of Diss provides a date for this tragedy, Saint James's Day (July 25).<sup>119</sup> Given the date of the charter (August 8), we can see that Matthew is making it two weeks after being shot by the crossbow. The wording of charter similarly confirms that he is close to death.<sup>120</sup> As such, his reference to Marie as his wife assumes more poignancy and pathos. Great wealth, time, and attention were

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<sup>116</sup> Baluze, *Maison d'Auvergne*, 2:97-98. See Appendix F for a transcription of the charter.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid. and J. H. Round, "The Debtors of William Cade," *The English Historical Review* 28, no. 111 (1913): 523: "in my estate in Norton."

<sup>118</sup> Baluze, *Maison d'Auvergne*, 2:97-98.

<sup>119</sup> Ralph of Diss, *Ymagine Historiarum*, ed. W. Stubbs, in *The Historical Works of Ralph of Diss* (London, 1876), 1:373.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid. The first two sentences of the charter read, "Rerum mutabilitas involvens omnia quaecunque beneque gesta sunt delet et tradit oblivionis sepulturae. Igitur ne pereat quod pie et juste factum est..." [All the things of impermanence involving whatever good acts are destroyed and surrendered to the tomb of oblivion. Therefore it is devoutly and righteously that he passes away...."]

lavished on Matthew's tomb that was originally in the abbey church at Saint-Josse.<sup>121</sup> It is of exceptional craftsmanship, made of black Belgian marble and depicting Matthew as a mail-covered knight in repose with two beautiful dogs at his feet and towers and angels at his head (see Figure 10).<sup>122</sup> The Abbey of Saint-Josse was located approximately six miles (ten kilometers) away from the abbey where Marie resided in Montreuil.

By contrast when Marie died in 1182, there was apparently no fanfare; she was simply buried at the nunnery where she lived. William of Ardres describes that she died and was buried by the monastery thirteen years after resuming her habit there; he names her as Marie, the daughter of the English king Stephen, who was formerly an abbess and then the Countess of Boulogne.<sup>123</sup> A supplement to this obituary appears in the *Gallia Christiana*. Whether part of William's original or added on later, it reads, "Her several gifts to the nuns are controlled by them even now."<sup>124</sup> This assertion receives support from charter evidence: as part of the financial arrangements of the divorce settlement, "After her retirement to Sainte-Austreberte, the countess Marie agreed to a rent of 10 livres to this abbey that would be used for clothing the nuns, and it is believed another rent of the same amount for the foundation of an obit for the repose of her soul

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<sup>121</sup> Today it is exhibited at the Musée de Boulogne-sur-Mer.

<sup>122</sup> See Appendix B for additional photos of the tomb.

<sup>123</sup> *MGH*, SS 24:716. Marie's sister-in-law, Elisabeth of Flanders, Philip's wife, also died in 1182. *RHGF*, 13:325.

<sup>124</sup> *Gallia Christiana*, 10:1319: "[N]unnulla monialibus largita, quibus etiamnum potiuntur."

and that of Count Matthew's.<sup>125</sup> Ganneron goes on to explain that some of the charters Matthew made after the dissolution of their marriage continued to receive confirmation from Marie.<sup>126</sup>



*Figure 10 Matthew of Flanders' tomb at the Musée de Boulogne-sur-Mer.  
Photograph by author.<sup>127</sup>*

Outstanding questions also remain about Alexander III's role in the final dissolution of the marriage. Key to unlocking his motives is whether Constance's dower claim was valid or whether it was even her own. It came some fourteen years after Eustace's death. Moreover Constance and Eustace had no heirs, and the county and titles went to William and Isabel after Eustace's death. When William died, it is significant that Isabel, whose remarriage was quickly

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<sup>125</sup> "Après sa retraite à Sainte-Austreberte, la comtesse Marie accorda a cette abbaye une rente de dix livres qui devait être employée à la vêtue des religieuses, et, croit-on, une autre rente de même importance pour la fondation d'un obit pour le repos de son âme et de celle du comte Matthieu." François Ganneron, *Les Comtes de Boulogne*, 178.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 178-179.

<sup>127</sup> In Chapter Four, I discuss the tomb inscription and offer some context for the wording.

arranged by Henry II, made no claim on the county, although she had been its most recent countess. The pope's allegations that Boulogne was Constance's rightful dower pose significant questions and appear suspicious in light of his cozy relationship with and dependence upon the French royal family.<sup>128</sup> In the end the threat to resettle Constance as the Countess of Boulogne was never advanced. Whether Alexander acted through conscience on the matter or whether more personal and/or political considerations drove him is apparently unknowable. Undeniably he did use Constance to further his aims, and his interventions fit into the larger contemporary contest between secular and spiritual authorities.

*Conclusion: Choice and Pragmatism*

All of the women in this chapter experienced some form of secular marriage. The marriage might have been little more than a verbal contract between parties arranged by others or a lifetime commitment. Widowhood as well plays into the stories of two of the women, affecting the young Constance of France in 1153 and Marie herself in 1173, when she was effectively widowed by Matthew's death. Her setting up of prayers for Matthew's soul fits the actions and reactions of a widowed woman. For all of the women, except Marie de France's Guildeluëc, male spiritual authorities involved themselves in the legalities and correct arrangements of the marriages. Had Marie de France allowed them a voice in her *lai*, it would likely have been one that celebrated Guildeluëc's vow but insisted that Eliduc make a parallel religious vow at the same time. The interventions of spiritual leaders, however, did not necessarily lead to consensus.

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<sup>128</sup> The monk of Afflighem writes that the pope was a fugitive from Italy and came to France who was received gloriously from the same King Louis and the Aristocracy." *Ex Auctario Affligemensi, RHGF*, 13:277. According to Heather Tanner, this dowry may also have included the Honour of Boulogne, a vast amount of land in Essex and elsewhere in England, and therefore, "[as] the current countess of Toulouse, Constance was the last person Henry wanted to possess Boulonnais lands..." Tanner, *Families*, 203. It is important to note the dates, however, and not see the claim as motivation for Henry's scheme in 1160.



For both Christina of Markyate and Marie of Blois, church and monastic leaders did not always agree upon the correct remedy for the future resolution of their marital vows.

Christina did successfully challenge the marital vow that her parents had forced upon her. Regardless of the reactions it incited and the actions she was forced to take, Christina eventually realized her childhood choice of becoming Christ's bride. The notion of choice cannot be so clearly defined and ascribed in the cases where women had not strictly been forced into their marriages. For example, Constance's first marriage to Eustace and her remarriage to Raymond were likely arranged by her family: first, by her parents in 1140 and then, by her brother in 1154. Within the process of negotiations, Constance's consent may or may not have been sought; regardless, the expectation would have been that she agreed to these choices. The one clear example of a forced marriage came from the romance, *Cligès*. Fenice found herself committed to a union with the Emperor Alis, whom she despised, even as she fell deeply in love with his nephew, Cligès. In the end, it took the intervention of magic, a series of enclosures, and the revelation of Alis's ignoble behavior to release Fenice from the marriage. As legists during this century of legal innovations worked to require free consent in marital and religious vowing, they worked to undo many of the entrenched cultural expectations and practices. The fact that Gunnhildr and Fresne (and possibly Marie) married the men of their choosing demonstrates the implications of choice and free consent. In Gunnhildr's case, her decision to marry (twice) required her to abandon the holy veil and enclosure and attract the ire of Archbishop Anselm and the tongue-wagging of those discussing Gunnhildr's scandalous actions. In Fresne's case, marrying Gurun required him to break his marriage vows to her sister, Codre. Both women then crossed social and cultural boundaries to achieve their chosen marriages.

This chapter has likewise demonstrated the complications involved in ending marriages. At first sight, Guildeluëc appears as the sacrificial wife whose life has been utterly ruined by her husband's infidelity and selfishness. As it transpires, however, Guildeluëc manages things well, not only ensuring that she takes the lead role in a religious house for women, but also that she becomes the younger woman's religious superior in the end. Marie de France signals that this former wife has ambition and direction for her life regardless of her initial heartache and feelings of betrayal. We are left in no doubt of Constance's feelings in the early days of her repudiation; despair and fear mark the letters she wrote her brother, portraying the dark and painful side of a failed marriage. In trying to piece together the story for Raymond's repudiation of Constance, the evidence suggests political motivations. That he is accused of debauchery by Pope Alexander III may suggest that Raymond's extramarital philanderings went well beyond the sin of his illegal marriage to Richilde.

Stacking up the evidence regarding Marie and Matthew's marriage continues into Chapter Four and into the Conclusion. In the present chapter, evidence has demonstrated that the couple had a successful marriage and worked together well in administrating the affairs of Boulogne. While nothing concrete can be proven, it is unlikely that their marriage would have ended in 1169-1170 had it not been for the pope's continuing persecution. We can only read between the lines as far as Constance's dower claim is concerned. In light of the terms of the compromise that settled things in Boulogne; the protracted silence surrounding Constance; and the continuation of healthy relations between Flanders and the Île-de-France, it appears that the pope engineered the dower claim to further his own ends against Marie and Matthew. Constance does not seem to have been directly involved.

The final chapter moves away from the format of these first three chapters, even as it continues to rely upon their medieval sources. Instead, the next chapter looks to the theory of emplotment to dissect, examine, and critique the subtext and intentions of the writers of the source materials. Looking at the writers themselves, whenever possible, it asks serious questions about context, motivation, and personal enmity or proximity. Focusing predominantly on the contemporary medieval writers, it nevertheless broadens the examination to include other types of sources as well as the writing of antiquarian and modern scholars.

CHAPTER FOUR—*PULCHERRIMUS MILES...COMITISSAM BOLONIENSEM DUXIT*

*UXOREM*: THE MAKING AND UNMAKING OF MARIE<sup>1</sup>

Re-visualizing historical identity lies at the heart of this chapter on the emplotments of Marie and her story. Previous chapters have presented and examined the varied titles and identities that described Marie and the other women of this dissertation within the context of choice and challenges. This chapter aims, however, to replace the individual women with the means and matter used to find them in the first place. That is, to abandon our quest for someone like Marie, the daughter/abbess/countess/wife and mother, and replace it with a revised and expanded examination of the valence of the source material itself. By adopting new perspectives, questions, and tools, we can negotiate with documents as self-contained narratives, probing to understand why and how their creators ascribed, described, and positioned history in particular ways. Consequently, this requires us to observe the witting and unwitting historians—generally those writing the narratives—and seek their context, subtext (including what it is not said), and word choices and language. For us, this exercise then relies upon how historical narratives become emplotted by those who create them. As discussed in the dissertation introduction, Hayden White assembled in the early 1970s the makings of a model including its language, tools, and template. His approach allows us to view the historical documents about Marie and others via four modes of emplotment. These documents include chronicle accounts, letters, charters and their seals, and genealogies.

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<sup>1</sup> “The most beautiful knight took the Countess of Boulogne as his wife.”

For our purposes then, White's four modes of emplotment function as a sieve through which to pass the multiple voices telling Marie's story. The model itself provides the mechanism to re-examine the polyphony of interpretations in order to view the historian as the architect of a story not simply as a conduit of factual information. According to White, historical narrative assumes a plot-structure in its effort to tell a history for an aim or vision, and thus becomes a "story of a particular kind."<sup>2</sup> As such all creators of history shape and influence how readers experience the history and the people within the narratives. In this way, a variety of identities exists for Marie in the narratives about her, even as the narratives help shape those identities. Employing White's model means that I approach the historical sources as narratives. Moreover, regardless of their classification as historical documents, they all lend themselves comfortably to other uses as literature and myth.<sup>3</sup>

To revisit and expand on some of the themes from the introduction, I look to White's article, "Interpretation in History" and his books, *The Content of Form* and *Metahistory*. It is in this last work that White provides his most concise yet considered explanations of the four modes of emplotment:

The Romance is fundamentally a drama of self-identification symbolized by the hero's transcendence of the world of experience, his victory over it, and his final liberation from it...The archetypal theme of Satire is the precise opposite of this Romantic drama of redemption; it is, in fact, a drama of diremption, a drama dominated by the apprehension that man is ultimately a captive of the world rather than its master, and by the recognition that...human consciousness and will are always inadequate to the task of overcoming definitively the dark force of death...Comedy and Tragedy, however, suggest the possibility of at least partial liberation from the condition of the Fall and provisional release from the divided state in which men find themselves in this world...In Comedy, hope is held out for the temporary triumph of man over his world by the prospect of occasional *reconciliations* of the forces at play in the social and natural worlds. Such

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<sup>2</sup> Hayden White, "Interpretation in History," *New Literary History: A Journal of Theory and Interpretation* 4, no. 2 (1973): 291.

<sup>3</sup> See the dissertation introduction and Hayden White, *The Content of Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 44-45.

reconciliations are symbolized in the festive occasions which the Comic writer traditionally uses to terminate his dramatic accounts of change and transformation. In Tragedy, there are not festive occasions, except false or illusory ones; rather, there are intimations of states of division among men more terrible than that which incited the tragic agon at the beginning of the drama.”<sup>4</sup>

In this totting up of the characteristics associated with each mode of emplotment, White in essence has created two sets of opposites: Romance and Satire, and Comedy and Tragedy.

Viewing the plot structures in this ways allows White then to play them off each other and thus emphasize their respective messages more forcefully. Subjecting the contemporary medieval material about Marie to an examination based upon White’s model forms the bulk of this chapter.<sup>5</sup> Picking and choosing the appropriate material for this exercise generally fell along the natural leylines of the evidence that self-divided by way of intention, designer, and ambitions.

As such, the chapter explores the mode of Tragedy most generally through the letters of leading clerics, including Pope Alexander III, Archbishop of Canterbury Thomas Becket, and bishops from the dioceses near Boulogne. This correspondence condemns the marriage repeatedly even as the authors mete out punishments in response, purporting heavy hearts and concern for Matthew’s soul in light of his egregious actions. Digging their heels in, the creators of this evidence substantially established the “divisions among men” and in so doing, cast themselves as the judges of correctness. In contrast to Tragedy’s pervasive mood of despair, condemnation, and fear, the triumph of hope emerges in the family histories and genealogies that interpret the Marie-Matthew history. Taking the long view of history, these sources result in Comedy as the chosen mode of emplotment. While limited disapprobation might be voiced, the writers framing these narratives tend to depict actions, decisions, and motives that are not merely

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<sup>4</sup> Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (1973; repr., Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2014), 8-9.

<sup>5</sup> Many scholars who use Hayden White’s work choose to use one or two modes only.

defensible but also noble. An “all’s well that ends well” message generally sums up their accounts. Family loyalty informs many of the subtle and not so subtle interpretations of historical events.

Unlike either of these two modes, the emplotment of Romance can be easily discerned in the evidence from Marie herself. Her letter from 1168, two deeds, and a seal of unknown date for Lillechurch Priory emplot an altogether different story, one in which the elements of Romance and intrigue can be found. Her self-identification coupled with the qualities of faithful service, loyalty, and power that she ascribes to herself construct a version of Marie in which wrongs can be righted even as rewards are properly bestowed. Finally, Satire emerges from three chronicle accounts of Matthew Paris, a monk from St. Albans whose work fits into the tradition of history writing from his Benedictine house. His treatment of Marie fits into the larger tradition of Latin Satire. This tradition, especially popular in the twelfth century among clerical writers, is situated in an overview of two twelfth-century satires, *De amore et amoris remedio* and *Le Concile de Remiremont*. One common thread in all of these works is their debt to and imitation of the classical writer, Ovid. Another influence on Matthew Paris’s writing came from his St. Albans predecessor, Roger of Wendover. His major chronicle, *Flores Historiarum*, contemporary with Marie and Matthew, remains silent about their marriage and life in Boulogne, allowing us to examine Roger’s silence in reference to Pierre Macherey’s theory of *le non-dit*. The section finishes with two satiric memorials composed about people associated with the Blois-Boulogne household.

Each section looks to medieval and classical examples, definitions, and usages to explain them. The work of White’s predecessor, Northrop Frye, also supplements some of the discussions on genre. Frye’s work generally preceded White’s and influenced his theory on

interpreting history.<sup>6</sup> Beyond the emplotments of Marie, other contemporary sources, such as *contes* and treatises, support our investigation of the four modes as they flesh out the expectations and formats associated with each mode.<sup>7</sup>

### *Tragedy*

Scandal and tragedy are common bedfellows in literature and history. They are often bound together by the cord of any number of iniquities, but particularly by the sins of inappropriate love. Chapter Two presented and discussed three scandals. Those involved had exhibited outrageous behavior and submitted to their fleshly inclinations or *carnis*: Gunnhildr and the Counts Alan Rufus and Niger; the Nun of Watton and her clerical lover; and Raymond of Toulouse's repudiation of Constance. In these examples, passion and envy motivated people to step outside the appropriate bounds of acceptable behavior. The consequences led all of them down, what were perceived by the churchmen reporting the scandals, the path of tragedy.

According to a parenthetical in Chaucer's *Boece*, tragedy is said to be a writing about temporarily good times that end in ruin.<sup>8</sup> In many of the following emplotments of tragedy regarding Marie and Matthew, the writers emphasized the scandal, its devastating potential, and its crippling aftermath. As such, we might see in their writings a cautionary tale that targets those men who would cuckold the heavenly bridegroom of the *sponsae Christi*, and to the brides

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<sup>6</sup> Early on in *Metahistory*, White flags his fellow scholar's contributions to the basic division of the four modes of emplotment from Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957). See White, *Metahistory*, 7.

<sup>7</sup> While a *conte* might be translated as a tale, its meaning along with other generic terms immediately throws up difficulties. For a discussion of these terms and their meanings, see Paul Zumthor, *Essai de poetique medievale* (Paris: Éditions de Seuil, 1972) trans. Philip Bennet as *Toward a Medieval Poetics*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), 118-19.

<sup>8</sup> Lines 70-72. "Tragedye is to seyn a dite of a prosperite for a tyme, that endeth in wrecchidnesse."



themselves who might collude in such adultery. After all, the medieval idea of Tragedy was rooted in the ancient belief that deities punished humans for their greed, hubris, or small-mindedness. Judeo-Christian theology similarly promoted ideals of reciprocity in which sin led to death and destruction.<sup>9</sup> Medieval theologians, such as Archbishop Anselm of Bec, emphasized the effects of sinfulness; a message plainly spelled out to Gunnhildr and found in many of Anselm's theological writings. For example, in his *Meditations*, he wrote, "Sweetness of my life, and soundness that fails not, O good Jesu, if I have sown in the flesh, what of the flesh shall I reap but corruption?"<sup>10</sup> This conceit of sowing and reaping emerges clearly in the following account of Marie and Matthew.

The *Auctorio Affligemensi*, writing from his religious house near present-day Brussels, provides the context, major characters, and conflict of a tragic narrative,

Henry the King of the English, gave against divine law the daughter of Stephen, his niece, a holy nun and consecrated abbess of the cloister to Matthew the son of the Count of Flanders, so that by her he could hold the county of Boulogne. Because the bride was dedicated to God, he did not become a husband but an adulterer to the highest king, the enemy roused wars and strife between father and son, and between brother and brother.<sup>11</sup>

This chronicle entry situates the characters according to their individual status and their relationships with others. For example, we learn that King Henry II took the consecrated abbess, who was Stephen's daughter and Henry's kinswoman, out of her cloister to give her illegally to

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<sup>9</sup> This notion of sowing and reaping is found throughout the New Testament, both in the Gospels and apostolic letters.

<sup>10</sup> Saint Anselm, *Meditations and Prayers to the Holy Trinity and our Lord Jesus Christ*, trans. Edward Bouverie Pusey, (Oxford, 1856), 111.

<sup>11</sup> *RHGF*, 13:277. Henricus Rex Anglorum filiam Stephani neptem suam, sanctimoniam et Abbatissam in claustrum consecratam, contra fas legum Mattheo filio Comitum Flandriae dedit uxorem, ut per eam Comitatum retineret Boloniensem. Et quia sponsa Deo dicata non sponsum, sed adulterum summon Regi superduxit, bella et seditiones inimicus inter patrem et filium, inter fratrem et fratrem concitavit.

Matthew, the son of the Count of Flanders. The account's emphatic condemnation of the marriage frames it as adultery against the supreme King, a sin that accounts for the shame and punishment of in-family fighting. Lambert of Watrelos, a regular canon at Saint-Aubert in Cambrai, as we have already discussed, adds to this bleak picture in recounting the devastating effects that the "accursed marriage" had on the health and well-being of Matthew's father. Lambert poignantly describes the sorrow which "could not be borne in [his father's] chest."<sup>12</sup> One can imagine an aged father clutching at his chest, ready to suffer a heart attack at such dreadful and shameful news. While the newly married couple's generosity to local churches and monastic houses, as described above in Chapter Three, assuaged many ruffled feathers, their gestures did not sway the pope, Alexander III. His forgiveness was not granted, and over time he was propelled into more decisive actions, and his letters over the coming years, more than any other sources, confirm the narrative of the Boulonnais couple as tragedy.

Alexander's first two surviving letters from December 1162, when read together, function as chapters in an epistolary novel, reflecting upon past events, describing the current state of affairs, and proposing future actions to be taken.<sup>13</sup> This comparison between the papal letters and an epistolary novel is further strengthened by the ample information that they supply to the letter's recipient, Archbishop of Reims, Henri, of the scandal being enacted in his own backyard.<sup>14</sup> Both letters are published in the fifteenth volume of the *Recueil des Historiens des*

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<sup>12</sup> *RHGF*, 13:517: "Quam ob rem moestitia pater excites, in folio armis non segniter insurrexit, quoniam nuptias execrabiles filium fecisse noesto pectore ferre non aequanimiter poterat." Lambert of Watrelos is best known for inserting his own family's genealogy into his chronicle.

<sup>13</sup> See Appendix C for the transcripts of both letters.

<sup>14</sup> Searching for the true authors of medieval letters becomes a difficult task, considering the role of scribes and copyists. The insistent vocabulary and earnest entreaties that pepper his letters, however, suggest that Alexander III is the true author of his correspondence. For other examples

*Gaules et de la France*. The first letter, number LXII, emphasizes Matthew's egregious behavior towards the clergy in Boulogne.<sup>15</sup> Matthew, we learn, ejected the abbots and monks from the churches of Saints Marie and Ulmar and replaced them with "secular canons." While many scholars and writers have assumed that his maltreatment stemmed from the interdiction that Boulogne suffered because of the marriage, no mention of this offense is made in the letter. The *Continuatio Aquicinctina* in the *Chronicle of Sigiberti Gemblacensis* does, however, connect Matthew's first excommunication by Archbishop Samson of Reims with his unlawful marriage to Marie. One seventeenth-century source, *Les Comtes de Boulogne*, combines two of the orders of excommunication against Matthew: Milo and Samson, after having condemned the conduct of the count, called upon him uselessly to separate from the Abbess Marie, in the face of his resistance, they found it necessary to punish him with excommunication.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, the authors of this text speculate that Matthew may have requested a marital blessing and been rejected by the Boulonnais clergy, thus prompting his reaction against them.<sup>17</sup> By the time that Pope Alexander is writing his letters at the end of 1162, Samson has died and been replaced by Henri, who was the brother of King Louis VII and Constance of France.<sup>18</sup>

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of the personal nature of his writing, see Ian S. Robinson, *The Papacy, 1073-1198: Continuity and Innovation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), particularly 244-292.

<sup>15</sup> *RHGF*, 15:788, letter 62.

<sup>16</sup> F. Ganneron and F. A. Lefebvre, *Les Comtes De Boulogne (Manuscrit De 1640)* (Boulogne-sur-Mer, 1891), 177.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* "Milon ... et Samson ... après avoir blâmé la conduit du comte, le sommèrent inutilement de se séparer de l'abbesse Marie; devant sa résistance, ils se trouvèrent dans la nécessité de frapper le coupable d'excommunication."

<sup>18</sup> See Patrick Demouy, "Les archevêques de Reims et les foires (XIe-XVe siècles)" in *Actes des congrès de la Société des historiens médiévistes de l'enseignement supérieur public*. 19e congrès (Reims, 1988), 85-86.

A close reading of Alexander's 1162 letters reveals his anxieties and shock over what Matthew had been doing as the new count of Boulogne. The pope's deliberate word choice punctuates his contemptuous appraisal of the current situation and its potential repercussions. After his salutation to Henri in Letter LXII, there is little that is formulaic as he enumerates the many troubles surrounding the new count. The pope's list includes Matthew's ejection of the abbots and brothers, replacing them with secular canons, and the promulgation of excommunication that Milo of Thérouanne had delivered. Alexander III strikes out with a commanding vocabulary, using such words as *iniquè* [wickedly], *enormiter* [irregularly], and *perversos...invasores* [evil invaders] in the first letter and a complementary list in the second letter (Letter LXIII), including calling Matthew by the name *nefarie* [nefarious], because he *copulavit illicite* [joined himself illegally] to the God's dedicated nun and abbess. To these words, he adds phrases that stress the earnestness of his troubled state: *gravi dolore super miseria* [heavy sorrow added to distress]; *suae malitiae virus* [of their—Matthew and the secular canons'—malicious poison], and *in animae suae periculum* [in danger of his soul]. His verbal passion reveals the magnitude of the scandal, reflecting too his mission to set things right and so avoid the developing tragedy. He ends the second letter by reprimanding Matthew's father, Count Thierry of Flanders, for not maintaining a firm disapproval towards his wayward son. Alexander enlists the archbishop's help and forcefully commands "that you [Henri] impress upon the aforementioned count [Thierry] as far as possible, that he in no regard foster him [Matthew] in this wickedness, but as much as he is able himself, he not delay to correct him regarding this matter."<sup>19</sup> It is likely that Alexander III had been apprised of the meeting arranged by the Bishop of Cambrai and attended by Count Thierry, his elder son and heir, Philip, Archbishop Samson of

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<sup>19</sup> *RHGF*, 15:788-89, letter 63.

Reims, and Matthew himself among other “*magnatorum*.” As we surmised earlier, Samson and Matthew may well have healed their past breach, perhaps even leading to the lifting of Matthew’s first excommunication.

The pope, however, determines that the new Archbishop of Reims must do the right thing. Delving further into the letter, we find an unexpected reprimand. Apparently, Henri had failed in the eyes of the pope to deal appropriately with the new count: “When with your going to those parts, you should have corrected this wrong; as has been said, you have excused this incorrigible and unreformed man more, as we believe, out of incapability than out of intention.”<sup>20</sup> The pope, for unknown reasons, portrays the new archbishop as someone who has failed in his duty toward Matthew. All in all, these two letters convey frustration and a sense of the Church losing out to a headstrong knight. So little is said about Marie at this stage that the responsibility for the marriage and the subsequent maltreatment of the abbots and monks has fallen squarely on Matthew’s shoulders. Such one-sided blame, however, is completely gone by the time of the pope’s next two letters, some five and a half years later in the late summer of 1168. Published as letters CCXXXI and CCXXXII in the *Recueil*, they lay the trap for the undoing of the Count and Countess of Boulogne in the tragedy that the pope is at once creating and controlling.

Hamlet mused, “Whether ‘tis nobler in the mind to suffer/The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,/Or to take arms against a sea of troubles, And by opposing end them?”<sup>21</sup> For the pope, it was the latter that directed his next actions as evident in the next letter written to Archbishop Henri. Dated to August 27, 1168, the letter introduces the subject of Henri’s own

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<sup>20</sup> See Appendix D for the transcripts of both letters.

<sup>21</sup> Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 1:3, lines 57-60.

sister, Constance, the repudiated wife of the Count of Toulouse. Alexander informed Henri that he would officially write the bishops of Soissons, Amiens, and Laon about the matter concerning Constance. Hints are dropped about the witnesses, truth, and a dower record, but the opacity of these clues only receives clarification with the pope's next letter to those bishops. The contents of this letter form the climax of the tragedy and result in the tearing apart of a family.

According to the letter, Marie and Matthew had committed an unreasonable occupation of the county and ignored previous "apostolic" instructions about vacating the lands. The pope spells out the details of the current drama: Matthew and the former abbess occupied the county without reason. They have refused to return it to its rightful countess, Constance, so the bishops are instructed, "You should impress more diligently upon the said Matthew and nun, that they restore the aforementioned county to the aforementioned Countess, and for this [to be] completed and fair, in your presence, they should deliver it with all delay and appeal removed."<sup>22</sup> If this return was not accomplished within three months, "it is allowed that they should be excommunicated one for the other [and]...you should forbid all divine services to be celebrated, except baptism of the very young and penitence of the dying."<sup>23</sup> As previously noted, this is the first time that Marie is included in the threat of excommunication and falls as equally under the papal axe as Matthew. Most sources provide 1169 as the date when the comital couple complied with some, but not all, of the pope's commands. Then the couple separated: Marie entered the Abbey of Sainte Austreberthe and Matthew retained the county of Boulogne through his two daughters. Subsequent to the marital dissolution, Matthew was killed just a few years later at the siege of Driencourt in 1173.

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<sup>22</sup> *RHGF*, 15:867.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

Largely dictated by Pope Alexander III, the tragic emplotment of Marie and Matthew's story allowed papal power to overcome the illegal marriage between the son of a count and an abbess. As the pope, who obsessed over marital theory and practice in his legal and papal capacities, Alexander was able to effect enormous change in the marriage of one uncanonically married couple. Continuing to control and dictate the terms of the arrangement, he did sweeten the bitterness of the tragedy by legitimizing Marie and Matthew's daughters and placing the Abbey of Sainte Austreberthe under his protection. The dissolution was but the best remedy for the sickness caused by the couple's sin. In the end, retribution was justly meted out for the knight who would abduct and marry the bride of Christ and for the abbess who had not willingly and speedily returned to her vow and enclosure. Their choices resulted in the tearing apart of a family with its reputation shattered, a former abbess penitently seeking a return to the religious life, and a headstrong, godless knight struck down by a crossbow.

### *Comedy*

In sharp relief then to the letters of frustration, condemnation, and fear that emplotted Marie's story as a Tragedy, the family histories, genealogies, and remembrances generally emplot an optimistic narrative for Marie and Matthew. Such optimism in literary terms translates into a Comedy. The genre has variously been defined as provoking laughter (often seen as less refined than Tragedy) or simply a story in which the plot culminates in a happy ending, or as John Lydgate explains, in a comedy things start out badly and are seemingly awful but end well and in happiness.<sup>24</sup> Thus the comedy is not a joyful experience from beginning to end; rather the

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<sup>24</sup> "A comedie hath in his gynnyng/At prime face, a maner compleynyng,/And afterward endeth in gladnes;/And it the dedis only doth expres/Of swiche as ben in pouert plounged lowe."From John Lydgate's *Troy Book* 2, lines 847-851. Quoted in Laura Kendrick, "Comedy" in *A Companion to Chaucer*, ed. Peter Brown (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 92.

elements of tragedy must exist for the comedy to succeed. This transition from possible ruin to a positive resolution holds true in how the Marie-Matthew story is emplotted in a number of sources. In essence, “hope is held out” through reconciliations. These select narratives tell the story of a marriage between an abbess and a knight burdened by the impediment of religious status that must be resolved somehow to effect a happy ending. The main sources that support this emplotment as Comedy come from the genealogies of the Counts of Flanders and the Counts of Boulogne, and a charter from a Boulonnais kinsman.

It is not surprising that these sources often contradict the perceived realities described and supported by the pope. The first of these contradictions can be seen in the collection of genealogical contributions for the Counts of Flanders by the Continuator from Clairmarais.<sup>25</sup> This codicil to the larger genealogy contributes a substantial and optimistic account regarding Marie and Matthew’s marriage, supplying much more than simple names and places:

Because the leadership of Flanders fell in right of the eldest brother [Philip], Matthew, a praiseworthy man, courtly of body and of knightly virtue, joins to himself—with *cogente patre*—as wife, Marie, the daughter of the English King Stephen. She, initiated in childhood to the religious habit, as the one surviving heir of the county of Boulogne, was brought out of the cloister and joined, with the assent of the pope, to Matthew in marriage thereby assuming [the role of] the lawful heirs of her paternal inheritance.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> The town of Clairmarais and especially its Cistercian abbey enjoyed sustained links with the comital families in Flanders and Boulogne. In the early 1140s, the abbey was established by Count Thierry and Countess Sybille of Flanders; its inspiration had come from Thierry’s time in Jerusalem. The house received later patronage from Marie’s parents and then from Marie and Matthew during their years of rule in Boulogne. See Henri de Laplane, *L’abbaye de Clairmarais, d’après ses archives* (Saint Omer, 1863), 4-12. See also Chapter Three above for details regarding Marie and Matthew’s contributions to the house in 1161.

<sup>26</sup> *MGH, SS* 9:326: “Matheus vero decore corporis et virtute militari vir laudabilis, quia principatus Flandrie in ius senioris fratris, ut mos est, cesserat, cogente patre Mariam filiam Stephani regis Anglie in uxorem sibi associat. Haec pueritia habitu religionis initiate, cum sole Boloniensis comitatus here superesset, a claustris educta et assensu papae Matheo ad subrogandos paterne hereditati legitimos heredes matrimonio est coniuncta.”



*Cogente patre* is a Roman legal concept (generally written as *patre cogente*) that underscores patriarchal power to enforce legally binding marriages upon offspring with or without the son or daughter's consent. The writer is thus underscoring that the marriage was indeed legal. Gabrielle Spiegel, in her article, "Genealogy: Form and Function in Medieval Historical Narrative," has asserted how twelfth- and thirteenth-century genealogies both created and legitimated lineage. She writes that genealogy's "appearance as a literary genre in the twelfth century signaled the lineage's consciousness of itself and, to a certain extent, as Duby has remarked, was able to create this consciousness and to impose it on members of the lineage group."<sup>27</sup> The *Clairmarais* account repeatedly emphasizes the legitimacy of Matthew and Marie's marriage, affirming that it was made with parental and papal approval; it concerned the one surviving heir of Boulogne; it joined her to Matthew; and it authorized them as the rightful heirs of the inheritance. Such assertions are echoed in charters from the next generation. In 1183 Marie and Matthew's elder daughter, Ida, "made concessions to the abbey of Licques concerning a tithe at Westaxla 'for the soul of her father and her mother.'"<sup>28</sup> Then, in the names of Ida, her third husband, Renaud Danmartin, and their daughter, Matilda, they remembered the weal of the souls of "Mathieu, Count of Boulogne and Marie, his wife" in a grant of free passage *ca.* 1200.<sup>29</sup> The inclusion of

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<sup>27</sup> Gabrielle Spiegel, "Genealogy: Form and Function in Medieval Historical Narrative" in *History and Theory* 22, no. 1 (Feb 1983), 47.

<sup>28</sup> Erin L. Jordan, "The 'Abduction' of Ida of Boulogne: Assessing Women's Agency in Thirteenth-Century France" in *French Historical Studies*, 30, no. 1 (Winter 2007), 11.

<sup>29</sup> "For the weal of their souls, for that of Mathieu, Count of Boulogne and Marie, his wife, that of Aubry, Count of Dammartin, and Mathilde, his wife, the grantor's father and mother, Renaud, Count of Boulogne, Ida his wife, and Mathilde, their daughter, grant to the Abbey the free passage at Harfleur," *ca.* 1200, Manchester, John Rylands Library, [R. 48433] 78 [170].

their daughter, who in 1260 became the Countess of Boulogne in her own right, further fixes and affirms the legitimate continuity of the lineage.

Anxieties regarding inheritance and legitimacy prompted the reiteration of births, deaths, and marriages; these anxieties also provoked antagonistic prying by those who would challenge the genealogies' trustworthiness. Incorporating the existence of official permission for Marie and Matthew's marriage could allay future worries regarding the succession of rule in Boulogne. These anxieties had a basis in history, and had been at the heart of the protests in 1135 when Stephen's partisans had "argued that Matilda's daughter and namesake should be barred from the throne because of bastardy."<sup>30</sup> This challenge was of course part of Marie's (and, incidentally, Matthew's) larger genealogy regarding the "legitimacy" of the Empress Matilda's birth, given that her mother, Matilda of Scotland, had indeed worn the religious veil. Though not forming part of this discussion, Matilda of Scotland's departure from Wilton Abbey coincided with Gunnhildr's.<sup>31</sup>

The Clairmarais genealogy's claim of papal dispensation is, however, immediately problematic yet is echoed in a number of medieval, antiquarian, and modern sources as will be discussed below. As evident throughout this dissertation, Pope Alexander III was wholeheartedly against this marriage from its origin in 1160 until he managed to dissolve it in 1169. The possibility nonetheless that another churchman granted the dispensation should be examined. Possible candidates include Pope Hadrian IV, the anti-pope, Victor IV, and Theobald, the Archbishop of Canterbury. There are, however, conditions that make these candidates generally

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<sup>30</sup> Huneycutt, *Matilda of Scotland*, 147.

<sup>31</sup> Anselm's biographers went to great lengths to explain that her marriage to Henry I was legitimate and that no impediments existed. See Huneycutt, *Matilda of Scotland*, 20-30, for the details of the complicated legal and theological process to rule on Matilda's intended marriage to the future Henry I.

unable or unlikely to have granted their permission. For instance, Pope Hadrian, the English Pope, died in the month before William of Boulogne's death. Secondly, given that Alexander III was not alone in his papal ambitions, the possibility that his opponent, the anti-pope, Victor IV, might have intervened on Matthew's behalf exists. The alliance that Matthew was making with Henry II, however, meant that Victor would not have agreed to a marriage that would threaten his friend and protector, the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick I.<sup>32</sup> Henry II's role in setting up the marriage, we are told, was to secure friendly rule in Boulogne. The one real possibility might have come through Archbishop Theobald, who had played an important role in Marie's younger life in moving from Stratford to Lillechurch. Given, however, Theobald's close ties with Thomas Becket, it seems wholly improbable that the spiritual head of the Church in England would allow the still-secular English Chancellor to trump him in spiritual matters, especially ones that carried such gravitas and poignancy.

Regardless of the holes that this exercise has opened up, the next source actually names the man who ostensibly granted the dispensation. Marie's kinsman, Faramus of Boulogne, similarly confirmed the existence of a dispensation.<sup>33</sup> Faramus claims to have been instrumental to its granting.

Therefore Faramus of Boulogne a great friend of the king Henry the second, argued persuasively, because he was related to the aforesaid Mary, and he obtained from the king letters addressed to Alexander the pope that the aforesaid Mary might be handed over from her professed nunship to Matthew brother of the count of Flanders to restore peace between Flanders and Boulogne, between whom there had arisen war. This was done in

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<sup>32</sup> Already by February 1160, Frederick was the one major power in favor of Victor IV. See Walter Ullmann and George Garnett, *A Short History of the Papacy in the Middle Ages* (London: Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, 2003), 124-126.

<sup>33</sup> According to Emile Amt, Faramus was "the son of William of Boulogne, whose father had been the illegitimate son of Count Eustace II of Boulogne. He was thus a kinsman of Stephen's queen, Matilda of Boulogne... a connection which was widely recognized at the time and which Faramus continued to emphasize throughout his life." Emile Amt, *The Accession of Henry II in England: Royal Government Restored, 1149-1159* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1993), 85.

this manner. Matthew therefore took the aforesaid Mary lawfully having been refused many times.<sup>34</sup>

There is emphasis upon Faramus's role in the prolonged negotiation process to obtain the dispensation. In order to justify these efforts, the writer explains that the marriage would enable a greater good to occur, namely, peace between Flanders and Boulogne. In Emilie Amt's study of Henry II, Faramus appears as a character of uncertain status on both sides of the Channel, neither fully integrated nor completely neglected. As such, his claims to effecting such a pact suggests a man trying to create a job of significance and relevance for himself. Proving equally problematic is understanding the voice behind the words, because tracing the exact reference for this source has as yet been unsuccessful. Unfortunately, the one modern historian to have referred to it, J. H. Round, only furnishes the scantest of details. Tantalizingly but frustratingly he dangles "an unpublished MS. of John's reign" as the source of the Faramus claim.<sup>35</sup>

This seductive idea of an approval for Marie and Matthew has shaped the writings of past and current historians in reference to the event. In 1887 Kate Norgate, writing in *England under the Angevin Kings*, paved the way for this dialogue, asserting that Marie "was brought out of her convent to be married by Papal dispensation to Matthew, second son of the count of Flanders."<sup>36</sup> To support this claim, she cites the chronicler, Robert of Torigni, and the collection of French historical writings, *Rerum Gallicarum et Francicarum Scriptores*. But, as Avrom Saltman states

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<sup>34</sup> Avrom Saltman, *Theobald, Archbishop of Canterbury* (London: Athlone Press, 1956), 148-9. "Pharamus ergo de Bolonia multum familiaris regis Henrici secundi, facta ei multa persuasione, eo quod predicta Maria eius fuit consanguinea, impetravit ab eodem rege litteras ad Alexandrum papam dirigi ut predicta Maria a professione monachali absoluta traderetur Matheo fratri comitis Flandrie quasi pro pace inter Flandrenses et Bolonieneses reformanda, inter quos mortalis guerra oriebatur. Quod ita factum est. Matheus igitur duxit predictam Mariam licet multum renuentem."

<sup>35</sup> John Horace Round, "Faramus of Boulogne" *The Genealogist*. New Series, 12, 148 (1895).

<sup>36</sup> Kate Norgate, *England under the Angevin Kings* (London, 1887), 469.

in his examination of the archbishop of Canterbury, Theobald, “Robert of Torigny mentions nothing about a dispensation and in fact describes the marriage as an unheard-of precedent.”<sup>37</sup> The second source, the *Rerum*, similarly makes no mention of the dispensation, concentrating instead on the controversy between the two papal candidates, Alexander and Victor, and then more specifically on the outrage which Matthew caused his father by marrying the *Deo dicata*, Marie.<sup>38</sup> Editors of at least two antiquarian collections, *Recueil des historiens des Gaules et de la France* and *Patrologiae Latinae*, similarly disagree. They each provide their reasons in their respective editions by calling attention to the obvious: all of the Church’s condemnations of the marriage would not have been necessary had a dispensation been previously granted.<sup>39</sup>

The anonymous *Genealogica comitum Buloniensium* provides a rather clinical role for Matthew within the marriage and enigmatically describes the union as having been made using the legal terminology of *licet illicite*—that is, valid but illicit. Forming part of the larger, *Genealogia Caroli Magni*, this portion about the Counts of Boulogne notes in formulaic style the information regarding the majority of the family marriages.<sup>40</sup> For example, of Marie’s grandparents, the genealogy notes that Eustace, the brother of Baldwin, the King of Jerusalem, married Mary, the daughter of the King of Scotland and beget Matilda.<sup>41</sup> This formula, however, does not apply for the more complex circumstances of 1160 that are reported with added detail. Prefacing the account with an explanation of Marie’s position in the lineage and status as an

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<sup>37</sup> Saltman, *Theobald*, 52.

<sup>38</sup> *RHGF*, 13:517: “Nun of God, Marie”

<sup>39</sup> *RHGF*, 13:414, footnote b. *PL*, 200:184-185, footnote 37.

<sup>40</sup> *MGH SS*, 9:301.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*: “Eustachius, frater Balduini regis Jerusalem, duxit Mariam filiam regis Scotiae, et genuit Mathildem.”

abbess, the genealogist writes, “However as legitimate heirs were lacking in Boulogne, Matthew the son of Thierry, Count of Flanders, took the abbess—although illegally—and roused the hereditary seed, producing two daughters, and [then] returned her to her place.”<sup>42</sup> From this description, it is hard not to imagine the dutiful Matthew impregnating the abbess Marie twice, then shipping her off to the nunnery as soon as possible.

The family history of the Counts of Boulogne continued to be written. In the sixteenth century, if not before, it achieved the status of what Spiegel calls “dynastic myth.”<sup>43</sup> By this time, its intention “to affirm and extend its place in political life” was co-opted to ensure marital and political claims for someone of wealth but not fully of great birth, Catherine de Medici. The production, display, and reading of another rendition of the genealogy of the Counts of Boulogne was produced and this ornate production allowed Catherine and those seeing it to place her into the lineage of this ancient and noble family. In essence, it signaled her rightful place in the nobility, just as the twelfth- and thirteenth-century productions had played roles in the lives of Marie and Matthew’s descendants.<sup>44</sup> For Catherine, it also affirmed that she could justly aspire not only to the nobility of France but also to its royalty. Extending her line back to King Arthur solidified just such claims.<sup>45</sup> Apparently, Catherine achieved her goals. Her arrival in France was

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid.: “Cumque defecissent in Bolonia legitimi heredes, Matheus filius Theoderici comitis Flandrensis, licet illicite, duxit abbatissam, et suscitavit semen hereditarium duas filias generando, et remisit eam ad locum suum.”

<sup>43</sup> Spiegel, *Genealogy*, 47.

<sup>44</sup> The *généalogie des comtes de Boulogne, 1547-1582*, appears in Aix-en-Provence, Bibliothèque municipale, ms. 0638.

<sup>45</sup> For example, Arthur’s role in the family lineage is described in *Chronica et fabulae*, early 13<sup>th</sup> century, Arras MS 163, anc. 184, fol. 129v. “Artus rex de britania dedit et concessit quiete & libere viro nobili ligero. In comitatu bolon’. ambianis teruani’ et tornacum. Qui ligerus fuit p(ri)mus comes bolonie. ”

regarded by some for “faire refleurir l’ancienne vertu oubliée.”<sup>46</sup> The following image, “*Armes de Catherine de Médicis*” focuses attention upon the ornate display of the symbols of her arms and the title of her position and power, “Catherine de Médicis, par la grâce de Dieu, royne de France.”<sup>47</sup>



Figure 11 Aix-en-Provence BM ms.0638, 1547-1582. © Institut de recherche et d'histoire

<sup>46</sup> “The reflowering of forgotten ancient virtue.” See Denis Crouzet, *Le Haut Coeur de Catherine de Médicis* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2005), 52. As quoted in this text, according to the poet, Ronsard, Catherine as the French Queen “appartient... a une race princière qui a déjà sauvé de l’oubli Athènes et tous les grands noms de la Grèce, Platon, Socrate et Homère entre autres, qui ‘eussent este occis/D’une éternelle mort sans ceux des Medicis.” “Catherine belongs to a princely race that saved Athens from obscurity and all the great names of Greece, Plato, Socrates, and Homer, among others, ‘who would have been slayed by eternal death without the likes of the Medicis.””

<sup>47</sup> “Catherine de Medici, by the grace of God, queen of France.” See a number of the manuscript images from <http://bvmm.irht.cnrs.fr/consult/consult.php?reproductionId=7126>.

Of Marie and Matthew's scandalous marriage, nothing is said; the manuscript notes simply that "And the Countess Marie, who was by marriage joined to Count Matthew, the brother of Count Philip of Flanders. From this Matthew and Marie, came the Countess Ida of Boulogne and Matilda the wife of the Duke of Louvain."<sup>48</sup> Like the later incarnation of the genealogy, there was no scandal mentioned about the marriage between Marie and Matthew.<sup>49</sup> Thus, after three hundred years, the power of the genealogy continued to create, even as it used misdirection through fictitious ancient claims to lineage and ornate illuminations.

Emplotting Marie's shared life with Matthew in such glorious and noble terms fits in well with the defining feature of Comedy as a mode for the plot structure in writing history. The story writ large in the family histories and genealogies substantiated the triumph of hope. This hope surrounds Marie and her immediate descendants as well as those to come in future centuries. White spoke of the "festive occasions" that often transform events into a Comedy. The celebration of Marie and Matthew's lineage that connects them equally with the likes of "Arthur Roy du Bretagne" and Catherine de Medici undoubtedly fulfills this grandiose mission as confirmed in the sixteenth-century genealogy of the Counts of Boulogne (see Figure 11).

### *Romance*

Reading more like a medieval *conte* than genealogical account, the *Continuatio Bruxellensis* embroiders a rich and noble presentation of the marriage between a knight and

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<sup>48</sup> Bibliothèque municipale, MS 0638: "Et la Contesse Marie, qui par mariage fut alliee au Conte Mahieu, frere du conte Philippin de flandres. De ce Mahieu & de Marie, vint ydde contesse de boullongne & mehault femme au duc de Louvain. "

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.: "Et comitissa Maria, qui habuit maritum comitem Matheum, *fratrem comitis Philippi Flandrie*. De comite Matheo et Maria comitissa uenit Ida comitissa Bolonie, et Matildis uxor ducis de Louuaing and et li contesse Marie, qui eut à mari le conte Mahiu, *frere le conte Felipon de Flandres*. Et du conte Mahiu et de Marie contesse vint Yde contesse de Boulogne, et Mehaus feme le duc de Lovaing."



countess: “The brother of Philip, named Matthew—the second born, said to be the most beautiful knight of all knights—took the Countess of Boulogne as wife, and by her had two daughters.”<sup>50</sup> This description appears in the *Genealogia Comitum Flandriae* and emphasizes the courtly status of Marie, but especially of Matthew. His martial and noble qualities feature strongly. As for Marie, she is described solely as countess and no mention is made of her religious status as abbess. Theirs is a match between the younger brother of an important count and the countess of nearby, strategically important lands. The descriptions about Matthew once again includes the superlative *pulcherrimus*, the most beautiful. The word can also be used in reference to a person’s noble qualities, but the fact that this notion of beauty continues to describe Matthew (and not Marie) is a curious one. Given that a woman’s beauty is so often emphasized in the contemporary romances of the day, the exclusion of commentary about Marie must be significant. The silence about Marie’s appearance may reflect that she was not considered physically attractive, but more likely takes into account the status that she brought with her. While virgin martyrs may be described in glowing terms as desirable and beautiful, abbesses are not. In fact, abbesses do not generally feature in twelfth-century literary creations with the exception of Marie de France’s writings. Similarly, the genealogy’s purpose is to extol the members of the new counts of Flanders and thus emphasize Matthew’s traits not Marie’s. As discussed above, Matthew’s father had only assumed the title and position only in the late 1120s. In reinforcing Matthew’s qualities, the genealogist underpins the nobility of his lineage. This reinforcement goes beyond Matthew moreover: the writer does not dwell on the lack of male heirs, and were we to read further, we would learn that their daughters would marry well.

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<sup>50</sup> *Continuatio Bruxellensis* in *MGH, Scriptorum* 9:326: “Frater vero ejusdem Philippi secundus natu post ipsum, Matheus nomine, pulcherrimus miles sicut dicebatur omnium militum, comitissam Boloniensem duxit uxorem, ex qua duas habuit filias.”

A similar promoting of Matthew's noble status comes in the elaborate tomb effigy in which he was buried at the abbey church of Saint-Josse. We might assume that Matthew's 1173 charter (discussed in Chapter Three) provided the necessary funds for this tomb; undoubtedly its ornate and elegant quality would have been costly. The tomb's inscription represents another narrative of the family and its role in the local area. One role of this story is to underscore the tragedy of Matthew's death, inscribed along the stone sword's lament, "O sadness! That a petty arrow deprived [this] life!"<sup>51</sup> At the same time, this narrative recounts the romance of the Count of Boulogne through the inscription that encircles his chain-mailed effigy: "In this tomb Matthew, of renowned stock, is enclosed; great by nobility, and of compassionate heart, he valiantly attained the county of Boulogne. Death has taken this vessel...."<sup>52</sup> In the late twelfth century, nevertheless, the inscription's reference to his taking the county of Boulogne was intended as a barbed indictment against those who, like Pope Alexander III, had consistently portrayed Matthew as an abductor and impostor. Thus, posthumously Matthew, the beautiful knight, retained his noble status that, as we have seen, remained an important legacy for his daughters and their heirs.

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<sup>51</sup> Originally published in 1864 in *L'Almanach de Boulogne*, the article by Abbé Daniel Haigneré, an archivist in Boulogne-sur-Mer, discussed Matthew's tomb. It was republished as L'Abbé D. Haigneré, "Le Tombeau de Matthieu, 1er, Comte de Boulogne, au Musée," *Bononia* 18 (1991): 15-18. My thanks to kind staff at the Musée de Boulogne-sur-Mer for allowing me to photograph the tomb uninterrupted and for providing me with a copy of *Bononia*.

<sup>52</sup> This translation reflects my transcription alongside Haigneré's.



*Figure 12 One of the tomb's dogs—significantly, undamaged by the Revolutionaries.  
Photograph by author.*

How the inscription ends is impossible to say, however, because of the damage the entire tomb suffered during the French Revolution.<sup>53</sup> In the late eighteenth century, Matthew's noble status was no longer something of which to boast publicly. The effigy of his body suffered serious damage by Revolutionaries whose grievances against the nobility of the *Ancien Régime* were transferred to him. Perhaps further underscoring this antipathy, the two dogs at Matthew's feet were left largely untouched (Figure 12).

Medieval sources such as genealogies did more than confirm lineage and perpetuate the dynastic myth, they also shaped cultural identities for families and the individual members within them. The manufacturing of these identities needed to rely upon well-known motifs that served useful purposes. To this end, twelfth-century ideals that reinforced courtly behavior and the expectations associated with it could serve those in positions of power. Appropriate displays then of chivalry, *fin amour*, violence, and religious devotion combined to form a potent identity

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<sup>53</sup> Haigneré puzzled over the following word or part of word “amazatum” that he believed followed “quod vas.” My own attempts at deciphering the inscription before seeing this article yielded, “AMUZA...” See Appendix B for additional photos of the tomb.

for people such as Marie and Matthew. These are the ideals of Romance, and its elements are writ large in multiple narratives about the couple. Their joint story moreover incorporates sacrifice, adultery, obligation, military challenges, and familial devotion, highlighting the tensions that characterized the better known twelfth-century romances.

These images of nobility are visually depicted in Marie's seal as princess. Examples from the same matrix hang from two separate deeds that record donations of land from Marie to Lillechurch Priory in Kent. Careful examination of the damaged seals reveals Marie's seal is attached to both of the deeds. Their worn inscriptions inform the viewer that they belong to the daughter of the English King. Standing and dressed in a flowing gown and veiled, Marie holds a book in her left hand and flower or bird in her right, as her uncovered left foot steps forward (see Figures 13 and 15).<sup>54</sup> As for the third seal, it answers a centuries-old mystery. The *Monasticon Anglicanum* notes that Lillechurch Priory's seal has not been discovered.<sup>55</sup> This seal, however, is most certainly that priory seal (right-hand seal in Figure 13). More damaged than Marie's, it depicts the seated Virgin and Child enthroned, in recognition of the priory's dedication to St. Mary. From the faint inscription, eight of the twelve letters of *Lillecherche* can be discerned along the seal's left side.

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<sup>54</sup> There is a resemblance between Marie's seal and Romsey Abbey's seal of 1130, particularly in the positioning of the book and the folds of their religious habits. See Appendix A for a copy of this seal.

<sup>55</sup> *Mon Ang*, 4:381. To my knowledge no subsequent scholarship has discussed this seal.



*Figure 13 Two Seals from Deed D46/58  
By permission of the Master and Fellows of St John's College, Cambridge.  
Photo by Tracy Deakin.*

Marie's self-styling underscores her identity as a royal daughter. Despite her father's usurpation of the throne, the civil war that followed, and the failure of the family to retain England's rule, Marie fostered this identity throughout her life. In defiance perhaps of the immediate and hostile reactions against her father's reign as England's king, Marie showed a determination to retain her identity as his daughter and possibly as rightful heir to throne itself. Dating these seals has proven problematic, and there is no consensus on whether they pre- or post-date Marie's time as Countess of Boulogne. Regardless of when they fit into Marie's chronology, they not only emphasize her royal status but also underscore—especially when read alongside the deeds themselves—the persistent combining of secular and religious identity that characterized her life.

Romance as a literary genre is similarly marked by this distinction. When Hayden White formulated his theories in the 1970s, he looked back to scholarship by Northrop Frye, who had himself written extensively over the course of the twentieth century. In Frye's collection of essays, *Anatomy of Criticism*, he explains, "Romance divides into two main forms: a secular form dealing with chivalry and knight-errantry, and a religious form devoted to legends of saints."<sup>56</sup> In "Courts, Clerks, and Courtly Love," Sarah Kay has subsequently revisited this theme of separation and used it to situate works of romance within the context of the court, comprised of both secular and religious members. Gauging the contemporary tensions that romances often paraded, she looks to their treatment of social needs and anxieties in the romances *Eneas* and *Tristan and Iseut*. For Kay, the former could "command general assent since it accords both with secular values of family and inheritance, and with church teaching confining sex to marriage. It would possess some appeal for each of the different constituencies, lay and clerical, that made up a court..."<sup>57</sup> Whereas "the Tristan tradition...effects a rapprochement between love and religious experience, [and] also flouts, through its theme of adulterous passion, exactly those principles of dynastic continuity and church authority which the *Eneas* upholds."<sup>58</sup> Playing upon themes from Aristotle's *Poetics*, particularly in reference to tragedy, Northrop Frye envisions Romance as "characterized by the acceptance of pity and fear, which in ordinary life relate to pain, as forms of pleasure."<sup>59</sup> These perspectives on romance thus emphasize the conflict and anguish that must be present for it to succeed.

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<sup>56</sup> Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*, ed. Robert Denham (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 34.

<sup>57</sup> Sarah Kay, "Courts, Clerks, and Courtly love," 93.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> Frye, *Anatomy*, 37.

As the following letter demonstrates, Marie assumes the identity of the author of her own romance, infusing both conflict and anguish into her role as the faithful and vigilant Countess of Boulogne. Perhaps Marie's letter of 1168 emplots her story as romance in its most distilled form: "a drama of self-identification symbolized by the hero's transcendence of the world of experience, his victory over it, and his final liberation from it."<sup>60</sup> This letter, briefly discussed above in Chapter Three, was written at a time of anxiety and potential change: in the aftermath of the ultimatum given by Pope Alexander III regarding Constance's dower claim. Not coincidentally, Marie wrote to King Louis VII, Constance's older brother. The letter does not broach the topic of the dower claim; rather it offers intelligence to the French king regarding the intrigues being orchestrated by the English king, Henry II, the enemy of both Marie and Louis. Its 125 words (in Latin) reveal much about Marie, not least that as countess of Boulogne, hospitality was essential to her role, and she provided housing to travelling diplomats as a matter of course. On this occasion, she entertained ambassadors sent by Henry II to the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick Barbarossa (d. 1190) on their return journey back to England. Probing them for information, she learned of an alliance between the Emperor and Henry II. The letter reads,

To her revered lord Louis, king of the French, Mary, countess of Boulogne, sends health and service. Let it be known to your highness that Henry, king of England, has sent his ambassadors to the emperor. It is certain that he has, for the most part, succeeded in obtaining what he wished: for the emperor shews himself kindly disposed to the king, and his [the king's] ambassadors being on their return, he has not hesitated to send his own with them to him, which he thought the best course, lest the aforesaid king should doubt whether he was sincere in his assistance against you. The returning ambassadors passed through my territories, and I spoke with them, and well I perceived from their words that the English king ceases not, day nor night, to devise mischief against you. Wherefore I thought it fitting to send to your grace, and to give you the necessary forewarning, that you may take counsel with your wise men, and act as is fitting, lest the impetuous

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<sup>60</sup> See footnote 4 above.

presumption of the fraudulent king should inflict violent injury upon you. Fare you well.<sup>61</sup>

We can have no doubt from this letter's contents how Marie felt about King Henry II or about his intentions against the French king. As the creator of this romance, she wastes no time in establishing the intentions of its characters: the evil, plotting King of England, Henry II, stands on one side with the Emperor Frederick against the vigilant and perspicacious Marie, Countess of Boulogne, championing the powerful yet vulnerable Louis VII, king of France. Henry and Frederick's conspiracy, however, is clearly not *sans souci*; and Henry II and Frederick must prove their earnestness and trustworthiness to one another. Marie engages with this dramatic exchange of envoys to extricate useful intelligence. Her emphasis upon the relentlessness of Henry's plotting, that she describes as occurring *nocte dieque* [night and day], intensifies the urgency of her missive as well as her importance in conveying the crucial details of the conspiracy.

Marie's obsequiousness toward Louis should be read in light of the dower claim. As a result of the disturbing threats that Alexander III leveled at Marie and Matthew, we can be fairly certain that Marie is interceding with the man who links all of the major parties. Louis VII was not only Constance's brother but also Henri's, the archbishop of Reims, whom the pope wrote to lead the local campaign against Marie and Matthew, and who was reprimanded for not having been more effective in previously dealing with the situation. Louis VII was, perhaps more importantly, the pope's protector and benefactor. As such, Marie knew that Louis held the power

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<sup>61</sup> *RHGF*, 16:144. Translation from Mary Anne Everett Wood Green, *Letters of Royal and Illustrious Ladies of Great Britain* (London, 1846), 11-13.



to arbitrate, and there was no reason to doubt that he would recognize the value of keeping Boulogne stable and out of Henry II's grasp.<sup>62</sup>

In Marie's romance, she is unquestionably the heroine. Slicing directly through the middle of the letter, Marie herself materializes as the proficient spy interrogating ambassadors. More importantly, she unflinchingly and unapologetically describes where the lands that the interrogation takes place: "meam terram," that is, my territories. The setting for Marie's efficient work as one of Louis' loyal servants confirms her rightful place there. Although the charter by Faramus of Boulogne that we discussed above named Marie as a peacemaker, this is not the role that she assigns herself. Rather, Marie presents herself with a more dynamic role as the eyes and ears of the French king. This assignation does not end here, however. Marie undoubtedly played the role of the double-agent, posing as the loyal servant of Henry II, to gain the trust of the ambassadors when she talked to them. They would not have divulged any details of the meetings between the two leaders had she not.

Further evidence of intrigue in Marie's life comes potentially from another encounter with Thomas Becket. Perhaps corroborating a warm friendship or a healed wound, Thomas wrote a nun, *ca.* May 1170. The letter from "Archbishop Thomas of Canterbury to his Beloved Daughter Idonea" communicates the need for an envoy to thwart the coronation of Henry the Younger in York. The letter is affectionately addressed to "*filie dilecte Idonee*," and instructs her to "hand over the Lord Pope's letter...to our venerable brother, Roger, archbishop of York, if possible in the presence of some of our brothers and fellow-bishops; or...in the presence of those

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<sup>62</sup> Three years earlier, Louis had chosen Count Philip of Flanders as one of the *dauphin's* three godfathers, and the family connections and alliances were strong at this time.

who happen to be there.”<sup>63</sup> Professor Anne Duggan has argued that the nun, “Idonea,” to whom he is writing is in fact Marie. Her supposition is partially based upon the mission’s promised reward, that is “the remission of your sins, an imperishable reward, and the crown of glory, which the blessed sinners Magdalene and the Egyptian finally received from the Lord Christ, when all the stains of their former lives were totally expunged.”<sup>64</sup> Duggan footnotes her belief about Marie as a possible candidate, asserting that Idonea “may be a pseudonym for Mary of Blois, only recently returned to the religious life.”<sup>65</sup> This identification signals that this nun may have thus been in need of remission of sins. Thomas’s use of exemplars combines women whose choices and lives changed history, such as Esther, Judith, and the women at Jesus’s tomb, alongside women whose sins were expunged by Christ, namely, Mary Magdalene and Saint Mary of Egypt.<sup>66</sup> John of Salisbury also wrote about this letter that “had long crossed the sea” before 14 June 1170.<sup>67</sup> Thomas’s reference to crossing the sea also fits in well with Marie’s situation. If Idonea, in order to deliver the missive, she or a representative would have crossed the Channel from Boulogne to England to deliver the letter. Similarly, we can be quite confident that Thomas would have seen Marie as tainted by her long marriage to a man with whom Thomas had shared such a nasty history. As such, Marie would have needed to perform penitential acts in contrition, an obligation made clear in the letter.

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<sup>63</sup> Thomas Becket, *The Correspondence of Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury, 1162-1170*, ed. Anne Duggan (Oxford: Clarendon, 2000), 2:1234-1235.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 1234, footnote 1.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.* 1235, fn 11. Duggan names the Egyptian as St Mary of Egypt, the fourth-century penitent and ascetic.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 1235, footnote 7. Duggan writes, “According to John of Salisbury, the mandate ‘had long crossed the sea’ before 14 June 1170, the day of the coronation at Westminster, and he tried to persuade Christ Church to publish it.”

In the name, *Idonea*, we may furthermore perceive the diminutive form of the family name, *Ida*.<sup>68</sup> As a Latin adjective, *idonea* means being the suitable or fit one for something.<sup>69</sup> The punning then works on a number of levels for Marie: she would indeed be suitable for such a mission, given her past role as Countess of Boulogne that involved her in church matters of great importance; given the family name and the number of strong and active women in her lineage that it recalls; and given that the letter's writer, Thomas Becket, can enjoy the power of his pun, even as he hides the recipient's identity yet emphasizes her need for penitence. Ironically the letter to be delivered to Archbishop Roger came from Alexander III, author of Marie's tragedy. The secret nature of the delivery meant that Marie's role as spy, as visible in her 1168 letter, continued two years later in a different mission. This ongoing role underscores once again the place that Marie held in society. In the timeline of events, this mission coincides with the first of two charter transactions for Marie to leave her home and marriage to resume her life in a nunnery. Taken together the two charters likewise solemnized the transition from one marital state to the other for both Marie and Matthew. The first charter made by the new bishop of Thérouanne, Didier, supplied a spiritual rationale for Marie's return to the "holy religious habit" as she thinks ahead to the health of her soul; it explains that Matthew had renounced the bond of matrimony, promising a rent of twenty-six Boulonnais coins in maintenance for Marie.<sup>70</sup> The

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<sup>68</sup> Marie's great-grandmother, (possible) great-aunt, and elder daughter shared the name. See Tanner, *Families*, 290-291.

<sup>69</sup> In the feminine, *idonea* forms the nominative, accusative, and ablative. In the twelfth century, related forms such as the verb *idoneo* began to assume legal implications, e.g. to clear oneself of a charge c. 1115, R. E. Latham, *Revised Medieval Latin Word-List* (London: Oxford University Press, 1980), 233.

<sup>70</sup> Robert and Léopold Delisle, *Chronique De Robert De Torigni, Abbé Du Mont-Saint-Michel* (Rouen, 1873), 2:20-21. Bishop Milo II had died in 1169 just after Marie's decision to return to the religious life. The editor of Robert of Torigni's chronicle, Leopold Delisle, provides excerpts

second charter was made by Matthew underscoring the dissolution of his marriage to Marie and acknowledging her as the mother of their two daughters.

Significantly, the second charter confirms too that Marie has done the choosing; it also introduces a noteworthy possibility not yet fully entertained thus far. Dated 1171, the year after the marriage was dissolved, Matthew, is named as the Count of Boulogne, and twice, refers to Marie as *Domina Maria*. He further notes, as I have done from the start of this study: “Elegit autem domina Maria domum sibi placabilem”—“the Lady Marie has moreover chosen a house that pleases her.”<sup>71</sup> Forming the title of this dissertation, we find a woman’s choice in challenging circumstances, to say the least, in operation. While Matthew states that she is withdrawing or retiring into holy religion, he also makes it clear that she has chosen a house that pleases her. The reasons for this choice might relate to Sainte Austreberte’s proximity to the family home in Étaples or more likely to Matthew’s plans to build a new château in Saint-Josse. Equally, the pope’s connection to Sainte Austreberte, dating from 1160 when Alexander III had granted it distinct privileges, received a further boost when he put it under his protection in 1170.<sup>72</sup>

More explication of the choice comes from Matthew’s charter: Sainte-Austreberte is located in Marie’s inherited lands.<sup>73</sup> Thus, not only do we learn that the choice was Marie’s, but we are also given an image of Marie still as *Domina*. This lay title and the acknowledgement that

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from the two charters that are contained in the Collection Moreau, volume 77, folios 103 and 226. See Appendix E for the texts of the two charters.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 2:20-21, footnote 8.

<sup>72</sup> Braquehay, *L’abbaye royale de Sainte-Austreberte*, 23. Although see above in Chapter Three, See Haignéré, “Une bulle inédite,” 24.

<sup>73</sup> This assertion is not without ambiguity. While a number of sources list abbesses who have kinship links with Marie, the clause could be read in reference to the geographical proximity of Boulogne and Montreuil, and the role played by Boulogne’s counts in its neighbor’s affairs.

Marie has chosen Sainte Austreberte for specific secular reasons casts her in the guise of a laywoman living in a religious house. In other words, she is retiring to the Royal Abbey of Sainte-Austreberte, not being re-veiled there. This reading of course stands in direct contrast to Bishop Didier's charter and the spin that he put on the move, as well as on the obituary of Marie's death as presented in Chapter Three.

Further supporting this possibility, Marie's administrative life did not come to an abrupt halt at the gates of Sainte-Austreberte. Nor did she relinquish interest or intervention in secular affairs; as Auguste Braquehay points out, Marie did not maintain any less an exercise of her rights of control over the County of Boulogne.<sup>74</sup> She continued to ratify charters for Matthew to Saint-Evode de Braisne in the Diocese of Soissons and helped facilitate matters with the Abbey of Saint-Josse for the construction of Matthew's new chateau.<sup>75</sup> In recounting Marie's confirmation of one of Matthew's charters to this local house, another French antiquarian mocked Matthew's lack of absolute rights over the county, noting that Marie's assistance was required because she was the true heir to Boulogne.<sup>76</sup> Similarly, it may help explain Matthew's enigmatic charter of 1173; as I noted in the previous chapter, "After the dissolution of the marriage, Matthew referred to Marie as *uxor mea*. This description was given in the charter he made just before his death in August 1173, providing support for Saint-Josse where his tomb was

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<sup>74</sup> Braquehay, 23 lists numerous charters, exemptions, and rights in which she was directly involved. "Marie ne conservait pas moins intact ses droits d'intervention dans l'exercice de la souveraineté sur le comté de Boulogne."

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>76</sup> De Rosny, *Histoire du Boulonnais*, 80.

to be located. In the charter, Marie is identified as his wife, the countess, and it is stated that she and his daughters consented to the agreement.<sup>77</sup>

Marie emerges from the pages of her Romance as the heroine whose endeavors to succeed lead her and others connected to her toward a redemption. This salvation validates the choice to leave Romsey and undertake the leadership of Boulogne alongside Matthew, *pulcherrimus miles* [the most beautiful knight]. Marie's own letter, deeds, and seals alongside her possible role in Thomas Becket's schemes most emphatically cast her as the romance protagonist. She self-identifies as someone with the power, connections, and know-how to effect great change on behalf of the community. Matthew's charter from 1171, moreover, reveals how, as *Domina Maria*, she maintained this role into retirement, widowhood, and the closing years of her life. Despite Marie's indeterminate status, one that is neither fully secular nor fully religious, she is heir to an ancient, royal lineage. Her sustained identity as *filia regis Stephani* further establishes her as a woman of power who chooses to comport and position herself as such.

### *Satire*

When Chaucer's Wife of Bath challenged the supremacy of the *auctoritees*, he presents her as waging a one-woman war against a formidable medieval tradition, that of looking back to the ancients for their knowledge, wisdom, and literary prowess.<sup>78</sup> Medieval writers—known and unknown, lay and religious—proved their own literary worth by demonstrating their ability to write in Latin while mimicking Classical generic and stylistic conventions. Twelfth-century writers similarly demonstrated such abilities. Even writers, such as Marie de France who generally wrote in Anglo-Norman French, demonstrated their serious literary side by proving

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<sup>77</sup> See the more detailed discussion regarding this charter above in Chapter Three: Baluze, *Maison d'Auvergne*, 2:97-98. See Appendix F for a transcription of the charter.

<sup>78</sup> Geoffrey Chaucer, "Wife of Bath's Prologue," *Canterbury Tales*, lines 1-3.

Latin learning.<sup>79</sup> Many others, often anonymous, found inspiration in Latin “originals” for their vernacular re-tellings of well-known romances, hagiographies, and *contes*. One genre in which the linguistic and imitation skills of writers were most tested and valued was Satire. The combining then of these two skills produced the Latin Satire that became particularly fashionable in the twelfth-century.

The ancient authorities so revered by many medieval writers did more than inspire thinking; they also influenced style and genre. Although satire was not necessarily a medieval genre in itself, writers often incorporated satiric elements into their works in order to ridicule, insinuate, and provoke. Of satire’s strength and priorities, Northrop Frye writes, “The romantic fixation which revolves around the beauty of perfect form, in art or elsewhere is also a logical target for satire. The word satire is said to come from *satura*, or hash, and a kind of parody of form seems to run all through its tradition....”<sup>80</sup> These characteristics of medieval satire positioned it as a weapon to mock, ridicule, and scorn women, and such attacks were not the sole domain of religious writers, although the added clerical ambivalence toward female power and sexuality provided extra fodder for their satiric misunderstandings of women. R. Howard Bloch has catalogued some of the better known anti-female satirists, including John of Salisbury and Walter Map.<sup>81</sup> Bloch also includes Andreas Capellanus’s Book Three of *The Art of Courtly Love*

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<sup>79</sup> For example, Marie de France’s translation of the Latin St. Patrick’s Purgatory into the Anglo-Norman French, *L’Espurgatoire de Seint Patriz*, showcased her linguistic abilities. See T. Atkinson Jenkins, *L’Espurgatoire Seint Patriz of Marie De France ... Published with an Introduction and a Study of the Language of the Author. Dissertation Presented ... by Thomas Atkinson Jenkins*. (Philadelphia, 1894), accessed November 14, 2015, <https://archive.org/stream/lespurgatoiresei00mariuoft#page/n5/mode/2up>.

<sup>80</sup> Frye, *Anatomy*, 233.

<sup>81</sup> R. Howard Bloch and Frances Ferguson, *Misogyny, Misandry, and Misanthropy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 1.

(*De amore et amoris remedio*). Composed in the last quarter of the twelfth century, this Latin satire indulges in its mimicry of the renowned Roman poet, Ovid (d. 17), as visible from the first lines that allude directly to Ovid's *Ars amatoria*.<sup>82</sup> Andreas's title of choice is immediately apparent as an homage to Ovid, even as the title suggests that the subject has been expanded and updated within his own work. The three medieval books that constitute *The Art of Courtly Love* are filled with allusions to Ovid's writings, and some chapters more than others reflect the debt.<sup>83</sup>

The ancient hand of Ovid is visible in the most unlikely of medieval subjects, perhaps none more so than Andreas's Chapter VIII: *De amore monacharum* or *The Love of Nuns*. It provides advice about the pros and cons of seducing nuns. Consequently, nuns, according to Andreas, "would have no hesitation in granting you what you desire and preparing for you burning solaces."<sup>84</sup> Before his worldly assessment is proffered, however, Andreas firmly acknowledges his own talents as a consummate lover, "For one time when we had a chance to speak to a certain nun we spoke so well on the art, not being ignorant of the art of soliciting nuns, that we forced her to assent to our desire...."<sup>85</sup> His locker-room boasting, however, quickly dissipates as he describes being "roused... from the deadly sleep, and [although] expert in the art of love and well instructed in its cure, we were barely able to avoid her pestilential snares and escape without contamination of the flesh."<sup>86</sup> Andreas succeeds in furnishing this unlikely

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<sup>82</sup> Andreas Capellanus, *The Art of Courtly Love*, trans. John Jay Parry (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), 143-144.

<sup>83</sup> Sarah Kay briefly discusses the twelfth century in its context as "the age of Ovid." See "Courts," 87-88.

<sup>84</sup> Andreas, *Courtly Love*, 143-144: "Tibit non crastinabit concedere quod optabis et ignita solatia praeprare."

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 143.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*



chapter with sage words from Ovid, noting in a parenthetical that “no lover ever sees what is seemly,” demonstrating his commitment to citing from the great authority.<sup>87</sup> In the end, Andreas advises Walter, “You should avoid a love of this kind, my friend.”<sup>88</sup>

Regardless of such censures, however, medieval male writers incorporated the theme of the carnality of religious women into satirical writings. This theme shapes the dialogue, plot, and characters of the Latin poem, *Le Concile de Remiremont*. Its twelfth-century anonymous author (likely another cleric) parodies the ecclesiastical council as the venue to debate the skills and sexual prowess of different kinds of lovers, that is, were clerics or knights the better lovers? In the same tradition evident in Andreas's *Courtly Love*, *Le Concile* pays homage to Ovid. The classical writer's enormous contribution is singularly and sacrilegiously acknowledged as the “Gospel” reading is replaced by the “Precepta Ovidii, doctoris egregii.”<sup>89</sup> The council itself is arranged in line with the hierarchy of the Benedictine nunnery that is holding the debate. Bruce Venarde explains that in addition to being staged in an ancient Benedictine house in Toul, “some of the names of the interlocutors in the debate are the same as those mentioned in the *Liber memorialis* of Remiremont for the mid-twelfth century.”<sup>90</sup> Venarde accentuates the anxiety behind the satirical façade: the “expression of fear of the female power and independence that found its greatest expression in the cloister.”<sup>91</sup> For Marie, in all likelihood, the combination of agency and purpose (visible in her roles as abbess and countess) and a changed sexual status

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<sup>87</sup> Andreas, *Courtly Love*, 143 footnote 85 provides the original source as Ovid *Heroides* IV. 154

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 143.

<sup>89</sup> “The teachings of Ovid, the distinguished master.” Charles Oulmont, *Les débats du clerc et du chevalier dans la littérature poétique du Moyen Âge* (Paris: Librairie Ancienne Honore Champion, 1911), 93-95. The poem is translated into French and provided on pages 101-107.

<sup>90</sup> Venarde, *Women's Monasticism*, 166.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

(from virginal to married) placed her in a vulnerable position where male satirists were concerned. Given that *Le Concile de Remiremont* was likely written before Marie accentuates her inclusion within the tradition of Latin satire further.<sup>92</sup> While, as we have seen, the majority of chroniclers blamed King Henry II and Matthew of Flanders, Marie did not entirely escape condemnation, however. “Aggressive female sexuality” continued to represent an easy target and formed the underlying theme in the one chief negative portrayal of Marie by a medieval chronicler. Attacking a woman based upon her sexual identity is no more apparent than in the chronicle writings of the thirteenth-century St. Albans writer, Matthew Paris.

In three of his chronicles, *Historia Anglorum*, *Abbreuatio Chronicorum*, and *Chronica Majora*, Matthew Paris discussed Marie; in the wordiest of them, he blended rape, Ovidian satire, and the mistrust of the veiled woman to unleash a satiric, misogynistic tirade parading as a chronicle entry. In Chapter Two, we discussed Matthew Paris’s praise for Ela of Salisbury. His admiration for her was not built upon her life’s accomplishments but rather upon her virility, that is, how she managed not to take the tragic news of her son’s death like a woman.<sup>93</sup> As we look now to his writings about Marie, in which sex, power, marriage, and divorce combine to form a potentially explosive narrative, perhaps predictably, we find the St. Albans chronicler directly attacking her as a woman. His attack moreover incorporates female sexual reputation alongside the notion of self-inflicted *raptus*, and the *raptus* of his account leaves little room for linguistic confusion.

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<sup>92</sup> Oulmont explains that most scholars have dated the poem between the late eleventh or early twelfth century, *Les Débats du Clerc et du Chevalier*, 61.

<sup>93</sup> Matthew Paris showed a mixture of judgmental contempt and grudging respect for Eleanor of Aquitaine. See Michael R. Evans, *Inventing Eleanor: The Medieval and Post-Medieval Image of Eleanor of Aquitaine*. (London: Bloomsbury, 2014). Chapter 1, “Creating the Black Legend: The Origins and Development of Eleanor’s Scandalous Reputation,” examines Eleanor’s mixed portrayals in Matthew’s writings.

According to Richard Vaughan, editor and translator of many of Matthew Paris's writings, the monk of St. Albans meticulously interwove classical allusions into his prolific canon of writings.<sup>94</sup> Vaughan notes that of all the ancient authorities, Ovid loomed largest as Matthew's favorite: "Ovid is the most frequently cited author, with thirty-two quotations in all."<sup>95</sup> Even as the rich illustrations and maps of Matthew's chronicles have been praised, his reliability as an historian has been questioned. Vaughan concurs with those who advise caution in using Matthew's historical writings, "Owing to his occasional indulgence in unscrupulous falsification Matthew can never be relied on in his treatment of historical material. When he repeats a good story, the second version often differs considerably from the first."<sup>96</sup> Certainly, Matthew's account of Marie in his *Historia Anglorum* demonstrates his indulgence in fabrication, self-promotion, and Becket's veneration. Similarly, it showcases his deference to Ovid, particularly in his anti-female satire.

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<sup>94</sup> Richard Vaughan, *Matthew Paris* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958), 37-47, accessed October 30, 2015, <https://archive.org/details/matthewparis012094mbp>.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 134. From a number of perspectives, Matthew's work has struck a chord of caution with scholars.

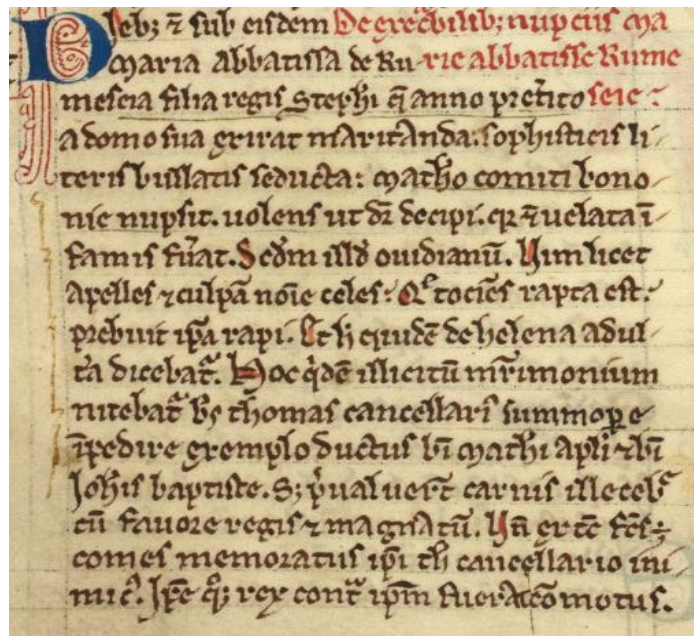


Figure 14 *Historia Anglorum*: © The British Library Board, London BL MS Royal 14, C VII, 55r. Available at [http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=royal\\_ms\\_14\\_c\\_vii\\_f001v](http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=royal_ms_14_c_vii_f001v) (accessed November 10, 2015)

Written in Matthew’s own hand, and represented in Figure 14 above, the entry about Marie and the basis for her marriage of 112 words offers a unique interpretation:

At this time also this woman, Marie, the abbess of Romsey, daughter of King Stephen, who from the previous year had exited from her house to be married—seduced by sophisticated letters—to Matthew, the Count of Boulogne. Willing, it is said, to be deceived, because the veiled woman had also been disreputable. According to Ovid “You may call it violence and cover your blame with a name: a woman who is raped that often is offering herself up to rape.” And indeed for this reason, Helen was called an adulteress. For this reason too Saint Thomas, the chancellor was fervently striving to prevent this illegal marriage, by the example provided by Saint Matthew the Apostle and Saint John the Baptist; but the enticements of the flesh prevailed, with the support of the king and with the barons. Whence from then the count was made an enemy of Thomas the Chancellor; the king himself had been provoked against him [Thomas].<sup>97</sup>

<sup>97</sup> This account comes from London BL Royal MS 14, C VII, 55r. Its transcription was taken from Frederic Madden ed., *Matthaei Parisiensis, Monachi Sancti Albani, Historia Anglorum* (London, 1866), 1:314-315. The translation is mine, except for the Ovidian quotation that comes from Thea S. Thorsen, *Ovid’s Early Poetry: From his Single Heroides to his Remedia Amoris* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 138.

This account is prefaced by one of Matthew's rubrics. Penned in red ink throughout the *Historia*, these headings pick out key themes and events. In reference to Marie, the red ink strikingly punctuates Matthew's scornful appraisal of her reputation and choices: *De execrabilibus nuptiis Mariae, abbatisae Rumeseiae*.<sup>98</sup> Likewise, his pluralizing of *marriages* immediately alerts the reader as to an obvious problem: why is the abbess, who is married to Christ, engaging in a(nother) marriage? Marie emerges from Matthew's account as a woman who has been willingly deceived and seduced by the literary creations of some man. Substantial gaps in the narrative lead the reader to believe that it was the Count of Boulogne who wrote these sophisticated letters. In fact, if there were any letters, they could not have been written by the Count of Boulogne because the last count of Boulogne, William, was dead. Matthew Paris has ignored the vital chronology and created a seduction between a *bona fide* count and the Abbess of Romsey. This inaccurate picture furthermore ignores the fact that Marie is not solely the daughter of King Stephen but also of Matilda of *Boulogne*. If the reader, however, were loath to accept Matthew Paris's own appraisal of such a woman, her duplicity and tactics, as he presents them, are further supported by the authority of Ovid.

This quotation from Ovid's *Heroides* or *Epistulae Heroidum* (*Book of the Heroines*) introduces the notion of *raptus* into Matthew Paris's account. Before this point, no use of the term or any implication has been made. The conclusions about women and rape that Matthew borrows from Ovid are recriminatory and one-sided. They derive from Ovid's depiction of the nymph, Oenone, who was the wife of Paris. Her bitterness toward Helen prompts the nymph's castigations and reprimands. Jealousy and female judgment combine to lash out at and accuse

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<sup>98</sup> London BL Royal MS 14, C VII, 55r: "Of the most awful marriages of Marie, the abbess of Romsey."

Helen for her “role” in the Trojan War. The implication for Marie is that the blame (*culpam*) for her own *raptus* and subsequent marriage can similarly be laid at her feet. Furthermore, Matthew Paris presents Marie as simple and impious in “being seduced by sophisticated letters.”<sup>99</sup> He escalates his attack against her, claiming she was “willing to be deceived” and “disreputable.”<sup>100</sup> Such vitriol culminates then in his equating of the violence against a woman, like Helen or Marie, with her “offering herself up to rape.”<sup>101</sup>

This victim-blaming device appears in another of Matthew Paris’s writings about Marie, the *Abbreuatio Chronicorum*.<sup>102</sup> Its abbreviated description of Marie’s seduction presents her as “*forte volens*” or wanting it badly.<sup>103</sup> This passage also extols the Chancellor, Thomas Becket, for his attempts to prevent the marriage, further explaining that his strife with Matthew, Count of Boulogne, was but the first seed of his persecutions.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Frederic Madden ed., *Matthaei Parisiensis, Monachi Sancti Albani, Historia Anglorum, Historia Minor, Abbreuatio Chronicorum Angliae* (London, 1869), 3:194.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.: “*Maria, abbatissa....seducta, forte volens, Mathaeo, Bononiae comiti, nupsit. Quod matrimonium illicitum nitebatr Thomas cancellarius impedire, sed praevaluit carnalis suggestio. Et hoc fuit primum seminarium persecutionis, quam postea multiplicatam sustinuit beatus Thomas.*”

<sup>104</sup> The third of Matthew’s references to Marie comes from the *Chronica Majora*, and like the *Abbreuatio*, it indicts Marie and praises Thomas. Unlike the other two accounts, it explains that from the marriage, two daughters were born. *Matthaei Parisiensis, Monachi Sancti Albani, Chronica Majora*, ed. Henry Richards Luard (London, 1874), 2:216. It largely provides the same information, with minimal omissions and additions. “Also, Mary abbess of Rumsey, daughter of king Stephen, married Matthew count of Boulogne, to whom she bore two daughters. For this sin, Thomas the king’s chancellor, who opposed this unlawful marriage, like John the Baptist, was exposed to many insidious acts from the count.” This translation comes from Roger of Wendover’s *Flowers of History*, trans. By J. A. Giles, (London, 1849), 1:533.

Of these three sources, the *Historia Anglorum* most overwhelmingly elevated Thomas Becket into the uncontested hero of the narrative. The saint not only merited Matthew Paris's attention and approval, but also his comparison with one of the most powerful of all New Testament saints, John the Baptist. The two saints were joined by their unflinching opposition to controversial marriages. In the case of John the Baptist, his denunciation of the union of Herod Antipas and Herodias, the ex-wife of his brother, directly led to his martyrdom. Therefore just as John had suffered for his faith, so too had Thomas, who became *inimicus* [the enemy] to Matthew of Boulogne and a target of the king's anger. Thomas's own martyrdom could be, in Matthew Paris's estimation, linked to his opposition of the abbess of Romsey's marriage.<sup>105</sup>

As part of the renowned St. Albans chroniclers, Matthew Paris was one of the most prolific. Nevertheless his major predecessor, Roger of Wendover (d.1236), indisputably had a profound impact on his work.<sup>106</sup> Roger, along with other twelfth-century chroniclers, completely ignored the 1160 abduction-marriage of Marie and Matthew's as well as their future role in Boulogne. In Roger's major work, *Flores Historiarum*, however, many of Marie and Matthew's family members appear, including King Stephen, Queen Matilda of Boulogne, Eustace, Henry of Blois, Constance of France, and Philip of Flanders. Roger's omission therefore cannot be put down to an avoidance of the larger Blois-Boulogne narrative. Notwithstanding, the silence surrounding Marie and Matthew's marriage is vast, as the chronicle discusses concurrent events,

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<sup>105</sup> By exploiting the John the Baptist narrative, Matthew was also able to indulge in some self-promotion of his own. Although reference to John the Baptist's martyrdom occurs in three of the four Gospels, it is specifically allocated to Saint Matthew's Gospel. This choice permitted the chronicler to advertise his own name within the account. His self-glorification can be further seen in his sandwiching of "Matthew" between two uses of "*beati*," thus situating himself within the physical confines of saintliness.

<sup>106</sup> Matthew incorporated much of Roger's *Flores Historiarum* into his work. For a discussion of the complex intertwining of their writings, see the entirety of Chapter 2 "Matthew Paris and Roger Wendover" in Vaughan, *Matthew Paris*, 21-34.

such as King Henry II's siege in Toulouse and the subsequent betrothal between children of the two rival kings, Henry and Louis VII. So obvious is the omission that it was noted by J. A. Giles in his English translation of the *Flores Historiarum*. In order to plug the hole, Giles provides a footnote in which he cites the entirety of Matthew Paris's *Chronica Majora* account.<sup>107</sup>

### *Le non-dit*

Understanding this great silence surrounding Marie leads us to Pierre Macherey's theory of *le non-dit*, or the unspoken, that probes the unsaid and unwritten to understand the implications of absence. Macherey's theorizing about the production of literary texts parallels Hayden White's efforts regarding the interpretation of history. Both scholars question, "What is it?" at the start of their writing. Macherey's question grasps at defining literary criticism.<sup>108</sup> The entirety of his work can be seen as the struggle to answer this "deceptively simple" question.<sup>109</sup> Two chapters in Macherey's work in particular are of interest to this exploration of the ignored and omitted in medieval chronicles, such as Roger of Wendover and Roger Hoveden: "Implicit and Explicit" and "The Spoke and the Unspoken." Circling around the same quarry in different

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<sup>107</sup> Roger of Wendover's *Flowers of History*, trans. By J. A. Giles, (London, 1849), 1:533. Giles's translation comes from the *Chronica Majora*. As far as finding an analogue for Matthew Paris's work, it is likely that there was not any source that inspired his vitriol towards Marie. The most likely stimulus derived from his consuming veneration and defense of Thomas Becket. Matthew, like Roger, had read and used Robert of Torigni, but as we have seen Robert never assigned such egregious behavior to Marie, only to Matthew, her husband. See John Gillingham, "Events and Opinions: Norman and English Views of Aquitaine," in *The World of Eleanor of Aquitaine: Literature and Society in Southern France between the Eleventh and Thirteenth Centuries*, eds. Marcus Graham Bull and Catherine Léglu (Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 2005) 64.

<sup>108</sup> Pierre Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production*, trans. Geoffrey Wall (London: Routledge, Kegan, and Paul, 1978), 3.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*



packaging, the two chapters interrogate the “language of the book.”<sup>110</sup> Positioning criticism within this context, Macherey sets out the illusion of completeness within this language:

Explicit is to implicit as explication is to implication: these oppositions derive from the distinction between the manifest and the latent, the discovered and the concealed. That which is formally accounted for, expressed, and even concluded, is explicit: the “explicit” at the end of a book echoes the “incipit” at the beginning, and indicates that “all is (has been) said”.<sup>111</sup>

Macherey’s referencing of medieval beginnings and endings is helpful for our examination. The chronicle might easily boast its intention of making historical events explicit to the reader, thus rendering that event within the “closed circle” of the written account.<sup>112</sup>

Macherey’s exploration into the juxtaposing of the spoken and the unspoken provides a subtle shift from the language to the silence of the book. For us, a slight tweak or modification is necessary to incorporate *le non-dit* into our examination of the silences in the medieval historical narratives. Macherey himself provides the case for this modification: “What is important in the work is what it does not say. This is not the same as the careless notation ‘what it refuses to say’, although that would in itself be interesting: a method might be built on it, with the task of *measuring silences*, whether acknowledged or unacknowledged.”<sup>113</sup> It is this unexamined path that applies more solidly to the following examination and explication of the chronicle silences.

As such, in Roger of Wendover’s case, his silence can perhaps be partially explained by the particular twist he gives to accounts concerning King Henry II himself. Roger, even in the most problematic of circumstances, succeeds in assigning noble motives to the English king and absolving him of severe wrongdoing. For example, Roger reports a curious and uncommon detail

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<sup>110</sup> Macherey, *Literary Production*, 83.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 82-83.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 83: Macherey’s term “closed circle” in his description of the language of the book.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

about the siege of Toulouse in 1159, describing how Henry did not “attack the city itself out of respect to the French king, whose sister Constance had married the count of Toulouse and borne him children.”<sup>114</sup> More astonishing, however, is Roger’s treatment of the assassination of Thomas Becket. While he recounts the Christmas murder in great detail, he offers only the gentlest of rebukes against the king, generally laboring to minimize the extent of Henry’s involvement.<sup>115</sup> As such, Roger’s whitewashing of painful truths would necessitate either reworking the Marie-Matthew abduction scandal or omitting it entirely. After all, Thomas’s objection to the marriage was, in the words of Matthew Paris, *seminarium persecutionis* [the seed of persecution] by Count Matthew of Boulogne, an act that provoked the king’s anger against him. Roger of Wendover, like other contemporary chroniclers, omitted any mention of the marriage, and the silence about the marriage in 1160 reverberates with anxiety and careful circumspection in the opening years of a new monarch.<sup>116</sup>

#### *More family satire*

Within the larger family narrative surrounding Marie, the use of satire was wielded as a weapon to frame memory and memorials. Whereas Roger of Wendover reported a kindly view of Constance in her new role as Countess of Toulouse, not all contemporary writers followed suit, including Stephen of Rouen, author of the *Draco Normannicus*. According to Michael Twomey, this fictional letter from King Arthur to the English king represents “royal propaganda for Henry II,” and such “fictional letters could have local, political, and even satirical

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<sup>114</sup> Roger of Wendover’s *Flowers of History*, 1:532-533.

<sup>115</sup> Roger of Wendover’s *Flowers of History*, 2:15-19.

<sup>116</sup> The silence, of course, works both ways. As discussed above within Comedy, family genealogies omitted information, leaving potentially scandalous material alone.

significance.”<sup>117</sup> Often translated as the *Norman Standard*, Stephen of Rouen's *Draco Normannicus* presents Constance, in the guise of a selfish, foolish woman with little honor or loyalty, as a traitor to England, having abandoned it to return to France so she could bed down with the enemy in Toulouse. Its satiric account was either ignorant of or dismissive of the facts surrounding Constance's position in the second half of the 1150s. Remaining in England after the death of her mother-in-law, husband, and father-in-law could have resulted in a new marriage arranged by Henry II. This had certainly been the case for her former sister-in-law, Isabel de Warenne, William's widow. For Constance, the insult to her natal and agnatic families would have run deep, to say the least. Not only was Henry Plantagenet the man who assumed the English crown instead of her husband, he was also the enemy of her brother, Louis VII. Given this set of circumstances, Constance returned to France and was quickly married to the young count of Toulouse.

By the time of the siege of Toulouse in 1159, Constance was the mother of at least one surviving son, who at the time was France's *dauphin*, or heir to the throne. The writer, Stephen of Rouen, however, took a dim view of Constance, depicting her, in her new role as Countess of Toulouse and Saint Giles, as a traitor to England and to Henry II. Set in the context of the tug-of-war between the English and the combined French-Toulouse forces, Stephen singles out Constance as being at the heart of the troubles, accusingly indicting her of treachery, “Had the deceitful, cunning, fickle, Constance not submitted herself to the count by a second oath.”<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Michael Twomey, “‘Morgan le Fay, Empress of the Wilderness’: A Newly Recovered Arthurian Text in London, BL Royal 12.C.ix” in *Arthurian Literature*, eds. Elizabeth Archibald and David F. Johnson, (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell and Brewer 2008), 74.

<sup>118</sup> In Richard Howlett, ed., *Chronicles of the Reigns of Stephen, Henry II, and Richard I* (London, 1885), 2:608, lines 429-434: “For that time/thereupon, if not surrendered, the crafty Toulouse will yield/It will rush to the French, because better that folly./[Than] as formerly subjected to the law of Poitiers/that the Count of Aegidi maintains by deceitful skill./Had the

Punning upon her name to call her inconstant as well as deceitful and cunning, Stephen calls attention to her second marital oath as further evidence of her treachery. In essence, the poet accuses Constance of duplicity for her marriage to Raymond of Toulouse. Echoes of the blame assigned to Marie by Matthew Paris can be heard: Constance is held singlehandedly responsible for leaving England, remarrying, and choosing someone particularly loathsome to Henry II.

Despite the rich tradition of anti-female satire, the genre was not confined to condemning medieval women. Another of Marie's in-laws—Pierre, the younger brother of her husband, Matthew—was posthumously on the receiving end of a similarly scathing verbal attack. Once again, echoes from Marie's experiences are audible in the reproaches that the anonymous author blasts at Pierre. Forming, what is in essence, his obituary, it became part of the *Gestes des Évêques de Cambrai*. Significantly the events and chronology are intertwined with Marie and Matthew's. Around 1167, while Marie and Matthew were still married, Pierre was elected Bishop of Cambrai. Of Pierre's time as the Bishop of Cambrai and subsequent departure, another writer, the chronicler Gilbert of Mons (d. 1225), furnishes a somewhat clinical and politically-correct review,

Peter was elected, but was never honored with sacred ordinations, and he did not oppress churches, nor adorn priests, and he governed the episcopate of Cambrai peacefully for several years. Finally, at the counsel and suggestion of his brother the count of Flanders and Vermandois, Peter assumed knightly office, setting aside the dignity of the episcopate.<sup>119</sup>

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deceitful, cunning, fickle, Constance not submitted herself to the count by a second oath. "Tunc, si non cessit, cedet Tholosa dolosa, Irruet in Francos, hinc magis ille furor./Exititi haec quondam Pictavis subdita juri/Egidii, consul quam tenet arte, dolo./Ars, dolus, inconstans Constantia ni subiisset/Consulis ejusdem jura secunda. Thori."

<sup>119</sup> Laura Napran, trans., *Gilbert of Mons Chronicle of Hainaut* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell, 2005), 46-7.

Upon the dissolution of their marriage in 1169, Marie and Matthew worked to secure their daughters' futures by naming their uncle, Philip, Count of Flanders, as their guardian. After Matthew's death, however, Philip handed over the guardianship and running of Boulogne to Pierre, who was pulled from his ecclesiastical office, knighted, and married. From the obituary's title, *De Petro Camarencensis electo* [Regarding/About Pierre, the elected of Cambrai], the anonymously written memorial presents a derisive assessment of Pierre, his family, and his priorities. Composed in rhyming octosyllabic couples, its sing-song meter does little to instill respect for the dead. This excerpt in particular denounces him as a man of woeful priorities,

Elected while still young  
Because of good character  
Capable of holding office  
Unless he took a spouse.

But as brother of a barren count  
Who was without children,  
And leaving a county devoid of heirs  
Although he should not have,  
As they are all from God,  
He preferred a wife.

But he who neglects the divine,  
Does not treat with himself correctly  
As shown by this example:

In less than a year he had lost  
both his life and marriage  
For them he refused the clergy:  
Because death snatched him,  
And his hope vanished.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Printed in Charles de Smedt, *Gesta Pontificum Cameracensium: Gestes Des Évêques De Cambrai De 1092 À 1138*, (Paris, 1860), 243: "Electus tamen juvenis/cum esset bonae indolis/tenere posset ordinem/ni post duxisset conjugem./Sed frater comes sterilis/cum esset absque liberis,/ne comitatus viduus/vacaret ab heredibus,/uxorem, non ut debuit,/his quae sunt Dei pretulit./Sed qui divina negligit/non recte sibi consult:/quod hic exemplo docuit./Qui infra annum perdidit/et vitam et conjugium/pro quo negavit clericum:/nam mors eum surripuit/et spes ejus evanuit."

This mocking retrospective of a young man's life fits in with the larger picture of Matthew of Boulogne's second marriage to Aliénor de Vermandois. As noted before, she was the sister of Matthew's sister-in-law, Isabelle. The two families were intertwined through a number of marriages. These unions proved to be childless or unsuccessful for other health-related reasons. What is likely at the heart of both Pierre's resignation from his episcopal office and marriage as well as of Matthew's second marriage was Count Philip's determination to have an heir, preferably male, who was without the taint of suspicion. Philip stood to lose the lands that his wife, Isabelle, had brought to their marriage, that is, the lands of the Vermandois. Both of Philip's attempts for his brothers, Pierre and Matthew, to provide this all-important heir ended unsuccessfully and the Vermandois lands escheated to the French Crown.<sup>121</sup>

In order to make sense of these satires and understand why Marie, Constance, and Pierre were singled out for blame, we must look to the creators themselves. All three of the satirists, Matthew Paris, Stephen of Rouen, and the anonymous obituary writer, were likely clerics. In their portrayals, we can perceive political and religious antagonism toward noblewomen and men who had purportedly used their positions of power and family connections to effect controversial courses of action. Significantly, in all three cases, the reputations of political and church leaders were threatened or at least compromised. What appears most troubling to the satirists is that Marie and her in-laws had acted selfishly and thoughtlessly. Further accusations of making imprudent choices—being seduced, marrying an enemy, forgetting one's obligations to religious office—justified these satires in judging, denouncing, and condemning even as these accusations warranted the generic choice of satire in the first place. Such literary censuring of personal

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<sup>121</sup> The stages by which Philip Augustus finally received the lands in full can be seen in John W. Baldwin, *The Government of Philip Augustus: Foundations of French Royal Power in the Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 80, 187, and 200.

choice can be clearly read in the threat within Pierre's obituary: do what your childless brother says, prefer a wife to God, and punishment in the form of death is sure to follow. Prejudicial commentary was not an uncommon characteristic of the religious chroniclers in general. For these writers, however, they made their own choices of mimicking Ovid, fitting themselves into the pantheon of Latin satirists, and pronouncing against others based upon their own cultural, sexual, and political biases. Only slightly veiling their arrogance, these writers judged others for acts they deemed worthy of the literary and highly public excoriation inherent in satire.

Of all the modes of emplotment, Satire wields the strongest literary blow and carves out the most clearly defined role for the "historian" who is creating the satiric narrative of events. As a "drama of diremption," it cuts and scatters the victims, exposing them publicly to the writer's caustic wit and verbal prowess.<sup>122</sup> The twelfth-century Latin satirists particularly targeted women, thus combining ridicule with judgmental condemnation and anti-female rhetoric. These writers lauded their abilities to model themselves after the great master, Ovid, flattering and imitating him in style, language, and scope. Matthew Paris, reckoned himself a continuator of this tradition. In his account, he emplotted Marie as an adulteress woman. Not content to label her as a "daughter of Eve," Matthew chose an example from antiquity and represented Marie as a daughter of Helen of Troy. All of his chronicle entries about Marie stand alone as the only disparaging accounts about her.

#### *One Victorian emplotment*

In 1850, the scholar, Mary Anne Everett Green, published the first volume of her series, *Lives of the Princesses of England*. Her comprehensive research pulled together a number of the chronicle and administrative sources, many of which are used in this dissertation. Everett

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<sup>122</sup> The *OED* defines diremption as, "A forcible separation or severance."

Green's approach to these documents and her interpretations of them, however, differ significantly from those that I have offered. Of Marie, she wrote passionately and defensively,

Regardless of all the vows, then considered so sacred, which bound her to a life of perpetual virginity, he [Henry II], in 1160, offered the hand of the young abbess to Matthew of Alsace, younger son of...[the] Earl of Flanders.... [T]he helpless and frightened abbess was forcibly conveyed from the scenes of peaceful retirement, over which she had so long presided, and before she had time to recover from her astonishment...she was compelled...to utter at the nuptial altar vows which could not be breathed by a veiled nun...<sup>123</sup>

Without a doubt, Marie has existed over the centuries generally dressed as a victim, an abbess abducted from the life she had known since early childhood and one to which she would eventually return. Everett Green concludes her heartbreaking emplotment of a tragic Marie by commenting upon the returned nun's lonely death, "Her funeral was conducted without more ceremony than that observed at the obsequies of any other of the saintly sisterhood, without any one of her own kindred to shed a tear.... This royal daughter of England found her last resting-place, after having spent thirteen years in her second seclusion...."<sup>124</sup> This bleak obituary does not take into account Marie's second exit from the nunnery to care for her daughters after Matthew's death, Marie's dynamism in continuing to ensure smooth running in county affairs, or Marie's generosity toward the nuns of Sainte-Austreberte. It reimagines Marie as living thirteen silent, lonely years within the religious enclosure, suffering for her sin.

#### *My (emplotted) Conclusion*

Positioning Marie as a victim similarly requires maintaining a blind eye to the many opportunities that Marie had to escape Matthew and her marriage much sooner in the marriage. As I have already noted, there were ample escape routes and people willing and able to remove

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<sup>123</sup> Everett Green, *LPE*, 1:197.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*: 1:212.



her from the accursed marriage during those nine years. Similarly, not factoring in Marie's inclusion in Alexander's last threat of excommunication misses out an important point in the overall narrative; by this stage, she is no longer considered blameless. As such, the conclusions that have been gaining support throughout this dissertation lead me to write Marie in a narrative in which, as a woman mindful of the circumstances and her responsibilities, she made pragmatic, necessary choices. My own emplotment of the Marie-Matthew narrative then combines elements from at least three modes: Tragedy, Comedy, and Romance. Through my own filters of learning, research, and life, the plot naturally casts Marie as a woman making difficult decisions in light of the straitened circumstances that life had presented her. Given the tragic nature of losing her parents and brothers and witnessing the bitter compromises made with the Plantagenets, Marie had nevertheless been heir to a lineage that demonstrated its commitment to duty, family loyalty, and responsibility. Consequently, the story adds up to one in which a knowledgeable woman finds herself in a potentially dangerous and vulnerable position in England under a manipulative and ambitious king.

By 1160, the year of the Marie's marriage to Matthew, Henry II's goals of reinstating the status quo of his grandfather's reign were far from achieved. Given the family's loss of land under his rule and William's obligatory homage to the new king, Marie undoubtedly had reason to consider the possibility of a new life and role in Boulogne. Putting distance between Henry II and herself and fulfilling her legacy as Matilda's daughter must have influenced her choice at this juncture. Marie's dynamism as an administrator and manager had already been proven at Lillechurch Priory and Romsey Abbey, and the need for strong leadership in Boulogne must have been a tempting proposition. Pressure from the people of the county would equally have been compelling at this time.

Marie's relationship with Matthew is more difficult to gauge, however. The possibility exists that she and he had already known each other before the marriage was orchestrated, particularly in light of their parents' somewhat intertwined relationships.<sup>125</sup> Marie and Matthew were third cousins, who were similarly related to Henry II in the same degree. Certainly, the physical proximity of Boulogne and Flanders would have provided the occasions for a meeting on the Continent, if not in England itself. Marie's potential complicity in the marriage, however, did not necessitate their knowing one another. Similarly, the subterfuge of abduction and *raptus* likely absolved Marie initially from the stigma of participating in the marriage accord. My discussion of Caroline Dunn's work on stolen women forms the basis for this conjecture. While it may be argued that a child oblate could grow up wholly ignorant of secular family life, we have seen how Marie's movements from 1148 to 1154 paralleled significant changes in the fortunes of her family and the civil war, and how Marie's religious houses during these years were situated in convenient locations for travel to and from her mother. Just as the themes of successful marriage and close family ties are visible in the contemporary histories of the Boulonnais counts, Marie had herself witnessed an extraordinary partnership between her parents, Matilda of Boulogne and Stephen of Blois.

Hayden White recognized the overlapping nature of "proper history" and "metahistory," seeing that rather than building up defenses between the two to keep them separate, each had a part to play in the "interpretation of historiography."<sup>126</sup> White took the controversial argument further in supporting the belief that "there can be no 'proper history' without the pre-supposition

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<sup>125</sup> See in particular Chapter Five, "The Apex of Boulonnais Power and the Fickleness of Fate" in Tanner, *Families*, 181-243.

<sup>126</sup> White, "Interpretation in History," 282.

of a full-blown ‘metahistory’ by which to justify those interpretative strategies necessary for the representation of a given segment of the historical process.”<sup>127</sup> For most medieval historians, this relationship and symbiosis of the two types of history constitute powerful tools in our abilities to make sense of documents that were written at a time and by people with vastly differing sensibilities regarding the nature of “history” and its documentation. Without the impetus and drive to pan for meaning in the least likely of places, such as in land deeds or medieval annals, women’s history in particular could not have developed into the field that it has. Hayden White’s scholarship has undergone a revival over the last ten or so years; reprints of his major works attest to this resurgence. New research and writing by other scholars (not solely historians) further attests to the flexibility and applications of many of White’s ideas.

Applying White’s theory of emplotment to the medieval sources in this dissertation has breathed new life into them. This exercise, however, has not been merely for the sake of casting an interdisciplinary eye over the evidence. It has instead enabled us to scrutinize motive, voice, and intention in sources as disparate as seals and satirical poems. The strength of this exercise has similarly allowed the sources to be released from the confines of expectation and deliver some unexpected messages. For example, the family histories of the Counts of Boulogne and Counts of Flanders did more than recount birth, deaths, and marriages; they also emplotted narratives of hope for members of Marie’s and Matthew’s separate and combined families. Depending upon the needs of each, the different genealogies emphasized legitimate rule and noble status. The value of such genealogies was not limited to the twelfth century, however, as

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid, 283.

evident in the lavish production of the Counts of Boulogne for Catherine de Medici in the sixteenth century.

Similarly, by using Pope Alexander III's substantial letter collection, we could point to both trends and emphases as well as anxieties and intrigues during his rule. His sustained disapproval of Marie and later, more limited disapproval of Constance, concerned their choices regarding marital and sexual status. More than spiritual and legal concerns motivated him, as he was caught up in potentially ruinous political and practical affairs. While we might not consider the pope's correspondence as history writing, we often treat medieval chronicles as such. This chapter's examination of the metahistory of these sources has highlighted how individual chroniclers promoted, exonerated, and ignored people and events to fit their version of the truth. Perhaps Matthew Paris's depiction of Marie in the *Historia Anglorum* represents the most striking example of a medieval writer intentionally molding his histories and emplotting his narratives. Not content with portraying Marie in a negative light, he chose to excoriate her verbally by framing her abduction in terms of a woman being raped because she wanted to be. In order to validate his work and reputation, Matthew imitated the ancient master of satire, Ovid. Matthew took the mimicry a step further, however, engaging in his own self-promotion by associating himself with John the Baptist and Thomas Becket. Matthew Paris's inaccurate use of details moreover within the narrative further justifies the caution that some but not all modern scholars have flagged when using his chronicles.

Consequently, in light of these emplotments, the question remains, is Marie's story knowable? Before I attempt to answer that question in the conclusion of this dissertation, I am presenting "A fanciful modern romance" to emphasize some of the tropes and images that resonate in the sources, particularly the ones that directly connect us to Marie.

*A fanciful modern romance*

Devout but wise, the Abbess of ancient lineage, mindful of her obligation to fulfil her Christian duty to the lands and people whom God had entrusted to her forebears, daringly left the safety and confines of her beloved Abbey. Orphaned by the cruelties of death, this royal daughter of England ventured forth across the sea, assuming the great burdens of leadership. Through marriage she was joined with a knight of noble birth, renowned for his great beauty, valor, and honor. There was none more comely nor faithful than he. With godly intent, the couple as countess and count ruled the lands wisely for many years. They brought prosperity and safety to their people, serving God through generous support of the monasteries and churches within their borders, and faithfully defending their overlord, the noble and illustrious king of France. Undeterred by threats and dangers from abroad, the countess dutifully warned him of plots and perils of which she had learned through her strategic vigilance.

In order to preserve their sacred patrimony from those enemies who would see it destroyed and removed from the bosom of their affection, the couple provided two heirs who would in time take up the reins of power and rule wisely and justly over the ancient lands and people that God had entrusted to their forebears. In time, God saw fit to gently separate the countess and count, and she was safely returned to the nest of religion.

Rejoicing in the successes of her rule and content in the nunnery, the Lady Marie lovingly and generously supported the sisters with whom she lived. As for the count, he too looked to religion for his future, providing generously to a nearby monastery. Struck down however by the bolt of a crossbow, the valiant, chain-mailed knight was laid to rest in this holy house, entombed in costly black marble with his sword and faithful dogs.

God, in his wisdom, had brought the count quickly to his eternal home. In the end, countess and count, as Christian sister and brother, rested for all eternity within two leagues of one another and were lovingly remembered by their daughters and heirs for generations to come.

## THESIS CONCLUSUS—CONCLUSIONS AND SUMMATIONS

Matthew Paris's choice words for his rubric introducing Marie and her most deplorable marriages reflects a conscious decision on his part to portray the abbess of Romsey as an adulterous woman comparable to Helen of Troy. The contributor to the *Continuatio Bruxellensis*, like many who wrote genealogies of the family, chose instead to describe the family in positive and glowing terms, particularly in reference to Matthew. In yet another version, Marie depicted herself as the eyes and ears of her lord, Louis VII, even as she emphasized his obligations in return for her diligence. Given this cacophony of competing voices, can we ever hope to extract the history about Marie as a twelfth-century daughter, abbess, countess, wife and mother?

Marie of Blois-Boulogne was likely born in the early 1130s into the family of Matilda of Boulogne and Stephen of Blois. By 1135, her father was king of England, a role he assumed despite the oaths he had pledged to King Henry I's daughter, the Empress Matilda. This usurpation of the throne by Marie's father in time led to the civil war that flared up by the late 1130s, running until the early 1150s and igniting the so-called anarchy of the period. A child oblate, Marie would have likely entered her first religious house while quite young, especially with the specter of war hovering around her family. Documentary evidence regarding the house that they selected is undoubtedly confusing. Given the number of connections between Marie and Saint Sulpice-la-Forêt, there is good reason to believe that it was indeed to this Breton house that she first went. The choice to have their daughter in Brittany, not Normandy or even Boulogne, may reflect a desire to have her well away from the maelstrom of the military and political fighting yet accessible by sea.

Our first decisive documentation of Marie's early life comes from the charter in which Archbishop of Canterbury Theobald of Bec arranged the formal transfer of Marie and her companions from the Stratford house of St. Leonard's to Lillechurch Priory in Kent. The reported strife that led to their move created an enormous amount of exchanging and re-arranging of lands and properties. At both houses, Marie had resided in locations that had good proximity to and were convenient for her mother, Queen Matilda. Their mother-daughter time came to an abrupt end, however, when the queen died unexpectedly in 1152 on one of her many trips to Essex. More loss was to come for Marie over the next two years as both her brother, Eustace, and father, King Stephen, died. The family had dwindled in the course of these years down to Marie and her brother, William. His advantageous marriage to Isabel de Warenne had sealed what looked to be a solid and bright future for the young royal son.

It is true that William had lost most of his English lands to the Crown, but he could still count himself a wealthy man as a result of his wife's substantial holdings. In time, William's obligations to Henry II required him to join the fighting in Toulouse in 1159. Of that siege we know that the English forces did not remain for long but upon their return through France, William succumbed to an illness, perhaps dysentery, and died in October of that year. It is reported that he died near Poitiers. Whatever Marie felt about her brother's death, her isolation in England under the rule of a king, whom she still regarded as fraudulent and undeserving of the throne, must have been obvious. When William died, Marie was no longer living in Kent, having moved to the Hampshire town of Romsey where she was abbess of its ancient abbey.

Once again a nearby family connection existed for Marie and may have influenced this relocation. Her prominent and powerful uncle, Henry of Blois, Bishop of Winchester and abbot of Glastonbury, likely played a role in setting things up for her. His physical proximity to Marie

and his diocesan control over Romsey meant that the relationship between niece and uncle assumed a professional, spiritual role as well as one of kinship. Marie's time in Romsey lasted only some four years at most, 1156-1160. The abbey's architectural design and close relationship with the town of Romsey meant that ingress and egress could be accomplished with little effort. Thus, in 1160 when Matthew either abducted or accompanied Abbess Marie out of the religious enclosure, the two were quickly married, provoking accusations of scandalous behavior by Matthew and scheming by the manipulative, plotting King Henry II. By this time, Marie's uncle was experiencing his own problems with the new king, so Henry of Blois may not have objected to her departure. Whether Marie and her new husband already knew each other or not, it did not take long for matters to be arranged.

We are given to understand that the *seigneurs* of the Boulogne had wanted Marie, Matilda's daughter, to return to them as their Countess. We can only speculate about their feelings toward Matthew. Most likely, his presence caused controversy in light of the interdiction that his behavior immediately caused. This punishment, however, may not have been solely in reference to Matthew's actions, given the turbulence that had affected local church matters between Boulogne and the diocesan seat of Thérouanne. The impact of the interdiction is hard to gauge in light of Matthew's hiring secular clergy to replace the ejected monks. Marie and Matthew clearly attempted to make amends with the local ecclesiastical community, most especially with those who mattered most. Such efforts can be seen for example in their donation to the lepers' hospital set up by Milo II, Bishop of Thérouanne, and their generosity toward the church of St. Ulmar. The nine years of their leadership in Boulogne can be seen as a period of great activity in terms of building up the previously neglected county. Perhaps most importantly, their leadership provided direct, on-site leadership: something that neither of Marie's brothers



had been able to provide. Regional matters pivoted largely upon Boulogne's relationship with its larger neighbor, Flanders. While continental chroniclers record a rift between Matthew and his father and brother, this genuine or contrived family enmity quickly dissipated during the first year or so of the marriage. The reasons for this breach are variously given as Matthew's marriage to an abbess or Matthew's marrying without his father's consent. Regardless of the reason or of whether there was in fact a rift, within months Count Thierry and his son, Philip, were working alongside Matthew in his new capacity as Count of Boulogne. Similarly we know that Matthew and Philip enjoyed a particularly close filial relationship whereas Matthew's original alliance with Henry II suffered substantial blows over the years. In the end, Matthew and Philip supported Henry's rebellious son against him. It was in defense of Henry the Younger that Matthew was fatally wounded at Driencourt in 1173.

Later French writers tell us that Marie left the enclosure once again to take care of her two daughters (this time for about four years). Regardless of the bother to dissolve the marriage in the first place, Marie's residence at Sainte-Austreberte, and even Matthew's possibly marrying a second time, his death in essence widowed Marie. Matthew's charter from sometime before his death in 1173 still names Marie as his wife, and we can see the family bond in the construction of the château in Saint-Josse so close to Marie's new home. Thus when she exited it after Matthew's death, she was acting as a mother of two girls, who were likely aged eleven and twelve. Having their Uncle Philip (and later Pierre) as their guardians did not remove the need for having their mother in their lives. We are told that once the girls were married, Marie returned for good to Sainte-Austreberte in 1177.

By viewing Marie as a widow-countess, we can see that the county may have needed her at this time. Philip's childlessness had driven his two brothers, it appears, to make decisions that

would keep the Vermandois inheritance in the family by supplying him with a male heir. This pressure likely led Matthew to remarry and Pierre to leave the bishopric of Cambrai to marry. Philip himself sought power increasingly *Outremer* in the hope of carving out a position for himself in the Holy Land, where he eventually died in 1191. When Marie died in 1182, there was no grandiose tomb effigy to mark her burial, it seems. Her daughters, however, continued to remember their parents well after their deaths. For them, their parents remained firmly married. Marie's own obituary includes a mild rebuke about her resuming the veil after rejecting it for so long; equally at least one version reminds the reader that Marie was generous to the nuns in her house. This legacy rings true given the inclusion of the three nuns—Juliana, Erebarga, and Emelina—in the deeds discussed above as well as the land itself that she was donating to Lillechurch at the time. The emphasis upon Marie's return to the holy habit may or may not have been true. As I have suggested in this dissertation, it is more likely that Marie simply retired to the nunnery without re-establishing herself as a religious. This reading not only fits in well with Matthew's charter of 1171 in which she is twice called, *Domina Maria*, but also with Marie's ability to leave again in 1177 for some four years. Her continuing role in county affairs similarly supports this conjecture.

Marie, Constance, and the other noblewomen of this dissertation utilized legal and cultural tools to realize plans that may have been considered "off-limits" to them as women. When Marie's brother, William, died in October 1159, she must have found herself between two opposing futures: one in which she continued as the abbess of a prestigious religious abbey and one in which she became an heiress to her mother's homeland and legacy. In the former possibility, she lived near her powerful, albeit highly ambitious and self-serving, uncle but under the rule of a king she deemed a pretender. In the latter possibility, she abandoned the monastic

role she had been raised for and engaged in a secular marriage, potentially tainted by a broken religious vow. Undertaking this second path, Marie did initially escape censure. The probable mechanism for escaping it came through her and Matthew's use of a fictional *raptus*. If the couple did indeed opt for this legal crime to be laid at the feet of Matthew, they do not seem to have been overly fearful for Matthew's immediate future. His early excommunications appear to have been eventually swept away, given that he and Marie can be found in a number of charters making donations to projects sponsored by the top local clergy. The fiction of *raptus* moreover allowed Marie to leave Romsey without assuming the blame and punishment of a runaway religious. This status would have carried with it a promulgation of excommunication, her immediate return, and years of penance. This scheme worked more or less for nine years, until at least one opponent, Pope Alexander III, had had enough and included Marie in his renewed threat of excommunication against both Matthew and her.

The pope similarly took issue with the choices that Constance made in the years after Count Raymond had repudiated her in the mid-1160s. While her choice to take vows with the Hospitallers as a *consoror* was not unique for married women, Constance took them a step further than necessary. Much to the disquiet of the pope, she vowed to live a chaste life. Research has revealed how a widowed medieval woman might become a vowess, using the single vow of chastity to safeguard her body, property, and future. Constance, however, existed in the vague status of married but repudiated. Her decision then to live a chaste life in many ways resembles the choices made by vowesses. By vowing chastity, Constance in essence exploited a religious ambiguity so that she could retain her dignity and dispose of her property as she wanted.

As examined in the individual chapter conclusions above, women like Ela of Salisbury, Mary of Woodstock, and Christina of Markyate found ways to carve out the roles that they desired. Ela persistently challenged for her rights as a widow, including her holding the shrievalty of Salisbury two separate times. Her later religious endeavors led to the creation of a number of religious houses, including Lacock Abbey. Not only did it prosper under her governance but also benefited from her family's support. Mary of Woodstock, made a child oblate at an uncanonically young age, never pursued a role as an abbess. Instead we find her promoting others from the sidelines. More crucially, Mary assumed the role within the Fontevraultine tradition as Visitor. While we do not know much about her time in the position, we do know that she was able to travel because of it. Entering Amesbury in the mid-1280s, her role as Visitor came after the promulgation of *Periculoso* and thus may have been the mechanism that allowed her the privilege of leaving the enclosure. Christina of Markyate, according to her *Life*, represented a young woman of equally strong opinions and goals. Her parents had envisaged and eventually arranged a marriage for her that flew in the face of her desire to be fully espoused to God. Unlike Mary of Woodstock's ambitions to travel and enjoy freedoms, Christina found her protection in confined spaces. By seeking out hiding places that often required almost super-human qualities, Christina in time achieved her religious goals. Her choice to be a *sponsa Christi* evolved over time. Although never formally canonized, she is generally considered to be a saint as evident in the revering that appears in the *Life*. In her own time, she accepted the leadership of Markyate Priory and was regarded as the spiritual mentor of women and men alike.

At the beginning of the dissertation, we asked whether we can read medieval sources—incomplete and emplotted as they are—with a view to understanding the motivation and rationale for making choices. Each of the women in this study made transformative choices that

did not fit the recognized pattern of either secular or religious. The sources confirm through language choice how and why these women chose as they did.

From *ex* (“out of, from”) + *legō* (“choose, select, appoint”)

Finally, this study has highlighted choice in the context of all of these women, who lived in the Anglo-Norman world of the eleventh through thirteenth centuries. At key moments in their lives, the documents use the Latin verb *eligere* in its various tenses and voices to signal that a change in direction was imminent. Gunnhildr read it in the letter from Anselm, who told her that she had been chosen as Christ’s bride from her childhood. As it transpired, she chose a different identity for herself. Similarly, it is used in this same sense for Christina of Markyate who is told in a vision that the “Virgin of Virgins” had chosen her from her father’s house. In its participle form, *electa/electus*, it generally assumes a more passive voice in the sentence, and often suggests, being selected. This positive image can be linked to the use of *electa* in the Song of Songs and its developing associations with the Cult of Mary. The word was used more derisively in the obituary penned about Pierre of Flanders, *De Petro Camarencensis electo*, that lampooned him as someone with good connections and thus “electus” but without piety and a true vocation. Crucially, as reflected in the dissertation title, *Domina Maria elegit domum sibi plabilem*; the Lady Marie chose a place that pleased her. Matthew’s charter thus emphasizes the role that Marie played in selecting for herself the site of (yet another) her new life.

Choice naturally extends to the production and reception of the historical documents used to “read” the women of this dissertation. Hayden White’s theory of interpretation, when distilled down to in essence, becomes an examination of choice. Thus the intentionally or unintentionally emplotted narratives of Romance, Satire, Comedy, and Tragedy reflect choices of selection, omission, and emphasis by the purveyors of history, just as complementary choices are made by

the consumers of those narratives who must themselves decipher and translate the historical text. The ultimate aim of this study is that its own interpretations and emplotments provoke further challenges and interpretations by future producers and consumers of history.



*Figure 15 Marie's Seal 1148-1182 from Deed D46/27.  
By permission of the Master and Fellows of St John's College, Cambridge.  
Photograph by Tracy Deakin.*

## APPENDIX A: ROMSEY ABBEY IMAGES

Romsey Abbey's Convent seal, 1130.<sup>1</sup>



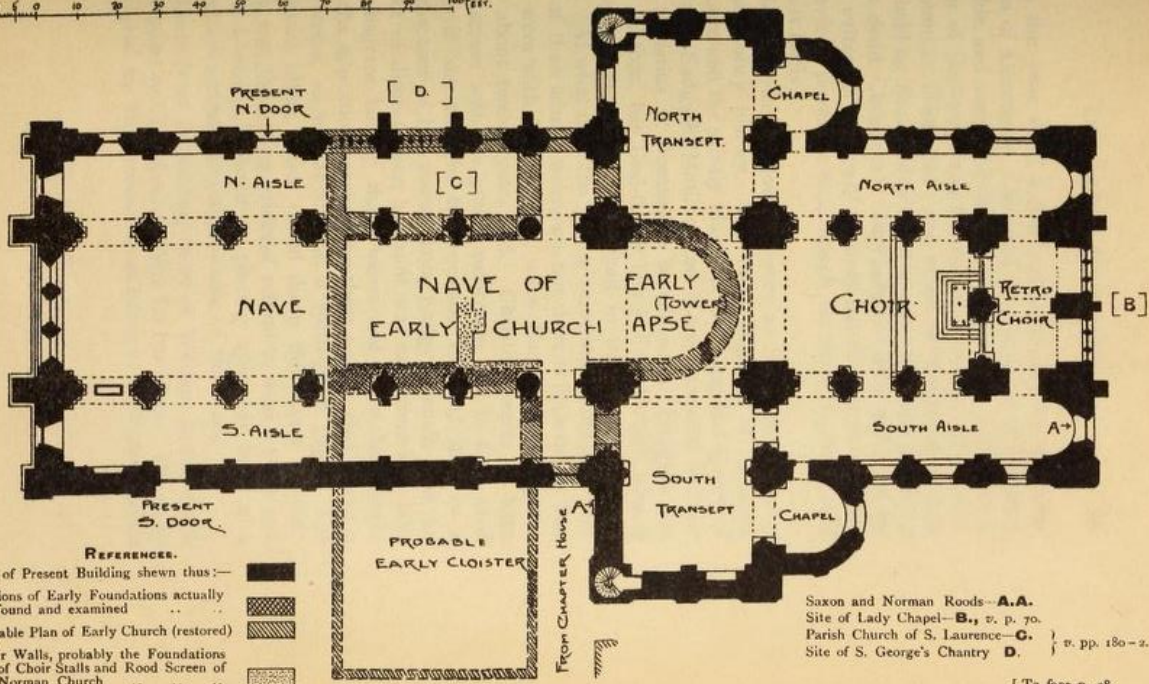
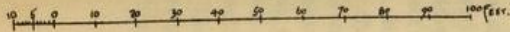
Plan of the abbey and parish church.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Henry George Downing Liveing, *Records of Romsey Abbey: An Account of the Benedictine House of Nuns, with Notes on the Parish Church and Town (AD 907-1588)*, [Abridged ed. (Winchester: Warren and Son, 1912), 32.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 52: plan of Romsey Abbey.

PLAN OF ROMSEY ABBEY.



**REFERENCES.**  
 Plan of Present Building shewn thus:—  
 Portions of Early Foundations actually found and examined .. ..  
 Probable Plan of Early Church (restored) .. ..  
 Later Walls, probably the Foundations of Choir Stalls and Rood Screen of Norman Church .. ..

Saxon and Norman Roods—**A.A.**  
 Site of Lady Chapel—**B.**, v. p. 70.  
 Parish Church of S. Laurence—**C.** } v. pp. 180-2.  
 Site of S. George's Chantry **D.**

[ To face p. 38.



## APPENDIX B: MATTHEW'S TOMB

Photos taken by author of Matthew's tomb, displayed at the Musée of Boulogne-sur-Mer.



Detail of head. Photo taken by author.



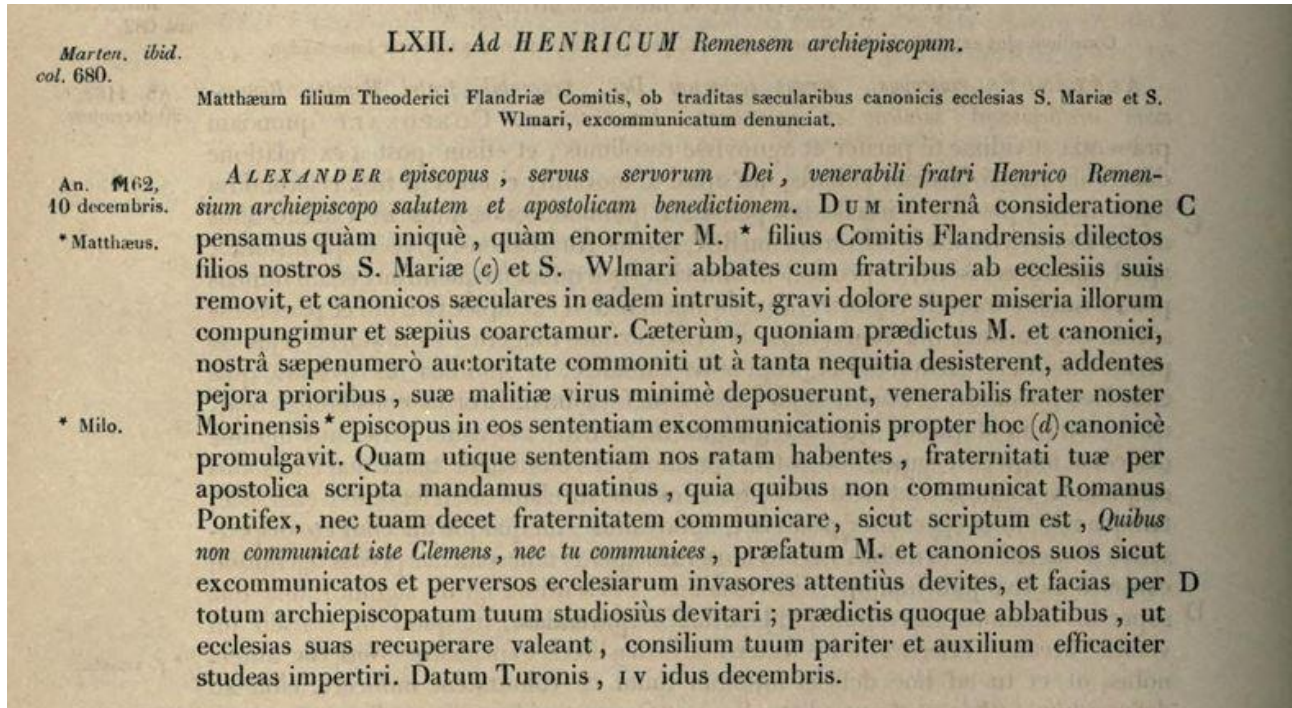
Detail of feet. Photo taken by author.





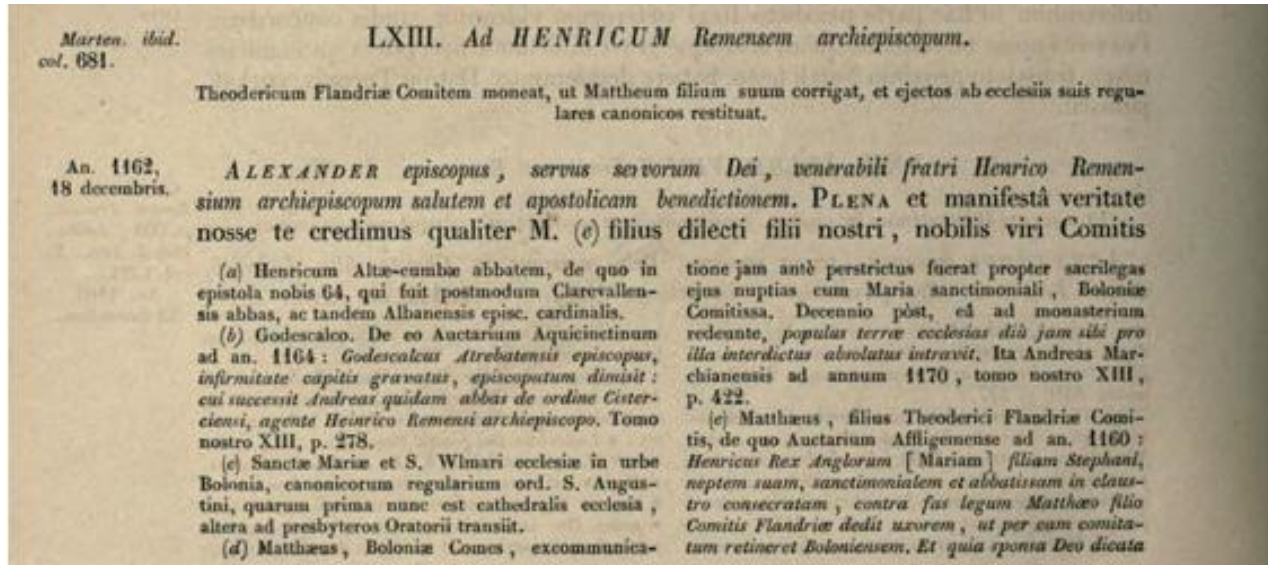
APPENDIX C: 1162 PAPAL LETTERS

Letter LXII from Pope Alexander III to Henri, Archbishop of Reims, regarding Matthew's outrageous behavior. It is dated to December 10, 1162.<sup>3</sup>



<sup>3</sup> RHGF, 15:788.

Letter LXIII from Pope Alexander III to Henri, Archbishop of Reims, continuation of Matthew's outrageous behavior with a solicitation for the help of Matthew's father, Thierry, the Count of Flanders.<sup>4</sup> It is dated to December 18, 1162.



A Flandrensis, in animæ suæ periculum, monialem Deo dicatam et in abbatissam benedictam sibi nefariè penitè et illicite copulavit Qui cum de tanta iniquitate Deo, quem offenderat, satisfacere debuisset, peccato peccatum accumulans, duos abbates de Bologna et fratres eorum, viros regulares et Deum timentes, ex ecclesiis suis violenter eiecit, et aliis quibusdam viris dissolutis intrusis, prædictos regulares nequiter exulare compellit. Unde, cum tu, ad partes illas accedens, iniquitatem istam diligenter corrigere debuisses, hoc, sicut dicitur, incorrectum et inemendatum ex impotentia potius, velut credimus, quàm ex industria dimisisti. Quia igitur nos in eo sumus loco, disponente Domino, constituti, ut et prava corrigere, et ea studeamus quæ sunt placita Domino solidare, fraternitatem tuam per apostolica scripta monemus attentius atque mandamus quatinus prædictum Comitem (a) studeas diligentius commonere, ut illum in nequitia ista nullâ ratione confoveat, sed

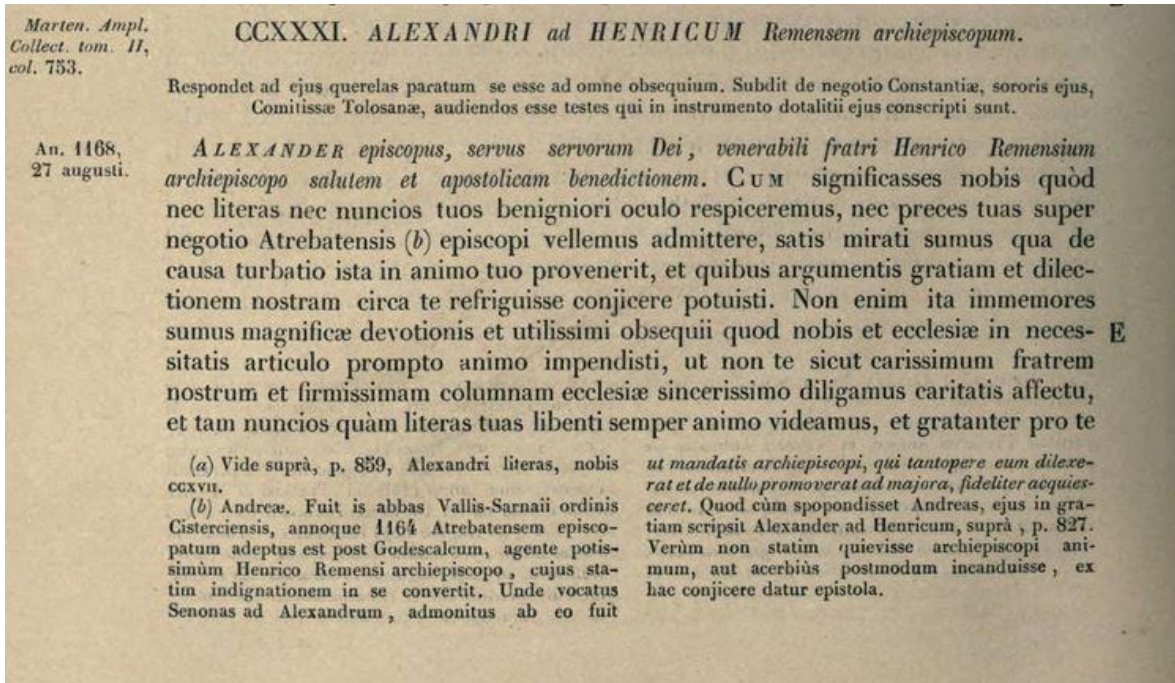
B eum, quantum in se est, quantocius super hoc corrigere non postponat: ita quòd, clericis illis excommunicatis ejectis, prædicti religiosi ad ecclesias suas liberè redire valeant, et ibi Domino pacificè deservire; alioquin timendum sibi erit ne in eum et totam terram suam divinâ ultione graviter vindicetur, et sancta Dei ecclesia diutiùs hoc dissimulare non possit. Datum Turonis, xv kal. januarii.

<sup>4</sup> RHGF, 15:788-789.



APPENDIX D: 1168 PAPAL LETTERS

Letter CCXXXI from Pope Alexander III to Henri, Archbishop of Reims, regarding the dower claim of Constance of France (the subject of the latter half of the letter).<sup>5</sup> It is dated to August 27, 1168.

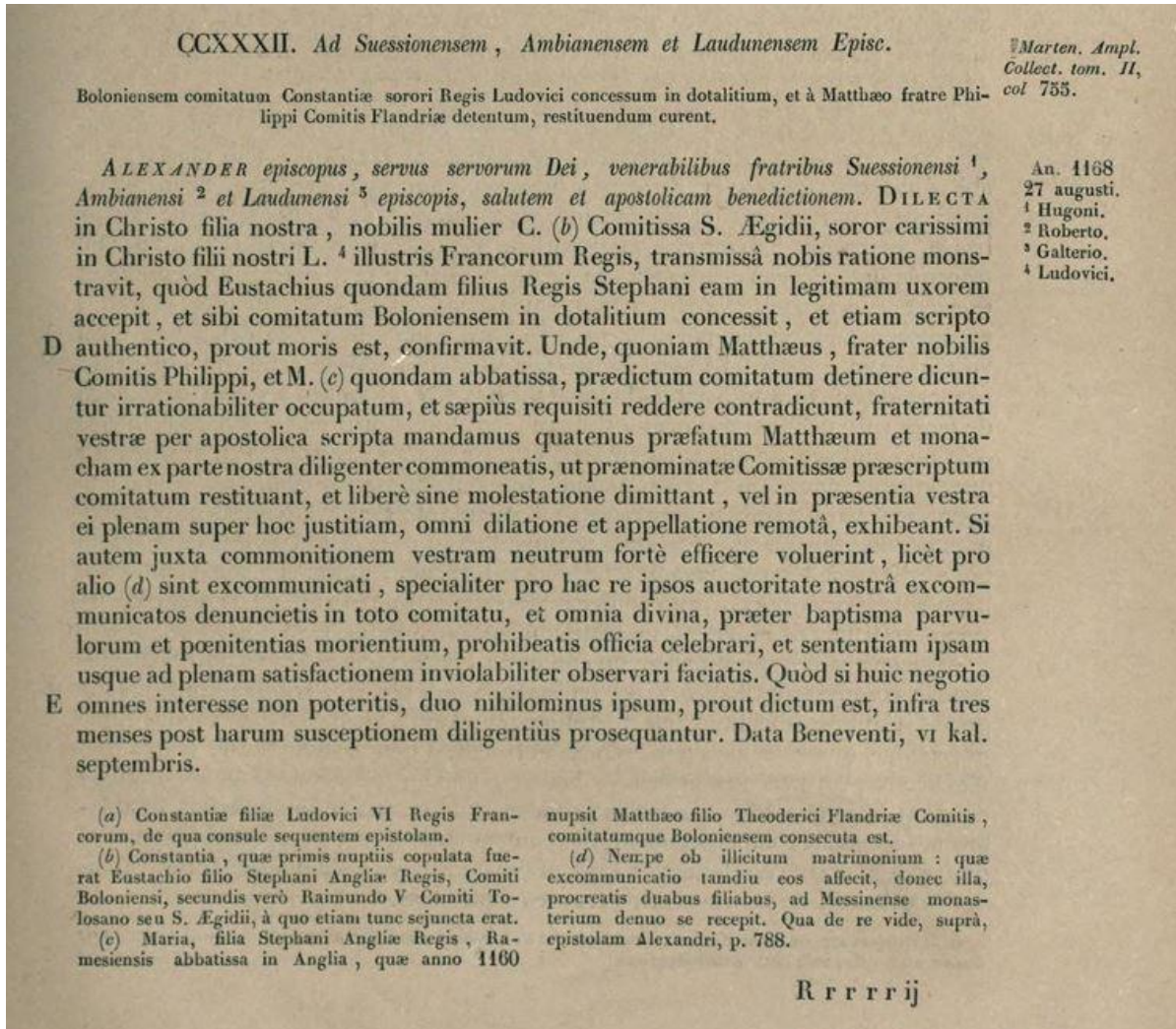


<sup>5</sup> RHGF, 15:866-867.

**A** velimus efficere quidquid cum Deo et justitia et honestate nostra possumus, et pro aliquo fratrum nostrorum essemus facturi. Nec recolimus nos unquam tuis precibus obviasse, quas salvâ formâ justitiæ et honestate nostrâ potuimus exaudire: immo plerumque præter officii nostri debitum tuæ curavimus fraternitati deferri et satisfacere voluntati. Quapropter hæc in animum tuum non descendant, sed omnem hujusmodi sollicitudinem et anxietatem deponas; et si quando petitionibus tuis non ad votum annuimus, non voluntati nostræ, sed potius meritis negotiorum ascribas. Desiderium namque, sicut diximus, et voluntatem habemus, ea quæ cordi sunt tibi gratanti animo exsequi, et votis tuis in quibus expedit benignum semper et promptum favorem præbere. Tu verò, sicut vir discretus et prudens, in omnibus agendis tuis cautè et providè ambules; suffraganeos ecclesiæ tuæ benignè et mansuetè pertractes, et de ecclesiis B. Petri principis, quæ in tua provincia constitutæ sunt, non tamquam de tuis disponas, sed eas in sua libertate relinquant. De cætero super negotio dilectæ in Christo filiæ nostræ nobilis mulieris C. (a) sororis tuæ, uxoris Comitis Tolosani, venerabilibus fratribus nostris Suessionensi, Ambianensi et Laudunensi episcopis, consideratione fraternitatis tuæ efficaciter scripsimus, prout novimus expedire. Verùm quia, sicut accepimus, in instrumento dotaliti sui testes conscripti sunt, ipsos auctoritate nostrâ et tuâ moneas et inducas, ut amore justitiæ testimonium perhibeant veritati. Sicut enim periculosum est falsum proferre, ita quoque bonum est veritati testimonium perhibere. Ad hæc, dilectum filium nostrum magistrum Paganum tibi devotum admodum et fidelem providentiæ tuæ propensius commendamus, rogantes ut ei benefacias et habeas multipliciter commendatum, quem scis pro suo negotio tanto tempore apud nos moram fecisse. Negotium enim pro quo eum misisti, satis citò et compendiosè expedivimus. Data Beneventi, vi kal. C. septembris.



Letter CCXXXII from Pope Alexander III to the bishops of Soissons, Amiens, and Laon, compelling them to involve themselves in uprooting Marie and Matthew from Boulogne in light of Constance of France's dower claim.<sup>6</sup> It is dated to August 27, 1168.



<sup>6</sup> RHGF, 15:867.

## APPENDIX E: 1170 AND 1171 CHARTERS

Two charters arranging affairs so that Marie could move into the Royal Abbey of Sainte-Austreberte in Montreuil.<sup>7</sup>

1. Ego Desiderius, Dei gratia Morinorum episcopus, universis sancte matris ecclesie filiis notum fieri Volo quod, cum Maria, illustris Stephani regis Anglorum filia, divini amoris instinctu et future examinis metu, salubriori prudentum accedens consilio, sacre religionis habitum resumpsisset, sicut in ejus autenticis scriptis continetur, Matheus, come Bolonie, cujus il copule matrimoniali abrenuntiaverat, sexies viginti libras boloniensis monete, de redditus videlicet comitatus, ab ejus possessi antecessoribus, eidem assignavit in vite subsidium.... Actum est hoc anno Domini MCLXXJ. Bibl. Nat. Collection Moreau, vol 77, fol. 103.

Second charter:

2. Ego Matheus, Boloniensis comes, tam futuris quam presentibus notum fieri volo quod domina Maria, Anglorum regis Stephani filia, divina providente gratia, michi quondam matrimonio conjuncta, post duarum filiarum procreationem, in sanctam est religionem secessa.... Elegit autem domina Maria domum sibi placabilem, scilicet apud Monsterolium ecclesiam sancte virginis Austreberte, que in sua sita fuit hereditate.... Actum est hoc anno incarnationis Domini MCLXXXI, Ibid., fol. 226.

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<sup>7</sup> *Chronique De Robert De Torigni* 2 :20-21.



APPENDIX F: 1173 CHARTER

The charter that Matthew of Boulogne made upon his deathbed and in which he refers to Marie as his wife.<sup>8</sup>

*Extrait de la Chronique de Lambert de Vvaterlos Chanoine de saint Aubert de Cambray MS.*

**A**NNO MCLX. Mathæus Theoderici Flandriæ Comitis junior uxorem, patre inconsulto, Stephani Regis Angliæ scilicet filiam, duxit uxorem, quæ à nonnullis Deo dicata vulgabatur. Quam ob rem mœstitiæ pater excitus in filio armis non segniter insurrexit, quoniam nuptias execrabiles filium fecisse mœsto pectore ferre non æquanimiter poterat.

*Extrait du Cartulaire de l'abbaye saint Josse sur mer.*

**R**ERUM mutabilitas involvens omnia quæcunque beneque gesta sunt delet & tradit oblivionis sepulturæ. Igitur ne pereat quod piè & justè factum est, ego MATTHÆUS COMES BOLONIÆ præsentibus & futuris notum volo fieri quòd causa Dei & pro remedio animæ meæ abbatiam sancti Jodoci cum omnibus ad eam pertinentibus quæ sunt in omni possè meo liberam & absolutam in perpetuum facio ab omni consuetudine & exactione, remittens quicquid juris & justitiæ sive consuetudinis & exactionis in ea habebam vel habere poteram, insuper addens & constituens ut nullus successorum meorum in ea valeat aliquid ulterius reclamare, nisi quòd respectu Dei & amoris mei grãtia eam ab infestantibus defendere & manutenere studeat. Concessi etiam ob amorem sancti & utilitatem Ecclesiæ fertum ejusdem, quod est VIII. Kal. Augusti, per quindecim dies prolongari & cum omni libertate ratum & perpetuum haberi. Dedi insuper eidem Ecclesiæ decem libratas terræ in Anglia in villa mea de Notorne singulis annis recipiendas. Huic donationi UXOR MEA MARIA COMITISSA præbuit assensum, & FILIÆ MEÆ similiter hanc concesserunt. Et ut omnia firma permaneant, sigilli mei auctoritate corroboravi. Actum est hoc anno ab incarnatione Domini MCLXXIII. Testes Comes Flandriæ Philippus, Anselmus Comes sancti Pauli, Bernardus de sancto Walarico, Pharamon-

*Tome II.*

N

us de Tingri, Willelmus de Monsterolo, Balduinus de Goudeffent, Ingerranus de Fienlles, Elias de Dodoville, Ingerranus de Hertrus, Isaac avunculus ejus, Arnulphus de Caiodo, Radulfus de Lens, Wido de Aylos, Anselmus de Hofdeng, Henricus de Caumont, Willelmus Castellanus sancti Audomari, Ph. Fordins, Abbates, Ancherus Abbas sancti Jodoci de Nemore, Petrus Abbas sancti Wilmari, Henricus Abbas sancti Salvii.

<sup>8</sup> Baluze, *Maison d'Auvergne*, 2:97-98.

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