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## Foreword

EDWARD MEAD BOWEN  
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Dear Reader:

It is with great pleasure that I present to you the long-awaited fifth issue of *Vexillum*, now complete after a year of tremendous change. It is the first issue that I have directed as Editor-in-Chief, the first completed under the supervision of our newly expanded editorial board, and the first to feature a revitalized team of committed peer reviewers, all of whom are currently enrolled undergraduates or holders of newly minted bachelor's degrees. We also received thirty-five submissions during this issue's application cycle—an unprecedented number, and one that we expect only to increase with our greater involvement in academic circles and social media. These welcome developments have required some adjustments and delays, as has been the case for this issue; I thank you for your patience as we work to take the journal in worthy and exciting new directions. Through such provisions we continue to further *Vexillum's* mission of mentoring young scholars and providing a dedicated venue for their scholarship in order that they can contribute their fresh voices and perspectives to ongoing discussions in their fields.

One of the most prominent changes in this issue is its lack of classical content. This lack stems partly from the content of this year's submissions pool. While *Vexillum* received submissions for its ancient and classical category this year, submissions in our late antique and medieval category far exceeded them in both volume and quality. This has been a general trend for submissions in recent years. Furthermore, funding from Yale University's Medieval Studies Program, staff connections in the medieval studies community, editorial expertise in late antique and medieval subjects, and lesser expertise in classical subjects all make for compelling reasons for the journal to deepen its late antique and medieval emphases. As such, our next issue, Issue 6, will in all likelihood be the last issue that features classical material for the foreseeable future. We may resume a classical focus at a later time, and bearing in mind *Vexillum's* initial classical emphasis and the nod to these origins in the journal's title, we have not made this decision lightly. However, we believe that playing to our current strengths will best allow us to pursue our stated purpose and to better serve both our editors and our audience.

Though *Vexillum's* focus may have shifted, we remain committed to presenting the best of our undergraduate work and to helping our published authors achieve their submissions' full potential. Toward this end, we have maintained a small ratio of acceptances to overall submissions while also improving the ratio of editors to accepted submissions, ensuring that each author is assigned a personal subject editor to advise him or her in the revision process. 2016 will also mark the beginning of a series of bold new initiatives designed to augment the journal's online presence, expand its conference participation, and further its involvement with undergraduate mentorship. As we stride forth into the future, I hope you will join us in making our vision a reality.

Edward Mead Bowen  
*University of California, Los Angeles, 2016*

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# The Monastic Symbolism of Prostitution in Late-Thirteenth-Century France

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*The motif of the reformed harlot is prevalent in medieval saints' lives, but its implications are problematic. This paper begins to examine these implications by contrasting the lives of Mary of Egypt and Mary Magdalene, which circulated in France during the late thirteenth century, with the lives of contemporaneous women in poverty to find that they do not in fact resemble one another. Rather, this paper argues for a reinterpretation of the prostitute as an example for—but more importantly as a symbol of—the monks who comprised its audience. It then examines the impact of this symbol's usage on gender and sexuality within the context of faith, including a monastic ideal of androgyny and erotic overtones in the desire for Christ, particularly in the form of communion. Finally, it contrasts the application of the symbol of the prostitute to monks and nuns, finding that the latter suffer from their affiliation in cases such as those of the Beguine sect, further emphasizing the gap between the saints and actual women, prostitutes or not, as well as their resemblance to male clerics.*

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Widely referred to as the oldest profession, prostitution has a long history fraught with varying social and cultural connotations. In the context of medieval Europe, a society veritably obsessed with order,<sup>1</sup> finding a place for such a morally tenuous line of work becomes a particularly difficult challenge, with fascinating ideological consequences. Some of the most visible representations of prostitutes in the literature are the lives of saints who were reformed harlots, such as Mary Magdalene and Mary of Egypt. While the seemingly simple sinner-becomes-saint motif is relatively clear, the function of the image of the prostitute in relation to its audience muddies the waters of the moral self-image. In other words, once the narrative is situated within a particular social context, numerous problems begin to arise. One ought not to forget that these texts were read largely by monks and were intended as *exempla*, or stories with a didactic purpose for the betterment of the reader's life. This context and function raise the question of just how a monk could relate to a prostitute, when the two occupy such radically different spheres of

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<sup>1</sup> Umberto Eco, *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages*, trans. H. B., (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986).

medieval society, a problem which can be easily solved by recognizing that perhaps the prostitutes represented are not in fact intended to even approximate real ones, but rather function entirely as symbols. However, the precise content of the symbol and the associations it may invoke remain complex. The discourse of the idealized prostitute can prove to be just as messy as that of the real one, with implications for gender, desire, love, and interdependence, not to mention poverty, chastity, and obedience, which shaped the structure of Christian monastic life in thirteenth-century Europe. After the symbol is applied to monks, its function can change radically when applied to female monastics. Where before the prostitute can be viewed as a metaphorical shorthand for everyday aspects of a monk's life, when it is applied to nuns it operates in an entirely different way. Perhaps the most beautifully messy example of the collision of prostitution and monasticism is the Beguines, a sect of female Franciscans who faced allegations of prostitution because of their mendicancy. All in all, the prostitute as monastic symbol is incredibly complex, but it must first be set against a particular social backdrop in order to be understood. In this case, thirteenth-century France has a particularly fruitful proliferation of sources.

When it comes to actual prostitutes, the logical first place to look for case studies is in the lives of poor urban women. Unfortunately, this group is something of a perfect storm for illiteracy in thirteenth-century France, but despite the challenges, Sharon Farmer has synthesized some excellent points on poor women in thirteenth-century Paris.<sup>2</sup> She locates gender differences in the lower-class economic structure within the ideological framework of the separate curses of Adam and Eve upon their expulsion from Paradise, designating these roles as "productive" and "reproductive," respectively.<sup>3</sup> Through this logic, where a woman's job is to produce children and a man's to feed them, it follows that women's labor was not paid with self-sufficiency in mind.<sup>4</sup> However, many women did not fit the tidy model of attachment to men who would care for them financially, and for them the options were limited. Such single women

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<sup>2</sup> Sharon Farmer, *Surviving Poverty in Medieval Paris*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, passim.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, 23.

raised ideological problems for medieval social structures, not least because of the methods some employed to augment their income: “because women’s wages were often not sufficient to support one person, many unattached women—including many laundresses—had to supplement their wages through prostitution.”<sup>5</sup> Though prostitution served as a source of financial relief to these women, its moral implications no doubt proved problematic in terms of their image in society, and perhaps as a result their own self-image, so it is reasonable to assume that monetary gain was the primary goal of entering this field of labor.

While the sources available on actual prostitutes operating in the Middle Ages are limited, the religious discourse surrounding them is, on the other hand, quite plentiful. Some of the most poignant and influential saints’ lives were those of reformed prostitutes, such as Mary Magdalene and Mary of Egypt. Supposedly the “special friend” of Christ,<sup>6</sup> the Magdalene as she is described in her *vita* is actually a conflation of three biblical women: “Mary Magdalene, Mary of Bethany, and the penitent woman of Luke 7:36-50.”<sup>7</sup> She turns from a life of sin brought on by her youth, beauty, affluence, and the “weakness of her sex”<sup>8</sup> by repenting and washing the feet of Christ with her hair and anointing Him at the feast of Simon the Pharisee.<sup>9</sup> After this, Mary and her siblings, St. Martha and St. Lazarus, then become intimate friends of the Savior. In her reformed life, Mary is devoted to contemplation, which is directly contrasted with her sister’s more active life,<sup>10</sup> the highlights of which include slaying a dragon.<sup>11</sup> Her contemplation is, of course, also set against her own previous life of the flesh, the zeal for which she now devotes entirely to spiritual matters. Though it describes a later saint, the written life of Mary of Egypt actually predates

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid, loc. cit.

<sup>6</sup> Rabanus Maurus, *The Life of Saint Mary Magdalene and of her Sister Saint Martha*, trans. & ed. David Mycoff (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1989), I. 1760. Hereafter referred to as *Life of M. M.*

<sup>7</sup> *Life of M. M.*, 1.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 63-75.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 237-308.

<sup>10</sup> Mycoff, Introduction to *Life of M. M.*, 1.

<sup>11</sup> *Life of M. M.*, II. 2330-2382.

that of the Magdalene and, in fact, provides some of the source material for other accounts of her legend,<sup>12</sup> so it is unsurprising that the two have quite a bit in common. Mary of Egypt also begins her life as a well-off young woman who falls into sin, but the description of her youthful debauchery is far more detailed. She describes to Zosimas, a particularly holy monastic through whom the story is told, how she fled from home to the city, where she immediately sought carnal relations with as many men as was possible. She is keen to emphasize, however, that the motivation for her debauchery was not money:

I was a public temptation to licentiousness, not for payment, I swear, since I did not accept anything although men often wished to pay me. I simply contrived this so that I could seduce many more men, thus turning my lust into a free gift. You should not think that I did not accept payment because I was rich, for I lived by begging and often by spinning coarse flax fibers. The truth is that I had an insatiable passion and uncontrollable lust to wallow in filth.<sup>13</sup>

After her conversion, she too devotes her life to contemplation and extreme asceticism. One commonality between the former sinful lives of the saints is particularly important: their lack of compensation. The Magdalene's carnal acts are not described in great detail, but there is no mention of her charging for the services of the flesh she presumably rendered during her profligacy. Mary of Egypt, on the other hand, as described above, makes very clear that she would rather beg and do hard labor than receive payment for sex.<sup>14</sup> Nonetheless, she is referred to as a "Former Harlot" in the *vita's* title. This lack of the definitional component of the profession of prostitution illustrates that the epithet of "harlot" here functions as far more than a mere descriptor of either Mary's job experience. This is made even clearer in that both Marys come from noble backgrounds, completely unlike the impoverished prostitutes of medieval Paris. The real-life content of prostitution is therefore completely subverted, and it becomes clear that actual harlots

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<sup>12</sup> Mycoff, Introduction to *Life of M. M.*

<sup>13</sup> "The Life of Mary of Egypt, the Former Harlot, Who in Blessed Manner Became an Ascetic in the Desert of the <River> Jordan," trans. Maria Kouli, in *Holy Women of Byzantium: Ten Saints' Lives in English Translation*, ed. Alice-Mary Talbot, (Washington D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1996), paragraph 18. Hereafter referred to as "Life of M. E."

<sup>14</sup> This story makes the interesting but questionable assumption that a woman could, in fact, earn a living through such means, but at least includes some detail of her hardship.

were far from the minds of the monks who constructed these lives, or that they perhaps actively sought to distance the saints from the realities of prostitution. Both Ruth Karras and Claire Nouvet have explored the alternate meanings of the term “whore” in the Middle Ages, the former stating that

[t]he terms *meretrix* (Latin), *putain* or *folle femme* (French), common woman or whore (English) and others, could be used for any woman considered promiscuous, indeed any who had sex outside of marriage. When we find them in sources we cannot assume they mean someone engaged in commercial sex, although they often do,<sup>15</sup>

and the latter describing how Heloise, in her famous letter to Abelard, “does not assume the status of a whore but only the name of whore.”<sup>16</sup> It is clear then that the image of the prostitute has a flexible meaning and function in medieval discourse, but its precise role in this literature has yet to be ascertained. Maria Kouli’s assertion in her introduction to the *vita* of Mary of Egypt that our takeaway from reading the life is one of “reassurance to every Christian: if such a licentious woman could find forgiveness, surely ordinary sinners could find salvation”<sup>17</sup> seems inadequate seeing as “harlot” does not necessarily refer to any specific type of licentious woman in the first place. Furthermore, in the literature even saints decry their own unworthiness and sin, and to imagine that in an *exemplum* one might communicate even by implication that their need for repentance is in some way lesser seems rather counterproductive. Karras’s view of the content of the prostitute’s image is more expansive. She writes that “the prostitute could be used as a metaphor for all sinners,”<sup>18</sup> but she also falls into the same trap as Kouli, also saying “if she could repent and be saved then surely so could everyone.”<sup>19</sup> Both neglect to consider that these *vitae* were not meant for the consumption of “every Christian,” because not every Christian could read them to begin

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<sup>15</sup> Ruth Marzo Karras, “Prostitution,” in *Women in the Middle Ages: An Encyclopedia*, v. 2, ed. Katharina M. Wilson and Nadia Margolis, (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2004), 770.

<sup>16</sup> Claire Nouvet, “The Discourse of the Whore: An Economy of Sacrifice,” *MLN* 105, no. 4, French Issue (Sept. 1990), 750-773, <http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0026-7910%28199009%29105%3A4%3C750%3ATDOT%22A%3E2.0.CO%3B2-T>, 754.

<sup>17</sup> Maria Kouli, Introduction to “Life of M. E.,” 65.

<sup>18</sup> Karras, “Prostitution,” 771.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 771.

with, but rather were most often read by members of monastic orders. The function of prostitution in these stories then must be located within the specific context of monastic spiritual life.

At a primary level, the prostitute saints function as a source of humility and a commentary on the sin of the human condition for the monks reading their lives. For example, in the life of Mary of Egypt, when the saint first encounters Zosimas, the especially holy monk who supposedly has written the story, there is a great fuss between the two of them as to who shall bless whom.<sup>20</sup> Each claims to be more sinful and undeserving than the other, but in the end it is Mary, the woman who “had an insatiable passion and uncontrollable lust to wallow in filth”<sup>21</sup> who ends up blessing Zosimas,<sup>22</sup> heretofore presented as the absolutely pure example of the most holy monastic life. Clearly, if monks are to follow this *exemplum*, they must set themselves beneath the very bottom rung of the ladder of society as more sinful and unworthy than even a prostitute. Such self-abasement fits smoothly into the New Testament doctrines that “every valley shall be exalted”<sup>23</sup> and that “there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.”<sup>24</sup> Naturally, the prostitute saints obtain their sanctity in part through the process of conversion, which shall be examined in greater detail below.

The second Franciscan rule defines monks by their vows of “poverty, chastity, and obedience,”<sup>25</sup> concepts which play a key role in understanding the conversion of Mary of Egypt and Mary Magdalene as well as the relationship between prostitution and monasticism. The saints go from lives lacking at least chastity and obedience to ones with all these qualities intact. This conversion to a monastic mode of life is clearer in the *vita* of Mary of Egypt than in that of the Magdalene. She is specifically said to “renounce

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<sup>20</sup> “Life of M. E.,” 13.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>23</sup> *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, ed. Herbert G. May and Bruce M. Metzger (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), Isaiah 40:4

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, Luke 15:7.

<sup>25</sup> Bernard Gui, *The Inquisitor's Guide*, ed. Janet Shirley (Welwyn Garden City: Ravenhall Books, 2006).

the world and all worldly things” when she crosses the Jordan at the Virgin’s behest<sup>26</sup> and is so chaste that she runs for some distance through the desert to avoid Zosimas seeing her naked body, as her clothing has disintegrated over years of exposure to the elements.<sup>27</sup> The issue of obedience is somewhat harder to parse for her but is related to her spiritual mediation through Zosimas, which will be discussed later. Mary Magdalene too denounces her worldly goods, including the expensive perfumes with which she anoints Christ, and even gives up the home in which she and her siblings offered so much hospitality to Him to travel to Europe and spread the Gospel.<sup>28</sup> Her chastity is similarly apparent, as Christ becomes the object of her now purely spiritual desire. The issue of her obedience is complicated in a way similar to the treatment of this issue in the life of Mary of Egypt, and they will be discussed in conjunction. While the parallels of the prostitutes’ conversions to the process of becoming a monk are obvious, we must remember that these documents were also probably largely read by men who were *already* members of monastic orders. These saints are meant to be an *ongoing* example. It is not enough to turn from the world once by entering a cloister, but one must constantly turn from it, as it is inescapable simply through the fact of living in an embodied, and therefore inherently sinful, form.<sup>29</sup> The monks, therefore, are not meant to identify with the latter stage of the Marys’ lives as saints, but the former, as prostitutes. In this way, they will *always* be striving to follow the *exempla*, hoping to one day achieve the sanctity of these holy women. A good literary example of this mindset, in addition to the aforementioned Mary of Egypt’s conception of herself as remaining a “sinful woman,”<sup>30</sup> is the life of Mary of Oignies, in which the already virtuous cloistered woman never seems fully satisfied with her own self-discipline, always striving to further mortify the flesh and lessen the distance between herself and the kingdom of heaven. Additionally,

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<sup>26</sup> “Life of M. E.,” 23.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>28</sup> This, of course, is how her relics are said to end up in France. *The Life of Mary Magdalene*, 2132-2208.

<sup>29</sup> Dyan Elliott, *Fallen Bodies: Pollution, Sexuality, and Demonology in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press), passim.

<sup>30</sup> “Life of M. E.,” 14 and passim.

the life of the prostitute as presented in the *vitae* does not differ as radically from monastic life as one might think. I have already discussed the poverty of Mary of Egypt during her sinful life, during which she made a living from begging and hard labor much as monks do, and though she certainly cannot be said to have been chaste, there is a certain removal from the world and interchange with others that parallels the vow of chastity in becoming a prostitute. Karras sums this up in her assertion that “the individual prostitute was...a marginal character, excluded from the community.”<sup>31</sup> As one may expect in the highly hierarchical Middle Ages, the issue turns on whom one reports to.

The vow of obedience is perhaps the most ideologically weighty of the three, and proves a fruitful ground for understanding the discourse of prostitution as it relates to monastic life. In theory, by taking vows of chastity and poverty monks give up sex and personal possessions,<sup>32</sup> but when it comes to obedience, their very autonomy is on the line. In the first two vows, one abandons the world, and in the last, one abandons the self by locating the will externally to the person. In the lives of Mary of Egypt and Mary Magdalene, their obedience is best exemplified through their spiritual mediation through others. The former, after living alone in the desert for decades is nonetheless dependent on Zosimas to give her communion before she dies<sup>33</sup> and does not even know how to read, “because [she has] never met a man” during her time in the desert,<sup>34</sup> though this is repurposed as a testament to the power of the Word. While these limitations of course raise questions about female disempowerment in the face of the medieval male religious hegemony, it also makes an important point about the structure of monastic life and indeed Christianity as a whole: that it is by and large based on interdependence. Obedience fosters this, and helps to perpetuate the understanding what Hegel would call “the I that is we,”<sup>35</sup> the identity-defining

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<sup>31</sup> Karras, “Prostitution,” 772.

<sup>32</sup> Just what this means for different orders at different times is much more complicated, but is beyond the scope of this paper.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>35</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977).

community that is in this case the revealed religion. To put it another way, medieval Catholicism is a structural realization of God's proclamation that "it is not good that the man should be alone"<sup>36</sup> in that it is impossible to carry on without at least two people so that the sacraments of Communion and Confession can take place. The mediation in the lives of these saints encapsulates this idea. Mary Magdalene's spiritual mediation adds to the discourse of obedience in that it occurs at first not just through another human, but through Christ Himself. Her most used epithet is the "special friend" of Christ, emphasizing her importance through her relationship to Him. In our context, this serves to highlight that even when there is no one else to report to, one must always obey God. However, there is also a certain element of earthliness which persists even in this narrative. After she becomes the first to see Christ on the day of the resurrection, he sends her to bear the news to the apostles, and thus she gains another epithet: apostle to the apostles,<sup>37</sup> again mediating her through not just earthly individuals, but designated mediators, apostle meaning "messenger."<sup>38</sup> The title is somewhat reminiscent of the Pope's title of "servant of the servants of Christ." After the ascension, the Magdalene does not turn to a completely solitary life of contemplation as one might expect, though contemplation remains the most important feature of her religious life, but rather she attaches herself to another apostle: Maximinus, with whom she travels to France.<sup>39</sup> In this case, keeping in mind that these works were meant for the eyes of men, if we read the women's spiritual mediation as an example of monastic obedience, it leaves male monastics in a somewhat odd position: one of femininity. The monks' feminization, while at first seemingly outrageous, actually makes a good deal of sense in light of the previously examined points that the reader of these *exempla* was meant to see himself as the lowest of the low, beneath the exalted scum of the earth, and that he was meant to be obedient. Women in this society were in some way seen as both. It

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<sup>36</sup> Genesis 2:18.

<sup>37</sup> *The Life of Mary Magdalene*, l. 1160-1.

<sup>38</sup> "Apostle," in *The Oxford English Dictionary* (online), last modified March 2013, (Oxford University Press, 2014), <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/9427?rskey=JFcAQL&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid>.

<sup>39</sup> *Life of M. M.*, 2100-3.

has been made abundantly clear that women were thought to have a greater potential for sin, both through their connection to Eve and the physical makeup of their bodies.<sup>40</sup> They were also often forced into obedience, consequently lacking spiritual and economic agency, and were encouraged to be completely subservient within the marriage structure.<sup>41</sup> Thus, they are perfect examples for monks attempting to spiritually humble themselves.

The implications of gender variation in the *vitae* are widespread and offer insight into the medieval monk's spirituality. The prostitute saints are presented in their former lives as unquestionably female, as exemplified in the life of Mary Magdalene when part of the reason she strays from virtue is explained by "the weakness of the sex."<sup>42</sup> This gendering makes perfect sense, women being, as indicated earlier, viewed as more susceptible to sin. After their conversion, however, the gender of these saints becomes decidedly more ambiguous. While parallels to the Virgin are to be expected, as she represents a paragon of womanhood, some of the more striking comparisons in the *vitae* set the Marys against John the Baptist and even Christ Himself. Not only is the Magdalene referred to as the beloved of Christ, a title generally given to John, but explicit comparisons are also made between the deeds of the two in Chapter 32 in pairs, including John calling himself unworthy to untie the Lord's sandal and Mary washing Jesus's feet with her hair, and a comparison of her anointment of Christ before His death with His baptism by John.<sup>43</sup> While Mary of Egypt is never explicitly compared to the Beloved, her life as a wild woman in the desert, clothed in tatters and feeding off what she can find, certainly recalls the early life of John,<sup>44</sup> and she also pays an important visit to a church dedicated to him before she crosses the Jordan.<sup>45</sup> Perhaps

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<sup>40</sup> Elliott and Farmer both return repeatedly to this theme in their separate works, *Fallen Bodies* and *Surviving Poverty*.

<sup>41</sup> Jacques de Vitry, excerpts from Sermon 66 in *Sermones Vulgares*, in *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended*, ed. Alcuin Blamires (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

<sup>42</sup> *Life of M. M.*, 74.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, 1839-1868.

<sup>44</sup> "Life of M. E.," 30; cf. Matthew 3:4.

<sup>45</sup> "Life of M. E.," 26.

even more strikingly, she is likened to Christ as well, not only by being tempted during her time in the desert,<sup>46</sup> but also by performing the miracle of walking on water.<sup>47</sup> Zosimas explains the latter thus: “Indeed, God spoke the truth when He promised that those who purify themselves *liken themselves to God as much as possible*.”<sup>48</sup> Even Mary of Oignies is also masculinized indirectly by Jacques de Vitry in his account of her life. Margot H. King describes his regard for the saint: “Although he was her confessor, he confesses that in the spiritual sphere she was master and he disciple,”<sup>49</sup> yet in his sermons, Jacques quotes the Pauline epistles, saying, “I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to use authority over the man.”<sup>50</sup> In all three cases, it seems that these saints are on some level viewed as something other than female, though not quite male either. On the other side, Christ himself feminizes his followers in the life of Mary Magdalene, saying “he gives birth to me who, hearing me in his heart, preaches me; he becomes my mother, whose voice engenders the love of me in others.”<sup>51</sup> All of these examples hint at a kind of spiritual androgyny arrived at through the power of religion: men become women and women become men. The texts present the spiritual self as a space between genders, in part by containing both, as in “man’s soul is woman,”<sup>52</sup> but perhaps more importantly in the notion of overcoming the natural self. When the Magdalene abandons her life of the flesh for one of religious contemplation, she is said to have “vanquished nature and triumphed over herself.”<sup>53</sup> Such a victory of course falls right in line with monastic concerns of defying the body. On a more gendered level, by taking vows of chastity monks are in a sense renouncing the most “natural” performance of their gender in terms of their role in sex and reproduction. By abandoning a life that thus forces one to consider one’s sexed nature, they too abandon the maleness

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., loc. cit.

<sup>49</sup> Margot H. King, general introduction to *Two Lives of Marie d’Oignies*, ed. Margot H. King and Miriam Marsolais, (Toronto: Peregrina Publishing Co., 2003), 10.

<sup>50</sup> Jacques de Vitry, “Sermon 66,” 1, quoted from 1 Tim. 2:12.

<sup>51</sup> *Life of M. M.*, 475-6.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 1185.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 340.

of their flesh. It is thus unsurprising that the prostitute, already shown to be appropriate in her sinful nature as a metaphor for the sinful monk with his eyes set on sanctity, not only *can* cross gender lines with relative ease, but also *must* in the sexless world of spirit.

While the content of actual prostitution is subverted to its new purpose as ideological shorthand for the sinner, it does not entirely disappear. The *exempla* of Mary Magdalene and Mary of Egypt, as well as that of the Beguine saint Mary of Oignies who, though not a reformed prostitute, is connected with prostitution through her affiliation with the Beguines, contain not just a highly gendered tone, but also an erotic one. At its most basic level, the eroticism of the texts manifests itself in the desire of the holy women for God and their particular attention to his body, whether it be whole as in the case of Mary Magdalene, received as Communion, or reunited with in death. As discussed earlier, Mary of Egypt waits for an entire year to receive her Communion, rejoicing when her longing is at long last fulfilled. The women of the diocese of Liège, where Jacques de Vitry learned at the feet of Mary of Oignies, are described as

wasting away with such an intimate and wondrous state of love in God that they were faint with desire and who for many years could only rarely rise from their beds. There was no other cause for their sickness except him, since their souls had melted with desire for him,<sup>54</sup>

and the death of the saint herself is called “her wedding day.”<sup>55</sup> Communion is also described in terms of intense desire in this life: “I knew one of these holy women who, when she violently desired to be refreshed by the meat of the true Lamb, the true Lamb himself could not endure that she languish for a long time but gave himself to her and, thus refreshed, she recovered.”<sup>56</sup> Mary Magdalene’s religious life is perhaps the most replete with erotic imagery not just with her death, which parallels Mary of Oignies’s in that it is put in terms of “enter[ing] that court for which [her soul] fainted and longed”<sup>57</sup> and reuniting

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<sup>54</sup> Jacques de Vitry, “The Life of Mary d’Oignies,” trans. Margot H. King, in *Two Lives of Mary d’Oignies*, ed. Margot H. King and Miriam Marsolais (Toronto: Peregrina Publishing Co., 2003), 42.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>57</sup> *Life of M. M.*, 2605-6.

with “Jesus Christ--her only desire,”<sup>58</sup> but also in her physical interactions with the Savior. The most important examples of these interactions are her washing of Christ’s feet and her two anointments of him, which are presented in highly sensual terms. In the first, after being “impregnated” by the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit,<sup>59</sup> she makes her way to the house of Simon the Pharisee and uses her body—that is, her hair, tears, and mouth—to wash the feet of Jesus,<sup>60</sup> which in conjunction with the earlier metaphor of impregnation is rather suggestive. Her second anointment of Christ is even more sensually charged:

Having sprinkled the feet of the Saviour with the precious nard, she spread it over them and massaged them with her hands and fingers; then she wrapped them gently in her hair, which was of surpassing beauty. Drawing them to her breast and lips, she tenderly washed them. She held them and caressed them for a long time, then let them go.

But this intimacy between our Lord the Saviour and the first of his servants is small in comparison to what followed,<sup>61</sup>

that being her anointment of his head, which follows in similarly loaded language. It becomes clear that in abjuring their former lives as prostitutes and entering into one of chastity does not necessarily mean that eroticism goes out the window for holy women like Mary Magdalene and Mary of Egypt. Rather, their erotic nature is preserved and becomes a central aspect of their spirituality. In fact, rhetoric of near-sexual desire for God becomes so integral for saints, especially female ones, that even those who have led virtuous lives from the beginning, like Mary of Oignies, are caught up in it. What this means for the monks reading these *exempla* is a complicated and far-reaching issue, in part explained by the biblical citations which tie these three lives together.

In the lives of the three Marys, perhaps the most oft-quoted book of the Bible is the Song of Songs. While the history of this passage to various religious sects is its own affair, it maintains a good deal of

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 2609.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 227.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 240-251.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 870-5.

importance for the Catholic Church. The erotic poem was interpreted by medieval theologians like Bernard of Clairvaux as an allegory for the relationship of the Church to Christ as the bride to the bridegroom. Bernard wrote numerous sermons on the subject, including a pivotal one on the nature of different types of spiritual love.<sup>62</sup> Bernard acknowledges that to some degree the human desire for Christ is often less than elevated in nature: "Notice that the love of the heart is, in a sense, carnal, because our hearts are attracted most toward the humanity of Christ and the things he did or commanded while in the flesh."<sup>63</sup> Yet he also takes care to emphasize the spiritual aspects of holy love, in part by the example of Christ, whose "love was never sensual, but always in the wisdom of the Spirit."<sup>64</sup> Bernard's efforts to retell the Song of Songs, a poem written in sensual language, into a higher spiritual love are clear, and shed light on the desire attributed to prostitute saints in their hagiographies and its significance for chaste monks. The force at work in the *vitae* is similar to that in Bernard's sermons on the Song of Songs, where the highly eroticized image of the prostitute is transformed into that of a saint, maintaining much of its desire and sensuality but this time directed at the more appropriate object of God. The zeal of these reformed prostitutes, expressed by both saints, is not lost but rather reappropriated in similar terms to constitute their sanctity. So, too, could monks turn their desires from sin, keeping all of their fervor toward salvation in order to themselves become exemplary members of the Church, but this would of course be an ongoing process, so monks could still be viewed as prostitutes constantly repeating the moment of repentance. In conjunction with the gender-switching aspects of the texts, monks are feminized both as members of the bride of Christ, and more subversively as receivers of the eroticized sacrament, the body of a man.

While the image of prostitution has proven to be an important and positive spiritual metaphor for monks, it becomes problematic when applied to women. Male religious authorities reapplied the

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<sup>62</sup> Bernard of Clairvaux, "Sermon 20: Three Qualities of Love," in *The Works of Bernard of Clairvaux*, v. 2, trans., Kilian Walsh (Spencer: Cistercian Publications, 1971).

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 152.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.

discourse of prostitution to monastic women for decidedly more negative purposes than the contemplative example it provided for men in the clergy. One of these purposes was to deprive nuns of their property. Because women could not say Mass, nunneries required a priest to be hired to do so for them each Sunday, and for this reason were more expensive than all-male houses.<sup>65</sup> This additional expense was often a fly in the ointment of the financial plans of the higher-ups in the diocese, a motive which, when coupled with the opportunity provided by the social power vested in the male sex, sometimes led to the dissolution of these female religious retreats. Such dissolution was often accomplished under the pretenses that the houses had been polluted by their sinful inhabitants, who were often labeled as prostitutes, as was the case with Hildegard of Bingen.<sup>66</sup> The monastic women who bore the brunt of defamation as harlots were not cloistered women like Hildegard, but belonged to the more active and worldly sect of the Beguines. An order of female mendicants patterned on the life and works of Mary of Oignies, as well as some Franciscan doctrine, the Beguines operated around Burgundy and were one of the most “active” sects of religious women in Europe in that they imitated male Franciscans in public begging, which sometimes included lodging in the houses of strangers.<sup>67</sup> Needless to say, their mendicancy raised the eyebrows of more than a few, and left them to face allegations of prostitution levied so regularly and early on against them that their ill-repute figured prominently in Jacques de Vitry’s *vita* of Mary of Oignies, one of the most important documents to the order.<sup>68</sup> Jacques himself exhibits some uncertainty as to their public begging practices, writing that though Mary wanted to live her life in this way, she was persuaded by her “friends” to stay in the cloister.<sup>69</sup> In their case it becomes clear that all of the positive aspects of the metaphor of prostitution that were available for

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<sup>65</sup> Michael Peixoto, in the seminar “Forgery, Lies, and Deception in the History of the Middle Ages,” given at Sarah Lawrence College, Spring 2014.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Jacques de Vitry, “The Life of Mary d’Oignies.,” 38.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 45.

religious men—humility, repurposed *eros*, spiritual androgyny, and a deepened understanding of the vows—did not apply to their female counterparts. The slandered holy women are unable to escape their womanhood, the way that men and the fictionalized “women” of the *vitae* were, for while “man’s soul is woman,” no mention is made of the reverse being true, and these women are still decried as weak in the face of fleshly temptation. This reasoning may proceed from the creation of Eve from the rib of Adam, for she proceeds from him such that he contains her. The Beguines’ vows are also invalidated in that their attempt at humility and observance of the vow of poverty gains them only defamation, and the locus of their eroticism is forced from the realm of the holy to that of the profane, attacking the vow of chastity. Once again, the vow of obedience remains paramount and is subverted in the case of the Beguines. In Bernard Gui’s *Inquisitor’s Guide*, which outlines questions to ask Beguines in order to ascertain if they are heretical, the bulk of concern is not for their chastity, but for their obedience, specifically to the Pope:

They say too that if the lord pope ordered or agreed to this condemnation of the four Little Brothers as heretics, then he is himself a heretic, and the greatest of them, when it is his duty as head of the Church to defend gospel perfection. Thus, they say, he has lost his papal power, they do not believe him to be pope, the faithful owe him no obedience and the See is vacant.<sup>70</sup>

While Bernard makes no mention of the accusations of prostitution, these no doubt fed the possibility of the Beguines’ trial by contributing to their *infama*. Where identification with the prostitute did no harm to the monk, the damage it did to the reputation of the Beguines began a downward spiral into their being tried as heretics. Perhaps the problems of connecting them to prostitutes stem, in addition to the obvious role of maintaining gendered power structures, from the tangible possibility of the association. A group of women who cohabitated but ventured out into their communities, many of which were urban, and asked strangers for money may have been simply too close to images of actual prostitution. This idea only increases the already wide gap between real prostitutes and the prostitutes of the literature. The

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<sup>70</sup> Bernard Gui, 103.

prostitute can only be a positive example when those for whom she acts as such cannot possibly be imagined as prostitutes within the prevailing matrix of cultural imagery, which mostly means monastic men.

The image of prostitution often brings with it a somewhat visceral reaction because of the connotations of the profession. While such piquancy was no doubt more than present in late thirteenth-century French discourse, it is nonetheless a mistake to allow this to halt our understanding of the metaphorical significance of the image. Because of the perceived divide between monastic men and prostitutes, the connection between the two in religious literature is often ignored, and prevalent scholarship tends toward highly generalized claims of the harlot's significance. By contextualizing the image, we are able to see that the prostitutes represented in fact have nothing in common with their real-life counterparts and indeed are available only with great danger for women at all. By and large, those who could most profit from their spiritual offerings were monks. With all of this in mind, it is truly a testament to the sophistication of medieval thought that despite whatever differences they may have in reality, in the literature even a monk can be a whore.

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# Public and Private Layers of Clothing and Tongue: Marie de France's Medieval Werewolf as Palimpsest

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*Marie de France's twelfth-century lai Bisclavret reveals the significance of the use of transparent technologies to construct a paradigm of the public versus private werewolf, human versus beast, Self versus Other, and illustrates the importance of these technologies to social perceptions and to one's assertion of one's own humanity, revealing that the human and the werewolf are not as different as the human attempts to profess. Both the human and werewolf are palimpsests: beings constructed from perceptions based on the addition and removal of layers of speech and clothing.*

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In his 2011 short essay, "The Werewolf's Indifference," Jeffrey Jerome Cohen says, "a werewolf is the problem of animal difference expressed in monster's flesh. This compound creature asks how intermixed with the bestial (-wolf) the human (were-) might already be."<sup>1</sup> He continues to suggest that "the werewolf is therefore not an identity-robbing degradation of the human, nor yielding to a submerged and interior animality, but the staging of a dialogue in which the human always triumphs. Hybridity is therefore a simultaneity of unequal difference."<sup>2</sup> Cohen's werewolf demonstrates that the human and the werewolf are not as different as medieval readers would like them to be. One such werewolf is the subject of Marie de France's twelfth-century lai, *Bisclavret*.<sup>3</sup> *Bisclavret* is the story of a baron who takes the form of a wolf three days a week; he is ultimately betrayed by his wife and her lover, who steal his clothes, thus trapping him in wolf form for a year until he is rescued by the king. *Bisclavret* reveals the significance of the use of transparent technologies to construct a paradigm of the public versus private werewolf, human

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<sup>1</sup> Cohen, "The Werewolf's Indifference," *In the Middle*, last modified October 16, 2011, <http://inthemedievalmiddle.com/2011/10/werewolves-indifference.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> All quotations are from Marie de France, *Bisclavret*, in *The Lais of Marie de France*, trans. Glyn S. Burgess and Keith Busby (London: Penguin, 1999): 68-72. Pagination rather than line number is used.

versus beast, and Self versus Other, and it illustrates the importance of these transparent technologies to social perceptions and to one's assertion of one's own humanity, revealing that in the use of such technologies the human and the werewolf are not as different as the human attempts to profess. Both the human and werewolf are palimpsests: beings constructed from perceptions based on the addition and removal of layers of speech and clothing or fur.

In werewolf stories, human characters can be bestial and bestial characters can be human. Sometimes not even the skin or clothes they wear confine them to one state or another. The transparent technologies<sup>4</sup> and identity markers of language and clothing that are used by humans are challenged by the werewolf. The werewolf as Möbius strip is a common reading produced by Wood and adopted by Miranda Griffin. For Wood, the werewolf is "a Möbius strip that turns the inner self into a surface and then retrojects that manifest identity into the human being as its essential nature."<sup>5</sup> A Möbius strip is a three-dimensional shape that consists of one surface that is simultaneously the inside and outside of itself. By comparing the werewolf to a Möbius strip, Wood suggests that the werewolf shows both its internal mechanisms and external realities at the same time. The werewolf is not hiding anything in its identity; the werewolf only needs to be examined from a different angle to see all of the layers happening at once. According to Griffin, "the lining and layering of human skin and animal skin represents another troubling of the fundamental relationship between inside and outside".<sup>6</sup> This transformation of "the inner self into a surface" and "troubling of the fundamental relationship between inside and outside" as described by Wood and Griffin are part of the problem of the palimpsest. A palimpsest is a written surface on which

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<sup>4</sup> Andy Clark, *Natural-Born Cyborgs: Minds, Technologies, and the Future of Human Consciousness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 37. As aforementioned, "transparent technologies" include language and clothing, tools that humans use but to which they have become desensitized, to the point that these tools are rendered them nearly invisible.

<sup>5</sup> Lucas Wood, "The Werewolf as Möbius Strip, or Becoming Bisclavret," *Romantic Review* 102.1/2 (2001): 5, accessed November 6, 2014, [http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?ctx\\_ver=Z39.88-2003&xri:pqil:res\\_ver=0.2&res\\_id=xri:lion&rft\\_id=xri:lion:rec:abell:R04779290](http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&xri:pqil:res_ver=0.2&res_id=xri:lion&rft_id=xri:lion:rec:abell:R04779290).

<sup>6</sup> Miranda Griffin, "The Beast Without: Animals and Clothing in Werewolf Romance." Presented at The International Courtly Literature Society, British Branch, 2012.

previously erased layers are still visible under the new text.

According to Andy Clark, humans are cyborgs because they are users of “transparent technologies.” Transparent technologies include language and clothing, tools that humans use but to which they have become desensitized, to the point of rendering the user unconscious to them and the tools nearly invisible to the user.<sup>7</sup> Werewolves are cyborgs in the same way that humans are because their transformations and exclusion from human society depend on the use and removal of these technologies. The most common transformation motif of the werewolf-narrative is the removal of human clothes<sup>8</sup> or the donning of animal skins.<sup>9</sup> Unlike the legendary berserkers who put on animal skins to trigger their transformations, Bisclavret removes his clothes to trigger his.<sup>10</sup> Bisclavret reveals to his wife that “if [he] lost them [his clothing] and were discovered in that state, [he] should remain a werewolf forever.”<sup>11</sup> Not only does his transformation into a wolf rely upon the removal of his clothing, but his subsequent transformation back to human form depends on him putting his clothing back on.

By removing these identity markers of transparent technology,<sup>12</sup> a specifically lycanthropic human can transform into a werewolf and mark its difference from other humans. However, even when wearing clothes and confined to human form, the werewolf is a werewolf. In *Bisclavret*, the baron is still referred to as “Bisclavret” whether he is in his knightly human form or his wolf form. Bisclavret as wolf and Bisclavret as human are the same being; the only difference is that the latter wears clothing. The transparent technology of clothing allows it to function in the human realm in the same way that language does. Clothing does not truly separate the human from the beast—it allows the beast to mingle with the

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<sup>7</sup> Clark, *Natural-Born Cyborgs*, 37.

<sup>8</sup> Leslie A. Sconduto, *Metamorphosis of the Werewolf: A Literary Study from Antiquity Through the Renaissance* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2008), 13.

<sup>9</sup> Peter Orton, “Theriomorphism: Jacob Grimm, Old Norse Mythology, German Fairy Tales, and English Folklore,” in *The Shadow-Walkers: Jacob Grimm's Mythology of the Monstrous*, ed. Tom Shippey (Tempe, AZ: Arizona State University and Brepols Publishers, 2005), 305

<sup>10</sup> Marie de France, *Bisclavret*, 69.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Clark, *Natural-Born Cyborgs*, 37.

human.

Bisclavret the human—the Self—and Bisclavret the wolf—the Other—are perceived as different beings though they are the same. Heidi J. Figueroa-Sarriera argues similarly of the Self in her chapter for *The Cyborg Handbook*, in which she describes the Self as “paradoxically [claiming] simultaneous difference from and equality with the 'Other.’”<sup>13</sup> The two beings are the same being, yet at the same time are different from each other due to the presence or lack of clothing or fur. What clothing does that fur does not is it designates the boundary “between the self and the rest of the world.”<sup>14</sup> Therefore, to remove that clothing is to remove the boundary and make one a part of nature. This crucial distinction between the human and the animal harkens back to Adam and Eve’s discovery and consequent shame of their nakedness after partaking of the Forbidden Fruit in the Garden of Eden. When Bisclavret’s clothes, his human identity markers, are stolen and he is trapped in his wolf form,<sup>15</sup> he can no longer participate in the human realm. It is his clothing that marks him as human in the eyes of the public, though his mind remains human.

It is often forgotten that the werewolf has a human form, bound up in clothing, which can walk upright and speak in human tongues. The body, of the human and of the werewolf, is animal and a container for the mind, “incarnat[e] of [...] being,” but not being itself; it is a container that limits and a limited container. The psyche, or in other words, the soul as well as the mind, is described as “impersonal and transcendent,” as well as always in “categorical opposition to the body.”<sup>16</sup> The mind of a being does not depend on the form of its body; the body may change but the mind will remain intact as Bisclavret

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<sup>13</sup> Heidi Figueroa-Sarriera, “Children of the Mind with Disposable Bodies: Metaphors of Self in Text on Artificial Intelligence and Robotics,” *The Cyborg Handbook*, ed. Chris Hables (New York: Routledge, 1995), 128.

<sup>14</sup> Figueroa-Sarriera, “Metaphors of Self,” 129, 131.

<sup>15</sup> Marie de France, *Bisclavret*, 69.

<sup>16</sup> David Williams, *Deformed Discourse: The Function of the Monster in Mediaeval Thought and Literature* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1996), 176.

demonstrates in his recognition of his king<sup>17</sup> and his wife,<sup>18</sup> though he is in his wolf form. The werewolf and the human are both bestial-rational hybrids as they contain divinely bestowed intellect in an animal body;<sup>19</sup> they are composite bodies that make use of the transparent technologies and identity markers of language and clothing.

As the werewolf shows, the mind does not depend on the nature of the beast to reflect it. Such a mind is not bound to a single body. The mind of the human and the werewolf is always in relation to the body, in the same way that the human, the Self, is always in relation to the werewolf, the Other. The mind marks its similitude and the body marks its dissimilitude. The werewolf body, like the human body, is merely a vessel to contain the mind and potential of being in the physical realm. However, containers are boundaries, and, as Cohen suggests, trespassing boundaries is the forte of the monstrous.

The werewolf is a monster which challenges the idea of what it means to be human. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen suggests seven theses of the monstrous in his essay "Monster Culture." His third thesis, "The Monster is the Harbinger of Category Crisis," can be coupled with his second thesis, "The Monster Always Escapes," "because it refuses easy categorization."<sup>20</sup> According to Cohen, "this refusal to participate in the classificatory 'order of things' is true of monsters generally: they are disturbing *hybrids* whose externally *incoherent bodies* resist attempts to include them in any systematic structuration."<sup>21</sup> Humans and werewolves are both paradoxical and hybrid by nature, and the two are not so different from each other. Both are composed of a rational mind and animal body, and both use external, physical markers to maintain and trespass the divides between the human and animal and between the Self and Other. The werewolf narrative is paradoxical. It (re)discovers the human in the animal and the animal in

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<sup>17</sup> Marie de France, *Bisclavret*, 70.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>19</sup> Irvn Michael Resnick and Kenneth Kitchell, "On the Natural and Divine Properties of the Human," in Albertus Magnus, *On Animals: A Medieval Summa Zoologica* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1999), 1445.

<sup>20</sup> Cohen, "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)," 6.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, emphasis added.

human—the Self in the Other and the Other in the Self. The werewolf shows that the human is not so different from itself, shows the human exactly what it is, what it can become, and why its futile attempts at identity distinction and control allow for the Other, the werewolf, to exist. Covered in layers of clothing, fur, skin, and tongue, the werewolf is never as it appears and is more like the human than medieval humans would like to admit.

The werewolf shows what humans perceive the wolf, the bestial, to be, and the werewolf shows the human what it can become. Both instances are matters of perception and of the public and private. The narrator states that Bisclavret becomes a werewolf for three days every week.<sup>22</sup> For three days of the week, Bisclavret is something he is perceived not to be during the other four days. He disappears from the public scene in order to undergo a very private and frequent transformation of his body. Bisclavret is a private werewolf, wrapped in the skin of a public knight and husband. He is unlike the werewolves of public knowledge, the Garwaf. Marie de France describes the Garwaf as a ferocious type of werewolf who is afflicted with madness and who eats men.<sup>23</sup> However, this werewolf is not the same type of werewolf as Bisclavret, and he is not the wild beast that his wife perceives him to be upon learning his secret.<sup>24</sup> To his wife, Bisclavret is now a public werewolf and the only other known public werewolf is the Garwaf. The public werewolf is seen as a threat and the private werewolf is misidentified.

Bisclavret does not wish to become a public werewolf, specifically a public animal, and having his secret known even by his wife causes him great anxiety.<sup>25</sup> Public werewolves have a bad reputation and as soon as his secret is out, that is all his wife can see him as. Bisclavret's wife sees him as what humans view wolves to be: violent invaders, human-eaters, and frenzied attackers.<sup>26</sup> Bisclavret without his clothes and with his secret revealed is forced into the space of the public werewolf. He fears he will be hunted

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<sup>22</sup> Marie de France, *Bisclavret*, 68.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

like the Garwaf.<sup>27</sup> The public werewolf is considered more violent than its private werewolf counterpart. For Bisclavret to reveal his lycanthropy to the public would allow the rest of humanity to deem him a public werewolf, capable of the same mindless violence and to be feared in the same way. The Garwaf is every horrible perception of animality personified and that is what inspires fear of the werewolf in general.

The Bisclavret is shown in both human and beast form, both while he is wearing his clothing and speaking with his human tongue, as well as when he is forced to convey his humanity while trapped in a private wolfish container that does not match his public human persona. Bisclavret's Self, his public identity as a human being, is contingent upon the clothes that he wears and his role as husband. He fears the consequences for sharing his secret with his prying wife, declaring he will have "great harm" come to him, "lose [her] love," and "destroy [his]self".<sup>28</sup> Without his clothing, Bisclavret will be seen as purely Other. He will only be seen as nonhuman—as a public werewolf.

Bisclavret is a private werewolf essentially, but for the rest of the narrative will be a public werewolf. However, this public werewolf comes to be perceived not as a Garwaf, but as a loyal companion—a housedog. Bisclavret is never assumed by the king to be a Garwaf; he already is *like* a man, just covered in fur and on all fours. This man is found asleep in the king's bed and not so different from when he was in wolf form.<sup>29</sup> There is no danger besides a perceived danger; actions and containers have already determined the identity of the beast. Clothing and verbal language are the identity markers that mark Bisclavret as human; though truly he is still a wolf, he is merely contained to human form. He is wearing his human skin that is publically recognized and accepted, but his fur remains as a hidden layer of his identity.

As aforementioned, a lack of clothing harkens to the shame of Adam and Eve in their nakedness;

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 68-9. Emphasis added.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 72.

humans have an inherent fear of nudity. More precisely, humans without clothing lack one of the few identity markers that distinguish them from other animals. Bisclavret hesitates to reveal his method of transformation to his wife because he fears that his clothing will be lost as a result, thus confining him to a nonhuman form.<sup>30</sup> He is metaphorically and literally an animal when naked. The perception of others degrades the Bisclavret as a public werewolf, as an animal to be feared, and as nonhuman.

Bisclavret's wife is the first to allow her fear of her unclothed husband and her knowledge of public werewolves to alter her perception of her husband. She questions him about his secret and the workings of his lycanthropy, displaying a surprising knowledge of werewolf stories when she asks one key question: "whether he [goes] undressed or remained clothed."<sup>31</sup> A clothed werewolf draws attention to the "were," the man portion of the hybrid. However, a naked werewolf functions just as a naked human, drawing attention to the "wolf," the animal that is feared. Bisclavret's wife treats her husband as if he is the fiendish Garwaf and no longer wishes to lie with him, as though his animality, which never threatened her while they were in private, will now emerge in bed. He will behave like a wolf or Garwaf, a savage eater of humans. However, as Marie de France shows later on, in bestial form the private werewolf poses no threat to its roommate(s). In his lord's private chamber he behaves as a human and sleeps among the knights and king without incident.<sup>32</sup>

At the end of the lai, Bisclavret is embarrassed of his transformation just as he was at the beginning. When his lycanthropy is made public, he fears what identity others will attempt to confine him to. He will not transform in the public sphere—he will not put on the identity marker, clothing, and reveal himself as human in the company of others. Ironically, he is given the privacy of the king's bedchamber to conceal his bestial body.<sup>33</sup> A public yet private space is used by a public yet private werewolf.

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 72.

In *The Shadow-Walkers*, Peter Orton writes that “the werewolf is the site of a struggle between the human and the animal in man,”<sup>34</sup> while in the same book Sarah L. Higley states that “the compound reflects the process of limitations set on what is human, what is proscribed, and what is driven from social consciousness and meaning.”<sup>35</sup> The fear of nudity is part of the anxiety of what it means to be human that the werewolf narrative addresses. Without the transparent technologies of clothing and language, the human fears it will be degraded by society and seen as an animal. As Griffin writes, “animal and human are interdependent categories” that can only be defined in relation to each other.<sup>36</sup> The human without is not so different from the animal without. The difference is that the animal is not aware that it is without clothing or human language. Wood claims that the use of the lycanthropy motif in Marie de France’s *Bisclavret* “rearticulate[s] the problem of human appearance and reality as a question about animality and the limits of the human.”<sup>37</sup> The werewolf shows humanity its limits—being confined to language and clothing—and that without these identity markers, they become the beasts they fear. However, more so, they become what they perceive the beasts they fear to be: without reason.

*Bisclavret* reveals that to be without clothing and human verbal language is not the same as being without reason. Language and clothing are important in *Bisclavret* as identity markers that distinguish the werewolf from the human, and also allow the werewolf to act as a human among humans in human form. That being said, language comprehension, human nonverbal communication, and behaviour demonstrating courtesy allow *Bisclavret* to live as a human among humans, although he is trapped in the form of a wolf. In this sense, he functions more as a housedog than as a perceived human or public werewolf. The verbs used to describe the transformed baron indicate that he remains human in nature.

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<sup>34</sup> Orton, “Theriomorphism,” 333.

<sup>35</sup> Sarah J. Higley, “Finding the Man Under the Skin: Identity, Monstrosity, Expulsion, and the Werewolf,” in *The Shadow-Walkers: Jacob Grimm’s Mythology of the Monstrous*, ed. Tom Shippey (Tempe: Arizona State University and Brepols Publishers, 2005), 339.

<sup>36</sup> Griffin, “The Beast Without.”

<sup>37</sup> Wood, “Becoming *Bisclavret*,” 11.

He “kisses” the king's foot and begs for mercy instead of “licking” the king's foot and begging for scraps.<sup>38</sup> His actions speak for him in the place of human words and he is able to overcome one of the two barriers—in this case, the lack of human verbal language that keeps him in the bestial realm. Bisclavret is able to reaffirm his identity as the owner of a rational mind, though it may be contained in the body of a beast.

The werewolf reflects its humanity, not through words, but through its actions.<sup>39</sup> The werewolf does not wear clothing, nor does it speak while in its wolf form. However, the werewolf *does* wear clothing and *does* speak while in human form. The werewolf does not need to use human verbal language when it is not participating in human society as human. As Peter Orton suggests, there is an “awareness of the animal in [the hu]man”.<sup>40</sup> However, in werewolf narratives there is also an awareness of the human in the animal. The king acknowledges that the beast “has the intelligence of a human” and “possesses understanding,” and so the commonly perceived (were)wolf is ignored due to better evidence of a rational (were)wolf.<sup>41</sup> The king does not immediately declare that Bisclavret is a human. Bisclavret becomes the housedog of the court, a tame werewolf, and his role as knight has not changed much. He continues to act as the servant and protector of his lord. He sleeps with the king at night and does no harm to anyone, for he is a noble animal.<sup>42</sup> The king allows for Bisclavret to join the human realm once again as he is recognized as something more than an intelligent beast, though he is not recognized for his true *knight* self. Instead, the king recognizes something of the human in this animal.

As the human is recognized in the animal that is Bisclavret, it is the *animal* in Bisclavret that prompts the (re)discovery of his “true,” or human, identity. Two occurrences of violent behavior erupt from Bisclavret in the course of the narrative.<sup>43</sup> Had Bisclavret been a regular wolf, or even a Garwaf, his

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<sup>38</sup> Marie de France, *Bisclavret*, 70.

<sup>39</sup> Sconduto, *Metamorphoses of the Werewolf*, 14.

<sup>40</sup> Orton, “Theriomorphism,” 320.

<sup>41</sup> Marie de France, *Bisclavret*, 70.

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

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*; Marie de France, *Bisclavret*, 71.

actions would not undergo questioning; they would be expected. However, had Bisclavret been such a beast, he would not have been accepted back into the human realm by the king and would have instead been hunted like any other threatening animal.<sup>44</sup>

This human realm contains two people who have done the Bisclavret many wrongs: his traitorous wife and her lover. When Bisclavret attacks one of the king's knights, his wife's lover, it is decided that the knight must have done some harm to him, for the Bisclavret never acted like this before. No one except Bisclavret and his wife's lover know that a wrong was done, yet the knights base their ideas on their newfound perceptions of their public "dog." The other knights in the king's court assume that the Bisclavret has reason.<sup>45</sup> His actions precede him and his mind, though trapped by a bestial form, is not contained to the bestial form. It surpasses the limits placed on it. Bisclavret, as the king and knights know, has a rational mind that does not align with common perceptions of his animal externality.

Not long after his attack on the lover, Bisclavret attacks his wife and permanently disfigures her.<sup>46</sup> It is Bisclavret's inhuman actions that cause his "true" human identity to be discovered.<sup>47</sup> Due to the Bisclavret's recognized human intelligence his actions speak in place of words. Once again, the court acknowledges that this is not the way of the Bisclavret, that he is not a wicked being, and that it is the people he attacks who are wicked.<sup>48</sup> A wise man also speaks for Bisclavret, lending a voice, and another layer, to the beast so that his story can be told. Bisclavret, with some vocal, human help, demonstrates his human nature and reveals his wife's bestial nature in her noseless form. Bisclavret effaces part of her identity as human in his attack, thereby degrading her to the animal realm in the perception of the public.

Where Bisclavret's actions reflect his humanity in place of words, his wife's actions contradict her words. She tells him she loves him "'more than the whole world'" and that he should not doubt her when

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<sup>44</sup> Marie de France, *Bisclavret*, 70.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>46</sup> Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner, "Of Men and Beasts in *Bisclavret*," *Romantic Review* 81.3 (1999): 235.

<sup>47</sup> Marie de France, *Bisclavret*, 71.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

he reveals his secret and the vulnerability of his transformation's required nakedness.<sup>49</sup> Yet that love is revealed to be a lie first by the narrator, and then by the wife herself as she offers her love to another knight.<sup>50</sup> Bisclavret's doubt is also justified as his wife reveals her husband's secret and vulnerability to her new lover in order to trap Bisclavret in his animal state.<sup>51</sup> Bisclavret uses his actions to speak in place of his words in order to regain his human form, whereas his wife uses her actions to go against her words in order to destroy the connection between Bisclavret's wolf and human forms. David Williams claims that "language, the science derived from Him [that is God], retained something of the same monstrous dimensions in its own double nature, which consisted of immaterial meaning incarnated in sensuous sound."<sup>52</sup> There is a duplicitous nature in language similar to the nature of the human and werewolf body. This double nature is not only found in Bisclavret, but also his wife. The narrative of *Bisclavret* is a palimpsest: it is layered with two parallel narratives in which the characters efface each other's humanity by removing layers of identity markers.

The truly "monstrous" werewolf is never the one suspected. In *Bisclavret*, there are two werewolves: Bisclavret and his wife. Matilda Bruckner deems Bisclavret's wife a "Femme Bisclavret," based partially on the Anglo-Norman text but also on that Bisclavret's wife function as his opposite and that she becomes a werewolf in another sense.<sup>53</sup> She wears her human skin and clothing, but her internal mechanisms are not noble like Bisclavret's—they are "hairy." Constitutional werewolves, as defined by Sarah Higley, are "wolves who wear the skins of humans; when they turn their inner 'hairiness' out, they are a menace to society."<sup>54</sup> Bisclavret's wife privately reveals her true self in the betrayal of her husband, and Bisclavret publically reveals his wife when he robs her of her nose.<sup>55</sup> When Bisclavret acts as his wife

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Williams, *Deformed Discourse*, 9.

<sup>53</sup> Bruckner, "Of Men and Beasts in *Bisclavret*," 255.

<sup>54</sup> Higley, "Finding the Man under the Skin," 351.

<sup>55</sup> Marie de France, *Bisclavret*, 71.

expects him to—out of character according to the king, but assumed of the Garwaf and other beasts—is when the Femme Bisclavret loses everything and he regains everything.

Bisclavret and his wife form a diptych, two pictures side by side, simultaneously the same but different. Bruckner's Femme Bisclavret undergoes her own transformation just as Bisclavret does.<sup>56</sup> Bisclavret's wife becomes and embodies what she believes Bisclavret to be: first, an adulterer,<sup>57</sup> and then a beast that deceives and causes harm.<sup>58</sup> She represents every opposing aspect of the Bisclavret, who is loyal to his wife until she betrays him and who remains loyal to his lord, whereas she falls out of love with her lord and manipulates the emotions of her lover. Her noselessness marks her as Other and beast-like, just as she marked her husband as Other and beast-like by stealing his clothing. In both cases the true nature of the werewolf is revealed by these concealing identity markers. Bisclavret is a noble beast that lives first away from society in the woods<sup>59</sup> and then at the heart of society in the castle, whereas his wife is a deceptive beast who lives first in society and then is banished to the outskirts as she did to her husband.<sup>60</sup> She is chased away like a mongrel; she is a Garwaf on the inside. In *Bisclavret*, Bisclavret may physically be a werewolf, but his wife, the Femme Bisclavret, is the one who becomes what a werewolf is thought to be—or more specifically, what a Garwaf is thought to be. Each removes each other's layers in the hope of exposing the other's true nature and in doing so, address the question of what is human and what is animal.

Marie de France's lai concludes with both Bisclavret and his wife being revealed as public werewolves as the Femme Bisclavret is driven away by society while Bisclavret is embraced for his noble bearing. The lai demonstrates the human in the perceived animal and the animal in the perceived human. The werewolf narrative and diptych within it that Marie de France presents functions as a mirror for the

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 68, 69.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 71.

reader. Readers are shown that they embody the beast that they fear and that anyone can become a Garwaf. However, while anyone can become a Garwaf, any beast can also be a Bisclavret. The human-animal binary is not as strict as it is initially perceived to be. Instead it can be crossed and challenged in both public and private spheres.

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# Well-Behaved Women Rarely Make History: Eleanor of Aquitaine's Political Career and Its Significance to Noblewomen

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*Eleanor of Aquitaine played an indirect role in the formation of medieval and early modern Europe through her resources, wit, and royal connections. The wealth and land the duchess acquired through her inheritance and marriages gave her the authority to financially support religious institutions and the credibility to administrate. Because of her inheritance, Eleanor was a desirable match for Louis VII and Henry II, giving her the title and benefits of queenship. Between both marriages, Eleanor produced ten children, nine of whom became kings and queens or married into royalty and power. The majority of her descendants married royalty or aristocrats across the entire continent, acknowledging Eleanor as the "Grandmother of Europe." Her female descendants constituted an essential part of court, despite the limitations of women's authority. Eleanor's lifelong political career acted as a guiding compass for other queens to follow. She influenced her descendants and successors to follow her famous example in the practices of intercession, property rights, and queenly role. Despite suppression of public authority, women were still able to shape the landscape of Europe, making Eleanor of Aquitaine a trailblazer who transformed politics for future aristocratic women.*

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Eleanor of Aquitaine intrigues scholars and the public alike for her wealthy inheritance, political power, and controversial scandals. Uncertain of the real date, historians estimate Eleanor's birth year to be either 1122 or 1124. Around age fifteen, the young girl inherited the prosperous duchy of Aquitaine in southern France after the death of her father, William X. The duchess married Louis VII in 1137, becoming the Queen of France and later giving birth to two daughters. Estranged after the Second Crusade, the couple dissolved their marriage with an annulment, preventing Eleanor from seeing her daughters again. A brief eight weeks later, Eleanor married Henry II, who became king of England in 1154. The tumultuous marriage was cooperative enough to produce eight children - five sons and three daughters. The grown sons became restless for power, and they revolted against their father in 1173 with Eleanor's assistance. After his victory, Henry placed the queen under house arrest for the next sixteen years. Richard the Lionheart released his mother Eleanor from imprisonment in 1189, and she served as England's queen-

regent during King Richard's continental expeditions. After Richard's untimely death, Eleanor labored to secure the right of her son, John, to the English throne. She continued to be a solid foundation of authority in the shaky early years of King John's reign. By her death on April 1, 1204, Eleanor was unquestionably one of the most powerful and influential women who had lived in the twelfth century.

Eleanor's wealth, land, and wit enabled her to be a formidable political figure in Europe. Louis VII and Henry II married Eleanor because her inheritance considerably enlarged and enriched their respective holdings. However, the kings could only oversee Aquitaine with Eleanor by their side, because her title was what gave them authority. Her sons, Richard and John, appointed Eleanor as queen-regent above their own wives. Of Eleanor's ten children, only one son died during childhood; the rest of her children became queens and kings or married into influential families. Her grandchildren and other royal descendants shaped much of Europe's history, including that of England, Denmark, Castile, and Sicily, giving her the well-deserved title of "grandmother of Europe."<sup>1</sup> Eleanor's influential and political presence in Europe had a long-term impact on medieval noblewomen's application of power.

Numerous puzzles and contradictions surround Eleanor of Aquitaine's life, attracting scholarly interest. Twelfth-century men disliked powerful women, and rumors about adultery, incest, rebellion and murder cloaked the historical memory of Eleanor in a "black legend" that continued through the centuries in various writings.<sup>2</sup> These rumors and legends obscured the significance of Eleanor's political activity for too long. Only recently have some modern historians shone a positive light on the queen, working past the negatively biased interpretations. Some scholars deem her a one-of-a-kind character for the Middle Ages, yet others asserted that myth and legend exaggerated her uniqueness. In either case, her career provides an excellent case study of the power that aristocratic women could hold in the Middle Ages.

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<sup>1</sup> *Encyclopedia Britannica*, s.v. "Eleanor of Aquitaine," accessed February 12, 2014, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/182258/Eleanor-of-Aquitaine>.

<sup>2</sup> Ralph V. Turner, "Eleanor of Aquitaine, Twelfth-Century English Chroniclers and her "Black Legend," *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 52, no. 1 (2008): 18.

Modern scholarship on Eleanor began with Agnes Strickland's series, *Lives of the Queens of England: From the Norman Conquest*. Published in 1902, this series documented the lives of famous English queens, including Eleanor of Aquitaine. Ranking Eleanor among the greatest female rulers, Strickland states that the duchess-queen "atoned for an ill-spent youth by a wise and benevolent old age."<sup>3</sup> At first, Strickland writes scathing reviews of Eleanor, calling her "immoral," "childish," "giddy," and "light-headed."<sup>4</sup> Strickland is more forgiving towards the queen in her elder years, but emphasizes Eleanor's instigation of her sons' rebellion and her resulting imprisonment. Strickland mainly focuses on the mythical rumors and scandals about Eleanor, from the queen dressing as an Amazon to presumably murdering Henry II's mistress, Rosamund. These stories fashion the book more as a romantic novel than historical research, especially since it lacks proper primary sources and footnotes. While Strickland's book does little for historical scholarship on Eleanor, it reveals that rumors and misogyny still dominated the duchess-queen's legacy at the turn of the twentieth century.

Marion Meade's 1977 book, *Eleanor of Aquitaine: A Biography*, became a highly influential work for later biographers, focusing on the feminist triumphs rather than the duchess' misdeeds. She argues that Eleanor was a key twelfth-century political figure, though misrepresented by historians who treated the duchess as "an accident among men" or a naughty, shameful woman.<sup>5</sup> Meade points out that despite the queen's associations with four different kings, the duchess's independent success endures in that she is still called "Eleanor of Aquitaine," and not "of France or England."<sup>6</sup> Meade supports her argument for Eleanor's unique greatness by sharing relevant stories such as the queen's presence in the Second Crusade and her reigns in three countries. Like Strickland's, Meade's biography reads more as a novel than research, as she speculates about Eleanor's life when evidence simply does not exist, including her

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<sup>3</sup> Agnes Strickland, "Eleanora of Aquitaine: Queen of Henry II," in *Lives of the Queens of England: From the Norman Conquest*, vol. I, revised edition (Philadelphia: George Barrie & Son, 1902), 299.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 250.

<sup>5</sup> Marion Meade, *Eleanor of Aquitaine: A Biography* (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1977), x.

<sup>6</sup> Meade, xi.

childhood, education and motives. Meade states that she utilized available primary sources, such as Eleanor's charters and letters; however, she relies heavily on biased twelfth- and thirteenth-century secondary sources.

Ralph V. Turner, however, provides an opposing view of Eleanor. Turner evaluates the negative perceptions of Eleanor in his 2008 article, "Eleanor of Aquitaine, Twelfth-Century English Chroniclers and her 'Black Legend.'" The "black legend," a portrait of a "scandalous, frivolous woman," formed when the Church restricted and redefined women's public and gender roles.<sup>7</sup> The Church believed that women had a sinful nature, and so it promoted the Virgin Mary as a good role model for subordinate women.<sup>8</sup> Turner argues that Eleanor of Aquitaine's largely unflattering portrayal demonstrates her failure to meet a misogynistic standard for women during a redefinition of gender roles. Medieval clergy and later English chroniclers, like Gervase of Canterbury, John of Salisbury, and Gerald of Wales, wrote sources on Eleanor that drip with disdain or document rumors because powerful, independent women were seen as unnatural and wrong. Turner reasons that twelfth-century writers' negative view of women shaped later chroniclers' interpretation of Eleanor, producing the influential "black legend."

Michael Evans criticizes previous interpretations of Eleanor, and like Turner, disagrees with Meade's argument for Eleanor's uniqueness. In his 2009 article, "A Remarkable Woman? Popular Historians and the Image of Eleanor of Aquitaine," Evans argues that Eleanor was not unique but merely an outstanding example of the admirable power twelfth-century noblewomen could wield. He shows that Eleanor's power derived from her inheritance, not so much from a remarkable personality.<sup>9</sup> Looking at works by Meade and Strickland, Evans reveals how popular nineteenth- and twentieth-century historians created misleading images of Eleanor and medieval women in general. These three authors formed an

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<sup>7</sup> Turner, "Eleanor of Aquitaine, Twelfth-Century English Chroniclers and her 'Black Legend,'" 18.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 22-23.

<sup>9</sup> Michael Evans, "A Remarkable Woman? Popular Historians and the Image of Eleanor of Aquitaine," *Studies in Medievalism: Defining Medievalism(s)* XVIII (2009): 246.

unfavorable cycle of scholarly ambiguity: Historians understood the duchess's actions in light of her character, and they knew of her character because of the duchess's actions. Using texts by John of Salisbury, Bernard of Clairvaux, and Odo of Deuil, Evans refutes the assumption of Eleanor's distinctiveness. He states that the duchess was just one of many remarkable women, though the individuality of Eleanor's position ranks her first compared to the other medieval women of status.

Katherine Crawford combines the earlier authors' theses into one line of research. Comparing six books on various queens in 2012, Crawford surveyed similar gender ideology trends surrounding aristocratic women in differing national contexts. Her article, "Revisiting Monarchy: Women and the Prospects of Power," argues that courtly women maintained a dynamic role in gender-biased social and political systems. Researching royal women like Eleanor and Maria of Castile, Crawford reveals that though men attempted to repress women's power, women used gender ideologies and stereotypes to their advantage. For example, Eleanor's rejection of stereotypes later won her admiration, while Catherine of Aragon manipulated the image of a cast-aside wife to gain sympathy from the public.<sup>10</sup> Despite being barred from major political opportunities, royal women facilitated palace functions, negotiated economic productivity, and enabled men to maintain power.

Evolving over time, historians' perceptions of Eleanor and her remarkable life widely differ. Some, like Meade, promote the duchess-queen as a unique beacon of feminism, while like Evans, other historians argue Eleanor only exemplified the considerable power aristocratic women could hold in the twelfth-century. Earlier historians, such as Strickland's unreliable fabrications, simply fanned the flames of vicious rumors sparked by medieval chroniclers. In contrast, Turner, Crawford, and other modern historians sifted through the old prejudices and perceptions to shed fresh light unto Eleanor's career.

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<sup>10</sup> Katherine Crawford, "Revisiting Monarchy: Women and the Prospects of Power," *Journal of Women's History* 24, no. 1 (2012): 163, 165.

These historians well address the legends and biased sources surrounding Eleanor of Aquitaine, but most of them lament the absence of Eleanor's motives, emotions, childhood, and personal life in documentation, which leaves a gaping hole in our understanding of her career. One topic they do not address is the legacy of Eleanor of Aquitaine in women's history. While the studies are extremely helpful with understanding medieval gender roles and the biographical information on Eleanor, none of them addressed how Eleanor's political career might have affected aristocratic women after her. While Evans believes other women held power like Eleanor's, he fails to articulate this insight further. He focuses on the negative interpretations of Eleanor and what caused the biases. Exploring this significant topic would redefine our knowledge of medieval women in politics and add to the scholarship of the duchess-queen. Eleanor of Aquitaine wielded substantial political power; the legacy she left to noblewomen after her death needs to be explored.

Eleanor gained the title Queen of France upon her marriage to Louis VII in 1137. The couple was both young and inexperienced, prompting rash decisions and encouraging counselors to vie for the king's ear and favor. The years before the Second Crusade would reveal the young king's lack of judgment and reckless decisions, often spurred on by his wife.<sup>11</sup> Much to the displeasure of the courtiers, Eleanor exhibited significant influence over her husband through intercession in the marriage's early years. Intercession constituted a vital component of a queen's duty in the Middle Ages, functioning "as an acceptable avenue of queenly influence and power," precisely because queenship "was a type of motherhood" where the queen sought the best interest for her "children," the people.<sup>12</sup> Even if denied official political involvement, the queen could still intervene and persuade the king, because of the intimate, personal access to her husband.

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<sup>11</sup> Ralph V. Turner, *Eleanor of Aquitaine: Queen of France, Queen of England* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 40.

<sup>12</sup> Kristen Gaeman, "Queen's Gold and Intercession: the Case of Eleanor of Aquitaine," *Medieval Feminist Forum* 46, no. 2 (2010): 11.

Eleanor visibly exercised her rights of intercession with Louis on one major occasion. Petronilla, Eleanor's younger sister, was romantically involved with Count Ralph of Vermandois, which Eleanor wholeheartedly supported. Louis, "incapable of resisting the insistence of Eleanor," found bishops to nullify the count's previous marriage, and marry Petronilla and Ralph.<sup>13</sup> The scandalous marriage so outraged the rejected wife's uncle, Theobald of Blois-Champagne, that he convinced the pope to excommunicate the newlyweds.<sup>14</sup> Louis VII, indignant from Theobald's opposition, invaded Champagne in the summer 1142. Tragically, when Louis's men invaded the town of Vitry, they burned to the ground the church providing refuge for the townspeople. Several hundred people burned to death inside, while the king helplessly watched from outside the town.<sup>15</sup> Louis is reported to have transformed into a different man after the massacre, becoming staunchly religious and seeking the counsel of Bernard of Clairvaux and Suger of Saint-Denis. Despite the tragedy, Eleanor stubbornly pushed for the revocation of the couple's excommunication, possibly bribing two cardinal deacons.<sup>16</sup> In 1148, the Church finally divorced Ralph of Vermandois and his first wife, allowing the count and Petronilla to officially be wed.<sup>17</sup> Eleanor was secretly blamed for the disaster, and her influence over Louis quickly deteriorated as the king now sought the advice of clergymen.

Regardless of the tension within the royal couple, Eleanor still held the title of Duchess of Aquitaine. Despite being king of France, Louis VII could not govern Aquitaine without Eleanor. While their marriage entitled him as duke, Louis needed to earn authoritative legitimacy over the Aquitainians by associating himself with the lawful duchess. He attempted to accomplish this by identifying himself with the duchess-queen's lineage of male ancestors. Most of Louis's Aquitanian charters, an official grant of authority or rights, confirmed the acts of Eleanor's ancestors, conveying the king's attachment to her

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<sup>13</sup> Turner, *Eleanor of Aquitaine*, 63.

<sup>14</sup> John of Salisbury, *Historia Pontificalis* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., 1956): chap. VI, 12.

<sup>15</sup> Turner, *Eleanor of Aquitaine*, 64.

<sup>16</sup> John of Salisbury, *Historia Pontificalis*, chap. VI, 12.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, chap. VI, 13.

family.<sup>18</sup> Aquitaine was never a truly united duchy, but rather constructed of factions overseen by barons who rarely agreed. These barons despised rule from anyone besides an Aquitanian, which is why Louis attempted to graft himself into Eleanor's lineage and identify as an "Aquitanian."

From 1137 to 1152, only sixteen charters show that Eleanor governed her duchy alongside Louis, confirming the notion of her "limited sphere of action."<sup>19</sup> Of these sixteen, four were issued solely by the queen-duchess, and even these confirmed issues decreed by Louis. In a charter from 1139, Eleanor presented the Knights Templar with gifts of mills and houses in La Rochelle from her possessions. Except in the greeting where the duchess introduces herself, Eleanor used plural pronouns ("we wish," "we have given," "we grant") throughout the rest of the charter.<sup>20</sup> Though the lands granted to the Knights Templar were originally Eleanor's, the pronoun plurality referenced her marriage and shared power. Two charters from 1140 and 1141 confirmed gifts given to the nuns of Notre Dame de Saintes that "[Eleanor's] husband granted" or "with the assent of Louis King of the Franks."<sup>21</sup> Eleanor's 1140 letter used personal, singular pronouns when doing Louis's bidding, while the 1141 official letter used the plural pronouns again.

French society denied Eleanor unrestricted power over Aquitaine, even as heiress, and she held no official authority as queen of France. Especially under Louis and his father, Louis VI, the French government centered on the king's authority, reducing the queen's role and power.<sup>22</sup> One of the first victims to this centralization, Eleanor's power extended only to Aquitanian matters and personal influence. During the twelfth century, men's intolerance for powerful women grew, preferring subordinate and weak-willed women. The Church instigated this low perception of women by portraying

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<sup>18</sup> Elizabeth A. R. Brown, "Queen Eleanor and Aquitaine, 1137-1189," in *Eleanor of Aquitaine, Lord and Lady*, ed. Bonnie Wheeler and John Carmi Parsons (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 60.

<sup>19</sup> Brown, "Chapter 2: Queen Eleanor and Aquitaine," 57.

<sup>20</sup> Eleanor of Aquitaine, "A Letter from Eleanor of Aquitaine (1139)," no. 1, in the Epistolae: Medieval Women's Letters Database, accessed Apr. 14, 2014, <http://epistolae.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/letter/891.html>.

<sup>21</sup> Two letters by Eleanor of Aquitaine, "Letter from Eleanor (1140, Dec. 28)" and "Letter from Eleanor (1141)," both in the Epistolae: Medieval Women's Letters Database, accessed Apr. 14, 2014, <http://epistolae.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/letter/893.html> and <http://epistolae.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/letter/895.html>.

<sup>22</sup> Brown, "Queen Eleanor and Aquitaine, 1137-1189," 57.

females as the evil seed of Eve, inheriting the temptress's wickedness.<sup>23</sup> The Church promoted the Virgin Mary as a role model for good, subordinate women to combat their inherited sinfulness.<sup>24</sup> Powerful women who defied traditional feminine standards, like the queen-duchess, were considered unnatural and wrong. It is understandable why Eleanor experienced this diminishing of female power, with Louis's father initiating the decline and with great religious men being her king's closest advisors.

Eleanor's involvement in the Second Crusade greatly contributed to highly negative perceptions of her, exemplifying the "wickedness" of women in general. It was not unusual for women to participate in a crusade, though men believed it threatened the mission's success. Noblewomen could join their crusading husbands and fathers, and several noblewomen besides Eleanor participated in the Second Crusade.<sup>25</sup> Multiple reasons motivated Eleanor to journey with the crusaders to the Holy Land. First of all, Eleanor shared conventional religious beliefs, so the idea of worshipping in Jerusalem would have been emotionally stirring. According to the Church, pilgrimages rewarded participants for their sacrificial journey, so Eleanor likely sought both the security of her soul and the ability to bear a son. Secondly, the queen possibly craved the excitement and adventure that Paris could not provide. Aquitaine and the rest of Southern France "lived for pleasure as an ideal to pursue," and the aristocrats, including women, lived a flamboyant lifestyle.<sup>26</sup> In contrast, Northern France possessed a strict puritanical culture because of the Church's heavier influence there. Lastly, the king probably encouraged Eleanor to accompany him for two reasons. Though reportedly not sexually attracted to his queen, Louis possessed an intense infatuation for Eleanor, and presumably could not bear long separations from his wife.<sup>27</sup> Also, Louis likely felt more comfortable leaving Abbot Suger behind with the kingdom's administration rather than Eleanor, and the

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<sup>23</sup> Turner, "Eleanor of Aquitaine, Twelfth-Century English Chroniclers and her "Black Legend," 22.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>25</sup> Meade, *Eleanor of Aquitaine*, 72.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>27</sup> Turner, *Eleanor of Aquitaine*, 73.

Aquitanian barons may have participated more willingly in the Crusade with their duchess's accompaniment.

Clergymen viewed crusading women unfavorably, however, so Eleanor's involvement in the Crusade earned their disdainful condemnation and provoked rumors of her shocking behavior. In many cases, the chroniclers only mentioned Eleanor if she did something wrong, improper, or scandalous. In his *Historia Pontificalis*, John of Salisbury documented the years 1148-1152 in which Eleanor, still married to Louis VII, supposedly committed adultery. While traveling on the Second Crusade, the long procession rested in the Principality of Antioch, which belonged to Eleanor's uncle, Prince Raymond. "The attentions paid by the prince to the queen" and their intense and continuous conversations "aroused the king's suspicion."<sup>28</sup> The suspicions strengthened when "the queen wished to remain behind" while the Crusaders pressed on; after hearing advice from close friends, Louis VII "tore her away and forced her to leave for Jerusalem."<sup>29</sup> After the miserable failure of the Second Crusade, people pointed fingers at antagonists like Prince Raymond and the queen for the embarrassment. While no chronicler blatantly accused Eleanor of incest, some, like John of Salisbury and Gerald of Wales, hinted at her immorality. Gerald referred to the incident as "a matter of sufficient notoriety on how she conducted herself in Palestine."<sup>30</sup>

The rumors of incest reveals the anxieties the Church and men in general had about women, sexuality, and authority, especially when defining queenship. "Strong" women were viewed as promiscuous and sexually driven, so the chroniclers portrayed Eleanor as passionate, immoral, and driven by her desire. In the Middle Ages, adultery was a sin and crime, but the consequences for an unfaithful queen were significantly higher. The crime threatened the legitimacy of the royal heir, which she had not

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<sup>28</sup> John of Salisbury, chap. XXIII, 52.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>30</sup> Gerald of Wales, "Chap: XXVII: Comments on the Angevin Family," *De Instructione Principis*, in the Fordham University Medieval Sourcebook Database, accessed Apr. 9, 2014, <http://www.fordham.edu/Halsall/source/geraldwales-dip1.asp>.

produced yet, and demonstrated the “king’s lack of authority in his own household and kingdom.”<sup>31</sup> The sexual and personal relationship between the royal couple came to be related to the political influence the queen had on the king. How the chroniclers depicted the queen’s scandals and desires suggest that Eleanor symbolized the “dangers of the queen’s intimacy with the king.”<sup>32</sup> In essence, Eleanor embodied the very fear medieval men harbored: Women’s power, sexuality, and influence could blind and persuade men.

Expanding on the Antioch scandal, some modern historians have blamed Eleanor and her foolish behaviors entirely for the Second Crusade’s failure, even with the lack of supporting medieval evidence. Agnes Strickland asserted, rather dramatically and incorrectly, that “the freaks of Queen Eleanor” and her entourage were the sole cause “of all the misfortunes that befell King Louis and his army.”<sup>33</sup> Eleanor and her handmaidens were rumored to have masqueraded as Amazonian warriors, encumbering the army with their useless fanaticism. They apparently mocked the Frenchmen who possessed “good enough sense to keep out of this insane expedition,” shaming them into taking up the cross.<sup>34</sup> Once the crusaders were in Laodicea, Eleanor presumably disregarded Louis VII’s order to camp on high ground, and camped in a valley. The exposed camp was brutally attacked by the Arabs, resulting in the death of seven thousand crusaders as “penalty for their queen’s inexperience.”<sup>35</sup> Like the folk superstition of women aboard ships, women brought doom upon holy pilgrimages, so naturally Eleanor and her entourage were charged with the failure of the Second Crusade. The queen’s reputation was “blackened” after the Second Crusade, thus “shadowing her portrait with evil.”<sup>36</sup> Her marriage visibly deteriorated after the crusade, and the

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<sup>31</sup> Peggy McCracken, “Scandalizing Desire: Eleanor of Aquitaine and the Chroniclers,” in *Eleanor of Aquitaine, Lord and Lady*, ed. Bonnie Wheeler and John Carmi Parsons (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 250.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 258.

<sup>33</sup> Strickland, 165.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 164.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 165.

<sup>36</sup> Turner, “Eleanor of Aquitaine, Twelfth-Century English Chroniclers and her “Black Legend,” 18.

pope had “to reconcile the king and queen...and confirm their marriage, both orally and in writing.”<sup>37</sup> Despite these attempts to repair the damages, the marriage ended in an annulment in 1152.

For a short time after her divorce, Eleanor reaffirmed her authority over Aquitaine. She hastily renounced Louis VII’s decrees, and replaced them with her own. For whatever reason, the disorderly barons highly favored Eleanor and heartily welcomed her rule, especially after the administration of a foreigner.<sup>38</sup> However, only eight weeks after the annulment, a young Henry II, the duke of Normandy and the duchess of Aquitaine wed. Eleanor’s interest in Henry likely grew from the prospect of her gaining a new royal title and that Aquitaine would be released from French control, becoming an autonomous territory again.<sup>39</sup> In 1154, the newlyweds were crowned king and queen of England after Stephen of Blois’ death. Creating the Angevin “empire,” Henry amassed his family lands which covered most of England and large parts of France.<sup>40</sup> Now that he had acquired France’s wealthiest and largest duchy, the king attempted to incorporate the duchy into his empire. Similar to what was occurring in France, the centralization of Henry’s power forced Eleanor into the political shadows, even in regards to Aquitaine.<sup>41</sup> Eleanor experienced a drastically visible reduction of power during her marriage to Henry; she was no longer independent but encountered a strong-willed and ferocious husband. She vanished from all charters, English and Aquitanian, between the years 1157 and 1167.<sup>42</sup> Only the patronage of religious houses and intercession gave Eleanor a productive outlet for her jurisdiction. For example, Bishop Anastasius IV of Sabina asked the queen to convince Henry to reinstall an abbot to the St. Michael

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<sup>37</sup> John of Salisbury, chap. XXIX, 61.

<sup>38</sup> Krisana E. West, “For Power, Politics and Lust: The Queens of the Angevin Empire: Eleanor of Aquitaine, Berengaria of Navarre, and Isabelle of Angouleme” (PhD diss., Central Missouri State University, 2002), 43.

<sup>39</sup> Elizabeth A. R. Brown, “Eleanor of Aquitaine: Parent, Queen, and Duchess,” in *Eleanor of Aquitaine: Patron and Politician*, Symposia in the Arts and Humanities #3, edited by William W. Kibler (Austin: University of Texas, 1976), 15.

<sup>40</sup> Turner, *Eleanor of Aquitaine*, 1.

<sup>41</sup> Brown, “Queen Eleanor and Aquitaine,” 65.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

monastery, since she “is a participant of mercy [and] a helper in good works.”<sup>43</sup> However, in 1167, Eleanor returned to the head of Aquitaine’s administration, not surprisingly because Henry failed to control all his territories and the disgruntled, rebellious Aquitanian barons. When Henry distributed pieces of his kingdom between his four sons, Richard inherited the title Duke of Aquitaine in 1174, and co-ruled alongside his mother Eleanor.

The most important role Eleanor fulfilled during her marriage to Henry II was that of mother. Despite the couple’s constant bickering, Eleanor gave birth to eight children, five sons and three daughters, well into her forties. Typical to royal families, the sons as potential heirs to the throne grew up under the tutelage of courtiers rather than with their mother, to be given an education befitting of future kings. Eleanor’s daughters, Matilda, Eleanor, and Joanna, remained with their mother until their betrothals, when they went to live with their new family. While they were still young, both her sons and daughters traveled frequently with Eleanor, crossing the Channel multiple times when her children were just toddlers and babies. This kind of frequent contact between mother and children was unusual for noblewomen in the Middle Ages. Aristocratic mothers were not neglectful, but rather had the means to hire caretakers and nurses to manage the children.<sup>44</sup> Except for announcements of childbirths, the chroniclers stayed silent in regards to Eleanor during her first sixteen years as queen of England. According to gender expectations and standards, Eleanor finally acted appropriately for a woman of her position by producing heirs and remaining out of politics.<sup>45</sup>

This period of calm reversed drastically, however, in the year 1173 with a rebellion against King Henry II. In the years leading to 1173, the king angered his subjects by hoarding absolute powers and

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<sup>43</sup> Anastasius, “Letter from Anastasius IV (1153),” ep. 215. in the Epistolae: Medieval Women's Letters Database, accessed Apr. 14, 2014, <http://epistolae.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/letter/142.html>.

<sup>44</sup> RaGena C. DeAragon, “Wife, Widow, and Mother: Some Comparisons between Eleanor of Aquitaine and Noblewomen of the Anglo-Norman and Angevin World,” in *Eleanor of Aquitaine, Lord and Lady*, ed. Bonnie Wheeler and John Carmi Parsons (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 102-3.

<sup>45</sup> West, “For Power, Politics and Lust,” 45.

possibly authorizing the murder of Thomas Beckett, the archbishop of Canterbury. After Easter of that year, the king of France, Henry's sons, and multiple duchies rose against King Henry II "and laid waste his French lands" in retaliation.<sup>46</sup> Many of Eleanor's contemporaries blamed the queen for influencing the revolt. Roger of Hoveden's account of the revolt only briefly mentioned the presence of the queen; however, he did not completely disregard the queen's participation. Gerald of Wales labeled the revolt as "a grave offense of [Henry's] sons against the father at the instigation of their mother."<sup>47</sup> Though chroniclers bitterly disapproved of the royal family, they avoided stating their hatred outright. They likely withheld their full-blown judgment to maintain royal favor and not anger the ones who had ultimate authority. Rotrou, the Archbishop of Rouen, composed a letter to the queen, reprimanding Eleanor for "opening the way for your own children to rise up against their father."<sup>48</sup> He reminded her of her duty as queen and wife to support the king and raise respectful sons. Rotrou implored Eleanor that a woman should submit dutifully to her husband in obedience to law, Scripture, and nature. He warned the queen that unless she obeyed Henry, her actions would "cause widespread disaster...and ruin for everyone in the kingdom."<sup>49</sup> The letter indeed reprimanded Eleanor's shocking behavior, but the tone was neither spiteful nor disrespectful. On the contrary, Rotrou commented on the queen's integrity, calling her "a most prudent woman," "most pious and illustrious queen," and as much of a "parishioner as her husband."<sup>50</sup> This might have been flattery or sweetening the sour message, but just as likely, Rotrou could have been genuinely complimentary and respectful of the queen's power and image.

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<sup>46</sup> Richard of Hoveden, "The Revolt of 1173-4, from the Chronicle," in the Fordham University Medieval Sourcebook Database, accessed Apr. 9, 2014, <http://www.fordham.edu/Halsall/source/1173hoveden.asp>.

<sup>47</sup> Gerald of Wales, "Book I, Chapter 46: Description of Henry II, king of the English," *The Conquest of Ireland*, in the Fordham University Medieval Sourcebook Database, accessed Apr. 9, 2014, <http://www.fordham.edu/Halsall/source/12Cgerald-ireland2.asp>.

<sup>48</sup> Peter of Blois for Rotrou, the Archbishop of Rouen, "Letter 154 to Queen Eleanor, 1173," in the Fordham University Medieval Sourcebook Database, accessed Feb. 9, 2014, <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/eleanor.asp>.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

In contrast to Rotrou's kinder words, Gerald of Wales strongly hated the scandalous and misbehaved Angevin family, "for they all come of the devil, and to the devil they would go."<sup>51</sup> In *De Instructione Principis*, Gerald questioned "how was it possible for the branches to be prosperous and virtuous" with a corrupt root.<sup>52</sup> Because Eleanor's father presumably stole another man's wife, Gerald called the queen the child "of an open and detestable act of adultery," doomed to fruitlessness (though she obviously was not). Gerald asserted that Henry's heritage was as bad as Eleanor's, so any headstrong behavior by the king was hardly unexpected. Since both family lines were dripping with sin, "how then from such a union could a fortunate race be born?"<sup>53</sup> At the end of the century, Gerald spitefully recounted the Antioch scandal and also rumored that Eleanor "had been known by Henry II's own father," Geoffrey of Anjou.<sup>54</sup> Despite being forbidden by Geoffrey to touch Eleanor, Henry "defiled this so-called queen of France," stole her from Louis, and married her himself.<sup>55</sup> These malicious comments written after Eleanor's death show how the duchess-queen's actions disgusted some chroniclers, which the chroniclers fitted into their larger propagandistic schemes. Writers contemporary to Eleanor expressed both respect and repugnance for the controversial and bold queen.

After Henry II defeated the rebels in 1174, he captured Eleanor, who was fleeing to Paris. The king imprisoned her in Chignon Castle, where she remained until Henry's death some sixteen years later. During her house arrest, Richard le Poitevin bemoaned the removal of Eleanor and Richard the Lionheart, who both managed the court at Poitiers before the rebellion. As had occurred with Louis VII, the Aquitanian barons opposed this situation as Henry, a foreigner, would create unwelcomed change after replacing the duchess. Aquitaine's cultural differences caused wary distrust of people across the Loire

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<sup>51</sup> Gerald of Wales, "Chap: XXVII: Comments on the Angevin Family," *De Instructione Principis*, in the Fordham University Medieval Sourcebook Database, accessed Apr. 9, 2014, <http://www.fordham.edu/Halsall/source/geraldwales-dip1.asp>.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

River. Thus, the genuinely distraught Richard le Poitevin prayed for the day when “[you, duchess,] will return to your lands.”<sup>56</sup> He painted Henry and his companions in a negative light, portraying them as backstabbers, uncultured barbarians, and evil oppressors.<sup>57</sup> This lament suggests Aquitainians’ support for the revolt and their duchess’s power. If both the duchess’s supporters as well as critics like Gerald of Wales spoke of her instigation, Eleanor indeed held tremendous political weight and persuasion.

As exemplified by the revolt, Eleanor certainly held political leverage during her husbands’ and sons’ lifetimes. However, her power thereafter was strictly limited to behind the scenes influence. Not until after Henry II’s death in 1189 did Eleanor finally experience political freedom. Her sons’ reigns can explain this change in authority; a strong political figure was needed with Richard I on crusade and in light of King John’s upsets. More charters and letters of Eleanor’s exist after Henry’s death, especially in 1199, than from her time as queen-regent. Though she held no official position in English government, Eleanor became respected, even reluctantly by the chroniclers, in her widowhood. Her role as queen-mother also “gave her a prominent part in English politics.”<sup>58</sup> Also, both Richard and John held strong attachments and affections toward their mother, more than they ever had shown for their father, Henry II.

Richard inherited the title of king of England after his father’s death. The king needed a trustworthy individual to administer England during his continental ventures, as Richard spent only six months of his ten-year reign in England. When Richard journeyed on the Third Crusade from 1189-1192 and then was held ransom by King Henry VI of Germany, Eleanor substituted as ruler until his return. Two letters from Richard to his mother provided valuable insight into Eleanor’s role during his absence. Richard thanked his mother for her “loyalty, faithful care, and diligence you give to our lands,” and continued by

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<sup>56</sup> “Richard the Poitevin Laments Eleanor’s Removal to England,” in Fiona Swabey, *Eleanor of Aquitaine, Courtly Love, and the Troubadours* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2004): 128.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Turner, “Eleanor of Aquitaine in the Governments of Her Sons Richard and John,” 78.

declaring that Eleanor's prudence and discretion caused the kingdom to remain peaceful.<sup>59</sup> In the two letters, Richard requested Eleanor's "hasty promotion" in naming Hubert, Bishop of Salisbury, as Archbishop of Canterbury according to the king's wishes,<sup>60</sup> urging her "with all possible devotion, that you carry this business to its conclusion with all speed."<sup>61</sup> This statement and similar ones show the trust Richard invested in Eleanor and her political abilities; he clearly was confident placing important matters into his mother's capable hands.

King Richard abruptly died in March of 1199 from a gangrenous arrow wound while fighting the French King Phillip II. Back in 1190, Richard had declared his nephew, Arthur of Brittany, as heir; however, before his death, the king chose his brother, John, as his successor. This uncertainty shaped 1199 into a greatly confusing and volatile time. Arthur's mother, Constance, another strong-willed woman, fought to have the nephew claim the throne. Eleanor deeply distrusted Constance and Arthur, since the nephew was raised by Philip II, an enemy of the Angevins. Eleanor flew into action, campaigning to establish John's right to the throne over Arthur's. The duchess attempted to create support for John by correcting wrongs against the barons and giving gifts to the nobility and religious houses, especially Fontevraud Abbey, which she founded.<sup>62</sup> John was crowned king of England in April 1199, with much help and assistance from his mother's efforts.

Seeking loyalty for John both before and after his coronation, the contents of the queen's 1199 charters and letters cover a wide range of topics: grants and gifts, confirmations, and intercessions, amongst others. Eleanor assigned an annual rent of ten pounds to the abbey of Fontevraud in France,

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<sup>59</sup> Richard I, "Letter from Richard, King of England (1193)," ep. 399. in the Epistolae: Medieval Women's Letters Database, accessed Apr. 14, 2014, <http://epistolae.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/letter/148.html>.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Eleanor of Aquitaine, "Letter from Eleanor of Aquitaine (1199)," 2<sup>nd</sup> series, BEC 19, 339-40. In the Epistolae: Medieval Women's Letters Database, accessed Sept. 22, 2014, <http://epistolae.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/letter/889.html>.

with a lifetime compensation for Chaplain Roger and any future abbess.<sup>63</sup> To honor the late Richard I's soul, William de Mauze presented the abbey a monetary gift of one hundred pounds a year, which Eleanor declared would be used "for the ladies' tunics and not for any other use."<sup>64</sup> The gift was in gratitude for Eleanor returning to him lands that Richard had seized. Many other aristocrats faced similar situations, and Eleanor restored most lands back to the barons to gain support for King John. Eleanor's charter for the monastery of St. John of Poitiers "wished and commanded that the liberty and immunity" granted them "be preserved there."<sup>65</sup> The queen reconfirmed the freedoms and rights granted to the monastery by Eleanor's father, grandfather, and great-grandfather.<sup>66</sup> In two similar charters, Eleanor granted the island community of Oleron off of France's Atlantic coast the liberties and customs, such as marriage laws, that her ancestors had established.<sup>67</sup> The queen also granted the entire fief of Sancta Severa to her friend and relative, Andreas of Chauvigny,<sup>68</sup> and a pond and some mill-houses to the abbey of St. Mary of Tourpignac in Poitou, France in honor of the late King Richard.<sup>69</sup>

Even on her deathbed, Eleanor was still considered a strong political force. In 1200, John set aside his marriage to Isabella of Gloucester and married Isabelle of Angoulême, deeply offending his new bride's prior betrothed, Hugh IX of Lusiana, Italy. This absurd dishonor outraged many barons, causing the Viscount of Thouars, the most important Poitevin noble, to seek Eleanor's advice.<sup>70</sup> After reasoning with the viscount, Eleanor wrote to King John, stating that the viscount "will now serve you truly and faithfully

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<sup>63</sup> Eleanor of Aquitaine, "Letter from Eleanor of Aquitaine (1199)," in the Epistolae: Medieval Women's Letters Database, accessed Apr. 14, 2014, <http://epistolae.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/letter/889.html>.

<sup>64</sup> Eleanor of Aquitaine, "Letter from Eleanor of Aquitaine (1199)," in the Epistolae: Medieval Women's Letters Database, accessed Apr. 14, 2014, <http://epistolae.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/letter/886.html>.

<sup>65</sup> Eleanor of Aquitaine, "Letter from Eleanor of Aquitaine, (May 4, 1199)," in the Epistolae: Medieval Women's Letters Database, accessed Apr. 14, 2014, <http://epistolae.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/letter/1327.html>.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Eleanor of Aquitaine, "Letter from Eleanor of Aquitaine (1199)," no. 508, in the Epistolae: Medieval Women's Letters Database, accessed Apr. 14, 2014, <http://epistolae.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/letter/1329.html>.

<sup>69</sup> Eleanor of Aquitaine, "Letter from Eleanor of Aquitaine (April 21, 1199)," no. 489, in the Epistolae: Medieval Women's Letters Database, accessed Apr. 14, 2014, <http://epistolae.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/letter/1326.html>.

<sup>70</sup> "Two Letters Dating from Eleanor's Old Age," in Swabey, 130.

against all men.”<sup>71</sup> Roger of Hoveden recorded that Eleanor focused on having “all freemen of the whole kingdom” swear fidelity to their king “for life and limbs and earthly honor.”<sup>72</sup> From her deathbed in 1200, Eleanor and the Constable of Auvergne convinced the rebellious Viscount Thoarc of the wrongs he had committed against John by seizing the king’s land and supporting those who had opposed the king. The viscount “conceded benevolently” and pledged that he would remain faithful to King John.<sup>73</sup> Eleanor deftly handled the different political issues brought before her. The older queen possessed a political authority second only to the king as she granted land exchanges, confirmed money donations, changed societal laws, and acted as a diplomat.

Throughout her life, but especially in her widowhood, Eleanor’s influence also extended to religious patronage and the Church. Clerics were the intercessors between earth and heaven, but they also possessed significant amounts of land and wealth, making either powerful allies or enemies. Helping the Church through either intercession or donations produced spiritual, economic, social and political benefits. Notably, high-ranking clergymen often sought the queen for assistance in furthering their agendas. Geoffrey, prior of the Canterbury convent, implored Eleanor to continue her protection and patronage of the convent. The prior wrote of the queen’s generosity and diligence, and alluded to rumors against the convent: “[D]o not believe any suggestion from anyone about us before the truth is established.”<sup>74</sup> The letter begged the queen to “protect [the convent] under the shadow of your wings” and prevent any unjust oppression of them.<sup>75</sup> The convent had sent a similar letter to King Richard in which the monks sought favor by flattering his ego; however, they sought direct protection from

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 130.

<sup>72</sup> Jane Martindale, “Epilogue: Eleanor of Aquitaine and a “Queenly Court”?,” in *Eleanor of Aquitaine, Lord and Lady*, ed. Bonnie Wheeler and John Carmi Parsons (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 428.

<sup>73</sup> Eleanor of Aquitaine, “Letter from Eleanor of Aquitaine (1200),” in the Epistolae: Medieval Women’s Letters Database, accessed Apr. 14, 2014, <http://epistolae.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/letter/900.html>.

<sup>74</sup> Geoffrey, “Geoffrey, prior, and the convent of Christ Church, Canterbury (Jan. 1192),” ep. 393. in the Epistolae: Medieval Women’s Letters Database, accessed Apr. 14, 2014, <http://epistolae.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/letter/147.html>.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

Eleanor.<sup>76</sup> Clergymen placed significant faith in Eleanor's political aptitude to fix the monasteries' problems.

At a later date, the Canterbury convent again sought Eleanor's intercession, but this time over a dispute about the rebuilding of the chapel of Lambeth. The monks requested the queen "to preserve the king's grace towards us" and "beseech for us."<sup>77</sup> Because of the queen's goodness, the convent "confidently brought [their] needs and troubles" to Eleanor.<sup>78</sup> Eleanor also helped other churches besides the Canterbury convent. Jocelin of Brakelond chronicled the formation of St. Edmund's Abbey during Eleanor's lifetime. He mentioned how King Richard demanded one thousand marks for the purchase of the Manor of Mildenhall, and as according to custom, Eleanor would receive ten percent.<sup>79</sup> She magnanimously received a gold chalice for payment but restored the chalice back to the abbey in honor of the late King Henry II, as it was Henry who originally gave the chalice to St. Edmund.<sup>80</sup> These chronicles reveal the strong bonds Eleanor of Aquitaine shared with churches. Different monasteries sought the queen's help and intercession throughout her political career. Confident in Eleanor's political influence and natural ability, the clergymen diligently entrusted their agendas and problems to the queen.

The ten-percent custom that Jocelin of Brakelond mentioned in his chronicle was called queen's gold. Queen's gold was a cash gratitude payment, or equivalently valued item, for the queen's intercession on the payer's behalf.<sup>81</sup> As queen of England during Henry II's reign, Eleanor received queen's gold, typically a gold mark for every hundred silver marks paid to the king. After Henry's death, Eleanor

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<sup>76</sup> Joan Ferrante, "Historical Context for letter: Geoffrey, prior, and the convent of Christ Church, Canterbury (Jan 1192), ep. 393.

<sup>77</sup> "Letter from the Convent of Canterbury," ep. 472. in the Epistolae: Medieval Women's Letters Database, accessed Apr. 14, 2014, <http://epistolae.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/letter/150.html>.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Jocelin of Brakelond, "Chronicle of the Abbey of St. Edmund's (1173-1202)," (Sept. 1189). In the Fordham University Medieval Sourcebook Database, accessed Apr. 9, 2014, <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/jocelin.asp>.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Gaeman, 12-14.

continued to receive the queen's gold stipend during her sons' reigns, even after they both married.<sup>82</sup> Richard and John both elevated Eleanor's status as queen-regent above their own wives, and she reaped the benefits. In addition to the queen's gold and Aquitaine's revenues, Richard bestowed on Eleanor income from her dower lands and from Norman farms.<sup>83</sup> In 1199, John published the agreement between him and his mother, acknowledging Eleanor's right to hold "all Poitou [Aquitaine] with the whole inheritance and acquisition" during the king's lifetime.<sup>84</sup> Eleanor and John established a joint-rights agreement over the duchy that "she would give away nothing without [John's] assent and counsel," nor could John "without her assent and counsel."<sup>85</sup> Only after Eleanor's death were the queen's gold and her dower lands in England, Normandy and Poitou given to another queen or returned to the king's domain. Eleanor certainly deserved financial rewards and political freedom after almost seventy years of relentless service to four kings and three countries. This remarkable duchess-queen died in April 1204 around eighty years of age, unusually old for medieval standards. Eleanor of Aquitaine was buried alongside Henry II, her beloved Richard, and daughter Joanne at Fontevraud Abbey, where she spent her last years. During her final years, Richard of Devizes, England, a Benedictine monk, wrote praises of Eleanor that beautifully summarized her strong political career: Queen Eleanor, "tireless in her labors," exhibited abilities "her age might marvel" at and "qualities rarely found in a woman."<sup>86</sup>

After her death, Eleanor left behind a political legacy that greatly influenced her female descendants and other noblewomen. Eleanor's successors continued using the religious and political avenues of power that Eleanor utilized. Hereditary rule became established as a way of guaranteeing a dynasty and legacy; typically, only male relatives inherited the throne. However, whenever a male heir

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<sup>82</sup> Brown, "Eleanor of Aquitaine: Parent, Queen, and Duchess," 23.

<sup>83</sup> Turner, "Eleanor of Aquitaine in the Governments of Her Sons Richard and John," 78.

<sup>84</sup> John I, "A Letter from John, King of England (1199)," in the Epistolae: Medieval Women's Letters Database, accessed Apr. 14, 2014, <http://epistolae.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/letter/867.html>.

<sup>85</sup> John I, "A Letter from John, King of England (1199)."

<sup>86</sup> "Excerpt from the Chronicle of Richard of Devizes," in Swabey, 124.

did not exist, was too young, or was considered unsuitable, powerful women filled the void. Often times, unstable political situations or vacuums created by no male heir lead women to abandon their traditional roles, just as Eleanor did during the years between Richard's and John's reigns in England. Women from the thirteenth century to the fifteenth century exercised certain types of power within "socially-accepted spheres," such as Hildegard of Bingen in religious literature and Matilda of Boulogne's political support of her husband, Stephen of Blois.<sup>87</sup> Despite the decline of official female authority, aristocratic women continued their predecessors' political practices in terms of religion, queenly duties and roles, and even control of property.

Aristocratic women found supporting religious houses, or even joining them, an increasingly positive channel for exercising their power and influence. The growing number of women's religious communities, usually prompted by wealthy contributions from women just like Eleanor, reflected the noticeable presence of women in the religious sphere. Eleanor herself founded and supported numerous abbeys and nunneries, like Fontevraud Abbey in France, and her female descendants followed her example. Berengaria of Navarre, Richard the Lionheart's wife, struggled to regain her dower lands' income after Richard's death in order to endow an abbey.<sup>88</sup> She sparred twenty years against King John for the monies he promised, but not until Henry III succeeded John did Berengaria receive her rightful income. With the dowry money, she graciously donated to religious institutions, and purchased land in France to build the Cistercian abbey of Pietas Dei of l'Epau.<sup>89</sup> Eleanor's blood descendants favored the Cistercian order, beginning with the foundation of the Las Huelgas Abbey in Spain by Eleanor's daughter, Queen Leonor. Leonor's youngest daughter, Constanza, never married but served as a nun in her mother's

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<sup>87</sup> West, "For Power, Politics and Lust," 4.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 96.

abbey.<sup>90</sup> Another of Leonor's daughters, Queen Blanche of Castile, founded four Cistercian abbeys in Paris and Maubuisson, France, between 1236 and 1253.<sup>91</sup> Blanche's cousin, Countess Isabelle of Chartres, made numerous gifts to Cistercian monks and nuns, and also founded at least two nunneries in France as well.<sup>92</sup> These relatives of Eleanor are just a few examples of the numerous aristocratic women who exercised power through religious patronage.

Other noblewomen also found their persuasive voice by joining nunneries. Religious houses taught their charges to read, write, play music, and other skills, sometimes basing this upon Peter 4:10: "that each one who has received grace should share it," providing an education possibly unavailable outside of the holy walls to some.<sup>93</sup> This ecclesiastical education gave numerous women the ability to voice their opinion without intense condemnation. One such nun of nobility was Hildegard of Bingen, renowned for her religious visions, musical and literary compositions, and sound judgement. During the late 1100s, Hildegard comforted Eleanor, telling her to "attain stability in God," and advised Henry II to follow the way of justice and not his will.<sup>94</sup> Abbeys allowed Hildegard to counsel royalty, just as it gave other noblewomen a similar religious platform.

Despite an arguable decline in official power, the title of queen still held considerable amounts of authority over king and kingdom. Queenly status positioned women in public roles usually closed to their gender.<sup>95</sup> Intercession continued to be an approved avenue of influence for women, as long as it only involved pleading mercy for individuals or groups. Queen Leonor held significant sway over her husband,

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<sup>90</sup> Miriam Shadis and Constance Berman, "A Taste of the Feast: Reconsidering Eleanor of Aquitaine's Female Descendants," in *Eleanor of Aquitaine, Lord and Lady*, ed. Bonnie Wheeler and John Carmi Parsons (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 188.

<sup>91</sup> Shadis and Berman, 189.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 190.

<sup>93</sup> Alcuin Blamires, ed., *Women Defamed and Women Defended: An Anthology of Medieval Texts* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 251.

<sup>94</sup> Hildegard of Bingen, "A Letter from Hildegard of Bingen [to Eleanor of Aquitaine], (1154 to 70)," in the Epistolae: Medieval Women's Letters Database, accessed Jan. 10, 2016, <https://epistolae.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/letter/1187.html>.

<sup>95</sup> Robert Bucholz and Carole Levin, "Introduction: It's Good to Be Queen," in *Queens and Power in Medieval and Early Modern England*, eds. Robert Bucholz and Carole Levin (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), xvi.

Alfonso VIII of Castile, which prompted men to “exploit her position, thus recognizing her important political role.”<sup>96</sup> On the other hand, if intercession strayed into influencing the king on policy or patronage, the misogynistic fears began to reemerge.<sup>97</sup> However, this did not stop some queens, such as Blanche of Castile, from influencing their kings. Like Eleanor, Blanche possessed strong leverage over her son, Louis IX, and dictated his directions of religious patronage, obviously favoring the Cistercian order, even after his marriage to Marguerite of Provence.<sup>98</sup> Queen’s gold also continued after the twelfth century. Eleanor of Castile, Eleanor’s great-great-granddaughter, and Eleanor of Provence both received monetary compensation for their queenly influence, demonstrating that “English queens made bureaucracy work for them instead of being marginalized by it.”<sup>99</sup> Eleanor’s strong use of intercession continued to be a vital function to following queens.

Despite the decline in authority, the title of queen still held substantial juridical weight beyond just intercession. Some queens were fortunate enough to become respected and powerful political figures alongside their husbands or sons, just as Eleanor had become. Castile’s king Alfonso VIII greatly relied on his wife, Queen Leonor, for political assistance. Leonor served as regent during her husband’s absences and ruled alongside her two sons, Fernando and Enrique, before her death in 1214.<sup>100</sup> Likewise, Blanche of Castile assumed regency for her son in 1223 after her husband’s passing.<sup>101</sup> This continued well into the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Another of Eleanor’s descendants, Maria of Castile, similarly held the sovereign authority of a king in all civil, military, and criminal matters from 1432 to 1453 while King Alfonso V was occupied in Italy. Alfonso deemed Maria his “alter ego” in the political sphere in which she was

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<sup>96</sup> Shadis and Berman, 187.

<sup>97</sup> Bucholz and Levin, xxv.

<sup>98</sup> Shadis and Berman, 194.

<sup>99</sup> Gaeman, 24.

<sup>100</sup> Shadis and Berman, 185.

<sup>101</sup> Shadis and Berman, 193.

comparatively successful.<sup>102</sup> If disgruntled subjects biased against Maria appealed to Alfonso in Italy, the king typically supported his wife's decision.

The inheriting and holding of property boosted noblewomen's power, as it had for Eleanor. Generally, women obtained land through marriage dowries, inheritance, and wills after a relative's death. Eleanor, for example, inherited Aquitaine from her father, but through her marriages and her sons' grants, she administered a large amount of European territory. King John's second wife, Isabelle, was the countess of Angoulême, a geographically important region in Aquitaine. Like Eleanor, Isabelle ruled Angoulême in her own right, even after she was no longer Queen of England.<sup>103</sup> Women of Aquitaine and Southern France possessed more freedom to own land than women in the north, because as previously mentioned, the misogynist Church socially and culturally regulated Northern France to a greater degree. However, this did not hinder other women from owning or governing lands. Marguerite and Isabelle, Eleanor and Louis VII's granddaughters through Alix, both outlived their male relatives and inherited the valuable territories of Blois and Chartres in France. After their deaths, Marguerite and Isabelle's own daughters inherited the land from their mothers.<sup>104</sup> Eleanor's great-granddaughters, Jeanne and Marguerite, ruled the economically vital Flanders region for a combined fifty-two years between 1212 and 1278. Jeanne managed Flanders until her death, when Marguerite assumed the responsibility; both countesses ruled without the assistance of any count or consort.<sup>105</sup> Eleanor's example helped lead these thirteenth-century noblewomen to realize the political power they could possess.

Eleanor of Aquitaine played an indirect role in the formation of medieval and early modern Europe through her resources, wit, and royal connections. The wealth and land the duchess acquired through her inheritance and marriages gave her the authority to financially support religious institutions and the

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<sup>102</sup> Crawford, 162-3.

<sup>103</sup> West, 127.

<sup>104</sup> Shadis and Berman, 195.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 196.

credibility to administrate. Because of her inheritance, Eleanor was a desirable match for Louis VII and Henry II, giving her the title and benefits of queenship. Between both marriages, Eleanor produced ten children, nine of whom became kings and queens or married into royalty and power. The majority of her descendants married royalty or aristocrats across the entire continent, acknowledging Eleanor as the “Grandmother of Europe.” Her female descendants constituted an essential part of court, despite the limitations of women’s authority. Eleanor’s lifelong political career acted as a guiding compass for other queens to follow. She influenced her descendants and successors to follow her famous example in the practices of intercession, property rights, and queenly role. Despite suppression of public authority, women were still able to shape the landscape of Europe, making Eleanor of Aquitaine a trailblazer who transformed politics for future aristocratic women.

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# Defining Excellence: A Grid of Jerome's "Good" and "Bad" Virgin, Spouse, and Widow

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*By late antiquity, the status of women fell into three divisions: marriage, widowhood, or celibacy. In the eyes of intellectual early Christians, these states were not of equal merit. Specifically, Jerome viewed virginity as the most holy state, then widowhood, followed by marriage. However, his deprecation of marriage can appear so potent and his asceticism so extreme that modern scholars struggle to provide a balanced analysis of Jerome's works. The focus of scholars on these two aspects of Jerome's works restricts them from the wider spectrum of judgments Jerome has about the above three states. Analyzing his premier works on virginity — Letter 22, Against Jovinian, and Against Helvidius — I will show that Jerome offers readers not only a three-tier hierarchy, but also an elaborate "grid," identifying the "good" and "bad" virgin, spouse, and widow. Additionally, I will demonstrate the necessity for this detailed grid by arguing that its components were evident in Jerome's construction of Paula's chaste sanctity in his hagiography of her. The nuance and detail Jerome infuses into all of his works should be equally appreciated in his judgments on not only virginity, but also widowhood and marriage.*

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## Introduction

Our physical world is full of easily understood opposites, such as light and dark and hot and cold. Even in the human world of thought, feeling, and emotion, the concept of opposites can help us make judgments and decisions. However, when the elements in question consist of the idea of lifelong virginity opposed to the idea of marriage, our judgments may be less easily obtained. Intellectual Christians of late antiquity such as Augustine, Gregory of Nyssa, Jerome, Helvidius, and Jovinian debated the superiority or inferiority of lifelong virginity over marriage.<sup>1</sup> Another opposition lurks below the surface: the distinction not between perpetual virginity and marriage, but rather between the "good" virgin and the "bad" virgin, as well as the "good" spouse versus the "bad" spouse. Gregory of Nyssa, in his treatise *On Virginity*, uses

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<sup>1</sup> For a general overview see Glenn Holland, "Celibacy in the Early Christian Church," in *Celibacy and Religious Traditions*, ed. Carl Olson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 67-83, and David G. Hunter, "Sexuality, Marriage and the Family," in *Cambridge History of Christianity Volume 2: Constantine to c. 600*, ed. Augustine Casiday and Frederick W. Norris (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 585-600.

this more nuanced opposition in order to construct an exhaustive hierarchy of holiness, with "good" virginity at the very top.<sup>2</sup> I find Jerome also has this wide spectrum of opinions in his own writings on virginity. By envisioning this as a grid, one can move away from a dichotomy towards something more sophisticated.<sup>3</sup> The grid, with its multiple headers, shows relationships and interactions between many different fields, which can clearly reveal the nuance of Jerome's opinions. How does Jerome use this grid? Why does he use it? What does this mean for Jerome's view of women? Exploring these questions, I will analyze Jerome's foremost works on virginity: *Letter 22, Against Jovinian*, and *Against Helvidius*.<sup>4</sup> I will show that, as he gives attention to not just virginity and chaste widowhood but also marriage, he presents the "good" and the "bad" model for each category through how one governs one's body and spirit. I will then show the application of this detailed grid by demonstrating its presence in Jerome's *Life of Paula*.

In late antiquity, the life paths of marriage, widowhood, or celibacy were part of one intertwined tapestry of society. Jerome strongly supported lifelong virginity and chaste widowhood, so his literature often does not reflect or speak positively of the diversity of practice in his own society. Jerome (c. 331 - 419), an Early Christian intellectual and ascetic, lived in Stridon, Rome, Antioch, Bethlehem, and, for a time, the Syrian Desert.<sup>5</sup> He wrote prolifically, concerning himself with biblical exegesis and translation within his commentaries and *Vulgate*. Additionally, he dealt with topics and questions on asceticism in his hagiographies, treatises, and correspondence.<sup>6</sup> His writings on virginity particularly captured the attention of his contemporaries and modern scholars alike. Most notably, Jerome held that a hierarchy was present within the Church, with voluntary virginity at the top, then chaste widowhood, and then marriage. Jerome

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<sup>2</sup> Valerie A. Karras, "A Re-Evaluation of Marriage, Celibacy, and Irony in Gregory of Nyssa's *On Virginity*," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 13, no. 1 (2005), 112.

<sup>3</sup> See the Appendix for the grid mentioned here.

<sup>4</sup> Within the footnotes I will refer to *Against Helvidius* as "AH" and *Against Jovinian* as "AJ." Additionally, I will note any letters of Jerome as "Ep." and then that letter's number.

<sup>5</sup> For a bibliographic introduction of Jerome see Gunhild Vidén, "St. Jerome on Female Chastity: Subjugating the Elements of Desire," *Norwegian Journal of Greek and Latin Studies* 73, no. 1 (1998), 139.

<sup>6</sup> Some Christians separated themselves from the secular, non-Christian, world, practicing different degrees of extreme behavior — such as harsh fasting, especially long prayer or Bible reading vigils, disregard for bodily comfort, etc. — known as "asceticism" (from the Greek *askēsis*).

defended this view, as well as his program for an ascetic lifestyle, in two treatises: *Against Helvidius*, written in 383, and *Against Jovinian*, written in 393. He also maintained his views in his famous *Letter 22*, which has been informally titled “On Choosing the Life of Virginité.”<sup>7</sup> He wrote this letter to Eustochium, Paula the Elder’s daughter, in 384. Further, Jerome immortalized exemplars of chastity—those who adopted sexual abstinence either before or after marriage—in his hagiographies of Paul of Thebes, Hilarion, Malchus, Paula, and Marcella.<sup>8</sup> Jerome’s writings exerted enormous influence, especially *Against Jovinian*, and he is undoubtedly a crucial figure in the modern discourse on late-antique virginity.<sup>9</sup>

So much attention has been put on Jerome’s extreme asceticism that a one-dimensional view of Jerome’s hierarchy has formed. Clark describes the “anti-familial” strand in early Christian literature, and she shows how Jerome held a heightened zealotry in his views of asceticism compared with those even of Tertullian.<sup>10</sup> Steven Driver has charted the development of Jerome’s ascetical views in his epistles.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, scholars strongly stress Jerome’s aversion to first marriages.<sup>12</sup> Bernhard Jussen goes so far as to say Jerome believed that “marriage did not lead to salvation.”<sup>13</sup> Andrew Cain synthesizes current opinion with: “Jerome had heaped unqualified praise on virginity and seemed to condemn marriage as something intrinsically evil.”<sup>14</sup> Unquestionably, for Jerome marriage held a lower place compared to virginity; a strict

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<sup>7</sup> Carolinne White, *Lives of Roman Christian Women* (New York: Penguin Books, 2010), 110.

<sup>8</sup> The *vitae* of Paula and Marcella were actually letters; therefore, they are quasi-hagiographies to be precise. For a bibliographic introduction of Jerome’s hagiographies, see Andrew Cain, “Jerome’s Epitaphium Paulae: Hagiography, Pilgrimage, and the Cult of Saint Paula,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 18, no. 1 (2010): 107.

<sup>9</sup> John Oppel, “Saint Jerome and the History of Sex,” *Viator* 24 (1993): 6.

<sup>10</sup> Elizabeth A. Clark, “Antifamilial Tendencies in Ancient Christianity,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 5, no. 3 (1995); see also Elizabeth A. Clark, “Dissuading from Marriage: Jerome and the Asceticization of Satire,” in *Satire Advice on Women and Marriage: From Plautus to Chaucer*, ed. Warren S. Smith (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 154-81.

<sup>11</sup> Steven D. Driver, “The Development of Jerome’s Views of the Ascetic Life,” *Recherches de Théologie Ancienne et Médiévale* 62 (1995): 44-70.

<sup>12</sup> Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*, Twentieth-Anniversary Edition. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 377.

<sup>13</sup> Bernhard Jussen, “‘Virgins — Widows — Spouses’ On the Language of Moral Distinction as Applied to Women and Men in the Middle Ages,” *History of the Family* 7 (2002): 18.

<sup>14</sup> Cain, “Jerome’s Epitaphium Paulae,” 137 and 102.

hierarchy exists in his writings.<sup>15</sup> However, by honing in on Jerome's desire to demote marriage to such an extent, scholars restrict and oversimplify his sayings on marriage within his works on virginity. What is missing is what Valerie Karras has so successfully done for Gregory of Nyssa's *On Virginity*. She labored to present Gregory as a nuanced judge: "one must recognize that neither marriage nor virginity is monolithic for the Cappadocian father; *On Virginity* describes two types of both marriage and virginity, one 'bad' and one 'good' for each." I argue in this paper that Jerome's opinions have a nuance and subtlety akin to that which Karras has shown for Gregory of Nyssa's work. If we filter Jerome's premier works on virginity—*Letter 22, Against Jovinian*, and *Against Helvidius*—through the same flexible lens, we may find that he too offers this spectrum of good or bad possibilities for not just virgins, but also spouses and widows.<sup>16</sup> This results in a more elaborate hierarchy—a grid. This in turn helps him to construct his superior female saint to meet the required good and best features of his "grid." Although the end result of Jerome's works may be a polemic on the superiority of virginity, he offers us a healthy amount of commentary on all three life paths: virginity, marriage, and widowhood.

### The Grid

To begin, Jerome's definitions and conceptions of virginity, marriage, and widowhood are detailed and elaborate. Further, he breaks down each category into two separate subdivisions of "body" and "spirit."<sup>17</sup> Hereafter, I define this dichotomy as follows: "body" is what is physical, and "spirit" is thoughts,

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<sup>15</sup> *Ep.* 22.2, 15; *AJ* 1.12, 13, and 15; and *Ep.* 123.11. For a full discussion of this basic hierarchy and its significance see Jussen, "'Virgins — Widows — Spouses.'"

<sup>16</sup> Jerome wrote these works intending for them to be copied and widely read. He even made references in future letters back to these works; see Cain, *The Letters of Jerome*, 101, e.g. *Ep.* 130.19. Jerome eagerly advertised his beliefs and mode of asceticism. J. N. D. Kelly marks this loud advertisement through these works as part of Jerome's "ascetical campaign," in *Jerome: His Life, Writings, and Controversies* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), 101. Andrew Cain suggests these works, when alluded to in other letters, convey a "Hieronymized model of piety" for others to follow, in *The Letters of Jerome: Asceticism, Biblical Exegesis, and the Construction of Christian Authority in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 74.

<sup>17</sup> For an example of Jerome's attention to this subdivision see *AJ* 1.13: *ut sit sancta et corpore et spiritu* (PL 23.0231A).

the spirit or soul, and even attitude.<sup>18</sup> Jerome's definitions of virginity, marriage, and widowhood serve as the foundation for the "grid" itself.

Lifelong virginity is a voluntary practice which eliminates the physical relationship between a man and woman in order to focus more attention on a spiritual relationship with Christ. Many men and women chose never to marry in order to devote themselves more fully to this lifestyle.<sup>19</sup> It is voluntary, because if the Lord had commanded it, then it would seem to condemn the practice of marriage.<sup>20</sup> Jerome believed that the voluntary nature makes the practice itself sweeter:

"The reward is greater when virginity is not compulsory but voluntary. If virginity had been obligatory, it would appear to detract from marriage."<sup>21</sup>

A negative view of sexuality also plays a role in this embrace of virginity. Jerome states in *Against Jovinian* that sexual relations themselves were not present before the Fall:

"As regards Adam and Eve we must maintain that before the fall they were virgins in Paradise: but after they sinned, and were cast out of Paradise, they were immediately married."<sup>22</sup>

Jerome's notion that Adam and Eve were virgins before the Fall is crucial, as Elizabeth Clark, Joyce Salisbury, and David Hunter have noted.<sup>23</sup> Through it, virginity becomes superior because it is a

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<sup>18</sup> Joyce E. Salisbury, "The Latin Doctors of the Church on Sexuality," *Journal of Medieval History* 12 (1986): 279. Salisbury's definition, although similar to mine, is more concerned with the separation of the mundane, the body, from what is closest to heaven, the spirit. My concerns are somewhat broader. Patricia Cox Miller picks up on the distinction between the body and the "inner self," in "The Blazing Body: Ascetic Desire in Jerome's Letter to Eustochium," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 1, no. 1 (Spring 1993): 25, 36. However, she then pushes it to say Jerome lets go of the physical "body" for a "literary" ideal by means of Biblical metaphor, something which I am not trying to do here.

<sup>19</sup> The increasing popularity of this way of life in the fourth century even led to legal changes, such as Constantine revoking any penalties for women who remained celibate; see Hunter, "Sexuality, Marriage and the Family," 586.

<sup>20</sup> See Gillian Clark, *Women in Late Antiquity: Pagan and Christian Life-Styles* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 75.

<sup>21</sup> *quia maioris est mercis, quod non cogitur et offertur, quia, si fuisset uirginitas imperata, nuptiae uidebantur ablatae* (CSEL 54:171), Ep. 22.20; cf. AJ 1.12.

<sup>22</sup> *ac de Adam quidem et Eva illud dicendum, quod ante offensam in paradiso virgines fuerint: post peccatum autem, et extra paradysum protinus nuptiae* (PL 23.0235A), AJ 1.16.

<sup>23</sup> Elizabeth A. Clark, "Ideology, History, and the Construction of 'Woman' in Late Ancient Christianity," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 2, no. 2 (1994), 174; Salisbury, "The Latin Doctors," *Journal of Medieval History* 12 (1986),

prelapsarian state. Socially, the popularity of virginity for females stemmed from the personal autonomy it created.<sup>24</sup> However, it must be kept in mind that practicing virgins in late antiquity were in a distinct minority.<sup>25</sup>

From an exterior, bodily perspective, virginity is abstinence from sexual relations, specifically the overcoming of the sexual impulse which leads to sexual relations and marriage. Patricia Cox Miller articulates this as the "closed body" virgin, meaning that her body is both closed to an earthly spouse but also to the norms of the world.<sup>26</sup>

The interior perspective, the spirit, pertains to how the virgin uses her time and what her heart and mind pursue. Jerome emphasizes that since the virgin does not take the time to make an earthly husband happy, she therefore has "free time," which should all be spent with Christ.<sup>27</sup> In simple terms, one could say the virgin trades one husband for another, as Jerome emphatically believes that the virgin becomes the bride of Christ.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, he colors her time spent with Christ not just as pious but marital. He remarks that the "bridegroom" becomes "angry" if the virgin distracts herself with "worldly business."<sup>29</sup> The virgin's every thought is for her bridegroom: "Of what, then, does she that is unmarried and a virgin think? 'The things of the Lord that she may be holy both in body and in spirit.'"<sup>30</sup> In return for

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281; and Hunter, "Helvidius, Jovinian, and the Virginity of Mary in Late Fourth-Century Rome," 68. See also John Moorhead, "Adam and Eve and the Discovery of Sex," *Parergon* 1 (1983), 1-12.

<sup>24</sup> Kate Cooper, *The Virgin and the Bride: Idealized Womanhood in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 73.

<sup>25</sup> Averil Cameron, "Virginity as Metaphor: Women and the Rhetoric of Early Christianity," in *History as Text: The Writing of Ancient History*, ed. id. (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 195, and Cain, *The Letters of Jerome*, 135.

<sup>26</sup> Miller, "The Blazing Body," 25.

<sup>27</sup> *Ep.* 22.21, cf. *Ep.* 123.5. This is taken from 1 Corinthians 7:34.

<sup>28</sup> E. Clark argues that Christ as the bridegroom "symbolically replaced the fiancé or husband that the female ascetic renounces here on earth," in "Antifamilial," 367.

<sup>29</sup> *saecularium negotiorum...sponsus...iratus* (CSEL 54:177), *Ep.* 22.24.

<sup>30</sup> *Quid ergo cogitat innupta et virgo? Quae Domini sunt, ut sit sancta et corpore et spiritu* (PL 23.0231A), *AJ* 1.13; Jerome directly quotes 1 Corinthians 7:34.

both a pious body and a pious mind, Jerome emphasizes the reward the virgin will receive.<sup>31</sup> For him virgins are the top of the hierarchy due to their extreme self-discipline and intimacy with Christ himself.

Virginity holds a central place in Jerome's discourses. Still, Jerome takes pains to stress he does not disparage marriage.<sup>32</sup> Jerome says simply that it is not a sin if a man marries, and that an honorable marriage has a certain status to it.<sup>33</sup> He adds that marriage has a place within the Church:

"The Church does not condemn marriage, but makes it subordinate; nor does she reject it, but regulates it."<sup>34</sup>

Marriage was under the umbrella of the Church; in this quotation Jerome defends it against critics who might truly disparage it.<sup>35</sup> Jerome, presumably in agreement with the Church, firmly places married individuals subordinate to virgins, yet he believes this is a respectable position that one should take pride in.<sup>36</sup> His hierarchy derives from his personal value system, but also from the reality that not everyone can be virgins: "Be not afraid that all will become virgins; virginity is a hard matter, and therefore rare, because it is hard: many are called, few chosen."<sup>37</sup> Marriage has its place; therefore, he defines it as carefully as he did virginity.

In fact, marriage was central to life in antiquity because, through it, children came about who would then carry on humanity itself and any accumulated wealth and property.<sup>38</sup> Predominantly, women

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<sup>31</sup> *AJ* 1.37, 40.

<sup>32</sup> Cooper, *The Virgin and the Bride*, 97.

<sup>33</sup> *AJ* 1.13; *habent enim et maritatae ordinem suum, honorabiles nuptias et cubile immaculatum* (CSEL 54:145-6), *Ep.* 22.2.

<sup>34</sup> *Ecclesia enim matrimonia non damnat, sed subjicit: nec abjicit, sed dispensat* (PL 23.0270A), *AJ* 1.40.

<sup>35</sup> Such as the Manichaeans. Jerome must defend himself against adhering to this heresy. See Kelly, *Jerome*, 184 and Cain, *The Letters of Jerome*, 33, 137-8 and Jussen, "'Virgins — Widows — Spouses,'" 18.

<sup>36</sup> *glorientur et nuptae, cum a uirginibus sunt secundae* (CSEL 54:168), *Ep.* 22.19.

<sup>37</sup> *Noli metuere ne omnes virgines fiant; difficilis res est virginitas, et ideo rara, quia difficilis: Multi vocati, pauci electi* (PL 23.0259C-D), *AJ* 1.36.

<sup>38</sup> Gillian Clark, "Do Try This at Home: The Domestic Philosopher in Late Antiquity," in *From Rome to Constantinople: Studies in Honor of Averil Cameron*, ed. H. Amirav and Bas Ter Haar Romeny (Leuven: Peeters, 2007), 153, and G. Clark, *Women in Late Antiquity*, 76.

of late antiquity had only one option: to marry.<sup>39</sup> Christianity welcomed marriage and benefited from the new worshippers and clergy members it produced.<sup>40</sup> Elizabeth Clark argues that the biblical Epistles present "respectable" models of marriage for pagan onlookers.<sup>41</sup> Subsequently, even with the rise in popularity of celibacy, figures like Augustine and Jovinian still held that marriage was very important. Augustine states that marriage is beneficial for "offspring, fidelity, and a 'sacramental bond.'"<sup>42</sup> Jovinian polemicizes that marriage is equal to virginity.<sup>43</sup>

The exterior perspective of marriage, for Jerome, consists of endless duties—the body doing something constantly for the spouse. In Jerome's opinion, at its heart marriage is sexual relations. Fornication led to the formation of marriage in the first place; now the man has to keep his own wife and render to her alone sexual relations as a "duty."<sup>44</sup> When a married woman was not fulfilling her duty to her husband, she was fulfilling household duties. Jerome depicts these duties as laborious, draining, and miserable. On three occasions he gives a detailed, demeaning description of the wife's daily life.<sup>45</sup> Jerome frequently observes that these married couples have no time left for God: their bodies keep their mind and heart away from Christ.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> G. Clark, *Women in Late Antiquity*, 13.

<sup>40</sup> Brown, *The Body and Society*, 90.

<sup>41</sup> E. Clark, "Antifamilial," 371.

<sup>42</sup> E. Clark, "Antifamilial," 375. See also G. Clark, "Do Try This at Home," for an explanation of Augustine's idea of a philosophical marriage.

<sup>43</sup> E. Clark, "Antifamilial," 375; Hunter, "Helvidius, Jovinian, and the Virginity of Mary in Late Fourth-Century Rome," 51; see also Geoffrey S. Nathan, *The Family in Late Antiquity: The Rise of Christianity and The Endurance of Tradition* (New York: Routledge, 2002), for more beliefs and practices of marriage in late antiquity.

<sup>44</sup> For example, see *AJ* 1.34: *officio conjugali* (PL 23.0257B), see also *AJ* 1.7 and 13. In defense of this, Jerome cites 1 Corinthians 7:2: *propter fornicationes autem unusquisque suam uxorem habeat et unaquaeque suum virum habeat* (Gryson et al., *Vulgate*, 1775).

<sup>45</sup> *Ep.* 22.2, *AH*.20, *AJ* 1.47. Kelly notes that Jerome, when he pulled these descriptions from classical authors, knew they were exaggerated, in *Jerome*, 184. Notwithstanding, their significance lies in their impact on the reader.

<sup>46</sup> *Ep.* 22.21 and *AJ* 1.7.

The interior view of a marriage is togetherness, oneness: “Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.”<sup>47</sup> Equally, marriage is God’s divine pairing: God commanded that man and woman should be joined this way. Jerome feels compelled to respect God’s spiritual union in married couples. He gives full credence to the supremacy of marriage in the Old Testament, and he emphasizes its honorability and secondary glory in the New Testament.<sup>48</sup> Jerome notes that the Apostle Paul cannot go against what God has joined.<sup>49</sup> So, too, does Jerome imply his own inability:

“If virginity had been a command, it would appear to detract from marriage. It would have been extremely hard to force them against nature and to obtain by force that men lead the life of the angels; this would somehow have been to condemn something given as an established thing.”<sup>50</sup>

Marriage is “natural” since it is “established” by God. Jerome praises marriage as natural because it is God’s spiritual union. At the same time, he acknowledges the bodily disadvantage of marriage separating individuals from Christ.

Widowhood, a natural extension of marriage, was important to Jerome because it was an opportunity for individuals to convert to the life of sexual abstinence—chastity.<sup>51</sup> The Church itself was very concerned with widows; the Apostle Paul, in his epistle to Timothy, lays out in detail the care widows should be given.<sup>52</sup> Although Jerome may want an increase in the number of chaste Christians, he submits to the reality that some widows may get remarried. Certain widows were so young that the “fires of passions,” or lust, were still a concern. In that case, they could get remarried, becoming a spouse again.

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<sup>47</sup> *quam ob rem relinquet homo patrem suum et matrem et adhaerebit uxori suae et erunt duo in carne una* (Gryson et al., *Vulgate*, 7), Genesis 2:24; Jerome cites this verse in *AJ* 1.5. For citations of the English translation used in this paper see “primary sources” in the bibliography.

<sup>48</sup> *AH* 1.22.

<sup>49</sup> *AJ* 1.12.

<sup>50</sup> *si fuisset uirginitas imperata, nuptiae uidabantur ablatae et durissimum erat contra naturam cogere angelorumque uitam ab hominibus extorquere et id quodam modo damnare, quod conditum est* (CSEL 54:171), *Ep.* 22.20; see also *AJ* 1.8.

<sup>51</sup> Though widowhood includes both widows and widowers, Jerome is most interested in widows.

<sup>52</sup> 1 Timothy 5:3-16.

Still, any widow could overcome lust and become chaste.<sup>53</sup> Nevertheless, the widow was inferior to the virgin, due to her corruption in experiencing sexual relations.<sup>54</sup>

Understanding the foundational definitions contributing to Jerome's view of virginity, marriage, and widowhood enables us to begin to see the depth of his thinking in these areas. I intend to interpret his comments on these practices by organizing them according to what made a "good" or a "bad" virgin, spouse, or widow. In forming my grid, I realize that Jerome did not construct this grid as the aim of his works, but instead had different goals, such as defending the maintenance of virginity.<sup>55</sup> I present this grid to enlighten Jerome's ideas, *not* restrict them; it is for the purpose of understanding the distinctions present in his writing on the subject.

### Virginity

The joining of a good body and good soul make the virgin great—"a virgin is defined as she that is *holy in body and in spirit*"—but when the body or the soul is "bad," the virgin is terrible.<sup>56</sup> Jerome despises "bad" virgins: "It would have been better for her to marry and to have walked in level places than to try to reach the heights and then to fall into the depths of hell."<sup>57</sup> Being a "bad" virgin hinged on the virgin's management of her body and soul. Jerome does not leave the virgin without instruction; as I will demonstrate, he clearly shows what is bad and what is good for a virgin.

A virgin who experiences sexual relations was considered "bad" in bodily terms. Jerome tries to warn and help Eustochium against the threat of losing her virginity. He says that the Devil has power

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<sup>53</sup> AJ 1.14; Jerome cites I Timothy 5:14 in support.

<sup>54</sup> AJ 1.37, 40.

<sup>55</sup> Ideas of author intentions versus the power of the reader's view can be found in the "Author/ity" chapter of Jeffrey Nealon and Susan Searls Giroux, *The Theory Toolbox: Critical Concepts for the Humanities, Arts, & Social Sciences* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2011); for an Early Christian discussion of authorship see Miller, "The Blazing Body," 23.

<sup>56</sup> *Virginis definitio, sanctam esse corpore et spiritu* (PL 23.0203D-0204A), AH.22 (English italics added). Jerome further parallels body and soul in Ep 22.38.

<sup>57</sup> *rectius fuerat homini subisse coniugium, ambulasse per plana, quam ad altiora tendentem in profundum inferi cadere* (CSEL 54:151), Ep. 22.6; cf. AJ 1.4 and Ep. 54.7.

against her through lust and the Devil wants virgins to fall.<sup>58</sup> The virgin needs to dash her lusty thoughts against the metaphorical rock of Christ.<sup>59</sup> Eustochium certainly heeded Jerome's warning, but others did not, and Jerome mentions them with the full weight of condemnation.

These "wives without being married" or "whores" tried to hide their sin.<sup>60</sup> They dressed like nuns but were "betrayed by their swollen belly."<sup>61</sup> Further, some pregnant "nuns" used drugs to abort their babies in order to hide their fornication. This easily could have resulted in their own deaths, thus committing an even worse sin in the process: "guilt of three crimes, namely their own suicide, adultery against Christ, and murder of their unborn child."<sup>62</sup> Jerome shares these remarks to Eustochium in order to warn her against keeping company with these women and to protect herself against becoming like them.<sup>63</sup> This warning equally serves as an example, though, allowing Jerome to showcase what a "bad" virgin really is.

How virgins ornamented themselves was a major concern for Jerome; it was an exterior indicator of holiness. Those virgins concerned with their luxurious attire were also concerned with going out, socializing, and, in Jerome's mind, seeking the attention of men.<sup>64</sup> The nicely dressed virgin, with her draped shawl and even her shiny shoes, held the attention of the lustful male gaze.<sup>65</sup> These improperly dressed virgins would see in the eyes of lustful men what the virgins themselves renounced.<sup>66</sup> Consequently, they were bad because they made themselves vulnerable to losing their virginity if they

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<sup>58</sup> *Ep.* 22.11, 13.

<sup>59</sup> *Ep.* 22.6.

<sup>60</sup> *unde sine nuptiis aliud nomen uxorum?* (CSEL 54:161-2), *Ep.* 22.14; *facies meretricis facta est tibi* (CSEL 54:162), *Ep.* 22.13.

<sup>61</sup> *nisi tumor uteri et infantum prodiderit uagitus* (CSEL 54:161), *Ep.* 22.13.

<sup>62</sup> *trium criminum reae ad inferos perducuntur, homicidae sui, Christi adulterae, necdum nati filii parricidae* (CSEL 54:161), *Ep.* 22.14. See also G. Clark, *Women in Late Antiquity*, 46 and 86.

<sup>63</sup> Kelly, 101.

<sup>64</sup> Vidén, 146 and *Ep.* 22.13.

<sup>65</sup> See for example *Ep.* 54.7: *quid facit in facie Christianae purpurissus et cerussa? quorum alterum ruborem genarum labiorumque mentitur, alterum candorem oris et colli: ignes iuuenum, fomenta libidinum, impudicae mentis indicia* (CSEL 54:473); cf. *Ep.* 117.7, where Jerome describes how each part of a virgin's luxurious appearance can inflame a man.

<sup>66</sup> *Ep.* 22.16.

yielded to the males' gaze. To Jerome, this potential situation was rooted in the wardrobe and makeup choices of the virgin. Miller notes Jerome's judgment of women extends to all parts of the woman's body: what they wear, eat, and drink; how they pronounce words; and even the color of their skin.<sup>67</sup> The interior of the "bad" virgin was simply a virgin uninterested in Christ:

"These are bad virgins, who are virgins in the flesh but not in the spirit, the foolish virgins who have no oil in their lamps and are shut out by the bridegroom."<sup>68</sup>

"No oil in their lamps" refers to the parable in Matthew 25:1-10 where five foolish virgins do not take oil for their lamps, whereas five righteous virgins do and are thus able to enjoy time with the bridegroom when he is ready. Virginité enables the virgin to be released from "duties" to an earthly spouse, but in return Jerome expects the virgin to seek out Christ, her bridegroom. "Bad" virgins neglect their spiritual duty not only to Christ as the bridegroom, but also to Christ as their Lord. The virgin may try to hide her bodily sins, but her spiritual neglect was direr to Jerome.

"Bad" virgins stood as warnings to "good" virgins. To be a virgin was not easy, but meeting the requirements outlined above made the virgin "good." Overcoming lust, important to virginité itself, came down to the virgin's ability to control her body.

First, the virgin needed to practice diligent fasting in order to distract herself from thoughts of lust.<sup>69</sup> Jerome strictly instructs Eustochium:

"It does not do you any good to go around with an empty stomach for two or three days, if you load it to a similar degree, if you make up for the fasting through satiety. The filled mind gets numb and the soil that is irrigated brings forth the seeds of lust."<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Miller, 24 and G. Clark, *Women in Late Antiquity*, 110; see also Vidén, who discuss Jerome's view about appearance in light of Tertullian, in "St. Jerome on Female Chastity," 144-7 and 152.

<sup>68</sup> *istae sunt uirgines malae, uirgines carne, non spiritu, uirgines stultae, quae oleum non habentes excluduntur ab sponso* (CSEL 54:150), *Ep.* 22.5.

<sup>69</sup> See G. Clark, *Women in Late Antiquity*, 78, and Brown, *Body and Society*, 376.

<sup>70</sup> *nihil prodest biduo triduoque transmissio uacuum portare uentrem, si pariter obruitur, si compensatur saturitate ieiunium. ilico mens repleta torpescit et inrigata humus spinas libidinum germinat* (CSEL 54: 165), *Ep.* 22.17; English from Vidén, 151.

Gunhild Vidén suggests that this quotation implies that lust is within the body always. Furthermore, through fasting, the virgin is able to overpower the body's inclinations toward lust, to rid the body of lust's control.<sup>71</sup> Such an interpretation is insightful, but I would say that "weakness" additionally plays a critical role here. The virgin weakens herself through eating, the "mind gets numb," and that vulnerability allows the "seeds of lust" to spring up. The harsh diet was, to Jerome, a way for the virgin to keep some control over her body to prevent the "seeds of lust," hence keeping her holy.<sup>72</sup>

Second, the virgin's simple sackcloth attire guards against succumbing to lust. In the same way the "bad" virgin is weakened by dressing luxuriously, the simply dressed virgin is freed, uninterested in the gaze of lustful men.<sup>73</sup> Jerome makes a special point to mention that the virgin Demetrias wore rough clothing.<sup>74</sup> In her simplicity, Jerome believed she was better able to focus on Christ, caring not about the world and its fashions.

The bodily concerns were really secondary to those of the spirit for the virgin. Everything leads and connects to the virgin's spiritual relationship with her bridegroom, Christ. The Bible instructs Christians to take up the cross of Christ and, as a result, be ready to hate their father and mother.<sup>75</sup> Jerome intensifies this call:

"But it is not enough for you to leave your country: you must also forget your people and the home of your father; scorning the flesh, you must be embraced by the Bridegroom."<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Vidén, 151; see also *Ep.* 130.10.

<sup>72</sup> Driver notes fasting evolved into a practice necessary for preserving chastity, though this was not Jerome's original belief, in "The Development of Jerome's Views of the Ascetical Life," 55.

<sup>73</sup> *AJ* 2.11.

<sup>74</sup> *Ep.* 130.5. He makes similar remarks about the virgin Asella and the widows Leah, Marcella, and Blesilla, see *Ep.* 23.2, 24.4, 38.4, and 127.3.

<sup>75</sup> Luke 14:26 and Matthew 16:24.

<sup>76</sup> *uerum non suficit tibi exire de patria, nisi obliuiscaris populi et domum patris tui et carne contempta sponsi iungaris amplexibus* (CSEL 54:144), *Ep.* 22.1.

The virgin closed herself off from earthly ties, but in return had to be open to Christ in a way a female married Christian could not.<sup>77</sup> Jerome was deeply enthralled with this idea; he used erotic language to emphasize how intimate this relationship was:

"Then your Bridegroom himself will come to meet you and say, 'Rise, come, my love, my fair one, my dove, for look, the winter has past, the rain is over and gone.'"<sup>78</sup>

Scholars have critically analyzed this relationship and its origins.<sup>79</sup> However, I am concerned here with how it makes the virgin "good." Although the virgin may have a marital relationship with Christ as the bridegroom, the virgin seeking Christ in the first place benefited her spirit: the "good" virgin was the "good" Christian. The more the virgin sought Heaven, such as through incessant praying or reading of the Bible, the better she was, because she was ever closer to the desired result of her harsh lifestyle: to truly know and love Christ.<sup>80</sup> The spiritual heights of Heaven and true renunciation of the mundane was the desired result of lifelong virginity. Specifically, through the virgin seeking Christ, she grew spiritually so that she might accomplish a resultant spiritual union with Christ as her bridegroom.

### *Marriage*

Jerome's instructions are largely aimed at virgins, but he comments on marriage as well. He does this for two reasons: firstly, he gives honor to marriage; and secondly, he wants the virgins who encounter married women to know the "good" from the "bad."

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<sup>77</sup> *Ep.* 22.26.

<sup>78</sup> *tunc et ipse sponsus occurret et dicet: surge, ueni, proxima mea, speciosa mea, columba mea, quia ecce hiemps transiit. pluuiam abiit sibi* (CSEL 54:209), *Ep.* 22.41, citing Song of Songs 2:10-11.

<sup>79</sup> See Cameron, "Virginity as Metaphor," 200 and Miller, 26-9; for Jerome specifically see Kelly, 102; Hunter, "Helvidius, Jovinian, and the Virginity of Mary in Late Fourth-Century Rome," 52-6; Cooper, *The Virgin and The Bride*, 79-80; Driver, 54-5; and Averil Cameron, "Early Christianity and the Discourse of Female Desire," in *Women in Ancient Societies: An Illusion of the Night*, ed. Léonie J Archer et al. (New York: Routledge, 1994.), 157-8 and 164.

<sup>80</sup> Jerome repeatedly praised his virgin's or widow's long prayer or scripture reading vigils: *Ep.* 23.2, 24.4, 108.15 and 27, 127.7, 130.7.

Jerome's externally "bad" married woman is similar to the attention-seeking virgin—that is, women who intend to marry purposefully to draw attention to themselves. After they marry, he still has great objections to women concerned with their appearance:

"The married woman has the paint laid on before her mirror, and, to the insult of her Maker, strives to acquire something more than her natural beauty. Then comes the prattling of infants."<sup>81</sup>

A woman who makes her body attractive to a man incites passions within that man which, carried out, lead to children. Certain clothing choices, which inevitably provoke the bubbling of passions, greatly upset Jerome. Even within marriage, passions led a woman to focus on the mundane, distracting her from the heavenly Christ.

Jerome also condemns spouses who commit adultery as "bad":

"Every day the blood of adulterers is shed, adulterers are condemned, and lust is raging and rampant in the very presence of the laws and the symbols of authority and the courts of justice."<sup>82</sup>

Married spouses overwhelmed with lust may sin in adultery, as numerous have.<sup>83</sup> Such "bad" spouses Jerome reduces to derogatory "beasts of burden," committing adultery on a very bodily, animal level.<sup>84</sup>

From a spiritual standpoint, a woman who marries a non-Christian is very "bad." The company a Christian keeps is vital, since a pagan might lead the Christian's spirit away from Christ. Jerome emphasizes this:

"Yet at the present day many women despising the Apostle's command, are joined to heathen husbands, and prostitute the temples of Christ to idols."<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> *Haec ad speculum pingitur, et in contumeliam artificis conatur pulchrior esse quam nata est. Inde infantes garriunt* (PL 23.0204A), AH.22.

<sup>82</sup> *Quotidie moechorum sanguis effunditur, adulteria damnantur, et inter ipsas leges et secures ac tribunalia flagrans libido dominatur* (PL 23.0259C), AJ 1.36.

<sup>83</sup> Jerome discusses what an adulterer was in AJ 1.14, where he cites Romans 7:2-3.

<sup>84</sup> *jumenta* (PL 23.0267A), AJ 1.39.

<sup>85</sup> *At nunc pleraeque contemnentes Apostoli jussionem, junguntur gentilibus, et templa Christi idolis prostituunt* (PL 23.0223C), AJ 1.10.

"The Apostle's command" refers to 2 Corinthians 6:14: "Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers."<sup>86</sup>

For Jerome, the spirit of the married woman, "the temple of Christ," was put at risk by the heathen husband. Each of these "bad" types of spouses as to be avoided and learned from.

Jerome's "good" spouse is not one exemplary ideal; rather, he offers suggestions and even detailed allowances to articulate what one might be. In highly idealized terms, Jerome wants the married couple to be chaste. He clearly states that married women should "imitate virgin chastity."<sup>87</sup> Jerome says that within the marriage itself,

"[h]usbands and wives are to dwell together according to knowledge, so that they may know what God wishes and desires, and give honor to the weak vessel, woman. If we abstain from intercourse, we give honor to our wives: if we do not abstain, it is clear that insult is the opposite of honor."<sup>88</sup>

John Oppel gives Jerome's yearning for "love" as expressed through "knowledge" as the reason for this zealous hope for untainted marriage. This is derived from Adam and Eve's original relationship as one of purity and thought.<sup>89</sup> In other words, Jerome urges that the married couple pursue spiritual knowledge and spend time with God, a lifestyle which cannot include sexual relations. Later on, he writes that a "layman, or any believer, cannot pray unless he abstain from sexual intercourse."<sup>90</sup> Vidén argues that the absence of physical relations allows the individual's spirituality to flourish by the couple separating

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<sup>86</sup> *nolite iugum ducere cum infidelibus quae* (Gryson et al., *Vulgate*, 1794), 2 Corinthians 6:14.

<sup>87</sup> *Non negamus viduas, non negamus maritatas [Al. maritas], sanctas mulieres inveniri; sed quae uxores esse desierint, quae in ipsa necessitate conjugii virginum imitentur castitatem* (PL 23.0204C), AH.23.

<sup>88</sup> *Cohabitanes juxta scientiam, ut noverint quid velit, quid desideret Deus, ut tribuant honorem vasculo muliebri. Si abstinemus nos a coitu, honorem tribuimus uxoribus: si non abstinemus, perspicuum est honori contrariam esse contumeliam* (PL 23.0220B-C), AJ 1.7.

<sup>89</sup> Oppel, 11 and 17-8.

<sup>90</sup> *Si laicus et quicumque fidelis orare non potest, nisi careat officio conjugali* (PL 23.0257B), AJ 1.34. Jerome notes that this practice is derived from Old Testament purification laws, e.g. Leviticus 15.

themselves from the mundane.<sup>91</sup> This physical abstinence leads to spiritual growth and intimacy with God for the married spouse.

This chaste marriage is crucial and preferred, but, contrary to the opinion of Oppel, Jerome does make allowances for sexually active couples.<sup>92</sup> Vidén agrees with the latter interpretation by showing that Jerome defends married women whom he felt were pious.<sup>93</sup> Jerome exalts marriage, but with his own unique conditional:

“I praise marriage, I praise wedlock, but because they are presently producing virgins. I gather roses from a thorn bush, I find gold in the earth and pearls in shells.”<sup>94</sup>

One can sense some degree of reluctance here in his choice of “thorns,” “earth,” and “shells,” because married couples producing children compromise Jerome’s hope for chaste marriage. Jerome focuses on the “fruits” of the marriage. He concedes that the mother might raise her child to become a virgin. The married parent's role is illuminated by their necessity. They would need to be pious, devoted to Christ, and supportive of the virginal life. Therefore, for this allowance to succeed, the married parent would need to be a “good” spouse. Thus, Jerome permits a markedly different “good” spouse from his ideal chaste one.

The spiritual health of the spouse is critical; hence, Jerome asserts that both spouses should be Christians so the marriage can be “in Christ.”<sup>95</sup> Compared to the “bad” spouse married to a “heathen,” this “good” spouse would be able to pursue Christ. What made a “good” spouse is complex but it is strongly rooted in the unrestricted ability to pursue Christ.

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<sup>91</sup> See also E. Clark, “Dissuading from Marriage,” 162.

<sup>92</sup> Vidén, 142; Oppel over-emphasizes Jerome's “sexless marriage,” in “Saint Jerome and the History of Sex,” 17.

<sup>93</sup> Vidén, 147.

<sup>94</sup> *Laudo nuptias, laudo coniugium, sed quia mihi uirgines generant: lego de spinis rosas, de terra aurum, de conca margaritum* (CSEL 54:170), *Ep.* 22.20, cf. *Ep.* 22.19, *AJ* 1.3, *AH*.21, and *Ep.* 130.8.

<sup>95</sup> *AJ* 1.10.

### Widowhood

The widow, a once-married but now single individual, appropriately concludes this grid. Jerome situates his discussion on the widow at the moment before she decides whether to marry again. To say the "bad" widow remarries may be an overstatement. Jerome understands that young widows remarry. After admitting that God does allow second marriage, Jerome encourages the widow to be concerned with "not what God permits, but what He wishes," namely chastity.<sup>96</sup> Permitted or not, Jerome has little nice to say of widows seeking remarriage. He phrases his complaints similarly to those he directs at the attention-seeking virgin or wife:

"Their lips so red that you would think they were looking for a husband rather than they had lost one."<sup>97</sup>

Here again the body is the focus.<sup>98</sup> The widow, wrongly, hunts the attention of earthly men. In the event this attention leads to remarriage, then Jerome becomes even harsher. In *Letter 123*, he says that a woman who remarries would be like the "unclean" animals of Noah's Ark. They are the weeds among the thorns.<sup>99</sup> Jerome takes issue with the widow giving into lust and thereby corrupting her body through sexual intercourse *again*. These "bad" widows are nothing more than lustful aspiring wives, as Jerome

<sup>96</sup> *Sed nos qui corpora nostra exhibere debemus, hostiam vivam, sanctam, placentem Deo, rationabile obsequium nostrum, non quid concedat Deus, sed quid velit, consideremus.* (PL 23.0263A), AJ 1.37. Jerome directly states that marrying once was better than bigamy and trigamy, AJ 1.10.

<sup>97</sup> *et rubentibus buccis cutis farsa distenditur, ut eas putes maritos non amisisse, sed quaerere* (CSEL 54:164), Ep. 22.16; cf. Ep. 123.3.

<sup>98</sup> Compare Jerome's lengthy visual description of the ornamentation of pagan widows: "faces painted with purple and wax, splendid silk dresses, sparkling jewels glittering gold" from Vidén, 148-9.

<sup>99</sup> Ep. 123.9, cited by E. Clark, "Dissuading from Marriage," 177. In *Letter 54* (chapter 4) he even relates remarriage to a dog returning to his vomit, referring to II Peter 2:22. Additionally, in *Against Jovinian* (1.15), Jerome notes that the "first Adam" was married once and Jesus (the "second Adam") was married not at all, and there was not a "third Adam" to represent men remarried. For a broader discussion on Late Antique distain for second marriage see Hunter, "Sexuality, Marriage and the Family," 588.

warns Eustochium: “I want you also to avoid anyone whom necessity has made a widow...their former ambition remains unchanged: it is only their clothes they have changed.”<sup>100</sup>

Widows that do choose to live abstinent and chaste lives could be “bad” if they were falsely chaste. Jerome warns Eustochium of these widows:

“These women, meanwhile, seeing that the priests need their support, become inflated with pride and, knowing what it is like to be under a husband’s authority, they prefer the freedom of widowhood. People call them chaste nuns but after a dubious dinner they fall asleep and dream of the apostles.”<sup>101</sup>

Jerome directly condemns the ill intent on the part of the widows. These quasi-nuns betray themselves by not fasting—“after a dubious dinner.” They become weakened and the “seeds of lust” mentioned above come through in “dreams of the apostles.” Such “bad” widows are to be avoided because they conduct themselves like fake virgins; they are not pious or worthy of emulation. Thus, the spirit of such women, without direct mention, could easily be inferred as sinking away from God and concerned with earthly things.

To Jerome, the “good” widow in actuality becomes an “adopted virgin,” since she had to imitate the virgin closely to be “good.”<sup>102</sup> Further, Jerome states: “let widows themselves be content to give the preference to virginity.”<sup>103</sup> However at the same time, Jerome employs chaste widows to seek holy widow exemplars, such as the Biblical Judith and Anna, to aid in their quest for holiness.<sup>104</sup> Spiritually, by

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<sup>100</sup> *sed etiam eas fuge, quas uiduas necessitas fecit... nunc uero tantum ueste mutata pristina non mutatur ambitio* (CSEL 54:164), Ep. 22.16.

<sup>101</sup> *illae interim, quae sacerdotes suo uident indigere praesidio, eriguntur in superbiam et, quia maritorum expertae dominatum uiduitatis praeferunt libertatem, castae uocantur et nonnae et post cenam dubiam apostolos somniant* (CSEL 54:164), Ep. 22.16.

<sup>102</sup> AH.23. This explains why some instruction on the good behavior of virgins can be found in extraneous letters to widows and virgins alike. I distinguish between them where need be, but I cite any pertinent extraneous letters within my footnotes in the “virginity” section.

<sup>103</sup> *virginitatem sibi praeferri* (PL 23.0256B), AJ 1.33.

<sup>104</sup> See for example Ep. 79.10.

abstaining from sexual relations, the widow remains separate from an earthly partner and can seek Christ. The widow's spirit, therefore, was focused on seeking Christ and leaving mundane things behind.

The "good" chaste virgin, spouse, and widow are alike in many ways to Jerome. The beneficial effects of temporal and physical freedom from marital duties allow them to fully pursue Christ. A key difference presents itself, though. Jerome stresses that God could not make someone a virgin again.<sup>105</sup> Consequently, comments about marriage and widowhood must be read differently.

### **The Constructed *Life of Paula***

To say Jerome cared about these "good" and "bad" characteristics contributes little without showing their application. Jerome wrote hagiographies with the features of this grid evident. Further, he constructs the *Life of Paula* itself in order to have his subject meet the ideals of his grid. Many constructed hagiographies exist, as hagiographers freely admit their aims, and modern scholars have articulated the rhetorical frameworks used. Concerning female subjects, Averil Cameron has argued that male authors actively employed rhetoric in discussing their female subjects to comment on current social issues and meet idealized Biblical precepts.<sup>106</sup>

I will analyze the *Life of Paula* (Letter 108), written in 404, as a case study for Jerome's construction of excellence. Jerome himself would be hesitant to admit he "constructed" anything within his *Life of Paula*, a common trope in hagiography. He calls on Jesus and the angels as witness to his truthful "realistic portrait."<sup>107</sup> Andrew Cain, however, has shown that Jerome purposefully constructed saintly Paula as a worthy cult figure. Jerome does this so revenue might flow into the debt-ridden monastic community

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<sup>105</sup> Ep. 22.5.

<sup>106</sup> Cameron, "Virginity as Metaphor." See also E. Clark, "Dissuading from Marriage," 166. For a fuller bibliographic introduction to rhetorization see David G. Hunter, "The Virgin, the Bride, and the Church: Reading Psalm 45 in Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine," *Church History* 69, no. 2 (2000): 281-3.

<sup>107</sup> Ep. 108.2, 15, 21; see Cain, "Jerome's Epitaphium Paulae," 121.

Paula had established.<sup>108</sup> At the same time, Jerome actively engages with the construct of her sanctity itself in order to conform her to the ideals of chastity within his grid.<sup>109</sup>

Paula was Jerome's benefactor and a widow with six children. As a widow, she moved to Bethlehem to lead a zealous, ascetic life and establish monasteries for men and women. It is the later ascetic portion of her life that is the focus and concern of Jerome. Keeping in mind both portions of Paula's life, though, Vidén makes the important observation that Paula is a hard figure to reconcile with ascetic ideals, since she was a very sexually active wife. Vidén suggests that Jerome dismisses her earlier life by stressing that she had to submit to her husband's desire to have a son, and therefore ended up giving birth to five daughters first.<sup>110</sup> In his hagiography, though, I will show that Jerome labors to present Paula as an admirably austerem chaste widow. He does this by strong manipulation, fitting Paula and even her family at times into the best features of his holy grid in order to present her as not just a worthy cult figure, but also an exemplar of chaste excellence.

Paula deeply respected asceticism. Jerome depicts her as so imbued with the chaste lifestyle that she taught it to young women and emphatically wanted her children to practice that lifestyle as well. Jerome deliberately stresses Paula's desire for others to lead the virginal lifestyle to such an extent that, when Paula's son Toxotius and his wife had a daughter, Paula's only comment about the baby was that she might become a virgin.<sup>111</sup> Toxotius' daughter becoming a lifelong virgin, which did happen, reflects Jerome's compromise that a sexually active couple may be redeemed through their child's perpetual virginity. Even though marriage does not play a direct role in any of Jerome's hagiographies, when it does come up, such as here, it certainly reflects the "good" version. Jerome wanted the reader to leave with a

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<sup>108</sup> Cain, "Jerome's Epitaphium Paulae," 132 and 138.

<sup>109</sup> Cain (*The Letters of Jerome*, 78) agrees that this sort of characterization happens generally in Jerome's hagiographies: "He transformed his subjects, each in her own way, into idealized personifications of his ascetic ideology."

<sup>110</sup> Vidén, 148.

<sup>111</sup> *Ep.* 108.27.

strong sense of Paula's pure devotion to the virginal lifestyle. Jerome made a purposeful emphasis that speaks to his own desire to see Paula as wholly devoted to the practice of chastity.

When Paula became a widow, two reactions are apparent in the *Life*: Paula's own devastation and Jerome's exaggerated insistence that Paula was quite detached from her husband:

"When her husband died she herself nearly died of grief, and yet she devoted herself to serving the Lord in such a way that she almost seemed to have longed for her husband's death."<sup>112</sup>

Jerome starts this sentence with the realistic reaction of a widow mourning the loss of her husband, "nearly died of grief," but he feels compelled to add an idealized portrait of Paula passionately devoted to Christ. In other words, Paula was so separated from her earthly husband in serving the Lord that she even longed not to have the weight of that earthly marital relationship. Jerome imposes the ideals of chaste freedom and the pursuit of heavenly things at the moment when Paula was presumably grieving deeply. Jerome's own writings about Paula serve as our only source for historical information about her life.<sup>113</sup> Here in this one sentence Jerome presents two reactions, and we are left to discern which is closer to reality. Understanding Jerome's detailed opinions, though, helps distinguish between what are clearly Jerome's additions and what may have truly happened.

Jerome later writes that Paula said, "I who used to please my husband and the world, now I wish to please Christ."<sup>114</sup> He again casts Paula as renouncing a mundane husband to seek Christ, a spiritual husband. Christ replaced Paula's earthly husband. For Jerome, Christ was Paula's new bridegroom.<sup>115</sup> Jerome hints that Paula's original marriage has been replaced by this chaste spiritual one. Thus, whatever Paula really felt at this time is eclipsed by Jerome forcefully conveying Paula's "truer" desire to seek Christ.

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<sup>112</sup> *postquam uir mortuus est, ita eum planxit, ut prope ipsa moreretur, ita se conuertit ad domini seruitutem, ut mortem eius uideretur optasse* (CSEL 55:310), *Ep.* 108.5.

<sup>113</sup> There is debate over whether several letters in Jerome's corpus were written by Paula herself, especially *Ep.* 46, see Cain, *The Letters of Jerome*, 37n, 95.

<sup>114</sup> *quae uiro et saeculo placui, nunc Christo placere desidero* (CSEL 56:326), *Ep.* 108.15.

<sup>115</sup> *sponsum* (CSEL 55:346), *Ep.* 108.28.

In order to stress the spiritual goodness of Paula, Jerome overemphasizes her separation from the world. Jerome states that Paula wanted to go into the desert alone, “disregarding her home, her children, her family, her possessions and everything connected with her worldly life,” in imitation of Antony of Egypt and Paul of Thebes.<sup>116</sup> Paula, however, did not truly leave her children, as we can see from Jerome’s own writings; once again, two Paulas are present. She kept in contact with them through letters, and her daughter Eustochium stayed very close to her side.<sup>117</sup> Additionally, Jerome writes in *Letter 39* that at the funeral of her daughter Blesilla, Paula was quite grieved and even fainted.<sup>118</sup> Such an emotional connection to her children is not in line with the stark, dismissive picture Jerome leads one to imagine in his hagiographic portrait. In having Paula imitate notable ascetic role models and exaggerating her own dismissal of everything in her life, Jerome molds her persona for the reader. Just as with Paula’s relationship to her husband, Jerome feels obligated to overplay Paula’s actions in order to imprint his idealism. He guides the reader to see Paula as the best “good” widow to accentuate her sanctity.

Although Paula was older when she adopted asceticism, Jerome diligently notes that she protected herself from the vulnerabilities a single woman might feel. She lived with like-minded women and did not interact with men other than those who were monks.<sup>119</sup> Hence, Paula remained strong against lust. Also, Paula exemplified harsh fasting, which was crucial for overcoming lust. Jerome mentions her fasting several times.<sup>120</sup> He adds that she taught the other girls to practice fasting in order to overcome lustful inclinations.<sup>121</sup> Paula’s own passions had probably subsided by the time she became an ascetic, but

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<sup>116</sup> *non domus, non liberorum, non familiae, non possessionum, non alicuius rei, quae ad saeculum pertinet, memorsola - sidici potest - et incommutata ad heremum Antoniorum atque Paulorum pergere gestiebat* (CSEL 55:311), *Ep. 108.6*. Antony and (to a lesser extent) Paul of Thebes were ascetic role models. *Life of Antony*, written by Athanasius, was widely read and influential; whereas, *Life of Paul* by Jerome has been considered by scholars as nothing more than a competitive stunt, thus largely fictional.

<sup>117</sup> *Ep. 108.26, 27*.

<sup>118</sup> *Ep. 39.6*, cited by Cooper, 68-9.

<sup>119</sup> *Ep. 108.14*. E. Clark mentions that Jerome puts great importance on women living together due to their weakness, she cites *Letter 130*, in “Dissuading from Marriage,” 166.

<sup>120</sup> *Ep. 108.1, 11, 15, 17, 20*.

<sup>121</sup> *Ep. 108.20*.

in order to present her as an example of chaste excellence, Jerome describes her actions against her supposed lust, actions that younger virgins might mimic.<sup>122</sup> Paula's exemplary conduct, as described by Jerome, made her worthy to be considered holy. After all, she and her family must live up to Jerome's standards for Paula to be considered excellent by his definition.

In conclusion, I have sought to point out two things: one, that a free-standing polemic on what makes a good or bad virgin, spouse, and widow is evident in the writings on virginity of Jerome; and two, that Jerome uses this grid when constructing his "excellent" Paula. Jerome wrote his letters and treatises as an educational experience for the reader. He took his observations on women's practices and formulated an elaborate grid of what he felt was "good" or "bad." This grid serves to inform the reader as to what is to be emulated and what is not. Following the "good" practices was so important to Jerome that he manipulated his female subjects' actions within his hagiographies to meet his own standards. Appreciating Jerome's subtlety and acknowledging his hearty discussion on marriage and widowhood in his works on virginity should impact discussion on Jerome: his thinking was multi-dimensional, as should be our discussion of his hierarchy.

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<sup>122</sup> Oppel notes Jerome's understanding of the "hot" fires of passion within young females and how they "cool" later in life, in "Saint Jerome and the History of Sex," 151.

**Appendix***The Grid*

	Bad	Good
<b>Virginity</b>		
Body	Practicing false chastity	Practicing harsh fasting to subdue lust
	Ornamented for attention	Simply dressed, unconcerned with attention
Spirit	Uninterested in Christ and Him as the Bridegroom	Seeking Christ, especially as the Bridegroom
<b>Marriage</b>		
Body	Seductive	Chaste <i>or</i> Raising a perpetual virgin
	Adulterous	
Spirit	Married to a heathen	Married to a Christian
<b>Widowhood</b>		
Body	Caving to remarriage	Remaining chaste
	Practicing false chastity	
Spirit	Far from Christ	Close to Christ

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### Abbreviations

PL *Patrologia Latina*

CSEL *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum*

NPNF *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series*

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# Liturgical Functions of Late Byzantine Art: An Analysis of the Thessaloniki Epitaphios

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*The Thessaloniki Epitaphios, a late Byzantine embroidered textile, is an important piece to consider in the study of Byzantine art and its role in liturgy. In this paper, I undertake a stylistic and formalistic analysis of the inscriptions, depiction of the humanity of Christ, and treatment of time in the Thessaloniki Epitaphios to determine if the Epitaphios had liturgical rather than simply symbolic functions, thus helping contextualize Byzantine art within the Western canon. Analyzing the potential for the liturgical function of this piece additionally sheds light onto how Byzantine art itself should be classified with regards to the Western canon.*

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## Introduction

The role of late Byzantine pieces in liturgical rites has been subject to a longstanding debate in the field, with one of the most recent subjects of this discussion being the Thessaloniki *Epitaphios* (see Figure 1). A silk on linen textile, the *Epitaphios* originates from Thessaloniki, Greece, circa 1300.<sup>1</sup> Located on a trade route that connected Constantinople and Durazzo on the Adriatic, Thessaloniki was a key commercial port and site for religious pilgrimage in late Byzantium.<sup>2</sup> Several stylistic features, in particular the expressiveness of the figures, suggest the *Epitaphios* was produced during the late Byzantine Palaiologan Dynasty (1259-1453), under which Thessaloniki reached its cultural height, and when there was a significant emphasis in the culture on liturgical rites.<sup>3</sup> Thus, artworks created during the Palaiologan Dynasty invites scrutiny with respect to their roles as active participants in liturgical rites.

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<sup>1</sup> Anastasia Drandaki, Demetra Papanikola-Bakirtzi, Anastasia G. Tourta, Jenny Albani, and Eugenia Chalkia, *Heaven & Earth* (Athens: Hellenic Republic Ministry of Culture and Sports, 1994).

<sup>2</sup> Paul Hetherington, *Byzantine and Medieval Greece: Churches, Castles, and Art of the Mainland and Peloponnese* (London: J. Murray, 1991).

<sup>3</sup> Eugenia Russell, *Literature and Culture in Late Byzantine Thessalonica* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

This concept is especially relevant when considering the place of Byzantine art in the Western canon as brought up by Byzantinists Anthony Cutler and Robert Nelson. Art from the Byzantine Empire, which existed on the fringes of the Western world, often boasts characteristically Western features, bringing into question whether it is actually to be considered part of the Western art canon. Cutler draws attention to the use of formalistic analysis when classifying Byzantine art as either part of or not part of the Western canon, while Nelson focuses on the distinction of this art as based on historical distinctions laid down by Hegel, based in large part on Byzantium's role as foil to the rise of the West in a similar vein to Islam.<sup>4</sup> Nelson suggests art historical analyses account for purpose and function when classifying Byzantine art within the Western canon. These different ways of contextualizing Byzantine art within the Western canon come into play when looking at the liturgical functions of the Thessaloniki *Epitaphios*.

*Epitaphioi* and *aeres*, smaller textiles similar to *epitaphios*, were traditionally used as covers for the chalice and paten during the Liturgy of the Eucharist.<sup>5</sup> Often decorated, these textiles traditionally depict Christ giving bread and wine to his disciples. This holds true in the Thessaloniki *Epitaphios*, which features a central panel depicting the dead body of Christ surrounded by angels. This scene is bookended by panels showing Christ distributing bread and wine respectively. A decorative border features the Eucharistic bread and the chalice alternating in order, and red linen underlays the embroidered textile.

Rather than serving as passive covers for the chalice and paten, *epitaphioi* were active liturgical pieces. Establishing this argument in *The Embodied Icon*, Byzantinist Warren Woodfin draws attention to various *epitaphioi*, including the Thessaloniki *Epitaphios*, and cites the late-fourteenth-century Byzantine

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<sup>4</sup> Anthony Cutler, "The Pathos of Distance: Byzantium in the Gaze of Renaissance Europe and Modern Scholarship," *Reframing the Renaissance: Visual Culture in Europe and Latin America, 1450-1650*. By Claire J. Farago (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 23-45. Robert S. Nelson, "Living on the Byzantine Borders of Western Art," *Gesta* 35, no. 1 (1996): 3-7.

<sup>5</sup> Drandaki et al., *Heaven & Earth*.

paintings featuring angels carrying textiles with the image of Christ's body in Holy Week processions and the *Diataxis*.<sup>6</sup> This would suggest such textiles played an active role in liturgical proceedings. In an effort to determine if the Thessaloniki *Epitaphios* was indeed produced as a liturgical rather than simply symbolic piece, this paper will undertake a stylistic and formalistic analysis of the Thessaloniki *Epitaphios* with respect to its inscriptions, depiction of the humanity of Christ, and treatment of time. Analysis of this piece can then help contextualize Byzantine art within the Western canon. The determination that the Thessaloniki *Epitaphios* had significant liturgical functions that influenced the creation and design of the piece would suggest that, in line with Nelson's argument, Byzantine works must be considered within the context of their function when determining their place in the Western canon.

### **Christ's Humanity**

#### *Emphasis on the Corporeal in the Eucharist*

Christ as both human and divine is perhaps one of the most contested points of Christian theology, both in the present day and in Late Byzantium. This concept holds a key role in the Eucharist as well. According to the Byzantine tradition, the bread used for the Eucharist is transformed into the actual body of Christ. In consuming it, the faithful participate in the divine. The Eucharist is dependent on the body and corporeal presence of Christ, as it represents the sacrifice of his humanity:

"The holy table [altar] corresponds to the spot in the tomb where Christ was placed. On it lies the true and heavenly bread, the mystical and unbloody sacrifice. Christ sacrifices His flesh and blood and offers it to the faithful as food for eternal life."<sup>7</sup>

Here St. Germanus, patriarch of Constantinople in the eighth century, stresses the connection between the liturgy and Christ's sacrifice of his body and blood, making his humanity, and in particular his bodily

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<sup>6</sup> Warren T. Woodfin, *The Embodied Icon: Liturgical Vestments and Sacramental Power in Byzantium* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2012). Discussing these paintings, Gemistos the Deacon (c. 1380) describes how *aeres* were held above the chalice and paten during Eucharist ceremonies rather than merely covering them.

<sup>7</sup> Germanus, *On the Divine Liturgy*, trans. Paul Meyendorff (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary, 1984), 59.

sacrifice, a key aspect of the Eucharist. The duality achieved in depicting Christ's corporeal presence in the context of a transformative liturgical rite is important to consider in analyzing the Thessaloniki *Epitaphios*.

There are several ways by which Christ's corporeal presence is depicted in the Thessaloniki *Epitaphios*. First, this primarily silk piece features a contemporary underlay of red linen that recalls blood under skin (see Figure 2).<sup>\*</sup> Many figures and symbols in the piece are outlined by red as well, mimicking blood flowing through the veins. Second, displaying Christ's dead body on a long rectangular textile brings to mind burial cloths. Thus, drawing attention to Christ's morbidity emphasizes his humanity and the sacrifice he made for the salvation of the faithful.

The transformative nature of the liturgy is alluded to in the *Epitaphios* to in the depiction of Christ's body (see Figure 3). Its muscularity is immediately striking; his abdominal and pectoral muscles are clearly defined, and his calf muscles bulge at the back of his legs. In many cases, the body of Christ is depicted as gaunt to emphasize his suffering. Having fasted for forty days and nights prior to his death, his body is weakened and frail. The tilt of the head of Christ serves as further evidence of this (see Figure 4). Rather than a head slumped in death, the *Epitaphios* presents Christ with his head tilted upwards. This detail draws attention toward the paradox of divine energy invested in a dying body. Christ still has life in his veins and strength enough to raise his head toward the heavens, toward his father. This begs the question as to why Christ in the Thessaloniki *Epitaphios* suggests a spark of life that contradicts the death that is depicted.

Christ is clearly depicted in a way that emphasizes his humanity. The red linen foundation, his muscularity, and the tilt of the head all serve as the last signs of life in the body of Christ. But the use of material as the medium for this image cannot be ignored. It is reminiscent of burial cloths, suggesting

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<sup>\*</sup> Damage to various areas in the piece, particularly the right side panel (see Figure 6), shows the foundation is red, which indicates the red underlay is contemporary to the embroidered textile.

Christ as depicted here is on the brink of death, but not quite dead yet. Thus, the moment presented in the center panel image is one of transformation – the moment life transitions into death. This kind of transformation, the bridging of human or physical with divine or mystical, known as the Incarnation, is a key component of Byzantine liturgical practices.<sup>8</sup> Ceremonies like the Eucharist are literal reenactments of the original event. Thus, the depiction of Christ and emphasis on the corporeal presence in the Thessaloniki *Epitaphios* is one that closely parallels the Eucharist liturgy.

### **The Interplay of Image and Text** *Use of Inscriptions in the Epitaphios*

Text plays an important role in preaching the truth of the images and scenes presented in the Thessaloniki *Epitaphios*. The use of inscriptions in Byzantine art goes beyond merely describing an image. They elevate it, working with the image to form a cohesive message that poses it as true in the eyes of the viewer. To illustrate this point, art historian Liz James in Art and Text in Byzantine Culture compares a hypothetical Byzantine icon to Magritte's *This is Not a Pipe*.<sup>9</sup> In Magritte's famous painting, the inscription "this is not a pipe" appears below a painted image of a pipe (see Figure 5). The inscription forces the viewer to acknowledge that the painted pipe is not a real pipe – it is only an image. The role of inscriptions in Byzantine art was drastically different.

"For a Byzantine viewer in the period after Iconoclasm it [looking at an image with the words *This is not Christ* underneath an image of Christ] would suggest that somehow the painter had painted Christ incorrectly and thus, because Christ did not look like Christ, he could not be Christ."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Robert F. Taft, "The Living Icon: Touching the Transcendent in Palaiologan Iconography and Liturgy," in: *Byzantium: Faith and Power (1261-1557)*, ed. Sarah T. Brooks (St. Louis, MO: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2013), 54-61.

<sup>9</sup> Liz James, *Art and Text in Byzantine Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

Therefore, text helps argue for the truthfulness of the image it accompanies, and it is with this mindset that the Thessaloniki *Epitaphios* must be approached.

There are several important inscriptions on the piece, the most prominent being those on the side panels of the *Epitaphios*. For example, the right side panel shows Christ giving bread to his disciples (see Figure 6). The inscription, located on the upper left hand side of the panel, reads, “Take and eat, this is my body” (Matthew 26:26-28).<sup>11</sup> During the Eucharist ceremony, the priest recites this line as the bread transforms into the body of Christ. As the priest speaks these words just as Christ spoke these words, the transformation occurs, and thus the liturgical rite makes the original event true and present. It is clear that this inscription is not a caption; it is not a descriptor of the image it accompanies. The viewer reads it as though Christ himself were saying it. This helps legitimize the image by presenting it as if it is occurring in the present for the viewer. Art historian Henry Maguire, in his thesis in the 1960s, speaks of how inscriptions on such images “make images live in the mind’s eye” and “convey perceptions of works of art and perceptions of the meanings of such works.”<sup>12</sup> This is clear in the use of this text, particularly since it is not set apart from the image in a distinct and separate area but is instead squeezed between the figures. This forces the viewer to contemplate the words as part of, and in time with, the image, rather than separate from it.

Another example of how inscriptions establish the Thessaloniki *Epitaphios* as a true image is the inscription “Hagios, Hagios, Hagios” accompanying the winged Seraph and Cherubim (see Figure 7).<sup>13</sup> Known as the Trisagion hymn, translated as “holy” thrice, it likely originated from Isaiah 6:3, in which angels cry out “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty.”<sup>14</sup> Byzantines sung these words as part of the opening of the Divine Liturgy, just before the Liturgy of the Word and the Great Entrance.<sup>15</sup> It was also

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<sup>11</sup> *Oxford Annotated Bible*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

<sup>12</sup> James, *Art and Text in Byzantine Culture*.

<sup>13</sup> Drandaki et al., *Heaven & Earth*.

<sup>14</sup> *Oxford Annotated Bible*.

<sup>15</sup> Germanus, *On the Divine Liturgy*.

sung during the Eucharist, allowing liturgical participants to reenact and reproduce liturgy by chanting these words. This hymn was often inscribed on processional crosses as well.<sup>16</sup> As seen above, the text is squeezed into the image in a way that necessitates interaction between the two. This implies to the viewer that it is the Cherubim chanting the hymn. This activation of image through words further encourages interaction of the viewer with the piece.

Text, therefore, plays an important role in allowing the viewer to activate the power of the Thessaloniki *Epitaphios*. As Robert Nelson describes in his essay *Image and Inscription*, "By means of inscribed icons, medieval viewers, readers, and listeners enacted liturgical dramas of their own in these spaces of devotion."<sup>17</sup> The Thessaloniki *Epitaphios* is a clear example of this. In quoting directly from Matthew and Isaiah, the same quotations used in the liturgy itself, the piece is invested with Eucharistic energy. The inscriptions are an integral part of the Thessaloniki *Epitaphios* and serve to activate the piece in a way that suggests its role was more than simple symbolism; rather, this textile served a clear liturgical function by encouraging the viewer to participate in the liturgy that the images depict.

### **Time and Eternity** *Temporality in the Epitaphios*

There is only one Church above and below, since God came down among us and was seen in our form and accomplished what he did for us. And the Lord's priestly activity and communion and contemplation constitute one single work, **which is carried out at the same time both above and here below**, but with this difference: above it is done without veils and symbols, but here it is accomplished through symbols.<sup>18</sup>

The idea of rituals as true reenactments rather than purely symbolic reenactments was key in late Byzantium, but another interesting point brought up in the above quote, from Symeon of

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<sup>16</sup> Glanville Downey, "A Processional Cross," *Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 12, no. 9 (May 1954), 276-80.

<sup>17</sup> Robert S. Nelson, "Image and Inscription," in: *Art and Text in Byzantine Culture*, by Liz James (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 100-16.

<sup>18</sup> Symeon of Thessaloniki, *Dialogue against all Heresies*, chap. 31, quoted in Taft, 54-61. Emphasis mine.

Thessaloniki (d. 1429), relates to the perception of time with respect to a liturgical rite. Not only were such rituals true reenactments; they were also simultaneous with events in the heavens. This idea, one of a ritual uniting its temporal dimension with divine eternal reality into a single moment of time that connects the human and divine worlds, will be important in considering the Thessaloniki *Epitaphios*.

The composition of the *Epitaphios* provides a great deal of understanding of the representations of time and transcendence of time. The symmetrical composition focuses attention on the central panel; the viewer is led inward toward the body of Christ. The figures of Christ on either side also gesture toward the center. Life is leaving his body, and in this moment, life transitions into death. Thus, the center panel is focused on a single moment, Christ in a constant flux between life and death. This is an interesting contrast to the way time is presented in the side panels, where time appears frozen. The side panels present Christ giving bread and wine to his apostles, his hand frozen just before the bread enters the kneeling apostle's mouth, or the wine about to tip into the other apostle's mouth (see Figure 8). There is no transition or transformation in these images; they are moments frozen in time. Yet these moments transcend time – the actions of these figures are always occurring, both in the time of the image and in that of the viewer.

Furthermore, the subjects of the side panels – the giving of bread and wine as the body and blood of Christ – is the first act of the Eucharist liturgy, in which viewers of the *Epitaphios* would have been participating as they viewed the image. Thus, the images of the side panels transcend time, as they occur in the past and present. Considering the series of panels as a whole and accounting for the centrality of the composition, it becomes evident that the energy of the center panel, of that single, fluctuating moment in time, is carried through the side panels. In this way the piece takes the moment before death and carries it throughout time. Christ, his human and divine presence, is carried to the present through the liturgical rite that the side panels present.

This theme culminates in the border of alternating Eucharistic wafers and chalices (see Figure 9), which poses the textile as an active participant in the liturgy. Closer examination of the border yields the following finding – the Eucharist wafers, rather than distinct circles, are interwoven together. Circles wind into smaller ones, which continue on to form larger wafers. Thus, the viewer is guided from one circle to the next, which invites the viewer to pause and contemplate the piece as he or she follows the border.<sup>19</sup> Thus, it would be reasonable to assume the border attempted to enforce a sense of continuity using interconnected Eucharist circles. Furthermore, there is no clear beginning or end in the border as the viewer is led through the piece continuously. The piece seems almost timeless while encompassing and promoting a liturgy based on very specific moments in time, that of the Last Supper and that of Christ's death.

Therefore, the Thessaloniki *Epitaphios* argues the truth of its image and the truth of the Liturgy of the Eucharist by collapsing the events it depicts into a single frame of time that bridges the human and the divine, a moment of time that also transcends time and exists in the past, present, and future. Similar to the corporeality of Christ's body, the temporality as presented in the *Epitaphios* transcends a mere symbolic function of the textile, suggesting instead that the textile served an active role in liturgy.

### Conclusion

The Thessaloniki *Epitaphios* clearly achieves a sense of activation and invocation of the Liturgy of the Eucharist, rendering it an active component of the ritual rather than a mere symbol. Jesuit priest and liturgical expert Robert Taft, in his essay *The Living Icon*, claims: "In this theology, church ritual constitutes not only a *representation* but also a *re-presentation*, that is, a rendering present again, of the

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<sup>19</sup> An argument against this theory would be the corners of the textile, where the aforementioned connections are cut across (see Figure 10). However, it seems there was an attempt to continue the connecting circles at the corners, but when unable to do so, the maker of the textile paneled the cut across the smaller hoops to fit it to the rest of the textile.

earthly saving work of Christ.”<sup>20</sup> After this analysis, it is clear the Thessaloniki *Epitaphios* falls in line. The piece argues the truth of the Eucharist liturgy as seen in its depiction of the corporeal Christ, use of inscriptions, and presentation of temporality. In demonstrating and designating the *Epitaphios* as liturgical in line with the argument of Woodfin, this paper suggests that Byzantine art be considered, as suggested by Nelson, within the context of its function and purpose when considering its role within the Western canon. In this piece, utility heavily informs its style, composition, and other formal aspects; thus, contextualizing Byzantine works of art such as the Thessaloniki *Epitaphios* without regard for functional aspects such as a role in liturgy would fail to capture the essence and depth of such pieces.

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<sup>20</sup> Taft, 54-61.

## Appendix

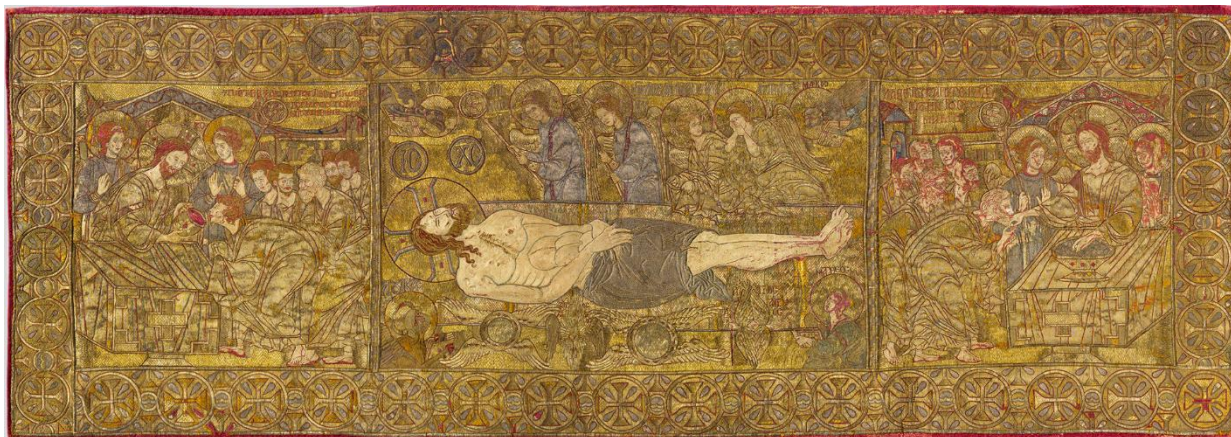


Figure 1 – Thessaloniki *Epitaphios*, from Thessaloniki, Greece, c. 1300



Figure 2 – Red underlay of the *Epitaphios*

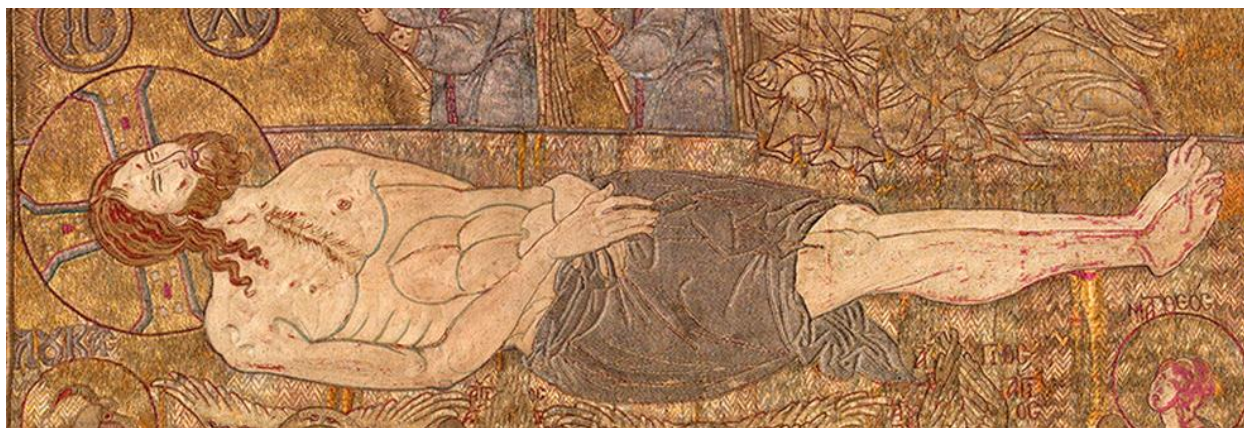


Figure 3 – Detail, Body of Christ, center panel.

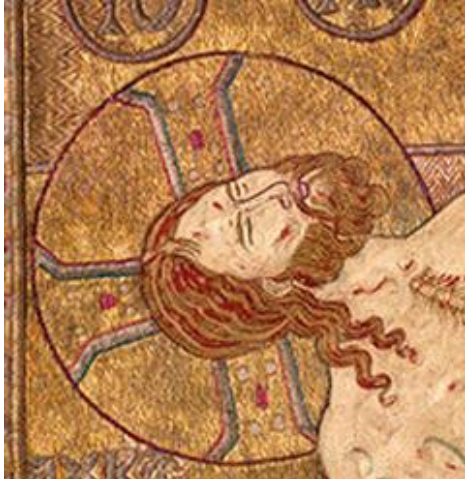


Figure 4 – Detail of Christ's head.



Figure 5 – This is Not a Pipe, Magritte

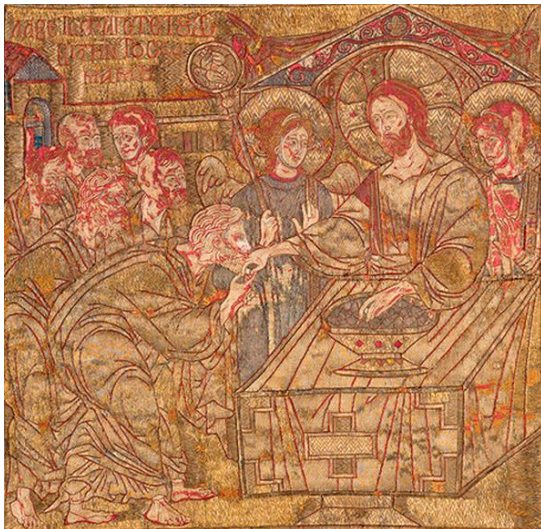


Figure 6 – Detail, Right panel showing Jesus handing bread to his apostle and inscription.



Figure 7 – Detail of center panel showing Cherubim with lance and *Hagios* inscription.



Figure 8 – Detail, Left panel showing Christ giving wine to kneeling apostle.



Figure 9 – Border of the Thessaloniki *Epitaphios* featuring alternating Eucharistic wafers and chalices.



Figure 10 – Detail of upper right hand corner of the border. Border is paneled, resulting in a break in the continuity established in the rest of the border.

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# The Troubadour's Woman: Mirroring the Male Gaze in Early Medieval Literature

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*The famed "lady" of the medieval courtly love narrative is introduced into medieval literature by the French troubadour poets of the twelfth century. They come singing her praises, conjuring with their poems and their songs the ideal—and original—cruel, fair mistress of affections. This is the domna, an archetype upheld in later literary tradition by famous figures like Isolde and Guinevere. The domna is a complicated figure; she is at once chaste and erotic, married and yet destined to be worshipped only by men who are not her husband. The domna is accorded tremendous power from the beginning—if the troubadours who bring her about are to be believed, she controls their hearts and their appetites, their minds and their souls and whether or not they live. But is this power a power at all? Or is this figure a mere construction of the male gaze, manipulated and agitated in turn so that these male authors can look back on the true objects of their affection—themselves? The domna is ultimately a canvas upon which the troubadours paint their own self-portraits, illustrations of pious sacrifice, romanticized struggles, and introspections on the concept of love that can only persist so long as the domna herself remains distant from the lover, absent from the passion she is said to inspire and consequently stripped of any ability to respond.*

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The study of courtly love is perhaps best understood as a study of paradoxes. It is a cultural climate in which men—knights and courtiers both—are encouraged to pursue the favor and ardor of married women while the women are applauded for bestowing such. Intimacy is expected, while consummation is condemned, and it is from this precariously balanced social code that the figure of the *domna* — the famed "lady" of the medieval courtly love narrative who is all at once adored, coveted, and thoroughly forbidden— emerges into western literature as a foundational archetype composed of contradictions. Introduced into medieval literature by the French troubadour poets of the twelfth century, the *domna* is an enduring archetype reincarnated most famously by later famous figures like Isolde and Guinevere. The *domna* is a complicated figure; she is at once chaste and erotic, married and yet only worshipped by men who are not her husband. The *domna* is accorded tremendous power from

the beginning—if the troubadours who bring her about are to be believed, she controls their hearts and their appetites, their minds and their souls and whether or not they live.

The *domna* is she who “is in full control while the knight owe[s] her absolute obedience and submission without hope of tangible reward.”<sup>1</sup> However, close critique of her earliest depictions in the troubadour poetry that would engender the courtly love narrative reveals that she is, in fact, bound by the same power she is venerated for holding. Her only means of influence over the male authors, who claim to worship her, stems from allowing herself to be objectified, by turns either glorified or vilified by the troubadour poets whom this work now contemplates. Troubadour poetry begins the literary tradition of courtly love as it is bound to narrative, elevating in the fictional what neither Ovid nor Andreas Capellanus could fully explore in their semi-serious “how-to-guides” to the arts of love—the figure of “the lady” as she influenced the poet-speakers of the troubadour canon.

Who is this “lady,” this *domna*, and is her power over the poet a real force to be reckoned with, or is she merely a means of first exploring and then displaying maleness on the page? Is her role best compared to the way that Camelot’s monsters and villains exist solely to be vanquished by Camelot’s knights, adding glory to the Round Table and distinction to the individual members? Or is it possible that the position of *domna* in troubadour poetry, the foundational first texts of the courtly love tradition, allows women to both exercise personal agency and express sexual desire, albeit in a carefully coded fashion? If courtly love can be defined as a “stylized and idealistic relationship between a knight and his lady”<sup>2</sup> based “on the feudal relationship between a knight and his liege lord,”<sup>3</sup> then it must be interpreted through the figures whom it centralizes: the poet-lover and the lady-loved. The evolution, then, of the *domna* as she is depicted by different poets must be the guide through which her power is determined to be either earnest in force or a simple literary device.

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<sup>1</sup> Pamela J. Porter, *Courtly Love in Medieval Manuscripts* (University of Toronto Press, 2003), 19.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

Troubadour poetry encompasses a range of attitudes concerning the practice of romantic love at court and outside of marriage. However, following the definition given above, the poetry of a select few rises above the rest in allowing for a clear picture of the lady as she progresses throughout time. The works of Jaufrè Rudel, Marcabru, and Bernart de Ventadorn together possess all of what would become the tropes of courtly love literature. Jaufrè Rudel wrote in the early twelfth century and he, “unlike Bernart de Ventadorn, [was] not concerned specifically with [his] courtly relationship to a particular *domna* or [his] position in society.”<sup>4</sup> It is no coincidence then that he is credited as the inventor of the *amor de lonh*<sup>5</sup>—love from a distance. It is a love that does not necessitate the presence of the *domna* to be a present force within the poet. Rudel’s poetry is chronologically some of the earliest of the canon to be identified as troubadour poetry. As such, his *amor de lonh* is particularly significant because it constructs a concrete standard on which the love literature to come would be built. His work emphasizes the strength of love’s bond, often equating the romantic impulse with the religious. An example of this conflation is found in Rudel’s “When in May”:

I have faith that the Lord will grant  
I see this love from far away;  
but for every good, it brings  
two evils, since it lies so far away.  
Oh, that I might be a pilgrim there  
so that her fair eyes  
could behold my staff and cloak.<sup>6</sup>

The “two evils” brought by this love that dwells so far away directly address the inherent paradox upon which courtly love is based. Theoretically, courtly love consists of desire devoid of action (that is, consummation). Instead, love finds its release in gifts of song and, later, deeds of battlefield glory. It is a

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<sup>4</sup> L. T. Topsfield, *Troubadours and Love* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 43.

<sup>5</sup> Simon Gaunt and Sarah Kay, eds., *The Troubadours: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 67.

<sup>6</sup> Anthony Bonner, ed. and trans., *Songs of the Troubadours* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1973), 63.

solitary experience, a one-sided love, because the desire a *domna* inspires necessitates her distance from the lover. The lady whom Jaufre Rudel writes of is herself distant both sexually and actually, a twofold distance that makes her doubly inaccessible. In spite of this distance, his love is ever present, dominating every aspect of his being from how he feels to how he measures his faith in God. Note that he believes *for* the privilege of seeing his lady again. He would venture to her as a pilgrim to a shrine, his devotion as pure and presented as equally righteous because there is neither hope nor expectation of physical reward. In exalting the *domna* to the status of a religious icon, this troubadour manages to sanctify her—and yet it is he himself whom he canonizes by highlighting his own piety and his own soul which he saves by faithfully serving a longing he can never satisfy. In this way, the distant *domna* is made to embody his own sacrifice. She is both the catalyst to his goodness and the canvas upon which he illustrates it.

Rudel's words frame the rules of courtly love; they express the proper way in which to practice it as though it is the only way. They present a romanticization of romance itself—not the lady these troubadour speakers purport to romance.

They speak the truth who call me greedy,  
Desiring love from far away,  
For no other joy so delights me  
As that in love from far away,  
But what I most want I cannot have  
. . . What I most want I cannot have<sup>7</sup>

The subject of the speaker's love being fulfilled, of him ever actually procuring the lady who is the cause of such pain, is never considered as a realistic outcome. In fact, it could be theorized that true love has no outcome so long as "outcome" is synonymous with "ending." The goal of Rudel's love is simply to remain in love—suspended, as opposed to falling. Rudel's work puts forth desire, rather than ownership,

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<sup>7</sup> Bonner, 64.

as the relevant issue at hand and it is from that division between wanting and having that the *domna* derives her initial ambiguity. She is either a figure that is liberated from patriarchy and empowered by the scopophilia that can never be more, or she is objectified by a voyeuristic fetishism that actually requires her absence—and moreover, her inability to respond in any way to the professed affections—in order to function.

If the *domna* cannot be owned, she cannot be classed according to the gender hierarchy. In his *Allegory of Love*, C.S. Lewis contends that marriage as an institution throughout the Middle Ages existed strictly within the bounds of business.<sup>8</sup> From that, it is no great leap to surmise that women—within the bounds of marriage—existed as the means through which that business was conducted. The generalization is that women are property and marriage is the trade that guides the buying and selling of them as such. Women are to be given in marriage by fathers and received by husbands; to be elevated as mothers of children, who are in turn legitimized only through the nuptial bond; and to be defined as wives and mothers, by their husbands and sons, after they are no longer defined as daughters. Marriage is, in short, a medieval woman's context.

The *domna*, however, has no such concrete claims on her identity. To remove a woman from the realm of marriage changes her position drastically and alters her personhood by *giving* her a personhood. Readers of Rudel's poems are not required to know who his lady's husband is, who her father is or who her sons might be. She simply *is*, a woman operating outside the jurisdiction of matrimony inasmuch as her identity is not linked to her status as a wife or mother. However, this apparent freedom only extends as far as she *is* Rudel's beloved—his muse, his object of romanticized affection, his means of exploring his own decidedly sensual emotions.

Rudel's poetry differs from later tradition in that the lady herself is scarcely to be seen in much of his work. His songs place the speaker's struggle in the forefront, mentioning the distance of his lady

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<sup>8</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition* (Oxford University Press, 1958), 13.

as the cause of his pain but concentrating on his own feelings rather than her many virtues. “The lady” is not nearly as relevant a figure within the poem as the heartache that she supposedly causes. However, in suggesting that she cannot be obtained and in never once making mention of to whom she might already belong, Rudel does bequeath the lady with independence even if he fails to reward her with relevance. Is that sufficient cause to reason that she is consequently a powerful figure?

Marcabru, like Jaufre Rudel, writes in the twelfth century and is one of the first troubadour poets to be recognized as such. L.T. Topsfield calls him “the most inventive and original of all the troubadours”<sup>9</sup> and certainly, both Marcabru’s depiction of love and the lady to whom such love is addressed differs greatly from the other troubadour poets. Just as Rudel must be noted for gifting unto love’s literature the *amor de lonh*, Marcabru sets the standard for *fin’ amors*. It is a concept that will be explored thoroughly throughout the rest of the later courtly love canon, from Thomas Malory’s *Le Morte D’Arthur* to Dante’s *Paradiso*. Marcabru’s *fin’ amors* refines Rudel’s *amor de lonh* by solidifying the implied link between “true love” and piety, emphasizing love’s innate influence over the morality of its practitioners.

If Rudel can be said to have glorified the pain of a true and chaste love, then certainly Marcabru celebrates the virtue it has the ability to both awake and enforce.

Marcabru judges the sexual behavior of the nobility in the light of the Christian ethic and the classical humanism of the great scholars of his day, and condemns it as adulterous, sterile and disruptive, for the individual person and for society. He offers a remedy of rational behavior which will bring social order and individual happiness. This remedy is *Fin’ Amors*.<sup>10</sup>

He condemns contemporaries for failing to practice love as it was practiced in days past, for gratifying lust over, essentially, longing. “Love was once virtuous and straight/But now it’s twisted and jagged,” Marcabru writes in “I’ll Tell You Plainly”:

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<sup>9</sup> Topsfield, 70.

<sup>10</sup> Topsfield, 72.

Love was perhaps once dear  
But now it has turned vile  
And virginity's a thing of the past  
Listen!<sup>11</sup>

Marcabru's castigation of evil lovers and false love defines true love and virtuous lovers by default. His speaker's words sift love's practices until there is a vast difference between indulging carnality and aspiring to something purer, something true and respectable and even righteous in the sight of God.

What is perhaps most intriguing about Marcabru's premise is the way in which he expresses it through a woman. No longer is the lady a silent source of pain or pleasure, to be used for the poet's own introspection. Nor is she even, necessarily, a lady, as his *pastorella* technique demonstrates:

The other day, beside a hedge,  
I came upon a humble shepardess,  
A person full of joy and wit,  
Daughter of a peasant girl . . .  
"Young girl," I said, "a gentle fairy  
Blessed you, when you were born,  
With a beauty unequalled by that  
of any other peasant girl,  
and it would be increased yet more  
if only once you'd let me  
lie on top, with you beneath."<sup>12</sup>

Marcabru's speaker is a nobleman hunting for immediate and physical gratification, exhibiting exactly the kind of careless carnality that Marcabru otherwise condemns. However, instead of allowing his identity as poet to intervene and speak directly to the erring nobleman, Marcabru chooses to exact a lesson through the "humble shepardess." Of all of the available techniques, of all of the characters or authorities he could have called upon, a woman is the means he selects to deliver the proper moral:

"Sir, a man beset with folly

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<sup>11</sup> Bonner, 48, stanzas V-IX.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 54, stanza VII.

Swears promises, and guarantees;  
 But though you might do me homage,  
 My Lord," said the peasant girl,  
 "I will not for a meager entrance fee  
 Exchange my virgin state  
 For that of whoredom!" <sup>13</sup>

The nameless shepardess continues. As the nobleman continues to pressure her, this time with compliments and that time with debate, the young woman of this poem disdains to become a mere object. In addition to exhibiting a will, she demonstrates the ability to reason—to argue and to confound a man who surpasses both her socioeconomic station and her female position in a patriarchal hierarchy. Here Marcabru brings the lady of courtly love literature to life, not only as a lady loved, but a human being.

. . . But each kind seeks  
 Its own: madmen seek madness,  
 Courtly men courtly adventures,  
 And peasant men peasant girls.  
 Old people say that to lose  
 All idea of proportion  
 Shows a lack of common sense. <sup>14</sup>

Such indiscriminate behavior not only shows a lack of common sense; it also raises questions of equality between the pursuer and the pursued, the love that is offered and the lover to whom it is offered. Had the shepardess succumbed to the nobleman's desires, she would have dishonored the both of them and placed them both in Marcabru's own contempt for practicing the "false love"<sup>15</sup> derided in the first of Marcabru's poems presented above.

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 55, stanza X.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 55, stanza XII.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 48, stanza VII.

In this same work, the poet admonishes that “men who follow women’s wisdom will surely come to ill,”<sup>16</sup> implying that it is women who hold the power to direct the course of love’s virtues. Should they succumb to male lust, they do both themselves and their lovers a supreme disservice. Should they refuse all carnal advances, they succeed over baser inclinations and instead inspire the men who would pledge their love to aspire to something higher.

L. T. Topsfield, too, finds Marcabru’s concentration on individual agency to be directly indicative of the quality of a specific individual’s love: “This ideal of perfect, true and complete love, *Fin’ Amors*, is rarely found, for love takes its quality from the qualities of those who practice it.”<sup>17</sup> What Topsfield perhaps does not mention is the significance of Marcabru’s “lady,” who is sometimes not a lady at all, but rather a peasant. Nevertheless, she remains the object toward whom desire is directed, and to whom the ability to cause pain or end it, to defend chastity or dispense with it, is given by the poet. In short, Marcabru’s *domna* has the power not only to determine the quality of the love she accepts, but in doing so, to also either raise or debase the quality of the lover.

Marcabru and Jaufre Rudel both use either the presence or the absence of the *domna* to propose that love has the ability to purify instead of debase. Marcabru argues that love ought to purify and that anything which does not is not love. Rudel maintains that a love beset by lust can only destroy itself and end itself by creating a carnal end rather than perpetuating the mental and spiritual process of being in love. In the works examined above, Rudel and Marcabru each treat the lady as a means; if the goal is spiritual elevation, then the lady is the means through which such an elevation is accomplished. She marks and measures the journey of the male lover from a man beset by carnal lust to a noble, humble servant who, in the image of Christ separated from the Father, is at every turn serving, striving,

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 49, stanza XII.

<sup>17</sup> Topsfield, 83.

and sacrificing amid the absence of the one from whom he draws his strength and on whom he focuses his ardor.

In this context, the *domna* is not an end within herself, though she graduates from being a mere figure in Rudel's distant love to being a vocal, reasoning force in Marcabru's *fin' amors*. So who does she become? And which is more powerful—being the way through which men reach righteousness, or being the destination that men seek to reach? If both involve objectification, is there any disparity between the two?

Bernart de Ventadorn's writings hail from later in the twelfth century than Jaufre Rudel's or Marcabru's, falling within the end of the first troubadour period and the beginning of the second. Bernart's work adds to the beauty of the earlier tradition by filtering his subject through the conventions already established by his predecessors. Ventadorn's lady is very clearly the ideal lady of courtly love's imagination: virtuous and cruel, sexual yet chaste. She is both a suggestion and a presence within Bernart's poems, possessing a physical form, various character traits, and reported actions, all while inspiring Bernart to ruminate on his own internal turmoil:

It is best that she should  
Bend me to her every wish,  
For then, if she does me wrong  
Or puts me off, she'll have compassion.<sup>18</sup>

In the work of Bernart de Ventadorn, the feudalistic submission of lover to lady emerges in full. Her authority over the speaker is complete; he admits it freely and often. However, working within this very same piece there is something that seemingly undermines the complete submission that the speaker claims he offers and which courtly love's definition demands:

. . . And if she takes her time,  
It's not for me to blame her—

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<sup>18</sup> Bonner, 86, stanza VI.

But if only she could mend her ways!  
 . . . I have always wanted you,  
 For nothing else so pleases me,  
 No other love so tempts me.  
 O wise, gentle lady, may He  
 Who fashioned you so beautifully,  
 Grant me that joy which I await.<sup>19</sup>

This speaker very openly engages with the idea of sex, something that Rudel never considered and Marcabru condemned outright. Possession of the *domna's* body is the goal that this speaker has in mind, and it is the end toward which he is working.

The poles are set thus: "the lady" of courtly love's literature is either *a means* to practice righteousness or *the ends* to be sexually achieved—either an instrument or a sinner. Bernart accords her the capacity to cause extreme suffering or equally intense joy. Her love warms his speaker despite the coldest winters<sup>20</sup> and deafens him to other "shouts or screams."<sup>21</sup> Indeed, separation from her is causing the lover to die on multiple occasions. Nevertheless, this same speaker, so enthralled, is still objective enough to issue his lady an ultimatum:

...Who ever saw a man do penitence  
 For a sin not yet committed?  
 The more I beg, the crueller  
 She becomes, and unless she changes,  
 we'll be forced to part.<sup>22</sup>

It is to be specially noted that Bernart de Ventadorn's speaker exchanges *domnas*, an unheard-of caprice and a completely unprecedented exercise of free will. It is personal agency operating apart from Love, outside of the *domna*, and this is all the more momentous in view of the fact that Bernart de Ventadorn, just as Jaufre Rudel invented the *amor de lonh* and Marcabru created and defined *fin' amors*, is

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 87, stanzas VI-IX.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 87, stanza II.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 90, stanza III.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 86, stanza V.

understood to be the first troubadour who united all of the tropes and really concretized what both troubadour tradition and courtly love literature comprise. That his speaker can even have an agenda apart from Love, once he has supposedly been overwhelmed, ought to automatically discount the lady and whatever influence she was purported to have. Instead, what Bernart's writings provide is a definition of power as it operates within the bounds of courtly love. His work explains the paradox at the heart of having a powerful woman as a literary device anywhere within the medieval tradition. It does so by, at last, placing the power of the *domna* within a context, limiting it with one essential proviso: the *domna* may indeed wield incredible authority over her lover, but she may, under no circumstances, withhold her love from that lover.

Should a *domna* withhold her love, she forgoes the privileges of being a lover's lady and she may then be exchanged for some more willing woman. The *Allegory of Love* admits that within the courtly canon, "[t]he lady is allowed free choice in her acceptance or rejection of a lover in order that she may reward the merit of the best . . . By admitting a worthy lover to her favors she does well."<sup>23</sup> To exclude any 'worthy' lover, however, the lady "truly is a woman," as Bernart De Ventadorn's speaker laments:

She doesn't want what should be wanted, and desires what is forbidden . . .  
 Since nothing serves me with my lady,  
 Not prayers, pity, or the rights I have,  
 And since my love displeases her,  
 I'll never speak of it again  
 But rather part from her and leave.<sup>24</sup>

To be a bit more direct, the lady at the center of the courtly love tradition may have authority over every thing except herself, own any body save her own. It is a power, but only to a very certain, very circumscribed, extent.

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<sup>23</sup> Lewis, 34.

<sup>24</sup> Bonner, 92, stanzas V and VII.

In idealizing romantic desire but shunning consummation, courtly love eliminates the need for the famed lady to be an active participant in her own love affair, and in doing so allows the lover full control over the literal narrative of their relationship. The troubadour's *domna*, accorded nominal power, is ultimately a canvas upon which the troubadours paint their own self-portraits—illustrations of pious sacrifice, romanticized struggles, and introspections on the concept of love that can only persist so long as the *domna* herself remains distant from the lover, absent from the passion she is said to inspire, and consequently stripped of any ability to respond. It is this lack of response that makes such sexless passion possible and makes courtly love as a system plausible.

Of courtly love, Lewis's *Allegory* concludes "that love is a 'kind of chastity,'" in virtue of its severe standard of fidelity to a single object. The lover must not hope to succeed, except with a foolish lady..."<sup>25</sup> If these lovers, the first of which being the troubadours, "must not hope to succeed"<sup>26</sup> in attaining the lady, then it must be resolved that the courtly lovers are in fact seeking to attain something else, that this single object is an ideal, not an individual. The *domna* may not be a wife to be owned, but she *is* a symbol created in the image of her makers to express their own piety, their own morality, their chivalry, and ultimately their own self-worth. In conclusion, the *domna* may indeed be a lady, but she is not quite a person.

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<sup>25</sup> Lewis, 34.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

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