Seeking Holiness: The Contribution of Nine Vernacular Narrative Texts from the Twelfth to the Fourteenth Centuries

Stephanie Grace Petinos

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SEEKING HOLINESS:
THE CONTRIBUTION OF NINE VERNACULAR NARRATIVE TEXTS FROM THE TWELFTH TO THE FOURTEENTH CENTURIES

by

STEPHANIE GRACE PETINOS

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in French in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

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Stephanie Grace Petinos

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in French to satisfy the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
Abstract

SEEKING HOLINESS:
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By
Stephanie Grace Petinos

Adviser: Francesca Canadé Sautman

Spirituality has been increasingly studied to determine the laity’s role within Church history in the Middle Ages. However, secular literature is often overlooked as a source of understanding lay spirituality, even though it is a crucial aspect of cultural and social history. I fill this gap by analyzing nine important vernacular texts to uncover several distinctive definitions of holiness, all of which blend the religious and the secular. Close reading of these texts reveals various paths to holiness, which undermine the Church’s attempts at sole control over spirituality. This study demonstrates that secular authors were concerned with exploring spiritual matters; that their notions of holiness transform, and often oppose, values sanctified by the Church; and, ultimately, that their constructions of holiness close the gap between religious and secular worlds by permitting lay persons access into religious realms not granted by the Church while, at the same time, not betraying their secular values.

I explore the varying definitions of holiness in five chapters. The first chapter, “Sacred and Secular Spaces,” explores secular spaces that take on religious functions—for example, the domestic space as site of miracle in Ami et Amile—and traditionally religious spaces that become secularized—when a quasi-magical, folkloric cure is administered in a hermit’s chapel in Eliduc. The second chapter, “Renunciation,” examines instances where secular heroes/heroines withdraw from temporal society to pursue the religious life; it is on the spiritual path that these individuals reap secular benefits such as autonomy, an elevated reputation and land holdings. Chapter three, “Women as Victim and Vehicle of Redemption,” concentrates on how victimization results in three heroines becoming the vehicles for redemption for those around them. They challenge traditional womanly passivity in moments of rebellion that grant them agency and influence. The fourth chapter, “The Ecology of Relics,” analyzes moments of divine touch through miraculous instances, particularly bodily restoration. Those who are touched become relics, and are thus religious objects in addition to living beings. The final chapter, “Conversion,” focuses on the fourteenth-century text La Belle Hélène de Constantinople, which features several individuals who convert from Islam to Christianity. This chapter concludes that conversion falls into distinguishable patterns that frequently divide along gender lines. I posit in the conclusion that all of the examined texts, in addition to Perceval, can be reconsidered under the guise of intra-religious conversion.
The intersections of the sacred and the secular that I outline in these chapters establish a new lens through which to read these non-religious texts, incorporating a heretofore neglected tradition into the conceptualization of religious and social history.
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This dissertation features material adapted from published articles. A portion of chapter two has been adapted as an article entitled, “Renunciation as point of departure in Marie de France’s Eliduc,” Anamesa 13:2 (Fall 2015): 10-20. A portion of chapter three has been adapted as an article entitled, “Woman as Victim and Vehicle of Redemption in the Search for Holiness: Marie de France’s Fresne,” Hortulus 12:2 (Spring 2016). A section of chapter four has been adapted as a forthcoming article, entitled, “The Ecology of Relics in Philippe de Remi’s Le Roman de la Manekine.” Ed. Heide Estes. Medieval Ecocriticisms. Amsterdam University Press (2017).
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Introduction

Understanding holiness—and thus, also identifying and neutralizing the unholy—is a preoccupation particularly evident in Western Europe from the late eleventh century through the late Middle Ages. It is during this time period that a series of religious reforms profoundly changed Western Christianity from the inside out.¹ My thesis thus focuses on the place of holiness following these events within a corpus of fictional medieval narratives. I thus examine a group of nine texts from the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries, in which representations of the sacred emerge in relation to the search for holiness, producing distinctive views—at their time, for their authors, and perhaps audiences—of its essence and of the coexistence of the spiritual and the secular. The twelfth-century texts in my corpus are Le conte du Graal ou le roman de Perceval by Chrétien de Troyes, the Lais Yonec, Fresne and Eliduc of Marie de France and the anonymous epic Le Moniage Guillaume. The thirteenth-century texts are the epic Ami et Amile, Le Roman de la Manekine by Philippe de Rémi, sire de Beaumanoir and the anonymous romance Robert le Diable. The fourteenth-century text to be discussed is the anonymous romance/epic La Belle Hélène de Constantinople.²

¹ Several scholars have attempted to explain the motivation behind the religious reforms of the central Middle Ages. Rachel Fulton, for example, cites the apocalyptic disappointment following the failure of the second coming of Jesus Christ after the year 1000 as a possible motivating factor, while others note that reform stemmed from the belief that monasteries had become too worldly, luxurious and complacent and called for a stricter adherence to the Rule of Saint Benedict.

This project focuses on how French vernacular texts written by lay authors acknowledge the presence of the sacred (and thus a blending of the spiritual and the secular) while suggesting or implying definitions of holiness that are not always consonant with Church doctrine, and thus constitute a fascinating lay exploration of holiness. It hinges on the use of several terms that are related but denote different levels of categorization of or experiences of religion. The first such terms are: vernacular, lay and secular. The term *vernacular* refers to the language used and spoken by the people of a particular country or region, and by extension, to the cultural framework of that region and can refer to architecture or ritual practices and beliefs, or, in this case, to vernacular texts, non-religious works written in French (Cazelles, *Unholy Grail* 3). The term *lay* applies here to writers who neither belong to the clergy nor have taken any form of religious vows, regardless of their interest in religious matters. *Secular* refers to matters of this world such as power, family life, hierarchies, the economy, etc., as opposed to matters that are (ideally) distinctly spiritual. While in a modern sense, *secular* tends to be read in opposition to the religious or spiritual, with positive or negative meanings within specific ideological or religious perspectives (Waterhouse 347), in this thesis, I employ the term *secular* simply to designate outlooks, rules or actions that are firmly rooted in the matters of this world. In effect, these three terms can overlap, but they nevertheless designate separate spheres of lived experience.

The second group of crucial terms consists of *holy, sacred* and *saintly*. The term *holy* implies a direct connection with God; to be holy is to strive to live fully in accordance with precepts that a society believes to be set by God, or pleasing to God (Whitehouse 751). Holiness is thus the highest moral and spiritual state that a person can attain, eliciting veneration when others deem it achieved by that person. A person who has reached the level of holiness has
transcended the earthly realm and completely surpassed secular attachments (Coats 745). While the pursuit of holiness can lead to mysticism, such as the experiences of Bernard of Clairvaux or the later mystics/visionaries, transcending the earthly realm was viewed as possible for the truly holy in the central Middle Ages, and not merely as an unattainable ideal. Sacred is distinct from holy: sacrality can demand veneration or can incite fear and avoidance. While often referring to religious objects, rites or practices, it can also pertain to objects of worship within the lay/secular world and not imply the total transcendence of this world (Vauchez, Sainthood 6). The sacred thus contains aspects of both the spiritual and the secular, for instance the sacrality of the kings of France, the religious crowning ritual, the power of healing attributed to kings, all firmly rooted in the secular world and in secular concerns (9-10). Finally, saintly refers specifically to the qualities of a person that has been or is likely to be declared a “saint,” an officially recognized and privileged status in the Church, but also one that lay communities have often taken upon themselves to affirm against Church sanction, as in the 13th-century cult of the dog-saint Guignefort.3

This thesis thus argues that medieval vernacular texts neither simply passively “copied” nor reflected holiness officially sanctioned by the Church, nor were mere narrative templates of normative religious practices. While matters of doctrine contemporary to my corpus such as the “birth of Purgatory” (Le Goff) were important in molding lay spirituality and thus, might be translated into vernaculars narrative, tensions do surface in textual instances between secular concerns and the religiosity that may otherwise permeate these texts (and thus, society, or the siecle). These narratives thus present unpredictable accommodations between the demands of the secular world (attachment to family, honor, feudal relations) and the pull towards transcendent holiness. My corpus was chosen because the texts are neither entirely religious or dogmatic, nor

3 For an in-depth study on this cult, see Schmitt.
wholly secular and devoid of any spiritual substance. Instead, the authors, whether known or anonymous, complicate notions of holiness by juxtaposing two or more separate codes of values in their narratives. This interaction of religious and secular values does not merely reveal how the texts deviate from or reiterate Church doctrine, but how they allowed a subtle transformation of spiritual values to surface. Thus my goal is neither to confirm the presence in this corpus of specific elements of Church doctrine, nor to explain away the enigmas and obscurities that are often intrinsic to such works through religious themes. Instead, I seek to uncover, under the layers of fictional narrative, the interpretations of the nature of the holy offered by these texts, and its insistent presence in the lay world, besides or beyond secular imperatives, in ways that can be syncretic, ambiguous, or unsanctioned by doctrine.

This thesis is interdisciplinary, employing historical, cultural/social and literary approaches in order to understand holiness in secular works of the central Middle Ages.

As these texts were written at specific dates and in certain geographic regions, the historical context in which they were produced is important. Lay authors of the time may have been particularly impacted, among other changes, by the reforms put into place by Pope Gregory VII that called for clerical celibacy at the end of the eleventh century; the monastic reforms that led to new orders, especially in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries; the papal decree of the definition of sainthood at the beginning of the thirteenth century; and the birth of an officially defined and recognized place termed Purgatory at the end of the twelfth century. My thesis relies in particular on three historical texts that discuss the dynamic nature of the central Middle Ages with respect to religious and spiritual concerns: David Knowles’ *Christian Monasticism*, Lester K. Little’s *Religious Poverty and the Profit Economy*, and Herbert Grundmann’s *Religious movements in the Middle Ages: the historical links between heresy, the Mendicant Orders, and*
the women’s religious movements in the twelfth and thirteenth century, with historical foundations of German mysticism.

Knowles’s overview of monasticism and its major reforms in the twelfth century shows that most of official Church doctrine was born within monasteries of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. By the end of the twelfth century and into the thirteenth, the spirit of religious rejuvenation had spread well beyond them, with the development of the Mendicant Orders, most notably the Franciscans and Dominicans, as well as the Beguine movement. Grundmann focuses on non-monastic movements, and on the Church’s fear of widespread lay access to the religious life, bringing these new movements under its control and regulating their teachings or declaring them heretical. Little covers the monastic and mendicant movements of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, citing economic changes as the motivation behind each movement’s definition of holiness. He posits that the growing profit economy, which expanded trade and fostered urbanization, sparked the crisis that caused twelfth-century monasteries to turn inward and retreat from the world, while, instead, the thirteenth-century mendicants chose to work within the profit economy and live within the world in order to combat its evils.

The social/cultural approach concerns crucial to the period of my corpus are addressed in two defining works by André Vauchez: Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages and The Laity in the Middle Ages: Religious Beliefs and Devotional Practices. Vauchez’s work illuminates in particular the religious climate and the practices that distinguished lay devotion from that of officially sanctioned Church practice.

Vauchez’s Sainthood thoroughly examines officially canonized saints who lived and/or died in some extraordinary fashion as to merit papal recognition, according to a rigorous set of criteria of sainthood. By the central/late Middle Ages the title “saint” had to be conferred by a
pope, but *Sainthood* shows that the laity played a large role in promoting the cults of those it deemed worthy of sainthood. He underscores the almost obsessive need of the Church to define, regulate and control the notion of Sainthood, edging out the veneration of local or popular saints. Since Sainthood was the highest level of holiness that a person could attain, the Church was in essence attempting to control the definition of holiness. Vauche’s *The Laity in the Middle Ages* reveals that while the Church was seeking to control such definitions, the laity was not entirely passive and unquestioning. Local cults and popular saints continued to exist after the canonization process became a matter of official doctrine and show that the laity had its own notions of Holiness, and was not willing to give up cherished local saints so easily.

This thesis argues that secular literature was one means for the laity to attempt to access the religious life independently, apart from the Church. In vernacular literary texts, notions such as sainthood and holiness are not fixed terms, but rather, socially constructed notions subject to change based on many factors such as time period, geography and the political climate. Vauchez indeed describes (*Sainthood*) how the laity attempted to access religious life on its own, not through the clergy or by taking monastic vows, but through individual penitential practices, confraternities and mysticism, in order to establish a direct connection with God. My thesis suggests that secular authors, in less evident ways, promoted alternate views of holiness that suited the secular world better than those advocated by the Church.

The thesis performs close readings of specific episodes where the view of holiness of authors and texts emerges. These examples demonstrate that holiness was not stable, but constantly re-constructed and malleable. Different aspects of what constitutes the path to holiness are evident in different texts, and are treated in separate chapters. In the conclusion, I highlight one additional narrative—*Perceval*—as well as *Robert le Diable* to discuss one final
aspect of holiness, that of intra-religious conversion, which extends the argument of the final chapter and allows a reconsideration of all of the texts analyzed in the main body of the text.

The texts examined in this project display varying levels of overt or implicit religiosity. Texts like *Le Roman de la Manekine*, *La Belle Hélène de Constantinople*, *Le Moniage Guillaume*, *Robert le Diable* and *Eliduc* are more overt in religious overtones: the heroes and heroines end their lives either in religious houses or as saintly, even sainted, figures. A few of these texts have analogous hagiographical versions. The *Vita* of the friends Amicus and Amelius, first referenced from around 1090 by Ralph Tortarius, a monk at the monastery of Fleury, can be considered a potential source or inspiration for the late twelfth or early thirteenth-century Old French version discussed in this project (Head, *Medieval Hagiography* 441). Whether or not this Latin hagiographical version is the source material for the Old French *Ami et Amile*, which was a widely known legend in both England and France at the time, even the *Vita* does not specifically refer to the friends as saints (441). The Old French *chanson de geste*, then, has hagiographical elements woven within its fabric, and yet it retains its secular nature as an epic/romance. *Le Moniage Guillaume*, the final installment of the epic cycle concerning William of Orange, ends with the titular character entering a monastery, only to leave in order to live an even stricter life of asceticism as a hermit. The central character is, in fact, a historical figure, most likely a count in Toulouse who founded the monastery of Gellone—now Saint-Guilhem-le-Désert—in 804. A *Vita* exists about this personage, the *Vita Sancti Wilhelmi*, which was composed in the 1120s, just before the time frame in which the earliest versions of the *chanson de geste* were being composed.⁴ *La Belle Hélène de Constantinople* is filled with saints, with the majority of the converts becoming saints in their own right; the most notable saints mentioned in this narrative

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⁴ Cloetta and Ferrante provide details on the historical life of William, his legend and the *Vita* in the introduction of their edition and translation, respectively.
are Saints Martin and Brice, the son and grandson, respectively, of the titular heroine.\(^5\) Saint Martin is one of the central characters of the narrative, and while several deviations from the *Vita* of Saint Martin exist to weave his life into the body of the narrative, the text does include certain notable episodes from the hagiographic tradition, including the famous scene where Martin divides his cloak to share it with a beggar. There is no specific saint mentioned in *La Manekine*, although her story shares many similarities with that of Saints Elizabeth of Thuringia, a Hungarian princess, and Margaret, a Saxon princess who married Malcolm III, King of Scots, whose mother was Hungarian and who, herself, was born in Hungary. Elizabeth died in 1231 with her canonization process beginning in 1234, while Margaret, an eleventh-century royal, was not canonized until around 1250. It is not possible to determine whether Philippe de Remi would have been familiar with the details of these women’s lives, though in both cases, their histories were widely diffused and their piety well-known.\(^6\) With respect to *Robert le Diable*, while some scholars have tried to determine a historical Robert on whom the legend is based, no one has successfully proven a convincing historical link.\(^7\) While *Mélusine* is not based upon a historical personage, her legend is well-known and widespread by the time Jean d’Arras writes his version of the tale. He uses this legendary serpent-woman to ground an historical familial lineage and to justify the family’s rule in Lusignan. The remaining texts—*Eliduc*, *Yonec*, *Fresne* and *Perceval*—do not have analogous hagiographical narratives or historical links, but they do show varying levels of spirituality: Guildeluëc enters and becomes the abbess of a religious house, and her piety inspires her former husband and his second wife to enter the religious life as well;

\(^5\) See Claude Roussel, *Contes de geste au XIVe siècle*, for a detailed discussion and comprehensive list of the saints mentioned in this text.

\(^6\) See Sargent-Baur’s introduction to the edition of Philippe de Remi’s work 108.

\(^7\) Löseth argues this in the introduction to the Old French edition. See Legros and Mathey-Maille, *La Légende de Robert le Diable du Moyen Âge au XXe siècle*, for a discussion of possible historical links upon which the legend of Robert could potentially be based.
Fresne does not end her life as a nun, but she is obedient and forgiving, even toward those who have victimized her; while the lady and bird-knight in *Yonec* participate in an adulterous relationship, it is clear through Marie de France’s portrayal that this activity is not condemned and, in fact, the bird-knight proves to be a sympathetic character; finally, while Perceval remains entirely within the secular realm, and he does not exhibit any particularly saintly qualities, several scholars have noted the Christian and/or spiritual dimension that exists in this narrative, particularly with respect to the mysterious Grail Castle scene and Perceval’s stay with the hermit after encountering the penitents on Good Friday.⁸

It must be noted that while the inclusion or existence of hagiographical versions of these narratives—either portions of the secular stories or *Vitae* of characters that appear in these narratives—provides a strong link to religiosity, official Church dogma and spiritual matters in general, my analyses of these narratives does not include a basic comparison of these hagiographical and secular versions. The hagiographical elements lend credence to and justification for their inclusion in a project that deals with spirituality within these narratives, yet what I bring out of these narratives goes beyond a simple acknowledgement of the similarity of certain characters or texts with saints’ lives. Instead, I look to how these secular versions transform those elements that seem entirely orthodox, recasting them in a heterodoxical way; how seemingly entirely religious figures, episodes or spaces are employed to undermine or subvert the very institution they would seem to support; and how, despite the inclusion of these hagiographical or religious motifs, they do not erase the importance of the secular lives and values of the characters in their path toward transcendence and salvation.

Each text involves some sort of blending of secular and spiritual concerns. At times, a strong religious message is evoked, but the action remains entirely within the secular realm, bringing spirituality to the laity. At other times, secular values and preoccupations are found within religious institutions. In the end, it is clear that separating these two realms depreciates the authors’ work and loses one of the central messages of the text. Separating the two realms also misses the mark on the originality of these texts: the authors create a universe where spirituality, though still very much Christian, is separate from the dogmatic Church and Church officials. It becomes a space of freedom, where secular individuals do not have to sacrifice their secularity or their temporal concerns to gain spiritual transcendence.

In the first chapter, “Sacred and Secular Spaces,” I explore various spaces in the texts Eliduc, Fresne and Yonec by Marie de France; Le Roman de la Manekine by Philippe de Remi; and Ami et Amile. What comes to light in this chapter is the fact that many of the spaces that seem either inherently Christian, secular, or even pagan are, in fact, a mixture of multiple traditions. For example, the convent and monastery in Eliduc becomes spaces for pagan folkloric motifs and the potential for same-sex and courtly love, while the typically savage, uncivilized seascape becomes the space for divine intervention and conversion in La Manekine. In Fresne, the convent is a place of corruption, while the ash tree is both symbolic of pagan motifs and Christian imagery. In Yonec, the lady’s tower prison is one of excessive patriarchal control and the bird-knight’s kingdom is a representation of the pagan underworld that transforms into a Christian space. In Ami et Amile, the domestic space becomes the site of miraculous occurrences and redemption. The idea of mixed spaces complicates the reading of these texts and establishes the pattern of the sacred and secular blending in order to accommodate the life of the temporal figures.
Chapter two, “Renunciation,” looks at instances of renunciation in Marie de France’s *Eliduc; Robert le Diable; and Le Moniage Guillaume*. I investigate how the protagonists in these stories choose to renounce the secular life in favor of the religious life; and at the same time how, in choosing the religious life, each individual benefits in myriad secular and spiritual ways from this choice. William and Robert are both allowed to continue their chivalric pursuits after having withdrawn from the secular life, solidifying their prowess in both the religious and secular realms. Guildeleuc, for her part, allows her husband and his lover to legitimately experience their love; by choosing the religious life, she gains agency as well as a life of autonomy, independence and power as the abbess of her own convent. In withdrawing from temporal society to pursue the religious life, it is on the spiritual path that these individuals reap secular benefits like autonomy, land holdings and influence in both the religious and temporal realms.

The third chapter, “Woman as Victim and Vehicle of Redemption,” discusses the female characters in *Fresne* by Marie de France; *Le Roman de la Manekine* by Philippe de Remi; and *La Belle Hélène de Constantinople*. The women in these stories are all victims of unjust violence; it is this victimization that allows them to attain a level of holiness that surpasses their secular counterparts and become the vehicle of redemption for themselves and those around them, including the individuals who victimized them. By focusing exclusively on women, this chapter highlights the inferior position to which women at this time are often relegated and the limitations to which they are subject, but that their unjust conditions can become the conduit for their own religious salvation. This chapter also challenges traditional womanly passivity through moments of rebellion that each heroine exercises to gain agency.

Chapter four, “The Ecology of Relics,” examines instances of touch in the texts *Le Roman de la Manekine* by Philippe de Remi; *Le Moniage Guillaume; Ami et Amile; La Belle*
I look at moments where individuals are divinely touched, often through miraculous restoration, transforming them into living relics. The loci of divine touch vary: it is at times a human body, an animal body or an inanimate object. When these bodies are divinely touched, they become what I call *relicized*, meaning that they become at once living and non-living, animate and object. In the end, this *relicization* process is what allows traditionally ‘inferior’ bodies to rise to the level of holy material and, thus, transcend the secular world while continuing to exist within it. These *relicized* bodies also initiate various ecosystems of interaction and interdependence, which expands their scope of power and influence, extending to include even the audience.

The fifth, and final, chapter, “Conversion,” focuses exclusively on the text *La Belle Hélène de Constantinople*. In this text, there are multiple examples of intra-religious conversion, where individuals convert from either Islam or paganism to Christianity. I identify various categories of conversion within this text that seem to differ along gender lines. My analysis concludes that conversion falls into distinguishable patterns that frequently divide along gender lines. Where the masculine heroes tend to convert within the realm of warfare; when defeated, they are faced with the choice of conversion or death. Once converted, the heroes tend to become either zealous Christian military leaders or they enter the religious life. The women, on the other hand, convert of their own free will. In both cases, for men and women converts, changing religious affiliations is synonymous with shifting political affiliations. In this way, religious conversion can be viewed as a veil for secular concerns.

To conclude this project, I briefly discuss interreligious conversion in the texts *Le conte du Graal ou le roman de Perceval* and *Robert le Diable*. In each of these texts, even though each protagonist is already Christian, the hero goes through a conversion experience, where he,
despite ignorance or diabolic roots, manages to overcome these obstacles to arrive at a higher understanding of spirituality. This idea of interreligious conversion is only discussed in three texts, yet the concept can be applied to all of the texts discussed throughout the body of this project. I have also included an appendix in which I provide a brief summary of each text discussed in this project.
Chapter One

Sacred and Secular Spaces

In this chapter, I discuss sacred and secular spaces. While usually separate entities, the texts examined in this chapter—*Eliduc*, *Fresne*, and *Yonec* by Marie de France, the anonymous *Ami et Amile* and Philippe de Remi’s *Le Roman de la Manekine*—blend religious and profane elements within a singular space. I will demonstrate how within these texts, religious buildings or other sacred spaces become the points of reference for activities that contradict or complicate their sacred nature. Conversely, I will investigate secular spaces, places that have no specific religious affiliation that, through spiritual activities, interjections or sensibilities that occur there, become religiously charged. It is within the selected physical spaces that intersections and juxtapositions of the sacred and the secular occur from which a new interpretation of the space emerges that is neither wholly religious nor wholly profane, but rather a co-existence of the two. This chapter is not intended to locate every instance in which religious or non-Christian elements appear. Rather, I have selected these texts as fruitful representations of the pervasive phenomenon of blended space within the corpus envisaged in this project.

The most religiously charged space in Marie de France’s *Eliduc* is the hermit chapel in which Eliduc places Guilliadun in her unconscious state after removing her from her homeland, as the hermit occupies a privileged place in medieval religious society. In medieval literature, the hermit is commonly referred to as “saint ermite,” indicating his spiritual elevation. It is a trope within this tradition that hermits are, by their very nature, exemplars in the religious realm. The fact that the hermit has occupied the chapel and is subsequently buried within it denotes his chapel as a place of spiritual significance. And yet, at multiple points in this narrative, events and
elements contradictory to the Christian religion occur within this holy place, leading to a blended secular/sacred space.

When Eliduc places Guilliaudun within the chapel after she has fainted, he lays her on the altar as he believes she is dead. While this chapel is a convenient location to hide her body so his wife, Guildeluëc does not discover his lover, putting her on the altar desacralizes it; he symbolically elevates her to a position not attainable by a woman within the Church. He is elevating carnal, courtly love to the level of Christ’s sacrifice by placing her on the altar that recreates this sacrifice during the Mass. He thus, transforms the religious sanctuary into a shrine dedicated to earthly, mortal, human love (Pomel 521). Fabienne Pomel remarks that “L’amour profane semble ici rivaliser avec l’amour divin,” and that the monastic chapel marks “l’annexion du religieux à l’amour profane et une sacralisation substitutive : la spiritualisation de l’amour profane usurperait la place du religieux ou le détournerait à des fins profanes” (522). Thus, because of the sacrality of the hermit’s chapel, profane love becomes elevated to the height of religious love. It is the sacred nature of the hermit’s chapel that allows these two different forms of love—spiritual and profane—to co-exist; while profane love takes precedent while Eliduc mourns the ‘death’ of his lover, religious love continues to exist in the background by its very nature as a religious building.

The next instance that blends the chapel’s religious sanctity with temporal concerns occurs once Guildeluëc discovers Guilliaudun lying inside and deduces that this girl is the source of her husband’s unhappiness. As Guildeluëc laments the fate of the girl, thinking her to be dead, she witnesses the extraordinary flower cure performed by a weasel to resuscitate its partner. Guildeluëc obtains the flower and follows the weasels’ example to revive Guilliaudun. Danielle Gurevitch, in “The Weasel, the Rose and Life after Death: Representations of Medieval
Physiology in Marie de France’s *Eliduc,* notes the Celtic influence of this scene, in particular the fact that the animals are demonstrating seemingly magical or, at least, unusual, feats; though she argues that “the part played by the weasel in the story does not depict characteristic Celtic representations of the thematic imagery of animals, but rather the knowledge that it is motivated by Christian moral values” (218). Even though the weasel recalls Celtic lore and symbolism, its function in this text is transformed to fit a Christian framework. This mixed imagery of the weasel reflects the mixed and even conflicted view of the weasel in the Middle Ages. On the one hand, there is a tradition that associates the weasel with uncleanliness and sexual perversion, and yet, there are many bestiaries that positively endorse the healing abilities of the weasel, while medieval scholars perpetuate the notion that weasels used herbs and flowers to revive their dead (Chamberlin 54, 57; Gurevitch 218). Rick Chamberlin, in “Mes ore est li nuns remuëz: Intratextual Misinterpretations and Shifting Symbols in Marie de France’s ‘Eliduc,’” notes that “Marie preserves the conflict between the opposite symbolic values of the weasel but resolves it ultimately in the weasels’ favor: the valet’s violent killing of the animal after it had touched the corpse is justified, but without the death of the first weasel, Guilliadun would never have received the flower which revives her” (57). Marie, then, transforms the original Celtic animal imagery and potential negative connotations into a source of knowledge for Guildeluëc to cure Guilliadun, justifying its critical function within the text and within the sacred hermit’s chapel.

The conflicting nature of the weasel is further complicated, yet also confirmed, by the flower cure that the weasel employs. While Marie de France does not mention what type of flower it is that the weasel uses to cure its companion, its major significance in this scene is as part of the natural ecosystem. Although Guilliadun’s revival seems, at first, to be the result of

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9 Gurevitch explores the possibilities of what type of flower this could be. While her arguments note pre-Christian and Christian significances, because Marie de France does not ever name the specific flower, Gurevitch’s arguments must remain entirely theoretical.
magic, this scene, in fact, glaringly lacks supernatural intervention. Guildeluëc does not use the flower to resuscitate Guilliadun because she believes it possesses magical qualities, but rather because she has witnessed its natural healing properties. Moreover, at no point in this scene does Guildeluëc pray to God, the Virgin Mary or a saint as an intercessor for Guilliadun; a striking omission considering the sacrality of the space. The biological and natural character of the flower is added to both the non-Christian and Christian associations with the flower and the plant remedy. The fact that this scene takes place within the hermit chapel emphasizes the Christian surroundings and environment, but it does not erase the non-Christian associations; in fact, it makes them more apparent, highlighting the blended nature of this space. Even the possible Christian associations within this scene are transformed and are expressed in a non-normative fashion. As Sandra Pierson Prior points out in her work ““Kar des dames est avenu/L’aventure”: Displacing the Chivalric Hero in Marie de France’s Eliduc,” the resuscitation of Guilliadun in this scene completes her fainting spell during the storm scene; taken together, these scenes evoke the Sign of Jonah, the metaphor Jesus uses to prefigure his future crucifixion, burial and resurrection over the span of three days—like Jonah’s three-day ‘burial’ within the whale—to inspire repentance.\(^{10}\) She mentions the variations from the Jonah story—Guilliadun, not the person thrown overboard, is revived and there is no divine or prophetic mission—, noting that they “raise the possibility of near-blasphemy (the Sign of Jonah, is, after all, the preeminent Christological sign), since Marie has put a woman and animal magic in place of divine power

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\(^{10}\) Matthew 12:38-41 Jesus invokes the ‘Sign of Jonah’: “Then some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law said to him, “Teacher, we want to see a sign from you.” He answered, “A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now something greater than Jonah is here.” I use the *New International Bible* for all Biblical citations throughout this project.
and the romantic reunion of an adulterous couple in place of a prophetic mission” (134-135). Thus, even biblical evocation is transformed and used in entirely non-orthodox ways.

The final instance I will discuss that marks this chapel as a mixed space is the exchange between the women after Guilliadun regains consciousness. Apart from the valet who shoots the weasel, it is a female-centric scene. It is also a scene that scholar Anne Wilson determines to be entirely Marie de France’s own creation, separate from the pre-existing ritual plot; thus, the entire exchange between the women in this scene is Marie’s invention. The significance of this scene lies in its reversal of norms, both social and religious, which undermines both feudal and Church hierarchy. When Guilliadun awakens, she recounts all that has happened regarding the deceit of Eliduc; without knowing who Guildeluëc is, she admits that her lover has brought her to this land without revealing he already had a wife. Guildeluëc believes the girl is sincere, and, knowing the love between her husband and his lover to be true and pure, she forgives them both, stepping aside to allow them to marry while she enters a monastery. At no point does Eliduc seek out a priest to confess his sins, yet they are forgiven through his wife’s selfless actions. Instead, his sins are confessed through Guilliadun: she takes it upon herself to confess his entire web of deceit, proving her own innocence in the affair. In doing so, Guilliadun takes away her husband’s voice, as he has lost credibility through his deceitful ways, including murdering the sailor that revealed the truth of Guildeluëc’s existence during the storm on the boat. Eliduc is no longer credible, so Guilliadun must stand in as the trustworthy source; she usurps his voice and makes the necessary confession on his behalf. On the other side, it is not a priest, but rather Guildeluëc, who is the recipient of the confession in this scene; it is she who forgives the lovers and takes up the penance to absolve her husband’s sins. This entire scene is a symbolic feminine performance

11 She also highlights Marie’s alterations of the ritual plot, like changing the color of the medicinal flower.
12 The sailor’s death is, on the one hand, justified because he has broken the oath he swore to Eliduc not to reveal the truth to Guilliadun; however, the crime still exists as a serious one, one that cannot go without absolution.
of confession/absolution: the validity of the confession and forgiveness enacted by these women is confirmed by the fact that Eliduc is allowed to marry Guilladun and reinforced by the fact that the scene takes place within the holy hermit’s chapel, a spiritually privileged space. The fact that this aspect of the scene is Marie’s invention underscores its goal to undermine masculine authority, even as it takes place within a building firmly engrained in the patriarchal Church hierarchy. In fact, Marie erases the need for men altogether: a priest is not necessary for forgiveness or absolution, and even the masculine sinner is rendered obsolete through his lover’s admission on his behalf. In this scene, Marie has managed to destabilize all imposed hierarchical models and has eliminated the notion of their sex being a hindrance to their redemption.13 Because the official formula of confession is never uttered, it remains symbolic and avoids condemnation of the author.14 Marie manages to transform a sanctioned Christian practice—confession/absolution—into an unorthodox undertaking within the space of an official Church space.

The entirely female exchange is not limited to the hermit’s chapel. At the end of the tale, Guilladun enters Guildeluëc’s convent, while Eliduc enters a monastery he founds. It is thus in religious spaces where female bonds are established and flourish in this text. Pomel notes that Guildeluëc, in a way, replaces Eliduc, not only in the aforementioned confession episode in the chapel, but within the convent at the end as well (513). As the abbess of the convent, Guildeluëc provides for and takes care of Guilladun, replacing Eliduc as her comforter and provider. The central couple at the close of the story is neither Eliduc and Guildeluëc nor Eliduc and Guilladun, but rather Guildeluëc and Guilliadun. Within religious spaces, Guildeluëc is permitted to take on

13 The role of Guildeluëc as agent of redemption through renunciation will be discussed further in Chapter 2.
14 Diekstra notes that a penitent must say the exact formula when seeking confession, otherwise it is not sacramental and the confessor is not bound to secrecy. See Diekstra “Confessor and Penitent: Robert de Sorbon and the Cura Animarum” 161.
multiple masculine roles: that of savior, confessor and Guilladun’s life-long companion.

Chamberlin pushes this line of thinking further by suggesting the existence same-sex love between these women, initiated by Guildeluéc, though it would be more appropriate to label their bond as homoaffective. He posits that this subtle inclusion of same-sex love on Marie’s part did not go undetected by contemporary readers and scribes, which could explain why later editors did not follow Marie’s statement that the name of the lai is renamed to honor the female characters. Marie states:

D’eles deus ad li lais a nun

Guildeluéc ha Gualadun.

Elidus fu primes nomez,

Mes ore est li nunz remuez,

Kar des dames est avenu

L’aventure dunt li lais fu… (21-26)

Rather, they retained “Eliduc” to reflect the masculine hero and to de-emphasize the female-female relationship (59). A same-sex couple would, without a doubt, directly violate Church law; and yet, as Chamberlin points out: “If Marie is in fact subtly introducing a positive model for a same-sex couple, then the spiritual dimension is indispensable: the monastic setting would, of course, be the only place in the Middle Ages where such a couple might thrive” (58). As a result, the religious space becomes then a blend of profane, spiritual and potentially subversive love. Because the monastery is the only place same-sex or, in this case, homoaffective, love could exist and flourish, it constructs its own subversive potential through the requirements of

15 Other scholars point out this fact as well. For example, Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner states, in Shaping Romance: Interpretation, Truth, and Closure in Twelfth-Century French Fictions: “Unfortunately neither medieval rubricators nor modern editors have followed Marie’s instructions about the name change—so we continue to refer to Guildeluéc ha Guilliadun by the (admittedly more convenient) title of Eliduc” (183).
gender separation. While Marie does not seem to imply a sexual relationship between the two women, she at least creates the space and opportunity for female homosocial bonds to exist, be it entirely platonic through the bonds of friendship or romantic. In the end, this religious space is the place where the protagonists can put aside temporal love and dedicate themselves entirely to God; at the same time, it is the only place where the two women can additionally nurture an entirely new form of love not possible outside this religious space. It is, therefore, the only space where multiple forms of love can exist at once and in the same physical location; courtly, spiritual, platonic and perhaps even same-sex love can thrive in the feminine space of the convent.

In another of Marie de France’s *lais, Fresne*, the titular heroine is raised in a convent by an abbess who acts as her adoptive aunt and protector. As an entirely religious space, the convent should be the place where Fresne is shielded from any and all threats from the secular world. Yet, the convent becomes the very source of her victimization. When Gurun buys the land on which the convent resides, he does so with a sinister motive in mind: to seduce Fresne. Additionally, the abbess who is supposed to protect Fresne does nothing to prevent her from entering into a situation where she essentially becomes Gurun’s concubine. While Fresne and Gurun are living a life of permitted love according to courtly standards, it is a life of sin according to Church law. The abbess is not depicted at any point trying to educate Fresne about how she should comport herself as a Christian woman, and she certainly does nothing for Fresne’s spiritual formation when Gurun begins his courtly seduction. In this way, the convent transforms itself from a space of spiritual edification and protection, where those seeking

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16 A thorough discussion of Fresne’s victimization and its effects as a result of the abbess’ neglect and Gurun’s scheming will occur in Chapter 3.
17 Burgess actually uses the term “concubine” to refer to Fresne’s living situation with Gurun. See Burgess, “Symbolism in Marie de France’s *Laüstic* and *Le Fresne*” 262.
spiritual transcendence would find the path to salvation, to a nefarious space of intrigue and seduction. In fact, the convent becomes a corrupt space, since the abbess fails in her duties to protect Fresne from the perils and dangers of the secular world. As such, the convent retains its religious function, as the abbess and nuns continue to reside within it; and yet, it is also the scene of blossoming courtly carnal love that is expressed and completed outside of the religious institution of marriage and, thus, sinful by religious standards.

The other noteworthy space in this text is the ash tree for which Fresne is named. The handmaiden that carries Fresne away from her homeland first thinks to place the baby outside the convent gate, but, upon seeing the tree, she reconsiders and places her in the sturdy branches of the tree for protection [ll. 165-174]. The tree, part of the natural landscape, enters in a significant way into this tale: it is the inspiration for the titular character’s name and it provides protection for the baby from the natural elements and hungry animals during the night. Although the tree was originally planted to provide shade for the convent, it serves to shade the baby from all external threats until she is discovered. The tree acts as the first safe haven for Fresne in her short life to this point. The tree then sets the stage for both the moment when the porter discovers Fresne in the morning and has her fed by his widowed daughter, as well as to the safety, relatively speaking, of the convent in which she will reside until adulthood.

While the tree enacts its natural functions for the convent and for Fresne, the significance of this natural marker is complicated by undeniably religious sensibilities attached to the image of the tree. The importance of tree symbolism is central to Biblical tradition. Della Hooke cites several examples in both the Old and New Testament in which trees are used to understand the spiritual realm. For example, the image of the tree is used to express the kingdom of God, where Christ “likens the kingdom of heaven to a tree: in Luke 13:19 ‘It is like a grain of mustard seed,
which a man took, and cast into his garden; and it grew, and waxed a great tree; and the fowls of
the air lodged in the branches of it’” (26). She notes the importance of both the Tree of Life and
the Tree of Knowledge that existed in the Garden of Eden in Genesis: “While the one tree is the
downfall of mankind, the other holds the power of eternal life, and is guarded with seraphim
armed with a flaming sword” (27); as well as the Tree of Jesse, about which she states: “The
Tree of Jesse, too, represented in Christian art from the eleventh century, depicted the descent of
the Messiah” (28). Most significantly, she identifies the connection between the tree and Christ
as the cross of the crucifix is referred to as a ‘holy tree’ (28). As a result, the tree becomes one of
the central symbols for the death, and implicit resurrection, of Christ. With the multiplicity of
Christian undertones present in the figure of the tree, it is possible to reconsider the ash tree in
which Fresne is placed as a source of not only natural but also divine protection. As a central
symbol for the Christian tradition, from its inception in Genesis until its role in the Passion, the
reader would, without difficulty, understand the connection between the tree and Christian
sensibilities. Moreover, the close physical distance between the tree and the convent underscores
the spiritual and symbolic relationship between the tree, with its myriad spiritual designations,
and the holy site of the convent.

While the tree is a spiritual space that protects Fresne before she is discovered, its
position as locus of Christian meaning is complicated by the fact that the tree, particularly the
ash tree, is significant in many pre- or non-Christian societies. Hooke notes that early European
traditions imagined a World Tree, like the Norse Ash Tree of Yggdrasill: “The World Tree
linked the underworld to the heavens and the gods to mankind, the dead to the living – it was,
indeed, the backbone of all worlds, an idea met with in a number of ancient religions from across
the world” (Hooke 3). The tree held a special, often sacred position in many ancient traditions as
a piece of nature that must be protected to preserve the ecosystem (4). Additionally, trees were used in medicinal cures. Although most cures, salves and ointments were extracted from or based upon herbs, certain trees were used as well for ailments including headaches and as a bone salve, while ash bark in particular was used as an ingredient in cures for bronchial trouble, for the bath of lepers and against shingles, among others (63-64). Coupled with this tree’s noted strength, hence its common use for spears and other weapons, the ash tree was considered a privileged tree, associated with bravery in battle and alleviation from suffering (60). Of particular note is the place of the Ash Tree in Celtic mythology and tradition in which this specific tree is sacred;\textsuperscript{18} it was considered a source of wisdom and closely associated with the druid priests (13). These qualities that stem from the pagan roots of the ash tree are reflected in Fresne who possesses strength of character each time she is victimized, going so far as to tend to the marital bed in which her lover and his new bride will spend their first night as husband and wife. It is, moreover, forgiving her mother that acts as the cure to resolve the central conflicts of the \textit{lai}. Just as the Norse \textit{Yggdrasill}\textsuperscript{19} links the underworld with the heavens, so Fresne, as the source of conflict resolution, allows her mother to pass from a fallen, sinful state to a redeemed position, re-accepted into the Christian community. Fresne herself transcends the bounds of typical human charity to attain an almost saintly state.\textsuperscript{20} Therefore, Fresne lives up to the pre-Christian associations of her namesake, encompassing the symbolic pre-Christian meanings of the ash tree but bringing them into a Christian framework.

\textsuperscript{18} MacKillop, in \textit{A Dictionary of Celtic Mythology}, provides the definition of “Ash”: “A tree regarded with awe in Celtic countries, especially Ireland… There are several recorded instances in Irish history in which people refused to cut an ash, even when wood was scarce, for fear of having their own cabins consumed with flame. The ash tree itself might be used in May Day (Beltaine) rites… Together with the oak and thorn, the ash is part of a magical trilogy in fairy lore. Ash seedpods may be used in divination, and the wood has the power to ward off fairies, especially on the Isle of Man. In Gaelic Scotland children were given the astringent sap of the tree as a medicine and as a protection against witch-craft.”

\textsuperscript{19} Hooke states: “The \textit{Yggdrasill} legend is a relatively late form of tree symbolism but embodies many older beliefs – no other Germanic literature of the Middle Ages has the same quantity of pre-Christian material” (15-16).

\textsuperscript{20} The discussion of the mother’s sin and redemption through her daughter will be expanded upon in Chapter 3.
When Fresne is named for this tree, her name and identity are wrapped up in these multiple meanings, pre-Christian and Christian, of the ash tree. Glyn Burgess notes: “The proximity of the ash tree to the convent … suggest[s] a close relationship between Le Fresne and the Christian life. The four forks with their differing direction are suggestive of Le Fresne’s future life, of her ultimate success” (262). The abbess pays homage to the tree by naming the baby after it, noting its protective qualities, although later in the *lai* the barons incorrectly cite the barrenness of this tree as one reason why she is not a suitable marriage partner for Gurun; the barons, encouraging Gurun to exchange his mistress for the noble lady La Codre—Fresne’s twin sister who also happens to be named for a tree—saying:

> Pur le freisne que vus larrez  
> en eschange le Codre avez.  
> En la Codre ad noiz e deduiz,  
> Freisnes ne portë unkes fruiz !” (337-340).

Burgess calls attention to the irony in the barons’ sentiment, since the ash tree is actually very fertile, bearing both a flower and fruit. He notes that it is the barons that threaten to render Fresne barren by preventing a legitimate marriage for her since the state of her fertility is, like the ash tree, intact (265). The fact that the barons make this error about the bareness of the tree stands out; one must then question the motivation of the barons’ mistake. It seems unlikely that Marie de France would have believed the ash tree to be a barren tree, thus this inclusion either serves to underscore the barons’ lack of knowledge or that their error is a deliberate attempt to rid their kingdom of the threat of Fresne with her ambiguous roots. If Marie did intend for this to be a lack of knowledge, it parallels their complete misunderstanding of courtliness in which they elevate feudal inheritance laws above the courtly love union. If this is a deliberate error, it
exposes the deviousness and corruption of the barons who would lie to their lord in order to manipulate his marriage choice. In either case, because Gurun follows their advice, it highlights his own lack of knowledge and undermines his judgement, a subtle dig by the author toward a feudal lord that has already proven his questionable character and towards predominance and presumed wisdom.

Burgess also notes that the ash tree in this story is neither the Tree of Life, though the image of this tree is naturally conjured in the reader’s mind, but rather it gives context where myth is part of the structure; in the end, he determines that the Christian and pagan symbolism of the tree reinforce the courtly ideals that ultimately give meaning to the lai. The ash tree is, then, a “traditional symbol adapted to the exploration of the problems of individual relationships in the feudal-courtly world and a vehicle for virtues which can counteract the harsh realities of life” (268). While I agree that courtly ideals are emphasized in the end, the importance of the Christian and pagan symbolism of the ash tree cannot be denied or ignored. It is the fact that both meanings, Christian and non-Christian, co-exist within this story that enriches the lai to do more than recite a simple love story. It is a text that is rooted in multiple traditions that Marie de France seamlessly weaves together to create new, innovative meanings for her audience and for the spaces within which they occur. In this way, both the convent and the ash tree are mixed spaces with multiple meanings that are both Christian and non-Christian, incorporating both without denying either.

The final lai of Marie de France that I will discuss in this chapter is Yonec. I will focus on two different spaces: the tower in which the unnamed heroine is imprisoned by her old, jealous husband and the kingdom of which Muldumarec, the bird-knight lover, is lord.
The tower is first and foremost a prison within which the lady is relegated and denied any and all contact with the outside world, any worldly comforts, and even access to hearing and celebrating the Mass or receiving the Eucharist. While the husband occasionally visits her chamber, the marriage does not produce any children, denying the lady even the fruits of reproduction. While the motif of the *Jealous Husband* is not Marie de France’s invention, but rather a trope inherited from Celtic sources, there is a layer of Christian feudalization that the author applies to the husband’s actions.\(^{21}\) The husband locks his wife in a tower, exerting his right of patriarchal control. However, his error is taking this control to excess, which renders him unworthy of the upper class to which he belongs. While in reality husbands at the time do have the right of control over their wives, there are certain limitations: the husband is within his right to prevent his wife from committing adultery, but he acts unchivalrously and transgresses his patriarchal right when he denies her her social station, refusing her access to fine clothes, and limiting her food. The husband is described as “uns riches hum” (l. 12), who possesses land and wealth, but there is no mention of nobility through a familial line; on the other hand, the lady is described as being from a noble lineage: “De haute gent fu la pucele” (l. 21). The difference in the way Marie describes the social position of these individuals implies that the lady occupies a higher social standing than her husband. His excess could be a symptom of his lower place in society, and his cruelty toward his wife highlights the unequal pairing of the woman and the husband, judged by Marie as a transgression of her nobility. Moreover, he transgresses the Christian law when he denies her the marriage bed and does not allow her access to the sacrament of the Eucharist. It is in these extreme denials that the husband is transformed from a

controlling, strict figure of patriarchy to a cruel, unworthy and un-Christian individual.\textsuperscript{22} The tower, then, becomes the space of denial, where the lady is the victim of her husband’s unchivalrous and unremitting violence toward her.

The force that enters the narrative to liberate the lady from her husband’s excess is, of course, the bird-knight Muldumarec; he represents both a complete foil to the lady’s husband and her only escape from her current situation. This bird lover provides the lady not only with the companionship, physical affection and courtly manners that she so desperately craves, he also provides the spiritual dimension that has been denied to her by her husband. When he recites the Credo, he proclaims the tenets of the faith that the lady has not been able to practice during Mass since her marriage to her husband. When he assumes her form in order to consume the Eucharist, proving that he is a Christian, he performs an action that has been denied to her by her husband as well; even though it is not the lady, but rather the bird-knight in the guise of the lady, that partakes in the Eucharist, she receives the sacrament by proxy through her lover in her form. Because the Host is brought into her room, where the lady hides while the bird-knight receives it, she bears witness to the sacrament for the first time in her married life. His corrections of the husband’s excessive violence toward the lady serve as the justification of adultery and of the resulting illegitimate child.

Marie de France thus, presents Muldumarec as the lady’s liberator, a quasi-savior figure sent for her personal salvation. Johnson highlights the salvific nature of Muldumarec through the lady’s prayer in which she wishes for a secret lover to end her loneliness, citing other stories of secret lovers. As Johnson notes: “Seeking spiritual comfort... she describes these stories as “aventures ki rechatouent les pensis” (v. 94). The verb \textit{racheter} has a strong religious

\textsuperscript{22} Susan Johnson, in “Christian Allusion and Divine Justice in Yonec,” goes so far as to label the husband as purely evil, aligning him with the forces of Hell.
connotation in Old French. It can mean simply “to relieve,” but more often it has the sense of “to deliver, to redeem.”” (165). The lady, then, is not looking simply for a companion, but for a savior to deliver her from the cruelties of her husband. Muldumarec fulfills this role, recalling spiritual figures at certain moments: when he first appears to her, he resembles an angel in his beautiful physical appearance and through his words of comfort when he directs her not to be afraid [l. 121]. Moreover, on two different occasions, he takes on a prophetic role: first, when he warns the lady that if she summons him too often, their affair will be discovered [ll. 201-210], and second, when he is dying, he announces that she is pregnant, will bear a son, name him Yonec, and in the future travel to a festival where she and her son will hear the story of his father, learn the truth of his lineage and avenge his parents [ll. 414-440].23 In the end, Muldumarec does deliver the lady by ending her isolation and by providing her with a son, succeeding in the reproductive realm where her husband had failed. Although she returns to her husband after her lover’s death, Muldumarec has provided the lady with the means to cope with his cruelty.

Despite his Christian character, Muldumarec’s position as a shapeshifting being that is at once human, animal and supernatural is still present within the space of the tower. Although Muldumarec is not condemned within the text, his pagan origins and participation in an adulterous relationship, no matter how vehemently it is defended by the author, persist. This Celtic, pagan motif is not merely a Celtic residue within a Christianized framework, as the bird-knight with his shapeshifting, demonic, abilities are central to the tale, not only for easy access into the lady’s tower, but also as the ironic proof of his Christian nature. His animalistic nature is not erased; rather, just as Marie reverses the demonic nature of the bird-knight to showcase his

23 Burgess, in the introduction to Alfred Ewert’s edited work of Marie’s Lais, notes Muldumarec’s gift of prophecy (xxx).
Christian nature, so she uses his animal nature to break down the wall that separates the animal world from the human world. In doing so, she shows that the heroic nature and sympathetic qualities of Muldumarec are not due to his humanness, but rather to the qualities that transcend all physical form (Campbell 102). In contrast, the lady’s husband is entirely human, and yet his cruel nature far outweighs any demonic associations in Muldumarec’s shapeshifting and animalistic abilities. Marie, then, makes two character reversals: she turns the mortal, jealous husband into the feared, unsympathetic figure; and, at the same time, she turns the typically demonic character into the chivalric, Christian hero. Onto this reversal of spiritual characteristics, Marie adds her signature layer of courtliness, which accompanies the spiritual dimension of each character: the husband is portrayed as entirely uncourtly while the bird-knight is the epitome of the courtly lover celebrated not only within her own body of work, but also lauded by the troubadours, whose lyrics often use the hawk, the bird into which Muldumarec morphs, as a symbol for the courtly lover24 (Hanning and Ferrante 153); although this association also serves to reinforce his animalistic nature. And yet, as Karl Steel notes: “an animal is human when it can be murdered” (15). When Muldumarec is wounded he is in his animal form; however, when he dies, he does so as a man, and he is thus murdered. It is in death that his full humanity is revealed, though his hybrid nature is never entirely erased.

The tower, then, is a mixed space where religious and courtly concerns, supernatural and animalistic characteristics are bound up and inseparable. The two men in opposition represent the opposite ends of the courtly and religious spectrum, where the issues of just and unjust conduct are put into conversation. The tension in this opposition is not resolved within this space, though; in fact, it is only instigated further through Muldumarec’s mortal wound. It is in Muldumarec’s domain where this tension is finally resolved.

24 See Hanning and Ferrante’s edited work Lais de Marie de France 153.
When the lady follows the wounded bird-knight to his final resting place within his castle, she is essentially following the roadmap to the pre-Christian Celtic underworld. Muldumarec’s dwelling is accessed through a series of natural landscapes: she follows the blood trail through a hill, across a meadow, and through marshes, forests and enclosed fields. Once she reaches the walled castle, she crosses a stream via the lowered gate; the author notes that the entire city seems to be made of silver, adding to the supernatural atmosphere and inaccessibility of this settlement [ll. 345-372]. After making his predictions, Muldumarec tells the lady that she must return to her tower. Before she leaves, he gives her three gifts: a ring that will make her husband forget their entire affair; a sword that she is to give to Yonec at the proper time; and a “chier bliant” (l. 438), a beautiful garment suitable for her noble station, since she is only wearing a thin chemise. The ring in particular possesses a magical quality; with the ring and the child she is carrying, the lady brings a supernatural presence back to her tower with her. With the article of clothing, Muldumarec grants back a material aspect and cultural marker of the lady’s nobility that her husband had so long denied to her. Though she must continue to live with her husband, she has psychologically freed herself from him, since she no longer lives in fear of being discovered; and she has the comfort of her lover’s gifts and child by which to remember her period of earthly love. These gifts also bear a striking resemblance to the gifts bestowed by Alexis to his wife in La Vie de Saint Alexis. K. Sarah-Jane Murray notes in her work “The Ring and the Sword: Marie de France’s Yonec in Light of the Vie de saint Alexis,” that while Yonec makes allusions to several texts, both sacred and secular, it is the allusion to Alexis’s Vie that ties

25 Illingworth, in a footnote, points out the subterranean fairy dwelling of Muldumarec, comparing it to subterranean dwellings in Celtic tradition. He also notes the pure nature of the Celtic tradition of this dwelling, as the Classical tradition of the other world would have been almost certainly known by Marie (509). See Hodgson 25: he additionally supports the Otherworldly nature of Muldumarec’s dwelling.
these echoes together and gives real coherence to the text. This grants a clear Christian character to the text through the bestowed objects. Yet, as Murray also notes, this Christian allusion is tied to earthly concerns as well, particularly issues of lineage and paternity (25). The union between the lady and her husband was based upon his desire to produce an heir; since this heir never materializes, the marriage between the lady and her husband is merely a social marriage, devoid of any real meaning (25). On the other hand, the union between the lady and Muldumarec, while adulterous, does produce an heir; the ring and sword serve to solidify this courtly, though not Church sanctified, marriage. It is, thus, in the Celtic otherworld that Muldumarec gives the gifts that seal this courtly, symbolic marriage. The effectiveness of the magical properties that make her husband forget all that has happened negates any potential accusation of bigamy that the lady might incur since her lover, and ‘second husband’, is dead while the first has no memory with which to accuse her of any crime.

The second time the lady encounters Muldumarec’s otherworldly realm is several years later, after her son has reached the age of knighthood. She travels, as foretold, with her son and husband during the feast of Saint Aaron to a foreign kingdom with the help of a guide. The lady eventually realizes that she is in Muldumarec’s kingdom, yet it is entirely transformed. On this return journey, the kingdom is now given a name, Caerleon; while the geographic details by which the lady and her family reach this city seem entirely different from her first journey, devoid of the multiple natural landscapes and accessed entirely by one road; and there is no mention of the city being comprised entirely of silver. While one explanation for this change is the fact that Marie de France combined two different tales that include two separate descriptions of the bird-knight’s kingdom and its surroundings, the element of magic that pervades other

26 She notes the echoes to the Annunciation, the Song of Songs, the Tristan and Iseut legends, and Celtic faery lore, 25-26.
portions of this text cannot be ignored. It is possible that the complete transformation of this kingdom that seemingly occurred after Muldumarec’s death is the result of the same unexplained magic that allows Muldumarec to shift into a bird, take on the appearance of a woman and allows for a ring to possess the power to make the husband forget his wife’s affair. How the kingdom transforms, though, is not as important as the transformation itself: this kingdom no longer possesses the characteristics of a Celtic underworld; rather, it is entirely Christian in nature. The secular, almost fairy-like castle is now the location of an abbey; instead of a community of otherworldly knights of the feudal and courtly realm, there is now a religious community residing within the castle walls. Muldumarec’s tomb is featured prominently in the chapter house; this hybrid individual enjoys a prominent position of honor within the religious house where he is mourned, prayed for and remembered collectively by the abbot and monks who await the arrival of his heir.

It is surprising that Yonec commits murder within this religious space after his mother has revealed the truth of his father and then dies herself [ll. 527-539]. With this action, Yonec commits murder, an unquestionable transgression of Church law within a sacred space. And yet, this is not viewed as an egregious violation of God’s law, but rather a necessary action to destroy the man who caused his father’s death and his mother’s suffering, to redeem individuals and to restore the bird-knight’s realm, which was in limbo since his death, to its former glory with a new, legitimate leader. The fact that Yonec’s action is not condemned by the religious community that witnesses it, confirms that the stepfather’s treatment toward his wife was entirely unjustifiable; his death is not viewed as a murder so much as the fulfillment of the quasi-saintly,

27 Additionally, there is the contemporaneous example of the Grail Castle in Chrétien de Troyes’ *Le conte du graal ou le roman de Perceval*, where an otherworldly castle whose location changes is known by several of the characters. It is possible, in light of the *Perceval* text, that Muldumarec’s castle possesses this same ability to change location and appearance.
or at least otherworldly, prophecy of Muldumarec to his people. This permissible blood vengeance serves a secular function, as it completes the heroic biography of the titular character and justifies Yonec’s position as the heir to Muldumarec’s quasi-Celtic/magical, quasi-Christian, courtly kingdom. When Yonec takes over the kingdom as his father’s successor, he completes his mission, vanquishes the man that abused his mother for most of her life, and allows his parents to reunite in death. Yonec has taken revenge against the lesser man who has mistreated the highly noble lady and allows her, in death, to remain connected to a man worthy of her social status.

This tale, through these combined spaces, is at once distinctly Celtic, courtly and Christian in character. It is within the tower and Muldumarec’s kingdom that the interplay among these realms surfaces. These realms are not in competition with each other; rather, they blend together to produce a unique tale that embraces the ambiguity of the mixed spaces and gives it a multiplicity of meanings characteristic of Marie de France’s craftsmanship.

The mixed space that will be discussed with respect to the text *Le Roman de la Manekine* by Philippe de Remi is the seascape. The seascape, like the ash tree in *Fresne*, belongs to the realm of natural landscape. It also conjures notions of physical danger through the potential for storms, shipwrecks and other natural disasters that can occur on untamed waters. In several medieval texts, the seascape is the locus of not only physical, but also figurative danger through sin and temptation; as such, the seascape often becomes a lawless space. Two notable examples of this are *Tristan et Iseut* and *Eliduc*. Tristan and Iseut first give themselves up to carnal temptations as they travel from Ireland, where Tristan has won the hand of Iseut for his uncle Marc, to King Marc’s kingdom in Cornwall. Although aware of the religious and courtly

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28 Boyd, in “The Ring, the Sword, the Fancy Dress, and the Posthumous Child: Background to the Element of Heroic Biography in Marie de France’s Yonec,” expands upon Murray’s article, stressing the point about this text being a heroic biography.
consequences of their actions, it is, significantly, on the sea that they initiate their love affair. In *Eliduc*, it is at sea, travelling from Guilliadun’s father’s kingdom back to Eliduc’s homeland, where a sailor reveals the secret of the existence of Eliduc’s wife that he has successfully concealed from her. When Guilliadun faints, seeming to be dead, Eliduc murders the sailor by throwing him overboard. The seascape, then, becomes the scene for both the attempted bigamy of Eliduc and murder. While Eliduc is eventually forgiven these sins, at sea he demonstrates the highest level of disregard for Christian law. Moreover, there are several examples of seascapes serving as the space for crossing to the Otherworld, or as an Otherworldly space itself, where the laws of the temporal and Christian realm do not apply. The seascape is, then, a place of uncertainty with the potential for a range of dangerous, sinful and generally non-Christian events to occur.

The image that results from these differing examples within medieval literature is that the seascape is an ambiguous space. Even in *La Manekine*, the precarious nature of the sea is present: each time Joïe embarks on a sea journey, it is secretly and as the result of an escaped condemnation of death for a crime she did not commit. When she sets out from Hungary, it is to escape her father’s condemnation because she would not submit to marry him; when she sets out from Scotland, it is to escape her husband’s falsified condemnation. The sea journey is always preceded by life-threatening events; as such, it becomes the only refuge to an unjust and hazardous world on land. As the ash tree serves as a safe haven to Fresne, so the sea on two separate occasions becomes, ironically, the safe haven for Joïe; although the realistic safety of the heroine is debatable, as she has little food and no way to steer the boat during both journeys.

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29 While neither Tristan nor Iseut make the conscious decision to enter into the affair, as their actions are result of unknowingly ingesting the philtre, it is still, significantly, on the sea that they drink the potion that causes their uncontrolled love.
30 Marie de France’s *Guigemar* is just one example of this *topos*. 
As such, the sea is classified under a common trait, which Marie-Madeleine Castellani, in “L’Eau dans *La Manekine* de Philippe de Beaumanoir,” characterizes as a place of “déséquilibre: perte de sécurité,” with no provisions and the risk of death (82). However, it is this very designation that leads to the significance of the seascape in this story, transforming it from a banal part of the background setting into a significant element at the forefront of Joy’s journey.

During both of these journeys, to which I will add the journey of the King of Scotland as he searches for his wife, the seascape becomes the space for prayer and divine intervention. Barbara Sargent-Baur notes in the introduction to her edition of this text that during her sea voyages, Joïe recounts the history of mankind according to her religious formation, spanning the fall of Adam to Christ’s Resurrection. On her second journey she “renounces Fortune and begs the intercession of the Virgin Mary with her Son, so that she may be saved and enlightened, and so that her child may be restored to his heritage.” She also notes the call for divine intervention by the King of Scotland, wherein he recites an *Ave Maria* that lasts about 160 lines, invoking Mary’s aid (115). In these instances, precisely because of the hazardous nature of the seascape, it becomes the space where all is entrusted to God. For Joïe in particular, who, on both occasions, is in a rudderless boat, eliminating all semblance of control over her destiny, it is necessary to put all of her faith in God in order to be saved (Castellani 84-85). In this way, the spiritual dimension becomes central to the sea voyages.

More than just being a call for divine aid, the seascape becomes a transformative space that changes and ‘converts’ those that journey upon it. Castellani notes the conversion of the King of Scotland, which he proves by respecting the requirement of abstinence during Lent when he reunites with his wife after not having seen her for several years (84). I would add that the seascape is the space of religious evolution for both Joïe and the King of Hungary. It is during
these maritime voyages that Joïe proves her saintly status through her unwavering dedication to God and to her faith. Unlike another notable episode that takes place at sea—when Peter briefly walks on water toward Jesus until his fears of the sea cause him to doubt Jesus’ power, causing him to sink—Joïe never doubts God. While she may renounce Fortune for the turn of events from Scotland to Rome, she never renounces God; she continues to pray and to invoke the aid of both God and Mary. When tested, Joïe proves that her belief is, in fact, steadfast, and she knows that if she remains faithful, God will protect her on her journey. Her father also undergoes a spiritual transformation, having come to regret his actions toward his daughter; he proves his ‘conversion’ by undertaking the sea journey from Hungary to Rome in order to confess his sins on Maundy Thursday. In each case, the sea becomes the space for self-discovery, the renewal of faith, and a sort of supernatural passage through which each travels in order to re-dedicate him/herself to God.

In this text, one cannot continue to grow in one’s faith by remaining in one country; there is a necessity to move geographic locations via the seascape that completes the transcendental journey. The sea, then, is a way to pass from one world to the next. In the geographical sense, this means that Joïe passes from Hungary to Scotland, and then to Rome, each time arriving closer to a more ideal, Christian life. In passing from one land to the next in the order that they occur in the text, Castellani notes that she passes from the feudal realm to the courtly realm and finally to the land that serves as the symbol of Christianity (82). As she passes from each realm to the next, the sea is the space of rebirth, where each new land begins a new life for Joïe; each sea voyage is like a new baptism as she starts over, each time with the hope of more positive results than in the previous land (85). The sea, then, is a mixed space of danger and hope; the uncertain nature brings the risk of death and lawlessness but also the possibility of a new life.
more conducive to a Christian way of life. Each rebirth is marked by a shift in the approach to her name and identity: she transforms from Joïe, daughter of a King; to Manekine, wife of a King, where this nickname is bestowed upon her; to Manekine, mother and servant in the senator’s household, where she willingly retains her nickname. Each transformation is accompanied by a shift in her social and political station which, like her nickname, she willingly embraces in order to abide by Christian law. In the final transformation, wherein her body is restored, Joïe does not undertake a sea voyage; instead, she is reattached to the hand which itself has undertaken a sea voyage via the sturgeon. The hand is discovered in the fountain of blessed water, and is, thus, baptized in the Roman fountain. The thirteenth-century association of Mary with fresh water underscores the fact that the sturgeon, which houses the Virgin Mary’s reliquary, is found in these same waters (Castellani 89). When this hand is reattached, Joïe is reborn yet again; though she regains her body, her original name and identity, she does not simply return to her pre-mutilated state; rather, she has transformed into a saintly woman of exemplary holiness who has proven her dedication to the faith on her multiple sea voyages.31

Although the seascape takes on a distinctly Christian character, there is a notable secular element that surfaces as well. Castellani notes that the danger of the seascape extends to the risk of losing one’s kingdom, particularly with respect to the kings that leave their country to search for Joïe, while Joïe herself prays to God that her son will be restored to his heritage from which he was unjustly driven (82) [“Et k’il voelle son yretage/ Rendre mon fil, dont a outrage; Sommes cachié et sans desserte.” ll. 4733-4735]. Her prayers for security are for bodily protection and to preserve one’s Christian integrity, and yet there is a distinct secular motivation in this protection that would ultimately result in the restoration to royal power. The risk that the kings take in leaving their countries is clear: by voluntarily being absent from the throne, they open their

31 The exact ways in which Joïe is transformed will be discussed in detail in chapters 3 and 4.
country up to internal rebellion, external invasion and/or conspiracies that could emerge; at the same time, their potential death would leave their countries without a legitimate, designated heir. Even Joïe implicitly puts her kingdoms at risk each time she must flee: when she leaves Hungary, she risks the disruption of inheritance as the sole heir to both Hungary and her mother’s land of Armenia; and when she leaves Scotland, she risks the disruption of its inheritance since she has taken the rightful heir, her son Jehan, with her to Rome. Joïe’s prayer that her son be restored to his heritage is a hope that the inheritance in Scotland will continue uninterrupted. At the same time, there is also the implicit hope that she herself will one day return to own political seat of power as Queen. The seascape in this scenario throws secular kingdoms into a perilous situation of potential crises of succession.

In the end, the seascape is a space where secular and spiritual concerns co-exist: it is at once banal, natural, ambiguous, dangerous, and lawless; it is also the only possibility for salvation, restoration and rebirth. It is the space where Joïe and the kings can renew and prove their faith, while it is also the space for God and Mary to exercise their divine power to the fullest extent (Castellani 87). It is a crucial element in Joïe’s journey to spiritual transcendence. In fact, the closing moral of the text attributes Joïe’s success to the fact that she never fell into despair, always praying to God and Mary for protection [ll. 8545-8557]. As the source of the test of Joïe’s dedication to her faith, the seascape, then, is the key factor to the saintly status that Joïe earns at the end of the text.

The final text that I will discuss in this chapter is *Ami et Amile*. The space upon which I will focus is the domestic space of Amile’s house in the sequence in which the angel reveals the leprosy cure; Amile follows through on this cure by murdering his sons to collect their blood;
Ami is bathed in the children’s blood and is cured of leprosy; and, finally, the children are restored to life.

The fact that the miracles of the leper cure and restoration of the children occur in a domestic space is not entirely surprising, as there are examples in hagiographical legends where miracles and spiritual happenings take place within the domestic sphere. One such example is the *Vie de Saint Alexis*, where Alexis returns to his family’s home after several years unnoticed, and lives as a pauper under the stairs of his home for the next seventeen years, until his death. A large portion of his ascetic journey, then, takes place in the domestic sphere, specifically in his own familial home. Because he is noted for his exemplary holiness, this domestic space becomes a privileged religious space. To cite Biblical examples, it is within the domestic sphere that Jesus appears to his disciples after the Resurrection: the disciples were gathered together in a room, the Upper Room, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders when Jesus miraculously appeared among them (John 20:19-23; Luke 24: 36-43; Mark 16:14). In Mark, the fact that the disciples are at table is included, further highlighting the domestic nature of the space where Jesus reveals himself to the disciples collectively for the first time. Additionally, Jesus heals Peter’s mother-in-law from a high fever as she lies in her bed in Peter’s house (Matthew 8:14-15; Mark 1:29-31; Luke 4: 38-39); this particular healing miracle is notable since the majority of Jesus’ miracles were performed outside, in the public sphere, often surrounded by a crowd. There is, thus, a precedent for the domestic space to become the site of spiritual occurrences. The miracles in *Ami et Amile* not only occur within the domestic space, they occur in spaces within the domestic sphere that evoke the most privacy: the bath and the bedroom. Yet, it is within these wholly private spaces that two remarkable miracles occur. In addition to its domestic nature, the miraculous space is rendered even more distinctly Christian in nature by the sacrifices that
accompany these miracles. When Ami is cured of leprosy, it is not simply that God comes down and touches him; rather, multiple sacrifices take place. To harness the necessary blood, Amile is called upon to sacrifice his children; thus, he is called to choose between his dedication to his friend, who has already sacrificed his own life, security and family to save Amile, and his dedication to his children. By sacrificing his children, he completes the sacrificial cycle that he himself initiates when he sleeps with Belissant. On the other hand, the boys sacrifice themselves. When Amile enters the boys’ room, his eldest son wakes up and sees the fate that is about to befall him and his brother; instead of crying out or running away, he gives himself up willingly, trusting in the mission of his father and the fact that his death will resolve his father’s conflicts [ll. 3000-3023]. The boys are true martyrs, almost Christ-like in their willingness to die for the sake of another.

Despite the Christian nature of the bath and the children’s bedroom they are mixed with distinctly non-Christian elements that transform the space into an ambiguously Christian and yet non-Christian one. The first non-Christian element that presents itself in this episode is the blood cure. Geneviève Madika notes that this ritual bath is similar to that of Naaman, a leper, in the River Jordan, (48); however, this does not account for the fact that Ami’s bath is not one that purifies by water as with baptism, but in blood. The Old Testament mentions sprinkling blood over the afflicted person as a cure, yet this blood is recommended to be from a lamb or bird.\[^{32}\] The Biblical tradition, then, even in its pre-Christian form, does not condone using human blood to cure leprosy. On the other hand, Ephraim Shoham-Steiner uses Medieval European Jewish sources as a lens through which to view traditional cures about leprosy and the use of blood in cures that do involve children. He cites the Greco-Roman medical tradition that invokes this method to cure “humoral imbalances,” which leprosy was considered to be (104). He

\[^{32}\] Leviticus 14:1-32 details how a person afflicted with a defiling skin disease is to be ritually cleansed.
additionally notes that both Pliny the Elder ad Midrash tradition mention Egyptian Pharaohs bathing in babies’ blood as a cure for leprosy. While this may not have historically occurred as the sources depict, it was, nevertheless, believed and rejected by medieval writers (106-108). Finally, he cites the tradition of Emperor Constantine’s miraculous healing in which he eschewed the slaughter of children to cure his leprosy, adding to the proof that the commonly believed cure for leprosy was to bathe in the blood of children (109). Because the story of Constantine’s cure is part of the Christian tradition, it highlights the rejection by Christianity of this pagan practice. The fact that this cure in *Ami et Amile* is announced by an angel serves to Christianize this cure, transforming it into a cure sanctioned by God himself; and yet, it also calls attention to the disparity that continues to exist between the traditions. While it is true that an angel has permitted this cure, it does not erase the fact that it is pagan in its origin; rather, it highlights the fact that a Christian celestial being is appropriating a pagan practice to cure a Christian member. In fact, by requiring the slaying of innocent children, the angel seems to return to stereotypical pre-Christian practices for curing leprosy, a practice that was rejected in the Christian tradition as Christ’s blood is considered the final blood sacrifice necessary to redeem mankind. In this way, the angel makes a direct association between the boys and Christ so that their sacrifice does not go unnoticed or underappreciated by the reader and by the characters within the text. It, moreover, underscores the miraculous nature of their restoration after their sacrifice, solidifying their position as saintly and spiritually transcendent.\textsuperscript{33}

The second notable non-Christian element that occurs in this episode is the golden apple: when Amile and Belissant rush into the boys’ room after Ami is cured, they find the boys perfectly restored, playing with a golden apple [ll. 3187-3192]. Of course, there is Biblical

\textsuperscript{33} The spiritual nature of the boys, especially their transformation into holy material, will be discussed further in Chapter 4.
significance to the apple: Adam and Eve eat of the forbidden apple, causing the Fall of mankind that Jesus redeems through his death and resurrection. This apple, then, could be viewed as a nod to the parallel of this text with the Biblical Fall: Ami and Amile represent the Fall through their sins; in fact, Ami, like Adam and Eve, is warned of the fate that will befall him if he swears the false oath. Like Adam and Eve, he ignores the celestial direction, is cast out of his home and then redeemed by a willing sacrifice. The boys, as mentioned before, serve as an echo to Christ through their willingness to sacrifice themselves, followed by their bodily resurrection, which serves to redeem their parents and Ami.  

While the apple does serve as a common Christian symbol and possible parallel in this text, it does not account for the fact that this apple is golden. The golden apple is entirely pagan in nature, recalling classical traditions such as the Judgement of Paris and the garden of Hesperides. In addition to the Greek mythological legends, Hooke cites golden fruit, specifically apples, in the Irish legend of the Otherworld tree; as an ancient tradition in the Iron Age in Bavaria; and within Nordic tales associated with perpetual youth (17). The golden apple, then, pervades non-Christian traditions across Europe, giving a distinct non-Christian tone to this scene and to this space. This pagan allusion seems to undercut the Christian overtones so that the sacrality of this miraculous space is at once nullified by the pagan undertones inherent in the golden apple the saintly boy holds.

The blended nature of each space discussed in this chapter within each text demonstrates the mixing of codes—religious, secular, pagan, etc. — that occurs often within medieval secular narratives. The spaces examined become loci of multiple, sometimes conflicting, codes that

34 The redemption of the guilty individuals in Ami et Amile through these sacrifices will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.
35 Madika, in “La Religion dans Ami et Amile,” suggests that while the golden apple recalls these legends from Antiquity, it expresses the innocence of the children who think only of play, and that its inclusion points to the trouvères’ affinity in the thirteenth century for telling tales of marvels from pagan tradition (45). I do not entirely agree, since the golden apple from Antiquity signals, above all, discord. It is perhaps that the boys reverse- or redeem- this meaning through their sacrifice, turning the golden apple into a positive symbol by resolving the discord that previously permeated the text.
allow for the co-existence of several meanings. It allows spiritual concerns to be expressed within a typically profane space, while secular concerns emerge within religious spaces. Because multiple meanings are permitted to exist simultaneously, these blended spaces allow for the concerns of both the spiritual and secular realms equally, rather than privileging one over the other. This chapter, then, sets the example for the following chapters, where spiritual and secular concerns will continue to overlap and co-exist so that a secular audience can imagine an alternate route to holiness that does not sacrifice the concerns of either realm.
Chapter Two

Renunciation of Power and Family Attachments

This chapter examines the notion of renunciation in three vernacular twelfth century texts: the anonymous *Le Moniage Guillaume*, *Eliduc* by Marie de France and the anonymous *Robert le Diable*. Each of the three texts belongs to a different genre—*Le Moniage* is an epic tale, the final text in a larger cycle about William of Orange and his adventures; *Robert* is a romance; *Eliduc* is a short *lai*—yet all three highlight the path of renunciation as one of intense spirituality and as the key to holiness, adhering to the spirit of renunciation as a religious action. In fact, the two male heroes, William and Robert, end up sainted, while Guildeluëc becomes the abbess of her own monastery. Renunciation is the key to the salvation promoted by the Church and the driving force behind the religious rejuvenation of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, because it signals a complete rejection of the secular, i.e. material, world. Customarily, renunciation means entering a religious house—a monastery or convent—but, especially at this time, it could mean entering the eremitic life, either attached to a particular monastery or as a free hermit. The secular heroes in question—William of Orange, Robert the Devil and Guildeluëc—renounce power and family attachments, two notions that are inextricably linked, since the former was often a result of the latter, to attain religious fulfillment. By severing family ties, these secular heroes find themselves in a precarious position, because any financial and social security guaranteed by family inheritance and influence disappears. The heroes choose to sever these familial ties, which denies them the connection to familial glory, denies them any

36 *Le Moniage* and *Eliduc* are considered mid to late twelfth-century texts. The date of the *Robert* romance is debatable: Löseth, the editor of the 1903 version that is still frequently used and cited by scholars today, and more recently Weiss, date the romance to the late twelfth century, while Elizabeth Gaucher-Rémond, who has also edited the text and has done extensive work on the legend of Robert, dates the Romance to the early thirteenth century.

37 For more on the various forms eremitic life takes, see Constable, *Monks, Hermits and Crusaders in Medieval Europe*. 45
legitimate land inheritance and effectively neutralizes their biological duties, casting them as failures in their responsibility to continue their lineage.

Each hero makes significant secular sacrifices by choosing renunciation, but their sacrifice guarantees their spiritual salvation, and their dedication to the religious life makes them models of holiness for those in both the secular and spiritual realms. They may each sacrifice financial security, familial support and feudal privileges, but they transcend the mortal world. The result is a version of holiness that not only blends the spiritual and the secular realms, but may actually privilege the secular in the search for religious fulfillment by validating the ways in which secular sacrifices have legitimate merit in the spiritual realm and creating a path to holiness that is more accommodating for secular individuals.

This chapter examines what happens once the secular hero renounces his/her family and is free to forge his/her own path. To do this, the chapter is broken into three main sections. First, it will unpack what choosing renunciation permits for the hero in both the spiritual and secular realm. Despite their sacrifices and preoccupation with the spiritual life, secular concerns are not entirely erased, and certain self-serving advantages, which are particularly beneficial for secular individuals, emerge as a result of their renunciation. Next, it examines how renunciation leads not only to spiritual transcendence, but to a new level of autonomy and agency by breaking away from the rigid blueprint dictated by secular society. Finally, it considers certain elements subversive of Church teachings and norms that surface as a result of the heroes’ renunciation. In the end, these texts underscore the growing desire of religious activity among the laity and provide an alternative path to holiness for the secular community that satisfies both spiritual and temporal concerns.
First, I will briefly recount how and why each hero renounces. In *le Moniage Guillaume*, William of Orange renounces the secular world in a two-step process that takes him first into the monastery, which he eventually quits to become a hermit. His journey takes him from the feudal realm, as vassal to King Louis, to a monastic setting under Abbot Henry in Aniane, and finally to the solitary eremitic life, where his chosen hermitage eventually becomes the famous pilgrimage site, “Saint-Guilhem-le-Désert.” Each stage of his journey into stricter asceticism is caused by a major life crisis: first, his wife, Guiborc, dies, prompting him to enter the monastery to repent for numerous deaths for which he is responsible; then, he is the victim of a deadly conspiracy concocted by the monks, prompting him to enter the eremitic life, a decision confirmed by the intervention of an angel. In *Robert le Diable*, Robert’s renunciation is likewise a two-step process, where he first renounces his family and then the entire secular world. After discovering the truth of his evil nature from his mother, Robert decides to repent, traveling to Rome to confess and receive penance; once this penance is fulfilled, Robert rejects his father’s inheritance as well as the Emperor’s proposed marriage and inheritance offer. He follows his hermit-confessor into the eremitic life, where, after serving God and performing miracles, he dies; his bones are eventually transferred to their current location in a wealthy abbey in Le Puy, now called Saint-Robert. Guildeluëc, in Marie de France’s *Eliduc*, renounces her marriage and takes the veil, becoming founder and abbess of a monastery Eliduc has built for her on his land, to allow him to legally marry his lover, Guilladun. Eventually, Guilladun enters her convent, and the two remain in contact with Eliduc, who has built a monastery for himself, through letters and prayers. Each hero’s renunciation is confirmed as salvific in the end: William and Robert die in

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38 When discussing the three central figures—William, Robert and Guildeluëc—I will use the masculine form ‘hero’ to group them together. When discussed individually, I will use the feminine ‘heroine’ for Guildeluëc.
39 I am using the longer version of this story, *Le Moniage Guillaume 2*, as it is commonly denoted, because it is more descriptive, more critical of the monastery and includes the removal of William from his hermitage.
the odor of sanctity, while Guildeluëc serves as the model of holiness that Eliduc and Guilliadun follow, with her solution marking the only successful resolution of the notion of adulterous love in Marie’s entire collection. In this way, each figure is promoting contemporary Church ideals, especially repentance, penance and charity, confirming renunciation as the path to ultimate holiness and salvation.

Robert’s renunciation of family ties is the most dramatic and most permanent among the heroes in this chapter. After learning the truth of his demonic conception from his mother, Robert severs all ties with his entire family, a bold move considering his father is a landowning duke in Normandy, and no small feat considering the extent of Norman ducal political and social power at the time. Robert confirms this rejection of his family when he turns down his father’s inheritance after his death, choosing instead to follow his hermit-confessor into the eremitic life. Robert gives up any claim to land, power and wealth through family ties; however, he also separates himself from the sin of his mother, who, through despair, prays to the Devil to conceive a child. With the devil manifest inside himself, his only opportunity for redemption is to break all ties with his parentage (Cooper-Deniau 38). In renouncing his old life, Robert is rejecting also the source of his impulses, and thus his mother. Freed from ancestral ties, Robert is now free from his mother’s sin, her influence, and her tainted reputation. His renunciation of family attachments is so complete that the title of the text leaves no indication of his familial name. By rejecting his family name, the author assigns a different surname, “le diable,” emphasizing his diabolical impulses rather than his biological ties. This emphasizes the morality
of his journey rather than his temporal ties; that is, no matter what the sin, it is never too late to seek God’s forgiveness through repentance and penitence.\textsuperscript{40}

Robert distances himself from his biological family, which grants him the freedom to create a new family, a spiritual family. In the end, Robert rejects, yet again, his biological family and his father’s inheritance; likewise, he rejects the Emperor’s offer, refusing to marry his daughter and inherit the Empire. Robert voluntarily gives up a vast amount of land, wealth, power and prestige, preferring to follow his hermit-confessor to his hut. It is in the hermit’s hut that Robert lives with the hermit and ultimately succeeds him when he dies, making Robert the hermit’s heir. Robert has replaced his biological father with the hermit, who, much like a secular father, teaches his spiritual son how to live; in this case, through the penance. It is the hermit that allows Robert to be reborn, reducing him to a quasi-animalistic state, only to rebuild his Christian character through the humiliating penance;\textsuperscript{41} in this way, the hermit ‘raises’ Robert from rebirth to adulthood, where he is reintegrated into the Christian community. Robert sacrifices his biological family, which begat him from sin, for a spiritual family, which begets him through penance. He fails in his duty to glorify and continue his biological family line, but this is exactly what he accomplishes in his spiritual family: he continues the legacy of the hermit, referred to as the ‘sains hermites,’ when he himself becomes ‘Saint Robert,’ having performed miracles [“Pour lui fist Dieus mainte miracle” (l. 5042)] to prove his divine privilege. Thus, Robert has regained the family he renounced, replacing it with a more perfect model.

When William renounces the secular world, his wife, Guiborc, is deceased and he leaves his lands to his nephew, securing the continuation of his lands and his

\textsuperscript{40} Cooper-Deniau, in "Le Diable au Moyen-Age, entre peur et angoisse: Le Motif de T'enfant voué au diable’ et la légende de Robert le Diable,” notes that this lesson is the same in all versions of the Robert legend—the romance, the exemplum, the chronicle and the miracle (40-41).

\textsuperscript{41} For more on Robert’s penance and his animalistic state during his penance, see Erussard, "The Watchdogs of the Soul: The Role of Dogs in the Spiritual Salvation of Robert the Devil."
family’s legacy. He is older when he enters the monastery, not a rare move for someone past his prime reproductive years, who does not desire remarriage and retirement. The monastery signals a spiritual family- it is a spiritual brotherhood. Though the monks at Aniane are far from brotherly, William does renounce his spiritual family ties in order to live the solitary eremitic life, leaving him with no familial ties, having separated from biological and then spiritual familial ties. William is thus left entirely alone, but what he regains upon leaving the monastery is his manhood. Renunciation involves giving up one’s arms and armor, thus shedding the former life dominated by the issues of war and violence for a life of contemplation and prayer; giving up the external, physical fight for the internal battle of salvation of one’s soul. For a noble and valiant warrior like William, giving up his arms and armor is emasculating, akin to symbolic castration (Smith 590). William undergoes this emasculating process when he dedicates his arms in the Church, and then hands over his armor and horse to the abbot upon entrance into Aniane. When William leaves the monastery, he regains the option to recover his armor and horse, which he eventually recovers several years later. He states:

“Chaiens comant mes armes a garder

Et mon cheval, que jou ai tant amé,

Par tel covent que, se mestiers en ert,

Que j’en pëusse avoir boin recoverr.” (2049-2052)

Thus, leaving the monastery for the eremitic life grants him back his manhood and his virility, while retaining his spirituality. Though he chooses to leave them behind for the time being, preferring to travel barefoot and ill-dressed like a true ascetic, he retains the potential to don his armor if he should so choose. In a similar way, when the divine messenger delivers the armor and horse to Robert so that he can fight in the battle against the Turks, God is symbolically
granting him back the manhood he gave up when he renounced his arms in favor of repentance and penance. Robert learns to control his violence and humble himself; he is not given his old arms, for they symbolize his former, untamed violence. Rather, he is given a new set of arms and armor, divinely touched and bestowed, which restore his masculinity, even during his penance. Both William and Robert have voluntarily given up their right to reproduce by entering the religious life; but they both recover the virility they sacrificed through the restoration of their arms and armor.

Guildeluëc’s renunciation is different than her male counterparts’. While William and Robert renounce in order to repent for past sins and violence, Guildeluëc’s renunciation is not an act of repentance but sacrifice. Yet, her act of renunciation after discovering Guilliadun in the chapel is the climax of the story: Eliduc’s decision not to reveal his marriage to his lover has created a web of lies and deceit, rendered worse by the fact that Eliduc was consciously bringing his lover back to his homeland, where his wife was bound to discover the truth. The anxiety inherent in this situation lies in the question of Guildeluëc’s reaction: will she fly into a jealous rage and kill the unconscious girl? Will she devise a cunning plan to trick and get rid of the innocent girl once she awakens? Will she say nothing and allow Eliduc to enter into an adulterous, and therefore sinful, relationship, placing him in opposition to both religious and secular law and, more importantly, putting his eternal soul into jeopardy? Or, in doing nothing, will she allow Eliduc to decide her fate for her: repudiating her by sending her back to her family; treating her badly while possibly carrying on an adulterous relationship; or forcing her into a religious house of his choosing to get rid of her entirely? At that moment in the chapel, the

42 While historically it was common and accepted for noble men and kings, all the way into the Early Modern period, to have concubines and mistresses, and these men saw no contradiction with continuing to participate in religious practices (going to mass, taking communion, practicing the other sacraments), clearly Marie de France presents Eliduc’s mistress as a problem, and real threat, to Guildeluëc.
fate of all three protagonists is uncertain. It is Guildeluëc who resolves the anxiety by renouncing her marriage and taking the veil.

What is noteworthy about Guildeluëc’s renunciation is the fact that Marie presents this option as a viable one at a time when voluntary renunciation was almost exclusively reserved for men. Women could attain a certain level of asceticism, but a noble woman still within her fertile reproductive years would rarely be permitted to renounce her marriage and the secular world entirely of her own volition. Yet, this is exactly what Guildeluëc does. Furthermore, as Jean. A Truax has noted, in “From Bede to Orderic Vitalis: Changing Perspectives on the Role of Women in the Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Norman Churches,” by the twelfth century the image of the ideal woman in England had shifted to include Anglo-Norman concerns: the ideal woman was the married lay woman whose religious responsibilities were confined to the domestic sphere. The ideal woman remained active in the world by advising her husband on spiritual matters and teaching her children the Christian way of life (40-41). There are exceptions: most notably, the noble women who sought refuge in Robert of Arbrissel’s early twelfth-century female monastic house in his famed Abbey of Fontevraud. The records show that there were certain high-ranking women that did successfully renounce unwanted marriages in order to enter the religious life; however, these examples are rare, and Robert of Arbrissel himself had to defend the right for these ladies to remain in his foundation (Venarde, Robert of Arbrissel 72). Additionally, after the Norman Conquest, there were a growing number of recluses, women seeking the solitary life, which runs counter to the idealized wife role. Even though Guildeluëc

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43 Marie de France, most scholars agree, was living and writing in England; she was most likely a close relation to King Henry II of England, and thus intimately connected to court life.
44 This is not to imply that men could always renounce marriage without consequences; rather, it was generally easier for men to eschew marriage than women at this time.
45 Notable examples are Christina of Markyate and Aethelthryth of Ely, aka Audrey, whose life—including how she renounced her marriage to become a nun—was rewritten to emphasize her yearning for solitude and translated into Anglo-Norman; a life of the latter saint was composed in Old French, most likely by Marie de France. See Tom
risks chastisement for an action discouraged for her sex and goes against one current ideal of womanhood, she does not wait for Eliduc to make a decision that could adversely affect her; instead, she takes control of the situation, forgives the innocent lover, and makes a decision that is to ensure the happiness of everyone involved, including herself. In a society where a woman’s worth was linked to that of her husband, her children and her lineage, Guildeluëc is consciously breaking this link for the benefit of her husband and his lover. Thus, Guildeluëc is performing a symbolic death for the happiness, forgiveness and redemption of others.

Guildeluëc gives up her worldly husband, but by entering the convent, she gains a better husband: Christ. Bridal imagery among nuns, with respect to their profession and vows, abounds; thus, when Guildeluëc enters the religious life, she gives up a mortal, flawed husband but she gains a husband whose perfection surpasses any and all human man.46 What Marie de France does, then, is to create two marriages when Guildeluëc renounces her marriage to Eliduc: the worldly marriage of Eliduc and Guilliadun and the spiritual marriage of Guildeluëc and Christ. Thus, like Robert, Guildeluëc leaves behind her worldly family but she gains an even more perfect spiritual family. While Christ is her perfect husband, she also gains several sisters—the thirty nuns that follow her into her newly established convent. Moreover, while Guildeluëc’s renunciation negates any possibility of furthering her ancestral line through the bearing of children, especially male children, it also erases any danger involved in childbirth, a very dangerous prospect with great risk to both mother and child, with no guarantee that that child would survive long enough to bring any temporal glory to the family; Guildeluëc’s renunciation allows her to escape this realistic hazard. She gives up her ability to bear biological children, but

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46 Warren, Spiritual Economies: Female Monasticism in Later Medieval England, among others, discusses the notion of nuns being the bride of Christ within several Orders, including the Benedictines, Franciscans and Brigitines.
she is figuratively granted back her reproductive function through the nuns in her convent. These women become her spiritual daughters, in addition to being her spiritual sisters, and as a ‘mother’, i.e. abbess, Guildeluëc is the person responsible for their education, their discipline and their well-being. In this way, she has regained her womanhood, as the mother of thirty spiritual children, more than she ever could have hoped for with Eliduc, without the risk of death. Her lineage lives on through the daughters of her convent. Her role as mother is intensified by the fact that Guildeluëc herself writes the Rule for the order, because all subsequent generations of nuns will be her direct descendants as the daughters of the order that she has brought into existence, which she has ‘birthed.’

Giving up family attachments is a huge temporal sacrifice, yet these three heroes, in choosing renunciation, regain all which they have lost, and then some. Family attachments are not the only secular aspect these heroes sacrifice; they also give up any power, privilege and social standing to be gained in feudal society. William and Robert give up the ability to climb the social ladder through marriages, royal privilege through their knightly accomplishments, or from their land holdings, while Guildeluëc gives up tangential privileges gained from Eliduc. On the other hand, in choosing to dedicate their lives to God, they escape the bonds that tie them to temporal rulers; and they transfer from a system of monarchical hierarchy to one of papal and spiritual hierarchy, allowing them to climb a different sort of social ladder, one that inverts the feudal model of supremacy.

For William and Robert, leaving the feudal realm means losing the privilege and intimate relationship with the King created through the vassal-lord bond. In William’s case, he is a loyal

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47 Warren discusses the notion of the abbess as maternal figure in the first half of her text. Within the Franciscan and Brigitine Orders, the maternal nature of the abbess is greatly emphasized; while the Benedictine Order did not stress the maternal role in the profession service as the Franciscons and Brigitines did, there is the potential for maternal authority. In fact, in the Benedictine vow, abbesses are charged with the well-being of their nuns, particularly with respect to chastity.
and dedicated knight, who has proven unwavering loyalty to King Louis, defending the realm from Saracen attacks. He sacrifices his continued good name and his reputation as the greatest knight in the realm. Robert earns favor with the Emperor when he reveals himself as the white knight who thrice defeats the Turkish invaders. He gives up ancestral lands, marriage to a princess and inheriting an Empire that is the heart of both temporal and religious power. On the other hand, they both escape the obligatory dedication to weak rulers.

William’s renunciation allows him to break his feudal bonds with King Louis; and by taking up the religious life, William finds the one legitimate form of escape from the sacred oath of feudal vassalage. Throughout his epic cycle, William is continually called upon by Louis to uphold his feudal oath in defending the King and his lands. This is a relationship that has never been quite reciprocal, with William being unwavering in his devotion to the King, despite never being granted a suitable reward. For example, the King does not bestow any land upon his most valiant knight; rather, William must confiscate Saracen-held lands. Louis is portrayed, then, as an unjust and weak King. His weakness is highlighted in the scene where Louis’ messenger encounters William gardening in his hermitage; the messenger is seeking William, because Ysoré has come to attack Paris. William pulls up his healthy plants, replacing them with weeds, a symbolic gesture indicating William’s knowledge that all good and noble supporters of Louis have abandoned him, leaving only corrupt and sycophantic advisors. Though Louis is undeserving of William’s steadfast loyalty, William is bound to uphold his military obligations and fight when summoned to do so, because of his feudal bond. Renunciation allows William to

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48 This is a position supported by Ferrante in her introduction to the translation of the epic cycle. She also discusses the King’s weakness as a political message of the dangers this type of inadequacy leads to for the country as a whole. Weiss, “Ineffictual Monarchs: Portrayals of Regal and Imperial Power in Ipomedon, Robert le Diable and Octavian,” identifies this type of ineffictual monarch as a reaction to monarchical power at the time, when the balance of secular and religious power is shifting in Western Europe. She applies her arguments to Robert le Diable, though she sees a parallel in Le Montage Guillaume.

49 See the long explication by old and wise Galerant on the significance of William’s actions in the garden to the foolish King, ll. 5120-5147.
escape this military obligation without betraying his previous feudal oath. The fact that William does fight in the battle against Ysoré speaks to the underlying power of his original bond and his sense of civic duty. William does still feel a sense of obligation to Louis [“Mout fu Guillaumes dolans et irascus/ Pour Löëy, le roi, qui ert ses drus…” (5156-5157)]; however, when he fights Ysoré, it is out of charity as William’s personal choice rather than requirement. More than loyalty to Louis alone, William demonstrates his loyalty to the kingdom and, more importantly, to Christendom at large. Ysoré is a pagan,\(^{50}\) thus his potential victory signals a threat not only to the current leader, but to all Christianity. William is well aware of Louis’ ineffectiveness, and thus, he defeats Ysoré to ensure the continuation of Christianity in the kingdom. Read this way, he has not reaffirmed his feudal oath to Louis, but rather he has confirmed his spiritual bond with God by protecting the faith. Moreover, by taking up arms to protect Christianity, William is fulfilling not a feudal requirement, but the biblical call to arms in which the faithful are all called to put on the armor of God in order to fight the Devil; in this case, the Devil embodied by Ysoré and his army.\(^{51}\)

William’s renunciation, then, has replaced the feudal hierarchy with a spiritual one. It is his bonds with God that trump those with any secular ruler. But, that is not the only hierarchical structure that William escapes: within the spiritual realm he renounces the monastic hierarchical model as well. In his first step of renunciation, William rejects the feudal hierarchy, but passes into a different version of the same structure, since the Benedictine monastic model mirrored the feudal order but under papal, instead of monarchical, control.\(^{52}\) His time in the monastery is

\(^{50}\) Ysoré, like all enemies in epic poems, is referred to as pagan, although this term simply denotes that he is not Christian.

\(^{51}\) Ephesians 6:10-11, 13: “Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his might power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes.... Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.”

\(^{52}\) See Hallinger for a more detailed description of the Benedictine model.
necessary for his spiritual edification, but once that is accomplished, he renounces yet another hierarchical structure in favor of a life that allows more freedom, mobility and independence.

The abbot of Aniane reveals himself as a corrupt and unjust leader, not unlike King Louis in his ineffectual nature. By rejecting this way of life, William, for a second time, avoids obligation and obedience to an undeserving authority.

Robert, likewise, avoids obedience to a weak ruler through his renunciation. Robert rejects the marriage proposal, escaping both the marriage bond and the double bond to the Emperor through his position as feudal knight as well as son-in-law. As with William, Robert’s role as knight is crucial in defeating the enemy; his three separate victories sideline the authority of the Emperor (Weiss 55). By rejecting the proposition to inherit the Empire, Robert actively avoids inheriting an unstable Empire ruled by an ineffective emperor. Judith Weiss attests: “Robert is from the start structured to show us the deficiencies of worldly achievement and the superiority of divine power” (60). It is not only the emperor’s weakness that Robert seeks to escape, it is the instability of the entire feudal world.

For Guildeluèc, renunciation means escaping a two-fold system of obligation: first, she is bound by the patriarchal system as subject to her husband, and second, she is bound by the feudal system that binds her to a King. In both instances of subjugation, the man in charge is weak. Eliduc continues to make poor choices that worsen his initial conflict at every stage: he violates his trust with the second king by kidnapping his daughter; he lies to his wife; he commits murder; and he almost commits bigamy. Eliduc is spared from being too harshly judged because he is betrayed by the King, whose weakness is affirmed when he listens to jealous slanderers instead of trusting his most valiant knight. He employs poor judgment when he exiles Eliduc; exile is the only reason Eliduc seeks out a new King, and turns out to be the way he
meets Guilliadun. Thus, behind each one of Eliduc’s poor decisions is the notion that they would not have been necessary if not for the King. Despite the weakness and poor decisions of these men, Guildeluëc, as a woman, is still subject to them; thus, for her, moving from the feudal realm into the spiritual is not only a matter of escaping bonds with a weak ruler, but subjugation due to her sex. By entering the religious life, Guildeluëc enters the only realm where she could escape the adverse effects of the decisions of Eliduc and the King. It no longer matters if Eliduc will renounce her, abuse her or send her to a nunnery of his choosing. Renouncing the marriage herself gives her the power to control the outcome of her life; Eliduc is grateful, and indebted, to his wife, granting Guildeluëc the land that she requests for her own monastic foundation. Guildeluëc simultaneously solves the issue of bigamy for her husband and escapes his patriarchal control.

The benefit of escaping the feudal system does not stop at her breaking unequal bonds with her husband. The fact that Eliduc grants Guildeluëc the lands upon which she builds her monastic foundation signifies a transfer of power from husband to wife. Historian Bruce L. Venarde states that once lands were donated for the purpose of founding a religious house, the occupants of that house had control of the economic rights to that property.53 This leaves Guildeluëc and her spiritualdaughters in an advantageous position during a time when women’s monastic houses were flourishing. These economic rights offer considerable monetary gain for the convent, reaping profit from any mills on the land, from agricultural gains, or from donations by nobles, pilgrims or the family of the nuns; this, in turn, ensures the continuation of the community, attracting women from prestigious families with powerful secular connections. Thus, Guildeluëc regains the wealth that she voluntarily gives up in the secular world. The

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53 For specific examples of the economic and property rights of female communities, see chapter 4 of Venarde, *Women’s Monasticism*. 
financial possibilities that she is granted as founder and abbess of her convent greatly surpasses any wealth she may have tangentially amassed through her marriage to Eliduc and any son she may have raised; and this economic gain in the spiritual realm is rightfully and entirely hers to control. It also marks one way that Marie de France allows her female protagonist(s) to escape the limitations of her gender within feudal society and participate in traditionally male-dominated activities. Renunciation has made Guildeluëc a landowner and potential businesswoman in addition to spiritual leader, positions she never would have been granted as Eliduc’s wife.

In this way, Marie de France nullifies the established order of the feudal system: she erases the hierarchy of patriarchal society by removing the role of men in the reproductive process; through spiritual reproduction it is Guildeluëc alone who ensures the survival of her own, entirely female, family line. Marie removes the masculine contribution in this spiritual community, which shifts the feudal idealization of the ‘mother’ from a tangential, behind-the-scenes influence to a direct and independent force. In Guildeluëc’s order, it is the maternal line that matters; there is no room for paternal lineage. This undermines the growing importance of paternal lineage during the twelfth century—for the purposes of land ownership and inheritance—to return to an older model of the maternal privilege. By annihilating all input from a masculine source, Marie de France creates a gendered space, a sort of feminine utopia.

In addition to recuperating her reproductive faculties as spiritual mother, Guildeluëc’s position as founder of her order grants her a considerable amount of power and autonomy. As abbess, she is the supreme authority in the religious house and is the one responsible for the education and guidance of all thirty nuns in her order, a considerably large convent. The most
prestigious member of the convent, who enters at the very end, is Guilliadun, Eliduc’s second wife. The author describes the relationship of the women in the convent:

Ensemble od sa femme premere
Mist sa femme que tant ot chere.
Ele la receut cume sa serur
E mt li porta grant honur.
De Deu servir l’amonesta
E sun ordre li enseigna. (1165-1170)

Guildeeluëc treats Guilliadun with honor and an affectionate rapport is implied through the author’s use of the term ‘sister’. However, there is a clever double meaning in this term, similar to the doubling devise present in the women’s names—Guill/deluec/liadun: on the one hand, it signals a familial relationship, in which these women are equal; on the other hand, as a religious sister, it signals an unequal teacher/student, abbess/nun relationship. In this way, Guildeeluëc receives Guilliadun into her convent as she would any other entering novice who would submit to the abbess’ absolute authority. The latter meaning is solidified by the fact that Guildeeluëc is instructing Guilliadun in her order. Guildeeluëc’s role as teacher to Guilliadun asserts her dominance; as author of the Rule by which the women live and abbess, Guildeeluëc’s instruction is incontestable. The conclusion of the story in the convent, then, is another reversal of the feudal order of supremacy. In the feudal world, Eliduc, as a man and husband, would occupy the top of the position of power, followed by Guilliadun, the daughter of a King, and finally Guildeeluëc, a noble, but not royal, woman. At the end of Marie de France’s story, the spiritual hierarchy has clearly inverted the social (feudal) one: on top is Guildeeluëc as perfect Christian model and teacher/abbess; followed by Guilliadun, who has remained innocent throughout the story, but is
not as spiritually elevated as Guilde luëc; and finally Eliduc who, though forgiven and redeemed, is the one most in need of Guilde lucëc’s sacrifice and charity. It is in the spiritual realm that Guilde luëc achieves a privileged position, a position she could not have occupied in the feudal realm. The author has opened up a world in which birth is second to merit in the social hierarchy; Guilliadun is, of course, still innocent and pure, but she is no match for Guilde luëc’s level of spiritual transcendence. Renunciation allows Guilde luëc to free herself from the bonds and chains of feudal society; she escapes the world of limited social mobility and avoids the traditionally established ‘roadmap’ that a noble woman was expected to follow, to attain a level power, prestige and autonomy unavailable to her in the temporal world.

This choice leaves Eliduc indebted to her, as it is the only option that allows him to marry Guilliadun while keeping his reputation intact. Her decision blurs the traditional gender lines, but it allows a ‘happily ever after’ for all three protagonists. Guilde luëc’s renunciation does more than simply allow a legitimate marriage for Eliduc and Guilliadun; its real power lies in its redemptive force. Through her voluntary act, Guilde luëc becomes the vehicle of redemption and salvation for herself, Guilliadun and Eliduc. While scholars have noted that the sailor’s death is necessary to reveal the truth of Eliduc’s marriage and to incite Eliduc to finally take action by guiding the boat to safety during the storm, it is nevertheless a real crime committed by the hero. Likewise, although Guilliadun’s unconsciousness serves as a failsafe against the committing of adultery or bigamy, the intent of this sin lies implicitly behind Eliduc’s actions—taking Guilliadun from her kingdom and bringing her back to his homeland.54 These are both serious offenses with grave temporal and spiritual consequences; it is only through the extreme selflessness of Guilde luëc that Eliduc is forgiven his transgressions. Her redemptive force makes

54 For more on the storm and chapel scene, see Nelson, “Eliduc’s Salvation”; and Fitz, “The Storm Episode and the Weasel Episode: Sacrificial Casuistry in Marie de France’s Eliduc.”
Guildeluëc the proxy of forgiveness and ultimate salvation for her husband. This position bestows a large measure of power on Guildeluëc, and her portrayal makes her a model of Christian behavior in the secular world; she ends the story as a saintly figure for all who hear her story, male or female, to imitate and venerate (Barban 25). In the end, all three protagonists achieve spiritual redemption as a result of Guildeluëc’s charity.

Her influence extends beyond the spiritual world, elevating her image to a model of Christian behavior. It is this perfect expression of Christianity that inspires Eliduc and Guilliadun to take the veil themselves. Her role as intercessor and willing ‘sacrifice’ is solidified in her acts that resemble those of the life of Christ. First, in a scene analogous to that of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead, Guildeluëc brings Guilliadun ‘back to life’ by awakening her from the death-like state with the natural flower remedy. Second, parallel to Jesus’ ultimate sacrifice of giving up his life to redeem the entirety of mankind, Guildeluëc literally and figuratively gives up her life to redeem her husband and his lover by taking the veil. In a literal way, she is giving up the life that she has experienced up to this point: foregoing any secularly acquired wealth, power, and reputation she may have acquired, as well as giving up any future glory through her lineage by severing her reproductive duty. On the metaphorical level, she is giving up her life because renunciation is an act that signifies death to and removal from the secular world, whereby all familial ties are severed. Entering a religious house signals a vow to reject the material world in favor of the spiritual; the monastery becomes an intermediary space, a suspended reality between life and death- it is a foot in the door to heaven while one is still in the mortal world. Guildeluëc reverses feudal, gender and social hierarchies. Her renunciation grants her the most privileged position, both socially and spiritually.
In a similar way, though through different means, William and Robert sacrifice their social position as noble warriors to pursue the religious life; by entering the religious life, they enter a world where birthright does not determine one’s position or prestige. This sacrifice reverses the feudal social structure; and ironically, humility determines William and Robert’s social mobility.

When William enters the monastery at Aniane, he has several negative interactions with the monks and abbot, but the purpose of this intermediary stage in his journey of renunciation is edification. William becomes literate, which allows him to read Scripture, sing the divine office, and learn the Rule of St Benedict, the text that details the way in which monks must live and comport themselves. More importantly, this formal education leads to his spiritual education; the most important lesson that William learns in the monastery is humility through obedience to both the Rule and to the abbot (Subrenat 657). As a valiant and successful knight, he finds humility a difficult notion, but necessary for his new role as religious figure. When William obeys the abbot in leaving the abbey to buy the fish he requests, he must comply with the chosen route—which takes him through an area where bands of robbers are known to dwell—and to avoid any physical retaliation should he be attacked, except if they try to steal his pants; in addition, William agrees that he will use no weapons, since, in entering the monastery, one renounces all arms and armor. William succeeds in his obedience: he manages to fight off attackers when they try to steal his pants by using his horse’s leg, which he tore from its body, as his means of defense. His action is divinely approved of when he prays to God and the animal’s leg is restored. Even after William violently attacks and kills several of the monks upon his return from buying the fish, he shows compassion when the remaining monks beg for mercy, a sign that his
former unbridled violence in battle is quelled. Henceforth, William fights and kills only when absolutely necessary.

Having learned the essential lessons of humility through obedience, being literate and seeking penance, William decides to leave the monastery for the eremitical life, where he spends some time with a hermit, who he discovers is his own cousin, continuing his ascetic education. William’s humility is tested yet again: after being liberated from his prolonged captivity and fighting in the victorious battle in Palermo, which gained the city for the French, he returns to his hermitage while the other soldiers travel to Paris; and when Paris is attacked by Ysoré, William leaves his hermitage in the South to anonymously defeat the enemy, after which he immediately returns to his hermitage. In both cases, William regains his arms and armor and interacts with the secular world, returning to his former position as valiant knight and protector of the nation. His victories earn him the opportunity for glorification, prestige and royal favor, but he rejects these privileges through his anonymity to continue his eremitical life (Subrenat 661). He reenters the secular realm, yet he maintains his spiritual formation through his humility. It is this virtue that he successfully acquires that makes him both a spiritual and secular model, a balanced character, an example for individuals in both realms to follow (657). Having been successfully educated, William is able to maintain his religious mode, even in secular society or within violent battle. His education allows him to leave the monastery, a life incompatible with his character, in order to enter a way of life more suited to his personality.

Robert’s edification through renunciation is similar to William’s, though Robert receives no formal education; his is purely spiritual in nature. Robert receives his education through the instruction of his hermit-confessor, who educates through the experience of penance. Robert, like William, must learn the essential virtue of humility through obedience. Rather than obedience to
a formal rule, Robert must obey the hermit; because the hermit received the details of the penance directly from God, Robert’s edification process is humility in the face of God. Robert’s humility and dedication to his new life is tested, by God himself, on the three separate occasions when an angel delivers a white horse and armor to Robert, who had renounced all arms and weapons, in order for him to save the Empire; but, Robert must do so anonymously. After each successful battle, Robert hides the armor and returns to his penitential life, where he acts as a fool, sleeping and eating with the dogs. As in *Le Moniage*, the hero must remain anonymous, foregoing any prestige or glory that would normally come from such decisive victories in battle. Robert’s test is intensified when a greedy seneschal comes forward claiming to be the white knight in order to receive the promised rewards from the Emperor—marriage to his daughter and control of the Empire. Robert remains steadfast in his silence, only revealing the truth of his role as savior of the Empire when the hermit, having received divine word, relieves him of his penance [ll. 4825-3839]. It is this extreme humility and dedication to the religious path that satisfies his bizarre penance, and allows him, after he rejects the Emperor’s reward, to follow the hermit into the eremitical life and eventually die as a saint.

For both William and Robert, humility through obedience is the most crucial lesson of their spiritual education. Their dedication to religious obedience is rewarded when they are both allowed to live the eremitical life. Of this life, Norval Lee Bard asserts: “to attain the hermitic status was to have demonstrated significant spiritual progress, to have achieved an ideal. Such hermits would traditionally have come from the ranks of the monastery, men who had proven their dedication and been “promoted” to the highest ranks of spiritual acclaim” (270). In renouncing the secular world, they give up glory, honors and royal privileges, but their humility allows them to achieve ultimate transcendence, recognized through their eremitic status. But it
goes even further when both heroes conclude their lives at saints: William’s hermitage is named after him [“En l’ermitage fu tant puis li sains hom/ Qu’il i prist fin…”; “Encor i a gent de religion,/ A Saint Guillaume del Desert i dit on.” (6622-3, 6625-6)]; while Robert performs miracles and has the final resting place for his relics named after him [“Encore est l’abeïe bele,/ Saint Robert tous li mons l’apele.” (5077-8)]. Both attain the highest level of holiness in becoming saints; but their highly regarded position is not limited to the religious world. Saints are privileged figures in the temporal world as well; in fact, they are possibly more highly regarded in the temporal realm within their local communities.\(^{55}\) Robert may have turned down temporal power, but he has gained universal influence. Robert eschews this offer of power and wealth, choosing voluntary poverty, austerity and a life dedicated to God. As a hermit himself, Robert is in the same privileged position as William, occupying the most highly regarded ascetic and religious way of life at the time. Moreover, the fact that Robert’s body was transferred from Rome to his final resting place in Le Puy is proof of his international renown. The continued miracles ascribed to Robert reveal his continued popularity and influence long after his death. This dedication to the religious life was lauded by those who knew him and culminates in his canonization. Having achieved the highest religious title possible, Robert has earned a privileged position in the religious realm, and, though his line is not perpetuated via biological offspring, his personal reputation endures because of his exemplary life. Robert’s bones are originally buried in Rome and reinterred in his current location at Le Puy; both places of burial are noted pilgrimage destinations. Their influence and power thus extends to the masses, and their prestige is supported by all who visit and promote their images. Ironically, their renunciation of secular glory leads to their glorification in both realms as chivalric heroes and

\(^{55}\) See Vauchez, *The laity in the Middle Ages*, for more on popular veneration; see Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity*, for more on the idea of popular saints’ cults.
saints. As a result, their stories, deeds and influence live on longer and with more esteem than if they had remained in the feudal world.

What the authors accomplish in having their heroes renounce the secular world is to create a new model of holiness that blends both spiritual and secular ideals. Each hero has made secular sacrifices that find merit in the spiritual world, and the rewards they reap are beneficial in both realms. Each concludes his/her life as an example for secular individuals to follow. But, what is noteworthy about each hero is that renunciation becomes not only the path to salvation, it also serves as a path to individuality and autonomy. Each hero, in breaking away from family attachments and feudal society, embarks on a journey of self-discovery and creates his/her own autonomous identity.

For Robert, the path to individuality and independence begins the moment he learns the truth of his mother’s sin. Jeffery Burton Russell, in discussing the place and representation of the Devil in the Middle Ages in his work *Lucifer: The Devil in the Middle Ages*, asserts that the Devil is the embodiment of evil, and an individual becomes evil in exercising his/her God-given free will not to accept the goodness and love of God; once considered a follower of Satan one “has lost his free will to the power of evil” (87). Robert’s mother, in praying to the Devil, has exercised her free will to reject God, and her lack of goodness, i.e. evil, is manifested in her son. Robert, represented as the embodiment of unbridled passion and uncontrollable evil, was never given the opportunity to choose to reject God; he inherited this trait from his mother. It is not until Robert has a moment of true self-reflection that he realizes the reaction and fear he instills in everyone who encounters him. Once he discovers the truth of his conception, he reacts with a complete repulsion for his own actions, life and self; it is at this moment that he can, for the first
time, exercise his free will. He chooses to renounce his family and to travel to Rome to repent his ways, an action synonymous with choosing to renounce Satan and accept God’s love.

Robert’s spiritual transcendence, then, is initiated as a result of self-reflection. This text is thus more than a romance, more than a secular hagiography; it is a journey of introspection. His interior journey is mirrored by his external journey, which takes him on an extensive pilgrimage from Normandy to Rome, and finally, as his own relics, to Le Puy. Robert’s choice to renounce his family and separate himself from his mother’s own sinful choice is externally accomplished when he leaves Normandy for Rome; Robert never returns to Normandy, even rejecting his father’s lands and inheritance when offered, symbolizing his dedication to never return to his former life of sin. In Rome, the center of Western Christianity, Robert repents, receives his penance and proves his dedication to his new spiritual path. By adhering to his God-given penance of humility, while also following the God-given directive to fight anonymously, Robert proves he is equally adept at secular and spiritual tests; once committed to his life of repentance, Robert never sways from following the religious path. His final decision to reject all secular rewards offered to him is his final enactment of free will as a result of his introspection. Robert realizes the benefits of following the eremitic path, which results in his ultimate achievement of sainthood. His superiority elevates his own name, as Robert “le diable”, as well as confirming the wisdom of his hermit advisor; but, because Robert has severed all ties with his secular family, his merits do not extend to his biological family. In fact, Robert’s transcendence in the face of his mother’s sin serves to further distance him from his biological lineage, putting the emphasis on the new family he has created for himself as heir to the hermit’s home and legacy.

In a way, Robert’s life anticipates the canons of the Fourth Lateran Council, which establish annual confession, repentance and penance as necessary for all Christians. Robert’s life
can be read as a documented case of upholding these sanctioned methods of Christian living. Robert’s life is thus presented as an orthodox method to salvation, one that serves as an exemplary model for its audience; its message of hope and redemption, no matter how far one has fallen from grace, is in keeping with Church teachings and traditions, including a parallel message of the Biblical Sampson. The message is wholly religious in spirit, enacted through a traditionally religious action, but it also speaks to a secular audience: at a time when knights were seeking personal glory and the idea of the discovery of the self was emerging, Robert’s life is a model of this personal self-discovery. The author presents renunciation and spirituality as a route not only to holiness, but to self-discovery, individuality and independence. It is only through renunciation that Robert is free to choose his eremitic life, to reject his father’s and the Emperor’s lands without secular repercussions. He is able to escape a life of constant invasions, of political adversaries, of being surrounded by weak leaders and deceitful vassals and, instead, live a life of fulfillment and independence. His renunciation is the only way to achieve true autonomy.

For William, self-reflection plays a role as well: after returning from his ambush and being denied reentrance into the monastery, William retaliates violently, killing several monks in his wake. He does, however, stop his killing spree when the monks beg for mercy. William grants mercy, but decides that he should leave the coenobitic life in favor of the eremitic life. The choice of the eremitic life is significant for William, as it is for Robert, because it is a way of life more compatible with his character. As Bard notes, the monastery was incompatible with epic traditions (208); the eremitic life is more suitable, because, as a free hermit not connected to any specific monastery, the hermit was social and mobile, with great diversity in his way of life.

See, in particular, Morris, *The Discovery of the Individual*, and Hanning, *The Individual in Twelfth-Century Romance*, for discussions of how notions of the individual, in the modern sense of the term, emerged during this time period, both within society and within literature.
Hermits removed themselves from conventional society, but they maintained contacts with the outside world (246-247). William leaves the monastery to live a more ascetic and rigid life, a life that adhered strictly to the Rule, much like the reformist orders of the twelfth century. 57 His choice of rigidity ironically grants him more freedom; as a free hermit, William, as well as Robert, makes his own choices- how to dress, where to live, how and when to pray, when to toil in his garden and when to fight; he is not subject to the directives of a corrupt abbot. The authors of *le Moniage* and *Robert* deftly employ the eremitic life to illuminate its suitability for its heroes, and, by extension, any secular knight looking to enter the religious life.

The choice of eremitism is not the only way in which these authors blend the two worlds, showing that the eremitic life is one of asceticism but also one of freedom and individuality. The portrayal of both William and Robert—as simultaneous saints and warriors—allows the ideal masculine image in both realms to co-exist. Normally, the idea of a warrior participating in bloody battle and grounded in the present world is not compatible with the image of a saint, who is generally peaceful and contemplative and whose thoughts are anchored in the next world. In addition, William’s participation in the battle against Ysoré, and likewise Robert’s participation in the battle against the Turks, is sometimes viewed as favoring epic traditions over religious ideals (Bard 208). What these authors actually depict is a blended image of heroes as both warriors and saints as the pinnacle of both secular and spiritual glory. This image recalls an older model of seasoned warriors who end their lives in sanctity, the most famous example being Saint Martin of Tours (Robertson 137). In the case of William and Robert, they fight as warriors even after their renunciation—William leaving the hermitage to fight Ysoré and Robert breaking his

57 The Cistercians, Carthusians, and several other new orders of this century cited this stricter adherence to the Rule of St. Benedict as one of the principle reasons of their formation. While the Cistercians and others were cenobitic Orders, Carthusians attempted to combine the cenobitic life with the eremitic life. William bypasses these reformist Orders entirely, preferring the strictest form of religious life- the completely solitary, eremitic life.
penance to fight the Turks. This image of them as simultaneously warriors and religious men creates the space for the co-existence of these ideals, both secular and spiritual; it reflects a growing ideal of the central Middle Ages, that of the miles Christi, who fought, both literally and figuratively, for Christianity (Smith 579). William and Robert belong to this breed of spiritual warrior, born from Peter Damian’s vita of Dominic Loricatus, of whom Katherine Allen Smith states: “…a holy man who not only armed himself with the spiritual weapons of prayer but wore temporal armor as well, …Dominic was representative of a new breed of spiritual athlete who appeared on the fringes of the church in the eleventh century and whose feats of endurance put contemporary observers in mind of the desert fathers” (585). And later: “For Peter Damian, as well as for later monastic hagiographers all over Europe, armor-clad ascetics like Dominic Loricatus perfectly embodied this militaristic ideal” (586); and that “the hard, strong body of the loricatus…had more in common with the ideal knightly body than with the passive, potentially effeminate male monastic body” (594). William and Robert, then, embody this model of spiritual and temporal excellence—they are a middle ground, a co-existence of spiritual and secular ideals. They are heroes who physically fight in battle to protect the ruler, the nation and the faith; and spiritually fight through their fervent prayers and their rigid asceticism as hermits. This warrior model is particularly significant at this time, with the Crusades being a preoccupation of both temporal and spiritual leaders. 58 Regaining their arms and armor for these heroes, then, is not only a mark of their renewed virility, but, more importantly, a mark of their spiritual transcendence as they arm themselves for God; a transcendence that blends the realms and allows a new version of holiness to emerge—one that is much more compatible with secular

58For example, Pope Urban II (r. 1088-99) promoted the First Crusade, Bernard of Clairvaux preached in favor of crusading, and military orders like the Knights Templar and Hospitaller emerge, while secular Kings often undertook their own crusade pilgrimage and/or had family connections in the Crusader cities.
society at the time and that would allow warriors and knights the opportunity to participate in the religious life while not compromising their feudal and military duties.

Guildeuëc’s route to individuality and autonomy through renunciation is, expectedly, different than the route of William and Robert, due to the limitations of her sex. However, it is entirely because of her sex that her act of renunciation is unique. The originality of this solution lies in the fact that it is Guildeuëc’s choice, one that she makes entirely herself, to renounce her marriage: Marie gives Guildeuëc power by taking a commonly held notion—that renunciation leads to salvation—and allowing her female protagonist to make a choice usually reserved for men—the renunciation of one’s marriage. In this one act, Marie changes the entire course of the narration; until this point, it is a story about Eliduc- his unjust exile; his dilemma of loving a woman he is not married to while trying to respect his marriage vows; and his suffering when his lover falls into a coma. Conversely, Guildeuëc exists almost entirely as an obstacle to Eliduc’s happiness with his lover, occupying a marginal, barely perceptible, space within the narrative. Her decision to renounce marks a turning point for the entire story as well as for Guildeuëc’s role: she ceases to be a passive figure, a victim of circumstances that come her way, and she becomes an active character in the story. Her renunciation transforms her from the obstacle standing in the way of Eliduc and Guilliadun’s marital happiness into the vehicle of that happiness, in fact their only option for attaining that happiness (Coolidge 276). No longer is she Guildeuëc- wife, betrayed, dismissed, deceived by her husband, cast aside for a younger, nobler woman; rather, she is Guildeuëc- Christ-like, redeemer, perfection, powerful abbess, a Christian ideal. Her choice to act drives the action at the end of the story, allowing the lovers to wed without committing adultery, and then serving as their inspiration to follow her footsteps into the religious life. In the end, it is this act that she voluntarily performs that becomes the lai’s central
message and morality. It pulls the focus of the narrative away from its title character, Eliduc, and makes her the real hero/heroine (Barban 25-26). This reverses the traditional gender roles, with Eliduc becoming the marginalized, weak figure, while the women are the morally strong, independent and active individuals.

In making this choice, Guildeluëc is granted back her life- she is no longer the nebulous ‘wife’ figure that is merely an impediment to Eliduc’s love quest; now she is the central protagonist, the answer to the love quest with an autonomous identity. In this final lai, Marie de France presents a solution that is determined by the women, confirmed by her remarks about the female protagonists’ names at the beginning of the tale:\footnote{59}

\begin{verbatim}
D’eles deus ad li lais a nun
Guildeluëc ha Gualadun.\footnote{60}
Elidus fu primes nomez,
Mes ore est li nuns remuez,
Kar des dames est avenue. (21-25)
\end{verbatim}

Marie attests that the lai should be named after the women, and not Eliduc, since the women have shifted the focus from Eliduc to themselves. Guildeluëc especially pulls herself out of the margins of the story to become a relevant, independent, autonomous individual, deserving of a real role and place and name within the story, a notable feat as the majority of Marie’s heroines remain unnamed. Her action gives her a voice, one that is entirely separate from her husband. Most importantly, her renunciation confers upon her an acknowledged identity in both the secular and spiritual realms. What Marie illuminates, then, is that the search for holiness for

\footnote{59}{For an opposing viewpoint, see Arden, who claims the resolution of every lai is determined by the men and that the masculine solution overrides the feminine one every time.}
\footnote{60}{The spelling differs here from elsewhere in the lai, most likely to ensure the rhyme.}
women in the central Middle Ages is at the same time a search for individuality. Ferrante and Hanning, in their translation of the *Lais*, posit that love is the vehicle through which the characters in the *Lais* explore notions of the self (5); this notion is more nuanced in *Eliduc*, where it is specifically through spiritual love, via renunciation, that Guildeluëc discovers her true identity. The emphasis on spiritual love is significant in that it reveals the triumph of religious modes over feudal ones in the search for the individual. When Guildeluëc’s marriage and feudal bonds are renounced, her gender no is longer a hindrance to her transcendence; instead, it becomes the vehicle for religious fulfillment, spiritual elevation, and discovery of her true identity where she can occupy a position of power, prestige and autonomy.

All three of these twelfth-century texts conclude with the heroes in religious institutions, because this was, at the time, the highest expression of spirituality; each has attained the religious fulfillment and spiritual transcendence desired during this time period. They embody the spirit of the religious rejuvenation of the time, occupying the highest position available for their sex. They prove that secular people can attain transcendence, and that the benefits are by no means limited to the spiritual realm. They have escaped feudal roadmaps of their lives as submissive—as vassals or as a wife—and have instead seized the opportunity for independence. The authors reveal that it is the Christian path that allows for the greatest autonomy. As the heroes achieve their individual identity, they do so at the expense of traditional institutions, both feudal and ecclesiastical.

In the case of *Le Moniage Guillaume*, the author conveys an anti-monastic sentiment. William’s time spent in the monastery, though it does serve to educate him in the religious life and is an important step in his religious formation, is portrayed in a very negative light. When

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61 This claim is supported by Payen, *Le Motif du repentir dans la littérature française médiévale (des origines à 1230)*; Moisan, "L'Abbé Henri et ses moines dans le Moniage Guillaume et le Moniage Rainouart ou la perfidie dans l'état monastique"; and Bard, "Changing Orders: The Poetics of the Old French Epic Moniages," among others.
William enters the monastery, he renounces the secular world in favor of a religious vocation, yet the description of the monastic world does not seem to differ much from the secular world. In fact, the monastery to which William belongs seems like the epitome of all the negative qualities of secular life, though it should be quite the opposite: in the monastery, William is mocked for being illiterate, even though his previous life would not have required him to be literate; the monks are jealous of William and constantly complain about him in a slanderous way to the abbot, and, in the end, the entire community conspires to have William murdered by putting him in a situation that would all but guarantee his demise through an attack by robbers. What makes these actions particularly egregious is that they are being performed by the very individuals who are revered for their religious dedication and transcendence of the secular world. Instead of trying to instruct William in the monastic ways or lead by example, they mock, slander, and plot against him. They eschew their commitment to generosity and charity, preferring to rid themselves of William instead of showing him compassion. Because these men are supposed to occupy the highest echelon of spiritual transcendence, their falling to the vices of jealousy, deception, conspiracy and murder are exponentially graver.

This text is not anti-religious but, rather, anti-monastic; the spirituality and religious fervor of William is not questioned, nor is the supremacy of the eremitic life at the end. Furthermore, this anti-monastic sentiment is specific to the Benedictine Order, making it a clear criticism of this order. There is a layer of satire in the depiction of the monks in this order, but there are real criticisms couched in the humor that reflect contemporary displeasure from

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62 This type of jealous slander, whereby jealous knights cause the exile of the noble hero through slanderous appeals to the king or lord, is a *topos* of secular literature at the time.
63 *Eliduc* is one such example of this motif, in which Eliduc must leave his homeland, having been exiled by his lord due to unnamed lies and accusations of jealous knights to the king.
64 The abbey is at Aniane, a well known Benedictine house.
reformists. Though William appears violent at times, this stems on one hand from his previous life as a warrior and second, from his frustration with the monks in his house. Meanwhile the abbot and other monks exploit William’s commitment to humility through obedience by sending him on the mission to buy the fish at the market, knowing he will be attacked; moreover, he reiterates the rules preventing William from carrying arms or defending himself if attacked, except if they should try to steal his pants (Subrenat 655). While the other articles of clothing are material possessions with which the monk should not concern himself, the pants are more than a simple garment; they represent the final layer to protect the modesty and chastity of the monk. Without the pants, William would be exposed to the public which compromises not only his modesty but would potentially feminize the hero, since pants were worn exclusively by men. The fish market conspiracy exposes the abuse of power among corrupt religious figures, particularly within Benedictine monasticism; William’s scenario might be considered fiction, but it raises a serious issue: if a religious leader violates the Rule or other Church dogma, are those under his control required to adhere to his orders? In the case of William, it leaves him in a precarious position: he vows to obey the abbot, but the abbot is violating the Rule to which William has also vowed obedience. William finds a way to satisfy the situation: he obeys the abbot and he does not carry arms, only fighting back when the robbers try to steal his pants; fortunately, his chivalric prowess is great enough that he is able to defeat the entire band using the leg of a horse. The fight scene is comical, but it raises the serious question of Church authority and hierarchy.

More than simply the question of monastic authority, William’s time in the monastery calls attention to the worldliness and luxury of the Benedictine order at the time. Powerful houses like Cluny were under fire for being too involved in worldly affairs; for example, its

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65 For more on the specific satirical instances, see Moisan.
promotion of the Crusades was denounced by some. Reformists were particularly critical of the wealth and complacency of the order; Bernard of Clairvaux was an outspoken critic of the lack of moderation and luxury of the Benedictines. Bernard vocalizes the contemporary problems that caused the monastic reform movement in the first place: reformers felt that monks needed stricter adherence to the Rule of Saint Benedict. He condemned the ‘black’ monks for their fine, expensive clothing and their lack of moderation with respect to food and drink, eating sumptuously, gluttonously and often. By focusing on food, drink and clothing, the author of the Moniage voices the same concerns and denounces the same excesses as Bernard and the Cistercian Order. Le Moniage humorously underscores these grievances by depicting monks that are concerned with comfort and materiality rather than charity and generosity. The monks at Aniane are so concerned about William’s large consumption of food and wine that they plot their murderous conspiracy; rather than teach William the ideals of moderation or lead by example, they try to rid themselves of his presence. Rather than view William as a brother and a true member of their monastic order, they consider him an imposition and a threat to their luxurious way of life. It is precisely these selfish concerns of the monks in le Moniage—food, drink, clothing—that monastic reformers, in particular the Cistercians, took issue with in their own criticisms. Living life as a free hermit allows William to escape the corruption of the monastery and live a life of strict asceticism. As a hermit, William is subject only to God, not to a corrupt abbot; his only obedience is to the Rule, with no hierarchical authority to contradict it. Bard notes that “the monks are shown to be threats to peace, to social stability, to spirituality…,” all notions that work against William’s character as a knight and defender of stability but, more

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66 Delaruelle, “The Crusading Idea in Cluniac Literature of the Eleventh Century,” states that one reason the Cluniacs promoted the Crusades was to take advantage of the booty to be gained and brought back by Crusaders. 67 For more on Bernard of Clairvaux’s Apologia, see Rudolph, The “Things of Greater Importance”: Bernard of Clairvaux’s “Apologia” and the Medieval Attitude toward Art.
importantly, that work in direct opposition to his spiritual goals (111). This text demonstrates how the monastery produces “bad” monks, those who are opposed to the ideals they are supposed to uphold. In order for William to live a pure religious life, to become a saint, he must leave the monastery so that he can grow spiritually as a hermit.

William, as well as Robert, ends his life as a hermit, a move that both complies with and undercuts Church tradition and authority. As previously mentioned, the eremitic life was revived in the twelfth century, becoming an idealized form of spirituality synonymous with holiness. However, by the late twelfth century, many hermits, or groups of hermits, had disappeared; some developing into large coenobitic institutions, similar to the ones from which they had broken away, while some had joined the old foundations of Cluny or a similar abbey. By the time these texts were composed, the Church was showing anxiety over the lack of organization and regulation of hermits, a fear that culminated in the decree of the Fourth Lateran Council banning any new orders, requiring an institutional affiliation for all religious men and women. William and Robert, then, represent an older tradition that was waning; these texts laud the eremitic life as the final and decisive path to holiness. This compliance with this tradition keeps the eremitic, individual spirit alive, which accommodates a secular, knightly audience better than the monastic life. It also highlights the shifting religious ideals of the time: this spirit of eremitic individuality is perfect for secular individuals wishing to participate in the religious life, but it is also a threat to the Church hierarchy that depends on these secular individuals to support their causes, to

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68 For a thorough discussion on the monastic reforms occurring during the eleventh and twelfth centuries, see Leclercq, “The Monastic Crisis of the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries.”

69 An historic example of this anxiety is Robert of Arbrissel, who lived as a hermit and mendicant preacher in the early twelfth century, but who was eventually forced to found two different houses—La Roë and the famous Fontevraud abbey—due to concerns about his large following. Founding these houses brought Robert into the Church’s hierarchical system instead of working outside of it. For more on this, see Delarun Robert d’Arbrissel et la vie religieuse dans l’ouest de la France and Robert of Arbrissel: Sex, Sin, and Salvation in the Middle Ages, as well as Venarde Robert of Arbrissel.
donate money and goods, and to solidify the Church’s power and authority. Living as free hermits, William and Robert escape both systems of hierarchy—feudal and religious—a very dangerous message for Church stability.

Robert’s tale goes even further in its destabilization of Church authority. While *le Moniage* focuses specifically on the Benedictines, *Robert* subtly undercuts papal authority by supplanting it with eremitic authority. Indeed, although Robert travels to Rome to confess to the pope, he is subsequently sent to a hermit for his penance. This gesture speaks volumes—it is the Pope’s admission that the hermit’s wisdom and authority surpass his own. The hermit’s authority is then reaffirmed by the fact that he receives a divine message dictating Robert’s penance, which also serves to justify its bizarre nature. It is this same hermit that tells Robert when the penance is satisfied, despite the miracle curing the princess of her mutism. She reveals that the seneschal claiming to be the white knight is an imposter and it is, in fact, Robert who is the savior of the Empire. The princess’ word plants the doubt, but it is not until Robert confirms the truth of his identity, permitted by the hermit, that the seneschal’s lies as well as Robert’s penance come to an end, confirming the end of his old life and marking the beginning of his new, spiritually transcendent life.

The notion of the ‘holy hermit’ is a common literary motif at this time, but in this tale Robert does not stumble upon the hermit in the forest; it is the Pope himself, the highest authority in Western Christendom and representative of God on Earth, who directs Robert to him. Faced with the Devil incarnate, the pope is powerless to direct Robert in his redemption. On the one hand, the Pope’s decision can be interpreted as an act of his own humility when faced with true evil; on the other hand, it undercuts his ability to lead his flock to salvation. The incapacity of the Pope to help one of his followers, especially one that seeks out a way of
repentance, calls the entire Church hierarchy into question. How can the Pope hope to help others who seek conversion, since, at the heart of Robert’s tale, it is a conversion story—the journey of Robert’s falling away from evil in order to live the penitent life of a good Christian? Not only does the Pope undermine his own authority, and thus that of the entire institution, he defers to a figure that lies outside of, or at least on the margins of, that power structure.

Considering the position of power the hermit-confessor is granted, it is no surprise, then, that Robert renounces all organized and institutionalized power models, which are revealed to be categorically flawed and effectively powerless. In light of the weakness of both the feudal and Church systems, Robert chooses the path that is not only best suited for his spiritual transcendence, it is actually the way to garner power for himself: effectively existing outside of these two systems, and acting as the hermit’s heir, Robert inherits the hermit’s privilege, even surpassing it through the miracles he works and his eventual canonization. Similar to William, Robert’s choice of eremitic life destabilizes the Church’s power and authority by presenting an alternate path. These heroes present the audience with a choice that allows secular individuals to essentially escape hierarchical structures altogether; to transcend traditional power systems; to live a life that is both autonomous and spiritually fulfilling.

The context within which Robert is written is especially important with respect to papal and eremitic authority. Scholars note that this text was composed sometime in the late twelfth, or possibly, early thirteenth century. At this time, monastic reform was in full swing and several new orders had emerged at a rapid rate within the span of one century.\(^7\) The canons of the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 banning the formation of new monastic Orders and regulating

\(^7\) During the late eleventh century and twelfth century, the Orders of the Carthusians (1084), Cistercians (1098), Fontevraud (1101), Prémontrés (1120) were founded, to name a few. As Kerr attests in *Religious Life for Women c. 1100-1350: Fontevraud in England*, this is an experimental time in which evangelical life was emerging in less ‘formal’ forms (17).
the canonization of saints reveal the Church’s almost obsessive preoccupation with control, structure and defining orthodoxy versus heresy, with the pope at the helm. A central concern of the papacy was to bring all religious members and affiliates under its control; there was an anxiety surrounding anyone who attempted to live an entirely isolated, disconnected existence, including unregulated hermits. In this context, Robert reads even more as a subtle critique of papal authority established and confirmed in the Fourth Lateran Council: since the hermit’s authority clearly surpasses that of the pope, this hermit seems to function not only outside of, but beyond, the scope of Church authority. His mere existence challenges papal authority in that it is not subject to or limited by it. The hermit not only is deemed wiser than the pope by the pope himself, he is shown to have direct communication with God, a privilege reserved for only a chosen few and here, significantly, not by the representative chosen by Church officials. Since a humble hermit and Robert, a grave sinner, are the two figures that receive direct divine communication, it elevates their spiritual merit above that of the pope and the entire Church hierarchy, calling into question the validity of this hierarchical structure. It calls into question the basic structure of the Church- why should Christians look to the pope for answers, make a pilgrimage to Rome, or donate money to the institution of the Church, when clearly there are better methods to salvation; namely, the eremitic life? This is a very serious threat to papal authority at a time when the papacy rivaled kings for power and influence.

Guildeluëc, as we have seen, concludes her life in a religious house. Unlike William and Robert, who end up as hermits, Guildeluëc, followed by Eliduc and Guilliadun, lives in a monastic house, abides by a monastic rule and lives in a monastic community. While monastic communities did provide the only option for women to receive an education, intellectual stimulation and any possibility of autonomy, there was a limit to this autonomy, as scholars like
Penny Schine Gold have pointed out, since women were still dependent on men for their spiritual, and often material, needs; even anchoresses were necessarily attached to an official order. Thus, Guildeluëc, even when granted full economic rights to her monastery, still relied on male religious leaders for religious offices: confession/absolution and the administering of the Eucharist. Guildeluëc’s scope of power is inherently limited by her gender; though she has garnered the maximum amount of power that a woman possibly could. There are, however, aspects of this story that work to reverse this instability of power and thus simultaneously challenge Church and patriarchal control: the fact that Guildeluëc writes her own monastic Rule; the parallel of Guildeluëc’s monastery with older, double monasteries, like the Order of Fontevraud; Marie’s depiction of the feminine ideal; and finally, the resolution of the potential adultery and bigamy.

It is noteworthy that Guildeluëc is permitted to establish her own Rule for her religious house. In the lai, there is not much attention called to this action, making it easy to miss its significance or even its existence: “La dame i fet sun chief veler,/ Trente nuneins ensemble od li;/ Sa vie e sun ordre e stabli” (1142-1144). Historically, Clare of Assisi is considered the first woman to write a Rule for her Order, but her Rule was modeled after Francis’ Rule, born from the original guidelines provided by Pope Gregory IX. Clare’s Rule was approved in 1253, more than half a century after Eliduc, making Marie’s ending unique and even more noteworthy, as there is no past or contemporary example upon which Marie could draw. This power is proof of Guildeluëc’s spiritual and intellectual capacity and a fitting reward for her selflessness. Since Guildeluëc is the most spiritually transcendent individual in the story, she is the most qualified to write a monastic rule. Through this factor, coupled with the erasure of men from the confession scene, Marie yet again destabilizes patriarchal society, eliminating the need for male interference.
in the spiritual matters. Just as she erases their need in biological reproduction, replacing it with spiritual reproduction, she eliminates their need in both practical and spiritual matters of her order. Guildeluëc now owns the land on which her foundation is established, she controls its economic rights, and now, as author of her own Rule, she manages how the nuns in the house will live their daily lives. This is truly a feminine utopia where women reign supreme and are self-sufficient. Marie eliminates female dependence on men, subverting the entire basis for patriarchal power, in both the secular and spiritual realms.

Marie concludes her text with Eliduc and Guilliadun renouncing the secular world and entering the religious life, following Guildeluëc’s lead. Eliduc builds a house for himself and his household, while Guilliadun is placed in Guildeluëc’s house. Marie describes how all three remain in communication after renunciation:

Deu priouent pur lur ami
Qu’il li feïst bone merci,
E il pur eles repreiot
Ses messages lur enveiot
Pur saveir cument lur esteit
E cum chescune se cunforteit. (1171-1176)

Marie does not reveal if Eliduc’s, or for that matter Guildeluëc’s, foundation has an affiliation with a known order; rather, she creates an ambiguous setting, where Eliduc’s house is in proximity to his wives’ house and a line of communication remains open. This ambiguity opens up a parallel between this organization and that of a double monastery, where men’s and women’s houses belonged to the same order, and, though they lived in separate physical houses, communication between the sexes existed in the form of letters and spiritual administration.
Double monasteries existed in the early Middle Ages and were especially prevalent from the sixth to the ninth centuries in France and England, when women were freer and more active in the religious life and fundamental in the growth and spread of monasticism (Gold 111). During the period of monastic development in the tenth and eleventh centuries, women’s power in this realm was severely reduced; certain houses, like the Cistercians and Premonstratensians, viewed women’s houses as a burden, especially a financial burden, and attempted to separate themselves as much as possible from female houses, which reduced the amount of double monasteries in existence. If Marie’s monastic organization is intentionally modeled after a double monastery, it hints at a nostalgia for a revival of this type of religious house, where women have a larger and more influential role in religious matters.

Although female religious power is weakened in the tenth and eleventh centuries, certain reformers, Robert of Arbrissel chief among them, revived the double monastery with the foundation of his famous Fontevraud Abbey (1101). Robert countered the growing hostility toward women by creating an order that not only encouraged women to participate in the religious life, it required their presence: Robert decreed that his order was principally for women, and all men in his order were subservient to the women. He upheld feminine spiritual privilege by proclaiming all those who succeeded him as leader of the abbey must be women (Kerr 44-45). Venarde confirms that Robert was indeed a controversial figure:

Robert roused both admiration and criticism by accepting some, but not all, of the reform program. He counseled obedience to church officials—including their new claims to supervision of marriage and divorce—but also criticized clerical monks. He championed clerical celibacy, but his pastoral mission to women and the mingling of the sexes in

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71 See Kerr for more on the hostility of certain new orders toward women.
72 Both works by Delarun and Venarde’s Women’s Monasticism discuss this decree in detail.
communities of his followers challenged the prevailing agenda of gender apartheid and the mistrust of women common to many Christian reformers of his day. (xxi)

Fontevraud made women the central focus of spiritual activity and reversed traditional gender roles, making their gender the key, rather than hindrance, to their opportunity for power and prestige. Marie seems to channel this Fontevraldine spirit into the creation of her protagonists’ monastic organization - a parallel that allows her to function within the scope of reality; to fit into an established, albeit controversial, tradition; and to exploit this monastery’s unusual practices to bestow her female characters with real power and autonomy. It was noted earlier that it was rare for women to renounce their marriage, except in exceptional cases; these cases are overwhelmingly attributed to Robert of Arbrissel, who allowed women refuge from unwanted marriages. Guildeluëc’s being allowed to renounce her marriage, then, makes sense in the context of Fontevraud. This parallel validates all of the benefits that Guildeluëc reaps from her renunciation. Her story is thus not entirely out of the realm of possibility; in fact, there is a very real way for a female audience to follow Guildeluëc’s lead in her quest to holiness.

Marie manages to remain within the established tradition, while intentionally aligning her fictionalized order with one that, inherent in its organization, threatens the stability of the Church hierarchy by reversing the supremacy of the sexes, making women superior to men, and making the male members of the community secondary to the women. Marie has found historical justification for her female protagonists’ measure of authority, power, control and influence, anchoring it in contemporary reality, rather than a purely nostalgic look back at female power in older models of double monasteries. Viewed in this historical context, Eliduc is no longer a fanciful escape from reality like some of the other Lais. There is a historical parallel to the female house in which Guildluëc and Guilliadun reside, a house that allows the opportunity for
autonomy, prestige and power. Marie is thus providing an alternative path for women-for those wishing to escape an unwanted marriage, feudal society, patriarchal control or for women wishing to be independent and educated. It may not have been a realistic path for every woman at the time, but it was a reality for some, especially noble women. Most importantly, it provides a glimmer of hope for women desiring to escape the current limitations of their sex.

Marie’s portrayal of Guildeluëc as selfless, intelligent and spiritually transcendent turns her into a model of holiness. Her spiritual significance does not begin until she renounces her marriage; it is her position as autonomous abbess that is lauded as the ideal of Christian womanhood in this text. Truaux notes that by the late twelfth century the ideal image of woman was as wife and mother, taking a behind the scenes role by funneling all religious participation into educating her husband and children. In this way, women’s religious participation is limited to the secular, and specifically domestic, realm; this ensures women’s dependence on men and idealizes their reproductive role. Marie challenges this contemporary idealization by depicting an independent woman who, through her process of individuality and self-discovery discussed above, solidifies her place within the story. Guildeluëc challenges the belief that women require male support and dependence by depicting a female character who single-handedly eliminates any need for a masculine presence. Marie glorifies the solitary woman, the independent woman, who makes a conscious choice to take back her agency through her act of abnegation. By reinstating Guildeluëc’s reproductive role in a spiritual mode, Marie ensures that she does not lose her womanhood through androgyny; she blends the two ideals to create a new ideal of womanhood: one where a woman can be at once mother, daughter, sister, leader, teacher, and a self-sufficient individual.
In a collection whose religious references, when mentioned at all, often subvert the intended dogmatic meaning, it is surprising that the final message would uphold such dogmatic religious morality; and that the resolution to the ubiquitous love triangle, so secular in nature, is accomplished through spirituality. It is not until the protagonists enter into the religious life that they are able to love each other without exclusion or guilt, because their love is directed first and foremost toward God. This is the only lai that ends with all three members of the love triangle in continual contact and all happy. According to Marie, satisfaction is possible for all members of the love triangle, but only through this alternate route of spiritual love, which allows for a plurality of recipients when its source is God. It is appropriate, then, that at the very end of the final lai Marie introduces spiritual love for the first time, for it is this form of love that finally resolves the pervasive issue of the love triangle that is present in each lai. With all other options explored, it is spiritual love that emerges as the final resolution; it is through the wife’s act of renunciation that this form of love is realized. Although it removes Guildeluëc from the triangle, it, ironically, brings the three characters closer together in the end (Ferrante and Hanning 18-19); they live separately but are indefinitely connected through spiritual love.

To conclude there, yet, would fall short of Marie’s full message. Yes, Marie upholds spiritual love as the ideal form of love; however, more importantly, she has revealed one way to escape the patriarchal and misogynistic courtly code. She has shifted from one system—the feudal—into another—the religious, which allows considerably more room for female autonomy, power and choice.73 She resolves the issue of the secular love triangle and, in doing so, creates a new triangle, a spiritual triangle, where Guildeluëc occupies the top position as well as the connecting point between Eliduc and Guilliadun. Marie de France cleverly uses a well-known

73 Whitfield, Venarde, McGinn, Warren, and Grundmann, among others, support the idea that frequently women have more room for mobility and independence in the monastery than in the secular world in the twelfth century.
religious practice usually reserved for men to grant her female protagonist the agency that is so often denied to women at the time. Her renunciation is a sort of “power play,” as the monastery was often the only place for women to receive an education and any real intellectual stimulation. This is not to say that Guildeluëc’s altruistic act is a calculated and entirely selfish move that allows her to steal the show, to leave her husband and his lover indebted to her, and to seize the only available opportunity for control and power. It would, however, be remiss not to mention these advantages that do, in fact, result from her renunciation, whether as a consequence of selfish motives, as a happy accident, or as fitting rewards for her magnanimity. This act, which makes Guildeluëc ‘dead’ to the world, actually keeps her alive and relevant in the text; indeed, her removal from the profane world leaves her memory even more firmly planted in it.

In the end, Marie de France presents readers with an alternative way of life: the spiritual route. Though this option was not available for all women of all social classes and of all ages, it served as a real option for some and as a realistic fantasy for others. Her story confirms that the search for individual holiness was just as desired for women as it was for men—a notion that becomes even more prevalent with the emergence of the Beguines and the Third Order of Franciscans in the following century. Marie presents a world where the satisfaction of this search for holiness is achieved the same way for both sexes, through renunciation. She erases gender barriers and elucidates the myriad benefits available for those who renounce the feudal order in favor of the religious life, subverting patriarchal hierarchy and destabilizing the idealization of wifehood and motherhood. Through her deceptively simple love story, Marie offers an alternative solution to marriage and bearing children for real women in twelfth-century medieval society; a solution that allowed for real opportunities, influence and agency.

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74 Here I am employing Pam Whitfield’s terminology from her work “Power Plays: Relationships in Marie de France’s Lanval and Eliud.”
75 For more on these emerging orders, see Grundmann, Little, Knowles, and McGinn.
These three texts are not speaking out against religion. In fact, all three of these texts portray the search for religious fulfillment as the central concern of the hero. These works uphold the religious life as positive, a worthy goal of all members of the Christian community. What these subversive elements reveal is that these authors have their own ideas about the ideal form of spiritual life, one that, at times, aligns with current religious practices, but at other times differs. It is in these disparaging moments that the authors reveal their attitudes toward certain contemporary religious debates and insert their own solution for the perfect path to salvation. The authors’ views about the path to holiness do, in a way, reflect the reality of the time: all three heroes employ the traditional method of renunciation and enter the religious life; however, they make room for secular concerns and reveal imperfections within the current Church structure. They create new and unique paths to holiness, which open up the space for a more personal quest for spiritual transcendence.

The heroes achieve privilege and prestige in both worlds. They all end up as models of holiness, and their actions are more attainable to a secular audience. They are heroes that suit their place and time: they are vassals, knights, husbands, wives, sons—roles with which the audience could sympathize. They are realistic examples that the audience could follow, because their images are attainable and their situations are relevant. In this way, the authors provide an alternate route to holiness for their audience, one that merges the secular and the spiritual, that allow secular individuals religious fulfillment while leaving room for secular concerns. They present an attractive path to salvation that liberates the heroes from a secular system of bonds and constraints in favor of a world where merit is rewarded over birthright, where social, gender and political imbalances are leveled.
By entering the religious life, these protagonists have managed to escape certain undesirable aspects of feudal society. They have chosen, in fact, the only option available as an alternative to feudal society, which benefits them in the myriad ways discussed above. Although all three heroes perform different forms of renunciation stemming from different motivations, they are all lauded as models of spirituality. Yet, the benefits that they experience are not limited to the spiritual realm; in fact, oftentimes their secular advantages outweigh the spiritual ones.

What becomes apparent from these three texts is that the secular sacrifices enacted by these heroes become privileged in their journey to holiness; thus, secular sacrifices have religious value and secular heroes exemplify religious ideals before they enter the religious affiliation. The authors bring to light the fact that the laity desires access to the religious realm, no longer satisfied with keeping the secular and spiritual worlds separated. These secular authors provide their lay audience with alternative routes to holiness; ones that give spiritual meaning to their secular existence and even suggest that holiness can be born directly from secular experiences on the road to salvation. They give the laity the hope for religious fulfillment, even if complete renunciation, like that of the heroes in these texts, was not a realistic possibility. These authors highlight that renouncing the secular world does not mean that secular concerns disappear entirely, or that it even means complete separation of the two worlds; they present a world in which the two co-exist, with renunciation as the final step in the salvation process, lauding the spiritual work of the laity and giving spiritual meaning to work done in the secular realm.

In renouncing their secular lives, all three heroes have successfully broken from the established traditions set before them in favor of a completely different life journey; one that allows them to become spiritually transcendent yet does not leave them entirely withdrawn from the world. All three have entered into the most ascetic form of life permitted for their sex, a
notion based upon complete abnegation. Ironically, this method of self-abnegation actually creates the space for agency and individuality. Following a spiritual path grants them the freedom to carve out an individual and unique path to personal salvation. This path blends the historical method of renunciation, which requires strict obedience to a prescribed way of life—be it monastic or eremitic—with the theoretical current of the discovery of the self during this time period. For Wililam and Robert, the eremitic life is the ideal path that allows both the official belonging to a religious order and complete autonomy; Guildeluëc does not have the option of eremitism, so she occupies the highest religious rank possible for her sex. Their renunciation, which marks their retreat from the world, actually solidifies their prestige within it and leads to their continued remembrance as holy individuals. They become models of holiness for a temporal audience, with a balance of secular and spiritual characteristics. The co-existence of these realms in these texts incites inspiration and hope for the lay audience. An entirely orthodox method, renunciation, blends both realms to leave the heroes spiritually and secularly superior. It is the key to salvation, but it is achieved and validated through secular sacrifices and deeds, and leads to a blend of spiritual and secular benefits. It allows for an alternative route for the laity, as well as an alternate definition for what it means to be holy and what it means to be a hero, whether epic, romantic or religious.

Chapter Three

Woman and the Search for Holiness:

Woman as Victim and Vehicle of Redemption
The heroines discussed in this chapter, Fresne, Joïe/Manekine, and Hélène are all victims of a level of violence and injustice beyond their control which render them silent: Fresne is unaware that she has been abandoned by a slanderous mother just as she is unaware of her nobility, leading her to obediently accept that she cannot marry her lover, Gurun; neither Joïe/Manekine nor Hélène reveal the truth about their wound or family, lest they accuse their father of his intended incest. These women are left effectively mute about the resulting suffering that they experience: Fresne as a concubine, Joïe/Manekine and Hélène as exiled amputees, and all three women as detached from a definitive ancestry. As women, the protagonists lack the right to claim new lands or dedicate themselves to the service of a new lord, as is the case with an exiled knight. Yet, despite the severely limited mobility of women at the time of the texts’ compositions, the heroines manage to forge a life for themselves where their suffering becomes part of the journey that solidifies their holiness. In fact, it is their suffering that is the key to their holiness. None of the protagonists are officially canonized or explicitly enter into the cult of the saints, yet all three are treated in the texts with an air of sanctity, and scholars agree on the spiritual and moral integrity of these women. The way they endure their suffering and seek the imitations of the life and passion of Christ are, as with contemporary saints and holy women, the path and evidence for their distinction as holy individuals. In the end, their spiritual merit is the justification for their subsequent secular gains.

Although there are three other women who appear in La Belle Hélène who are also heroines—Clariande, Plaisance and Ludiane—I will limit the discussion to the titular heroine in this chapter. The additional heroines will be discussed more thoroughly with respect to conversion in the final chapter. I have yet to find a reference that does not mention the spiritual integrity of Joïe/Manekine or Hélène. Similarly, Fresne is often cited as a spiritual woman; one should note that the corpus of scholarly literature is considerably larger for Fresne than the other two works. Several scholars discuss female sanctity and the ways in which women in the central Middle Ages either became saints or were considered especially holy. They agree on the fact that female sanctity undertakes some form of suffering (usually bodily). See, among others, Vauchez, “La sainteté féminine dans le mouvement franciscain” and Saints, prophètes et visionnaires; Cazelles, The Lady as Saint; McGinn, The Flowering of Mysticism (The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism); Grundmann, Religious movements in the Middle Ages: the
This chapter examines how these women transcend the temporal realm to achieve a level of spiritual perfection that surpasses those around them while also gaining for themselves a level of agency through their suffering that solidifies them as models of holiness and womanhood in both realms, temporal and spiritual. First, I will discuss the ways the heroines are made into victims, identifying the various sources of their forced silence and suffering. Next, I will explore how this victimization allows them to attain a higher level of holiness through a series of figurative deaths and resurrections akin to Christ’s death and resurrection. Having established the proof of the heroines’ holiness in this way, I discuss how these women continue their transcendental journey to become the vehicle of redemption for themselves as well as for those around them through forgiveness and caritas. The heroines undergo a penitential journey on behalf of another, which is yet again a form of identification with Christ whose death is a sacrifice to redeem the sins of all mankind. Finally, I will reconsider certain crucial moments in each text to elucidate how the protagonists manage to attain varying levels of independence, autonomy and agency through their moments of greatest selflessness. In the end, the heroines become exemplars of holiness, which in turn advances their secular prestige.

For Fresne, her initial, and immediate, victimization comes from the rejection by her own mother. The violence directed at Fresne is not fully achieved, but is threatened: when her mother gives birth to twins, she chooses to protect her reputation rather than her child and plans to have Fresne killed, choosing temporal social standing over the moral and ethical concerns surrounding infanticide. This threat of violence for selfish motives establishes the opposition that exists between Fresne and her mother, where the mother represents the sinful, fallen, Eve-like woman while Fresne becomes the patient Marial figure who redeems her sex (Nelson, “The Implications....

\(\text{\textit{historical links between heresy, the Mendicant Orders, and the women’s religious movement in the twelfth and thirteenth century, with the historical foundations of German mysticism; and the edition of Dor, Johnson and Wogan-Brown, New Trends in Feminine Spirituality: The Holy Women of Liège and their Impacts.}}\)
of Love and Sacrifice”153).79 Although she does not kill Fresne, but rather abandons her at the
door of an abbey, the mother sets in motion the series of rejections that Fresne will face over the
course of her life by denying Fresne the knowledge of her identity. Her mother leaves the
expensive silk cloth and ruby ring with her daughter to signal her nobility to whomever should
discover her. However, without her knowing to what specific lineage she belongs, these
indicators fall short of their purpose.80 Deborah Nelson points out that the material possessions
become useless markers objects, failed talismans to protect her daughter; it is the intercessory
maid’s faith in God that actually protects Fresne (153-4).81 Sharon Kinoshita notes the core
problem behind the mother’s rejection of her daughter: “without an identifiable lineage she is
nothing more than a foundling with no value on the marriage market” (36).

The mother solidifies Fresne’s hopelessness in having any sort of legitimate family,
silencing the cultural demands that befit a woman of her rank. The silk swaddling cloth and ring,
though indicators of nobility, still fail to overcome the anxiety of a woman with no known family
attachment. This causes her identity to be determined, instead, by the Ash Tree in which she is
discovered: Pur ceo que al freisne fu trovee./ La Freisne li mistrent a nun (228-229). Her name
thus embodies not only the maternal rejection, but also barrenness surrounding the possibilities
for her future. The barren tree82 becomes a metaphor for Fresne’s limited options: she will
become a celibate nun in the convent in which she is raised; a handmaid; or Gurun’s mistress

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79 Fresne is not perfect by Church standards, as she becomes the lover/concubine of Gurun; however, the author
does not judge Fresne negatively for this. In Marie’s setting, Fresne and her mother do represent opposing sides of
rectitude, where the mother fails while her daughter succeeds.
80 While these objects are crucial for the recognition by her mother, which does ensure the story’s happy resolution,
when Fresne first meets and undertakes a relationship with Gurun, the objects fail to signal her nobility; her
ambiguous lineage is the reason the barons object to Gurun legitimate marrying Fresne.
81 For more on the intercessory nature of the handmaid, see Ainsworth, “‘The Letter Kil leth’: Law and Spirit in
Marie de France’s Lay of Le Freisne.”
82 As Ainworth points out in a footnote: “the ash does bear a fruit, the irony here being that it is the barons’ specious
argument that threatens to render Le Frense barren… Marie exploits this erroneous belief that the ash tree is barren”
(13).
whose children, should she bear any, would not be legitimate heirs to their father’s lands— all of which deny her the possibility of marriage and a legitimate lineage. This imposed barrenness, caused by the threat of rebellion among Gurun’s knights if he fails to produce a legitimate heir, silences her womanhood and her biological potential. The knights proclaim:

La Codre ad non la damesele;
En cest païs ne ad si bele.
Pur le freisne que vus larrez
En eschange le Codre avez ;
En la Codre ad noiz e deduiz,
Freisnes ne porté unke fruiiz ! (335-340)

Her silence and barrenness are an exact reversal of her twin sister, Codre, named for the fruitful hazel tree and heiress to her family’s fortune, who is joyfully accepted as Gurun’s fiancée by the knights. The doubling of the twin sister underscores everything denied to Fresne due to her mother’s selfishness.

Rejected by her mother and barred from marrying Gurun, Fresne is denied agency, having no say in the course of her own life. Even her relationship with Gurun is not entirely without an element of victimization. When Gurun hears about Fresne’s beauty, he decides to make her his mistress. 83 To avoid any suspicions or hint to his true intentions in visiting the convent where Fresne resides, he devises a plan to meet and seduce her:

De une chose se purpensa:
L’abeëe crestre vodera ;
De sa tere tant i dura
Dunt a tuz jurs l’amendera,

83 This notion of a man falling in love with a woman he has never met is fairly common in medieval literature.
Before Fresne has met Gurun, there is a plot in place to coerce her into a relationship that can never lead to marriage. Gurun is not concerned with what will become of Fresne when he will inevitably be required to marry and produce legitimate heirs; he selfishly coerces her away from the convent to become his concubine. Gurun’s offense is rendered worse because he uses a religious pretense while violating Church law. As Deborah Nelson states:

[Gurun] appears to be generous when he donates land to the convent, but his outward gesture contrasts sharply with his hidden motivation… He simply wishes to be certain of a warm welcome at the convent, so that he may spend more time with Fresne, whom he seduces in full knowledge that he cannot marry her because her family background is unknown. Like Fresne’s mother, he consistently makes decisions with a conscious disregard for the state of his soul. (154)

Gurun is supposed to be the protector of the nuns in the convent, since they reside on his land, ensuring their economic survival as well as their bodily safety. Yet, he does the exact opposite when he leads Fresne into an illicit relationship for which she is ill prepared: despite receiving a formal education in the convent, she is wholly without knowledge of the world outside the convent walls, particularly in relation to men. While the abbess has kept Fresne as her own niece, she does nothing to protect her from the sexual advances of Gurun. Yet again, Fresne is
dismissed by a mother figure: this time, it is her adopted aunt who, through her passivity and neglect, does nothing to protect Fresne from the realities and dangers of the secular world. The abbess, like Fresne’s mother, chooses to avoid any negative repercussions from opposing secular forces over Fresne’s well-being and protection, electing to deflect secular punishment rather than uphold spiritual values.

The abbess’ failure to shield Fresne from Gurun’s advances, coupled with Gurun’s later caving in to the local barons’ demands, signals another layer of victimization: this time, at the hands of the entire patriarchal and feudal society. Fresne is prohibited from marrying Gurun because of feudal concerns about inheritance and familial connections. Gurun himself is subject to these feudal laws, as evidenced by the barons’ threat to rebel unless he produces a legitimate heir. The abbess’ reluctance to prevent Fresne from becoming Gurun’s mistress thus stems from her submissive position in relation to Gurun, as both a woman and as a subject on his property. Because Gurun bestows a large portion of his lands, on which the convent exists, there is the expectation of a counter gift. Typically, this return would come in the form of intercessory prayers, but the author makes it clear that Gurun is not seeking spiritual benefits. As Kinoshita notes, the abbey is located in a wealthy town, and Gurun could easily direct his generosity elsewhere (35), leaving the abbess in the precarious position of subjugation to Gurun. Perhaps she is not as unaware as scholars have previously thought; it is possible the abbess is entirely aware of Gurun’s intentions, yet recognizes her powerless in the face of the patriarchal and feudal codes that shape society, even within the convent. While her inaction leaves Fresne victim to Gurun’s will, to act is to transgress feudal codes. Even Fresne herself is powerless to refuse Gurun, since he is her lord as well. In becoming his mistress, she completes the gift exchange, becoming the counter-gift he receives for his generosity (35-36).

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84 Kinoshita refers to the abbess as “less-than-vigilant” (36).
The subjection of individuals, especially women, to the secular codes of feudalism and patriarchy prompts a reconsideration of Fresne’s mother, initially considered entirely evil because of her willingness to kill her child to save her reputation. While not justified in her extreme reaction to birthing twins, she is, like her daughter and the abbess, a victim of this same feudal system. She does admit that she would rather make up her sin to God than live in shame:

\begin{quote}
Pur mei defendre de hunir,
Un des enfanz m’estuet murdrir:
Meuz le voil vers Deu amender
Que mei hunir e vergunder. (91-94)
\end{quote}

However, her choice is not exclusively to preserve her reputation; when the accusations of adultery reach the neighbor’s household, the husband becomes suspicious of his wife and keeps her under strict watch:

\begin{quote}
La prode femmë en haï
E durement la mescreï,
E mut la teneit en destreït
Sans ceo que ele nel deserveit.” (61-64)
\end{quote}

Fresne’s mother has seen these negative consequences and fears the same, or an even worse, fate. Like Guildeluëc in \textit{Eliduc}, this wife finds herself in a precarious position that leaves her powerless against the will of her husband: if he chose to repudiate her or abuse her for a perceived adultery, she would be powerless against him, sent back to her father’s house or destined to endure his abuse. Thus, Fresne, the abbess, Fresne’s mother, and even Gurun are entirely at the mercy of the secular code of feudalism and patriarchy and victims of its constraints.
Joïe is, like Fresne, a victim of multiple familial sources, including her father, her mother and her mother-in-law as well as of larger, systematic networks of power. Also like Fresne, Joïe/Manekine’s name and its changes embody the violence and victimization she experiences throughout the story. She is born Joïe, appropriately named for the joy that she brings to her parents, providing them with an heir, albeit not male; she reclaims this name only after she is restored to her family line and is safe from further victimization. Once Joïe can safely speak again, her true identity is revealed because there is no longer a threat to her chastity or to her life; she is once again a source of joy for her father and her countrymen. During the time that bookends her life as Joïe, the majority of the text, in fact, the heroine is called ‘Manekine.’ The King of Scotland confers this nickname; he says:

Il nous estuet,

Puis que vostre non ne savons,

Que nous aucun non vous metons.

Or soit ensi : je vous destine

Que vous aiiés non ‘Manekine.’ (1336-1340)

The etymological connection between her nickname and her missing hand reaffirms the violence that her body endures since her new name draws attention to her bodily trauma; it also highlights the necessity of her silence: the king grants her this nickname due to her refusal to reveal her real name, which would reveal her father’s sin and treatment toward her. Being named for her lack symbolizes not only her physical lack of a hand, but also her lack of family, homeland, nation; it makes evident her total lack of support and her complete vulnerability in the world. Her silence about her name and background only further underscore the ambiguity of her

85 King, in “Learning from Loss: Amputation in Three Thirteenth-Century French Verse Romances,” notes that the term ‘Manekine’ is “equivalent to the modern French manchot, designating a person missing a hand or hands” (3).
roots and the nature of the sin that merited the loss of the hand, arousing suspicion in Scotland, especially in the king’s mother. Unlike Fresne, Joïe is not prevented from marrying due to her ambiguous lineage: the king is free to choose to marry a woman with no name and no known family ties; additionally, Joïe and the king wait several years before marrying, allowing the time for Joïe to become beloved by her new countrymen and prove her worthiness to be queen.86

Years later, at the Maundy Thursday service where the king of Hungary confesses his sin, Joïe is finally released from her prison of silence: she is allowed to encounter her father, who, upon receiving the visual proof of her identification through her missing hand, allows her to reclaim her identity as Joïe. When Joïe runs to her father after he confesses his sins, though, he does not recognize her, stating that all women look alike [“femmes s’entressanblent assés” (7161)], an ironic statement considering that it was the resemblance to her mother that spurred the king’s desire to marry his daughter, leading the barons to search far and wide, finding no other woman suitable to fulfill the wife’s rash boon. In this scene, however, the king of Hungary does not recognize his daughter until she reveals her stump: “vés ichi u brac le moignon/ dont je colpai le puig en son” (7169-70); it is now the only physical feature that distinguishes the daughter from her mother that serves to confirm her identity.

This bodily proof of identity calls attention to the suffering the king has caused his daughter by making her the victim of his illicit feelings. Indirectly, she is also the victim of the barons and corrupt clergy that pressure her father into remarriage. In their council with the King, the barons and clergy inform him of the only remaining marriage choice: his daughter. They

86 King also points to the fact that Manekine’s beauty and grace prove her merit and noble spirit; one of the queen mother’s failings is not recognizing Manekine’s character. Similarly, the barons in Fresne are guilty of this same failure, not recognizing Fresne’s true nobility, who is also beloved by all in her household. The major difference is that the king’s decision to marry the girl of unknown origins is supported by his subjects, while it is a source of anxiety and contention among Gurun’s followers. This highlights the political and social constraints experienced by those in even the highest positions of power as well as perhaps shifting attitudes about origins in texts of different periods.
implore the King: “Si vous pri[ons qu’en mariage/Le prend[és]. Nous le vous lôons :/ Et sur no[us] l’affaire prendons” (354-356). Even though the King resists at first (“Signour,’ ce di[st li] rois, ‘pour voir/ Saciés, pour [ri]ens ne le feroie./ Trop durement m’e[n] mefferoie,’’” 360-362), the threat of his subjects proves too dangerous:

“Si ferés, sire! Vos clergi[és]
Velt que ensi vous le fac[ié]s.
Et se vous ne le volés faire,
Vo hombre vous seront contraire.” (363-366)

By not remarrying, the King avoids any need to fulfill the conditions of the wife’s dying wish; as soon as he succumbs to the political pressure to produce a male heir, the full effect of the promise surfaces, bringing with it the incestuous impulses. After the council meeting, the King “il l’esgarde/ Plus volentiers c’ainc mais ne fist” (416-417), and falls in love with her (“Atant de sa fille se part./ Mai sod lui emporte le dart/ D’Amours, qui grant anui li fait,” 423-425). Thus, it is the insistence of the barons and clergy that the King remarry that pushes the incestuous impulses to realization:

Je sai bien que cele est ma fille
Dont le pensers si fort m’escille.
En cel pensé, qui n’est pas gens,
M’ont mis mi baron et mes gens ;
Si m’ont en tel folie empaint
Dont li miens cuers souspire et plaint. (441-446)

Among the most culpable of those that provoke this situation are the barons and especially the clergy, who erroneously set aside Church marriage laws prohibiting marriage within four degrees
of kinship at this time, in order to ensure the land passes through a male heir, rather than the current female, heir, Joïe. In this way, she is also the victim of the entire feudal and patriarchal system, which favors inheritance through a son rather than through a daughter. This cultural, ecclesiastically backed, favoring of a male heir over a female, to the extent that the clergy would encourage the transgression of Church law through father-daughter incest, robs Joïe of any argument to avoid the marriage (Gouttebroze 204). Because the patriarchal leaders turn Joïe into a victim of their political agenda, she resorts to self-mutilation to escape violating God’s law:

“Mais roïne ne doi pas estre,
Car je n’ai point de main senestre;
Et roïs ne doit pas penre fame
Qui n’ait tous ses members, par m’ame.”
Donques a trait hors son moignon,
Loïé d’un cevrechief en son. (795-800)

She becomes the victim of her own bodily violence in order to maintain her chastity and avoid the more serious victimization intended by the barons, the clergy and her own father.

While the father’s incestuous impulse is the reason behind her self-mutilation, there is another force that cannot be ignored: the promise elicited by Joïe’s mother on her deathbed, requiring her husband to remarry only if the woman resembles herself. Her first request is that the King not remarry at all [“Sire, si vous requier et proi/ Que vous ja mais femme après moi/ Ne voelliés prendre a nes un jor.”(129-131)]; however, she introduces that caveat that, if the barons and counts require remarriage to produce a son, not wishing the kingdom to pass to Joïe, then he can marry a woman who resembles her:

“Bien vous otroi: se vous avoir
Poés femme de mon sanlant,
Qu’a li vous alés assanlant ;
Et des autres bien vous gardés
Se vous mon convenant gardés. ” (138-142)

While the notion of the ‘rash boon’ is a common folkloric motif, here it serves not only as a catalyst for the story, but as a way to alleviate the guilt of the father (Jeay 66). At first, he refuses the suggestion set forth by the barons and clergy that he marry his daughter, ordering them, instead, to search high and low for a woman that fulfills the promise; it is only after failure to find a suitable replacement and rebellion is threatened that he succumbs to inappropriate feelings for his daughter.87 It is impossible to determine with certainty the motivation behind the mother’s deathbed promise, but it is worth noting the possible outcomes of her limiting promise: it is possible that the mother did not think a woman exists who would fulfill the promise, ensuring that the inheritance, which includes her land of Armenia, would go to her biological child, and not to any other (male) child her husband might produce in the future. Another possibility is that the mother knows, or at least suspects, that the only woman who could possibly fulfill the promise is her own daughter; if she thought her husband would not commit incest, then she put the constraint into place with the insurance that this incestuous marriage would/could not take place. On the other hand, she may have knowingly put her daughter at risk for incest. Either way, the mother’s lands would have remained within her lineage through Joïe, whether she produced children begotten from her father or from someone outside of her own family. Thus, the seemingly desperate dying wish is not so much rash as a calculated maneuver to ensure her inheritance remains in her bloodline, even at the expense of Church law and her daughter’s

87 This idea of victimizing a woman due to anxiety over patrilineal succession is not unique to this text; one well-known example is Griselda in Chaucer’s Clerk’s Tale, though incest is not involved.
virtue. Joïe is yet again the victim of a parent’s selfish motives as well as of secular concerns—land inheritance and temporal power. In the end, Joïe’s mother’s lands do remain within her biological line; whether intentionally or not, her mother is successful in retaining Armenia within her lineage as it passes through Joïe to her son, Jehan.

Joïe’s victimization does not end when she leaves Hungary, escaping her parents, the barons and clergy. When she marries the king of Scotland, his mother is against the union. She actively attempts to prevent her son from marrying a mutilated woman whose ancestry, and even her name, are unknown by threatening Joïe with death if she continues to keep company with her son [“Si vous desfense quë a nul fuer/ Ne tenés plus sa compaignie,/ Se plus amés le vostre vie,” (1820-1822); and later, “S’il vou avient mais a nul jour,/Vous en serés arse en un four” (1827-1828)]. It is after the birth of Jehan that the mother-in-law undertakes her falsified letter conspiracy, turning Joïe along with her child, into a victim yet again. Once again Joïe is the victim of incestuous impulses, but this time the desire stems from her mother-in-law and is directed toward her son, Joïe’s husband. This mother-son incestuous undertone parallels the father-daughter desire from the beginning of the story, except the mother-in-law has no one who can help alleviate her blame: her desire is not the result of a dying spouse’s last wish or pressure to remarry; instead, its roots are internally born and entirely transgressive. Instead of the son becoming the victim of a nefarious plot, as was the case for Joïe when incestuous desire was directed toward her, it is Joïe yet again who is victimized; she is the target of the mother-in-law’s anger and jealousy. Her missing hand is not only the inspiration for her nickname, it is also a source of anger, for both her father and her mother-in-law: upon seeing her maimed, the King of Hungary declares that his daughter should burn at the stake; likewise, owing to her anxiety over

88 Gouttebroze discusses the fact that the king of Hungary is not entirely to blame for his impulses; rather, they result from the multiple exterior pressures that he can no longer avoid. See “Structure narrative et structure sociale: Notes sur La Manekine” 204 in particular for further discussion.
the severed limb,\textsuperscript{89} the Queen Mother forges letters from her son, condemning Joïe and her child to burn at the stake. Her mutilation incites anger and fear; yet, it is also the marker for her identification. It is the source of her constant suffering and victimization.

Hélène’s story is almost identical to Joïe’s, though it is much more elaborate and set against the backdrop of a mass Crusade agenda. Hélène is also the victim of incestuous impulses by her father, the emperor Antoine of Constantinople; but, unlike Joïe, Hélène’s father is not bound by a deathbed promise from his dying wife. After Hélène’s mother dies, Antoine becomes unnaturally attached to his daughter, forcing her to sleep in the bed with him and having portraits of his daughter painted on the pillars of the palace. When he travels to Rome to aid in the attack against the Saracens, he has her portrait painted on the columns and pillars in the papal palace. Moreover, there are no barons or corrupt clergy urging Antoine to remarry or produce a son; thus, the blame for his unnatural and condemnable desires, which he does not attempt to control, lies within himself. Quite the contrary, Antoine takes advantage of the pope’s bleak situation, being under attack by the Saracens, to extract a promise to approve a marriage between himself and his daughter. The pope, encouraged by the cardinals and seeing no other recourse, consents to the incestuous marriage.\textsuperscript{90} Even if Hélène’s beauty is the inspiration for the father’s desire,
Antoine is, nevertheless, guilty in his unrestraint: he threatens his daughter’s chastity and moral integrity as well as Church law.

Hélène is also subject to victimization by her mother-in-law, but not because of anxiety about the perceived sexual transgression implied by the missing hand; rather, because Hélène, like the other heroines, has an ambiguous past with unknown familial connections. Hélène has passed herself off as a poor woman in order to remain hidden, thus her perceived low station is a source of hatred for the queen mother. Marguerite, Henry’s mother, is motivated not by an inappropriate love for her son, but because of her lust for power: she plans to kill Hélène as well as her son, by burning her alive and poisoning him, in order to become the sole ruler of England. Her lust for power motivates the conspiracy of falsified letters, leading the count of Gloucester to believe Hélène is ordered to be burned at the stake. While Joïe’s amputation is a result of self-mutilation as a preventative measure against marrying her father, Hélène’s is a result of violence done to her, as part of the ruse to help her escape this death, where the severed arm serves as proof that the order has been fulfilled. The count’s niece, Marie, stands in for Hélène, becoming a willing martyr and another victim of Marguerite’s unbridled violence just as Hélène’s governess is burned as a punishment for having helped Hélène escape before the incestuous marriage with her father could take place. In both cases, Hélène is the source of anger, inappropriate desire and is constantly threatened with violence. While she manages to escape death, and even a few attempted rapes, her body is in constant danger, and, after escaping

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91 Jeay, in “Chercher une fille, une épouse. Sexualités déviante et parcours de rédemption,” attests to this fact as well. She states: “C’est donc comme intervention du diable que sera présentée la triple tentative d’inceste du récit. La première vise l’héroïne, Hélène, fille du roi de Constantinople dont la femme est morte en couches. Comme précédemment, si la responsabilité est clairement attribuée au roi qui se laisse surprendre par l’« ennemi, » cela ne signifie pas pour autant l’innocence de la victime dont la beauté est nettement identifiée comme la source du mal. Celle de l’enfant suscite chez le père un amour sans doute déjà excessif puisqu’il refuse qu’elle couche ailleurs qu’avec lui, et qui devient de plus en plus obsessif au fur et à mesure qu’elle grandit” (68).
England, is in a state of fragmentation until her son, Martin, reattaches her arm in Tours at the end of the text.

These three texts, despite their disparate subject matter and being composed in different centuries, share consistencies that characterize the situation for women in the central Middle Ages. In all three cases, the heroine lacks a mother, or at least, a reliable mother. All three encounter surrogate mothers, such as the abbess and the mother-in-law, only to be put at risk in their care. There seems to be the implication that a missing mother facilitates victimization for a young girl, causing suffering and leaving her open to threats from any source, even her own father. Linked to the issue of the absent mother, it is the concern for family and family politics that turns the heroines into victims. As Kinoshita states: “In the middle ages, marriage was not only the institution through which the feudal aristocracy reproduced itself, it was the practice through which it conducted its politics, legitimized its ambitions, and expressed its desires” (50). Thus, it is the concern over marriage and heirs that stirs up the conflict in these texts, and the women become victims when feudal politics sacrifice moral and spiritual concerns. These texts reflect contemporary issues of the time when definitions of marriage are coming to light and tensions arise over who controls it, lay or Church officials.92

While the tensions play out for who controls marriage, it is the women who become the victims of this struggle, of a system that is trying to negotiate power between two realms, lay and ecclesiastic. While the secular demands victimize the heroines, their prolonged suffering serves a double purpose as a criticism of the ecclesiastical institutions as well: in all three texts, Church

92 Archibald, among others, discusses the lay and ecclesiastical preoccupations with the definition not only of marriage, but also incest and contrition in *Incest and the Medieval Imagination*. The issue of endogamy versus exogamy is discussed by Hurtig—“‘I do, I do’: Medieval Models of Marriage and Choice of Partners in Marie de France’s “Le Fraisne””— and Kinoshita in *Le Fresne*; by King and Shepherd— *Tradition and Re-creation in Thirteenth Century Romance*: “La Manechine” and “Jehan et Blonde” by Philippe de Rémi— in Manechine; and by Legros in both Manechine and Belle Hélène in “Parenté naturelle, alliance, parenté spirituelle : de l’inceste à la sainteté.”
officials are complacent in giving in to feudal dynastic politics: the abbess and the archbishop of Dol in *Le Fresne*\(^93\); the clergy in *La Manekine* who encourage the king to marry his daughter; and the pope in *La Belle Hélène* who, though assured by a celestial voice that the marriage will not take place, still puts the heroine in mortal danger by permitting Antoine’s request. These heroines, thus, are reduced to their reproductive functions, seen as purely sexual objects whose only worth comes from their ability to continue a family lineage with no hope of gaining any land, power or agency for themselves. The perpetrators of the incestuous or patriarchal projects fail in their immediate aims and succeed only in driving the heroines out into the larger world where they are able to make legitimate exogamous marriages and, as a result, produce the desired lineage that prompted the initial crisis.

In the following section, we will see how these women overcome this simplistic reduction of womanhood. They turn their victimization into a positive attribute, where their suffering allows them to identify with the suffering of Christ, the martyrs and countless other holy individuals. In this way, the heroines display a growing notion of female piety and prove their holiness without gender inversion, to identify with the sacred through manifestations of suffering and to cope with their imposed suffering, bearing it patiently and willingly.\(^94\) As Kuuliala asserts: “In the Middle Ages, pain was generally accepted as an inevitable part of human existence. At the same time, suffering was considered to be a divine gift, making it possible to expiate one’s misdeeds already in this life. Suffering also made it possible to imitate the passion of Christ” (141). This patient suffering becomes a solution to the injustices done to these women, where the suffering body becomes a sacred vessel through which others come to

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93 See Kinoshita for an in-depth discussion about the power dynamics concerning the archbishop of Dol in *Le Fresne*.
94 See Bynum *Fragmentation and Redemption* for an in-depth discussion of female piety in the twelfth and thirteenth century, especially as it relates to physicality.
repentance and redemption. The heroines may be the weaker sex, the victimized characters, but they prove to be morally strong and impenetrable in their steadfast faith. Thus, these women find their path to holiness through the violence done upon their bodies: it is through their suffering, like that of Christ, and their subsequent rebirth that they achieve a claim to unsurpassed holiness. It is their exemplary selflessness in which they demonstrate their capacity for forgiveness and Christian charity that fulfills their spiritual transcendence. These women become the vehicle of redemption not only for themselves but for those around them. The violence and suffering that these women undergo is, as it were, the penitential journey for those they redeem. The heroines serve as proxies, doing penance on behalf of the sinners who have initiated their sufferings; once forgiveness is granted, the women are freed from their penance and from their imposed silence. This transcendental holiness propels the heroines into the position of models of piety, the epitome of holiness, for men and women in their society.

Fresne’s first death occurs as soon as she is born: although she escapes physical death, she becomes metaphorically dead to the mother who has rejected her child. Her existence is never revealed to Fresne’s father or her twin sister, leaving her entirely non-existent to her family. Fresne’s second ‘death’ occurs when she enters the convent under the abbess’ care. This death is not finite, since she does not take official vows, but it does remove her from the secular realm and is thus akin to the conventional monastic death in that she is isolated from the secular world behind the monastic walls. Even though she eventually has contact with Gurun, a secular individual outside the convent, this contact occurs because Gurun purchases the land to become her feudal lord. It is only at this point that he has any real contact with Fresne. Thus, she remains

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95 While monastic initiation rites for women were akin to marriage ceremonies—see Warren, for example—I posit that Marie is intentionally using the more masculine model of monastic death with respect to Fresne’s time spent in the convent; this monastic death would ensure that she remain ‘dead’ in the eyes of her mother, the initial threat to her safety.
withdrawn from the secular world until her convent is attached to Gurun; and even then, Gurun remains her only secular contact beyond the convent.

It is this contact with Gurun that begins her first rebirth, accomplished when she leaves the convent with him. However, she is not entirely reborn: she has transferred out of the convent, where she is hidden from almost the entire secular world, but, as Gurun’s mistress, she still remains hidden from the world, this time as a concubine. She reenters the secular world with Gurun, but only as a sexual object; her first death prevents her from becoming anything more, until her second, and final, rebirth. This final rebirth is accomplished when Fresne’s mother discovers that Gurun’s mistress is, in fact, the daughter she abandoned at birth. When Fresne reveals that the silk and ring are her possessions, Fresne is brought back to life before her mother’s eyes; the possessions that failed as justification for her to marry Gurun, or any man of noble lineage, do succeed as identification markers that reunite Fresne with her family. No longer is she an orphan of ambiguous ancestry, reduced to remaining Gurun’s concubine; rather she is part of a family with a noble lineage. Fresne is reborn and her memory restored to her mother, her true identity emerges as she is reinstated to her rightful social position, and she is born for the first time in the eyes of her father and twin sister. With this restoration of identity, Fresne gains the justification to marry Gurun, which recovers her womanhood and the ability to pass on her lineage and familial inheritance, both maternal and paternal. Although Marie does not mention if Fresne and Gurun have any children, the potential is now there, and any child that might come from Fresne would now be deemed acceptable by society.

When Fresne is informed that Gurun will be married to another woman, she does not protest. In fact, she continues to serve Gurun, even preparing the bed where the newlywed couple will sleep on their wedding night. As she prepares the bed, she determines that the intended
coverlet is not suitable for Gurun; so, she has her birth garment, the rich silk from Constantinople, laid on the bed in order to honor him: “Un cofre overi, sun pali prist,/ Sur le lit sun seignur le mist./ Pur li honurer le feseit” (403-405). Despite a grim future with no hope of marrying Gurun, Fresne remains steadfastly dedicated to him; her behavior is akin to the later model of patient Griselda (Kinoshita 51). As Ainsworth states: “In laying the paile on her erstwhile lover’s bed, Le Fresne does indeed give up that which is dearest to her, preferring the happiness of others to her own, earthly self-realization. She is, in this wise, moved to perform an act of Christian grace and self-sacrifice totally at variance with the ethos of the earlier part of the tale” (8). This unreserved expression of charity demonstrates her profound selflessness, a characteristic noticed by the mother, who begins to regret, for the first time, causing pain to the young girl:

Pensat e dist, si ele le seüst
La maniere ke ele fust,
Ja pur sa fille ne perdist
Ne sun seignur ne li tolist” (385-388)

[“Elle se dit que si elle avait su/ quelle femme était Frêne,/ celle-ci n’aurait pas perdu son seingeur/ à cause de sa fille”].

Because Fresne has switched the old coverlet for her own, the mother is able to identify it as the one in which she wrapped her own daughter, at which point she collapses out of pity for Fresne:

“De la pité ke ele en a/ Ariere cheit, si se pauma” (451-452). Hearing Fresne’s story and seeing

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96 Nelson states: “The totally unselfish behavior of Guildeluëc and Fresne, when faced with other women who desire to replace them, defies belief even in an idealized world. The actions of…Fresne can be described only as motivated by the purest Christian caritas” (153). She supports the idea that the unselfish deed insures the salvation of the protagonist and those around her in this lai.

97 I use translation provided by Harf-Lancner in the Warnke edition of the Lais. I have translated only this passage because it is particularly difficult.
her lowly position, Fresné’s mother realizes fully, for the first time, the true extent of her transgressions.

Fresné’s sacrifice is not merely admirable, the author considers it a marvel: “A grant merveille le teneient/ cil et celes ki la veeient” (391-92). It is due to the extreme nature of the sacrifice and charity that the mother is moved to repentance (Ainsworth 9). Upon waking up from her faint, Fresné’s mother is herself reborn as a penitent woman. She asks forgiveness from her husband, admitting the slander against her neighbor and the conspiracy in which she abandoned their daughter. It is not just the slander and abandonment that are revealed; she is also guilty of jealousy, pride and intended infanticide. When the mother confesses her transgressions, she is on her knees before her husband, like a penitent before God or a priest. This display of emotion and position of submission are the proofs of her contrition. Fresne and her father are both overjoyed when they hear the truth; this joy, in stark contrast to the anguish of the mother, confirms their sincere forgiveness toward her. This moment of confession and forgiveness absolves the mother of her sins; she is, like Fresne, brought back from death, caused by her sins, and purified through confession.

It is through Fresné’s suffering, the penitential journey that this innocent girl has endured on behalf of her mother, that the mother is redeemed. The mother is redeemed spiritually, through absolution and the proxy penance, but also secularly as a wife and mother. The revelation of the slander and conspiracy sets the truth free and allows Fresne to be welcomed into her legitimate family line. As the locus of reunification for her family, Fresne restores her own lineage, attaching her nobility to a specific genealogy, which permits her marriage to Gurun. In

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98 Maréchal and Payen discuss the notion of repentance at this time. This period is characterized by a concern for confession, penance and repentance, marked by obligatory annual penance after the Fourth Lateran Council. Maréchal in particular notes that this text reflects the spirituality of the time in its presentation of the idea of repentance in “Le Lai de Fresne et la littérature édifiante du XIIe s.”
the end, it leads to two advantageous marriages: Fresne to Gurun and Codre to another, unnamed noble man. Gurun is also absolved of his misdeed. His base intention toward Fresne when he purchased the land he donated to the convent is forgiven as Fresne becomes his legitimate wife. No longer are his feelings toward and actions with Fresne a vehicle for her downfall or a future with no hope for happiness. On the contrary, now that Fresne, through her own selflessness, is released from her penitential journey, she is released from all impediments to her happiness, including her unequal social standing with Gurun. The marriage between Fresne and Gurun transforms the original metaphor of Fresne’s name: for it is through Fresne that (re)birth is achieved, family is restored and the potential for heirs is now a realistic and legitimate possibility for the once-barren Ash. She restores the full integrity of her family line, multiplying the potential for the family’s extension of power and influence through the addition/readmission of herself as her father’s heir. As such, Fresne has redeemed herself and her family politically as well as spiritually. In her redemption, Fresne has not only recovered what she originally lost, (her family) she gains even more (a husband, spiritual transcendence, a privileged place in society).

Those aspects of Joïe’s life that evoke Christ’s suffering are written upon her body; she identifies in a corporeal way with the suffering of Jesus and the saints as well as through the more miraculous death and rebirth.\(^9\) She accepts her suffering patiently without complaint: the fact that the title of the story, taken from her nickname rather than her birth name, derives from the vulnerable and violent state in which the heroine finds herself confirms the crucial nature of the violence done to her. It is because of this violence that she is able to experience a three-fold death and resurrection. First, since her father, along with the populace of Hungary and Armenia,  

\(^9\) The corporeal suffering of Joïe’s missing hand evokes especially certain martyrs who lost limbs; for example, Saints Basilissa and Anastasia who had their hands and feet—along with their tongues and heads—cut off during the reign of Emperor Nero; Saint Dymphna, a 7th-century Irish saint and one possible source of inspiration for La Manekine, was eventually beheaded by her father for her refusal to marry him, though her limbs remained intact.
were fooled by the first mock execution, Joïe is, in their eyes, brought back to life once the king has confessed his sins against her. This restores her memory to her father and to her people, which is renewed when she returns to Hungary and then to Armenia, confirming her return as the agent to continue her family line. Almost simultaneous to the first rebirth is the second: the resurfacing of her identity. Once the confession is performed and the heroine knows she is safe from harm by her father, she can become Joïe again and reclaim her true identity. She is reborn not only as a daughter, but as a princess, the heiress to a large kingdom, whose name evokes elation rather than bodily harm. With her true identity revealed, she is not simply reunited with her husband, a few days prior to the Maundy Thursday mass, but she is reborn as a new individual. Instead of an unknown, incomplete girl of suspicious origins, she becomes part of a larger, very powerful family; the means to claim a vast kingdom for his family; and the justification of his choice to marry her despite her ambiguous past. The final rebirth is corporeal: her body is physically renewed when her hand is reattached, completing her transition from suffering, silent, body to living relic. Joïe shifts from being defined as a fragmented, incomplete, imperfect body to the site of miraculous healing. She is directly touched by God, marking her as divinely privileged and unquestionably saintly.\footnote{This idea of the heroines Joïe and Hélène being divinely touched and becoming relics will be discussed thoroughly in Chapter 4.}

Joïe’s threefold reemergence, accomplished with the miraculous restoration of her body, is the vehicle for a threefold redemption for those in contact with her: directly- her father and husband; visually- viewing her miraculous body; or indirectly- those who ingest the sturgeon that housed the hand and the Virgin Mary’s reliquary that is served at the meal at the papal palace and internalize her salvific powers, or by seeing the Virgin’s reliquary as it is delivered to St. Peter’s Church where, as the author tells us, it might still be present, if it has not been lost.
through our sins [“Encore est a Romme veë./ Se par nos pechiës n’est perdue.” (7661-7662)]. The resulting redemptions are at once spiritual, social, and political.

Spiritually, Joïe is the vehicle of redemption for her father. When her father confesses his sins publicly—admitting his transgression and clearing his daughter’s name—the truth that had been written upon her body for nine years is finally vocalized. Her silence is broken, and her first act after recovering her identity is to forgive her father when he begs her forgiveness. The King falls on his knees in front of his daughter, shedding tears and saying:

“Bele fille,” dist il, “merchi
De cuer plus de c. fois vous pri
De la grant laidure et du tort
Dont je vous cuidai mettre a mort,
Par cruel outrqueriderie

Merci vous en pri et demant.” (7181-7187)

To which she responds: “La merci que vous me priës/ Vous doing… Je le vous pardonning
bonnement” (7195-7196, 7199). The Pope performs the absolution which welcomes the king, wiped clean of all sin, back into the Christian community. His redemption is possible not simply due to Joïe’s capacity for forgiveness, but also because the necessary penance has already been performed by his daughter through the loss of her hand (Black 38). Joïe’s absence from her homeland is a penitential journey carried out on behalf of her father. Her body is marked as the site of violence, which then becomes the site for conversion and confession for her father, who finally recognizes the magnitude of the sins he has committed. Seeing his wounded daughter, he is faced with the bodily proof of the effects of his transgressions, he sees the full extent of her suffering, of her victimization. As David S. King states: “For the king, to recognize his sin
requires that he recognize the wound his concupiscence brought about” (7). As a result, he becomes the spiritual beneficiary of his own misguided violence, and finds salvation through the body and blood of the woman he wrongly condemned to death. Once Joïe’s hand is restored, the sin that caused the violence—the father’s lust—is redeemed. Her bodily restoration mirrors the restoration of the king’s soul, marking it as the return of her father to the righteous spiritual path (8).

Once the father’s lust is absolved, he is no longer guilty of intending to transgress the law of consanguinity set forth by the Church after the Fourth Lateran Council which considered marriages of less than four degrees of kinship to be incestuous; this redeems the social, and familial, order. When Joïe cuts off her hand, her fragmented body symbolizes the fracture between the secular and the spiritual in her father’s kingdom; her mutilation is the literal embodiment of the moral decay that is taking place in Hungary: her own father ceases to view her as his daughter and dedicated follower of Christianity by refusing to bow to her Christian ideals, seeing her instead as a purely sexual object, whose existence hinges on her reproductive abilities. Joïe’s refusal to follow her father’s command underscores her strength and moral fortitude in the face of social corruption by putting God’s law above patriarchal and feudal law (Black 38). Once the father repents and receives forgiveness, order is restored: his familial relationship with Joïe returns to the acceptable father-daughter model, rather than the daughter-as-wife, and, thus, sexual object, one: this reaffirms his original opposition to the wishes of the barons and clergy, reestablishing his strength as the king and political leader; and it redeems his position as a moral, Christian leader, clearly a quality necessary for his successful kingship. When Joïe’s body is made whole again, it completes the final unification of her family: she is already reunited with her husband, but reunification with her father reveals her true identity and
royal origins, resolving the anxiety of her ambiguous ancestry, as well as the anxiety around the transgression of the missing hand. Joïe’s restored body thus reestablishes her as a wife, mother and daughter, the social roles that, particularly as royalty, she is required to fulfill.

Linked closely with the redemption of the social order is the political ‘healing’ that Joïe permits. Joïe’s reunited family unites two political kingdoms, comprised of three nations: her husband’s land of Scotland is joined to her father’s kingdom of Hungary as well as to her mother’s land of Armenia. As Jane Bliss asserts, in discussing the mother’s kingdom which remains in the background until Joïe is found, “[Armenia] is symbolic of the fact that she is whole again and can now safely be like her mother” (150). Armenia can resurface, just as Joïe does, because the biological heir has returned to rightfully rule the nation; in this case, Jehan, through Joïe. Likewise, because Jehan is born (and, in fact, already seven years old) at the time she is healed, the political crisis at the beginning of the story— the lack of male heir for the kingdom of Hungary— is resolved. Joïe’s body is thus the symbol for unification and for stability: when her body is fragmented, so are her family, and the social order and political kingdoms; once her body is restored, healed, stabilized, so are the familial and political problems that plague the kingdoms during her absence.

As with Joïe, Hélène is often assumed dead— by her father, her husband and her sons. After some time, they all come to realize that Hélène is possibly alive, driving the over thirty year quest that leads to her figurative rebirth in Tours. During this time of her ‘death’, Hélène travels far and wide, remaining hidden to avoid both her father and her husband, who she believes wishes her dead. Hélène’s mutilation, like Joïe’s, represents a society in danger. Just as Hélène is under attack by her father and mother-in-law, so the entirety of the Christian realm is

101 Even the king of Scotland expresses anxiety over her missing hand when he first considers whether or not to marry her. He laments that her missing hand could indicate a misdeed on her part, though he immediately chastises himself for even considering Joïe could be guilty of any transgression [ll. 1548-1566].
under attack by all enemies of Christianity. At the time of the text’s composition, dated to the mid-fourteenth century, the Schism between the east and west is in place, France and England are in the early wars of Edward against France and Flanders is in the midst of a political struggle that divided it between French and English loyalties. Both the political and spiritual realms are threatened and even disabled by fragmentation. The threat of destabilization is written upon the protagonist’s fractured body.

It is also during her time of figurative death, akin to a state of limbo where she is neither and yet at once princess, queen, mother, lowly washerwoman and beggar, that she travels to Rome, hearing of the death of her husband. At the papal palace, she refuses all offers of comfort, choosing instead to reside under the staircase and receive left-over food scraps: “Que vous me laissiés, sire, s’y vous plest, demourer/ Droit dessous les degrés ou on doit chy monter,/ Et que de vo reliés me faichiés presenter” (10687-89). This motif of voluntary poverty and self-deprivation under the staircase is almost identical to that in the life of Saint Alexis. Hélène is following in the footsteps of a revered saint in her steadfast humility and self-abnegation. Hélène is also living a life of voluntary poverty that is exalted by the teachings of Saint Francis (c. 1181-1226) and the growing mendicant orders of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries that adhere to the apostolic life of the early Church.  

It is this life of simplicity, of humility, of absolute poverty that reformers saw as returning to the original content of Christianity in its inception, modeled on the life of Christ himself. Hélène herself can, then, perhaps be seen as a fictional character, sympathetic to the mendicant movement, aligning herself with those who criticize the Church and clergy for its luxury, simony and laxity through her physical suffering (Jones-Wagner, *La Belle Hélène de Constantinople* 161).

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102 Velay-Vallantin, in *L’histoire des contes*, confirms that while Hélène is exalted for her patience and submission, her poverty and mendicancy is also valorized (107-109).
When Hélène is finally discovered in Tours and brought to the court where she is reunited with her sons, her husband and father, her penitential journey as proxy has come to an end. Her suffering has granted her father the opportunity to learn the error of his ways. In a scene that parallels his own incestuous desires, Antoine is approached by a young woman, Clariande, who has fled her father’s court and seeks his help, stating:

“De men pere me plaing qui, par oeuvre ennemie
Se fait dieu apeler en ycelle partie.
Fait a un paradis en se sale vautie;
Tout ly diable d’enfer ly tiennent compagnie…” (4379-82)

She adds: “Espouser me voloit, pour che me suis fuie,/ Car sachiés que je voeul que je soie baptizie” (4392-93). Here, the incestuous desire is inspired by the idol, by the devil, and it is Antoine who destroys the iron idol, after which the devil departs and the false paradise is destroyed [ll. 4478-84]. Clariande’s father is successfully exorcised of the demon and he comes to recognize Christianity. In casting out the demonic force that causes Gribaut’s incestuous desire, Antoine demonstrates his capacity to overcome this impulse within himself. Antoine’s success in overcoming this demon reaffirms the evil nature of incest as well as its previous hold over Antoine. However, it also confirms Antoine’s contrition in the repentance he seeks by trying to find his daughter. The quest for her, and the resulting conversions to Christianity that he incites in pagans all over Europe, are his own personal penance while his daughter experiences hers by proxy on his behalf. She allows not only her father to come to realize the orthodox path, but for all of Europe, since Hélène does not reunite with her father until after Jerusalem, Castre and Flanders are converted to Christianity (Jones-Wagner 86). She is thus redeemer for her
father, but also for all of Europe; she is the vehicle for a mass conversion of the known Christian world of the time.\textsuperscript{103}

Hélène experiences her rebirth in Tours when she reunites with her family. Her son, Martin, performs the miracle of reattaching his mother’s arm, which remained miraculously preserved. The restoration of her body brings about the restoration of her position as princess, queen and mother. Like that of Joïe, her healed body redeems in a multi-faceted way, as she redeems her father and restores her family. Antoine’s desire began outside the realm of Roman Christianity, in fact in the heart of Eastern Christianity. It is thus significant that his healing process, including exorcising the incestuous desire from Gribaut in Bavaria, occurs in lands under the Western tradition. Where her father has gone astray in the east, he finds redemption through Hélène in the West. Her redemption privileges Roman Christianity over the eastern tradition, where the former is the path to redemption not only for herself and her father, but for all individuals. The bodily harm she undergoes grants her son, the future Saint Martin, the occasion for his first miracle. Her resurrected body becomes inscribed into a larger tradition of the life and legend of an early foundational saint of France and establishes Tours as an exceptional center of holiness. As his mother, she has granted him life, in a double sense: first, in the literal sense of having birthed him, and, second, by introducing him to his ministry of miracles that establishes his saintly reputation and solidifies his future canonization. This introduces an established hagiographical tradition into this fictional text, and, in a sense, transforms the life of Saint Martin so that he can be easily inserted into a medieval romance epic. Moreover, the presence of this renowned saint solidifies Hélène’s saintly status, not only as the descendent of a sainted personage, but also through the miraculous interaction with him.

\textsuperscript{103} Conversion in \textit{La Belle Hélène} will be discussed in more detail in the final chapter.
Her restored body is also the vehicle for an idealized unification of the East and the West, both politically and spiritually. When Hélène’s arm is reattached, Rome, Constantinople and Jerusalem have been unified by Henry’s army. The rift between the east and west was well established at this time; *La Belle Hélène* fabricates a universe where this rift is overcome so that Constantinople and Rome, the respective centers of power for the east and west, resolve their tensions and unify to bring all Christians under one tradition. Likewise, political power becomes centralized: Hélène’s son Brice mounts the throne in Constantinople and England, uniting the kingdoms at the farthest geographical points within Europe under one crown and under the Roman Church. Brice’s twin brother Martin becomes the archbishop of Tours; this brotherly affiliation ensures the continuation of the Roman tradition while maintaining friendly relations between the countries. Given the political climate of the early wars of Edward against France, this text may provide an idealized resolution for the tensions between France and England.

Pagan and Saracen enemies constantly surround Christian lands, attacking from all sides; it is through Helene’s bodily integrity as a metaphor for the solidarity of all of Christendom that the only answer to the continued success of Christianity and Christian nations is provided. Her healed body is the metaphor for the healed rift between all Christian nations and factions that, in an idealized and imagined past, sees Christianity as one force, both spiritual and political, and as the ultimate expression of spirituality, the ultimate defense against enemies.

All three of these women—Fresne, Joïe and Hélène—are intercessors for those who have sinned; they have carried the burden and the penance of the one who has sinned against them. They are the vessel for God’s grace and redemption for themselves and those around them. Their capacity for forgiveness redeems individuals as well as the integrity of the entire family line. By redeeming a parent, Fresne, Joïe and Hélène have forgiven the sin directed at them which
sparked their penitential voyage. Being reunified and rejoining the family ensures an uninterrupted continuation of the lineage, a disruption that threatened it during the women’s absence. Through their suffering, the heroines engage in a form of piety that was common for women at this time, allowing their bodies to speak, since they were not permitted to preach. The success of their holiness is expressed in their capacity for redemption. While all three women end their tales in culturally scripted situations, as wives and mothers— for two of the three— their period of suffering allows for a period of poverty, for a mobility in crossing class boundaries and for restoration that brings stability to their families, society and kingdoms. They resolve the central conflicts of the texts and become models of piety and holiness for both men and women.

We have seen without doubt that these secular heroines have managed to attain a level of spiritual perfection while remaining in the secular world. Their suffering has solidified their own transcendence and redeemed those around them. Yet, there are significant moments of action and personal choice that grant them agency that, ironically, coincides with moments of selflessness. The final section reconsiders the selfless acts of the heroines as a method to attain agency and personal benefit. This does not nullify the spiritual validity of these women, for the narratives establish them as vessels of God’s grace and models of Christian charity, nor does this section argue that these women act out of selfish motives. Rather, it allows the space for a co-existence of spiritual and secular meaning, whereby selfless acts can be read as leading to two different paths simultaneously: one that leads to holiness and one that leads to agency.

In *Fresne*, I return to the pivotal moment where the heroine gives up one of her two material possessions to honor Gurun and his new bride, Codre. While I do not deny the element of sacrifice, charity and love in this scene, I do propose another reading. As Ainsworth asserts:
Le Fresne is certainly aware of her immediate actions: her sacrificial laying down of her
paile roé reminds us, but in ‘romantic’ rather than homiletic mode, that there is no greater
love than that shown by the one who lays down his (her, in this instance) life for the
brethren; but in the lay, as in the Kingdom, the achievement is wrought through grace
(the Scripture, of course, points to Christ as ultimate exemplar). (8)
Fresne may not be aware of the full significance of her action—she certainly does not know that
laying down this cloth will lead to her estranged mother recognizing her—but she is aware that
her action is one of sacrifice. She is also aware that this silk wrapped her as a child, given to her
by her parents and that is signals her nobility. By giving this cloth to Gurun, she is, in a sense,
presenting him with a dowry; she is acting as the intermediary between her parents and her lover,
paying a high price, one that links her to a birthright, for a desired marriage. It is a symbolic
gesture, as Fresne does not give the cloth directly to Gurun, nor does she suggest that he should
marry her instead of Codre. She accepts that, in the feudal world, she is not a proper social match
for Gurun; yet, she cannot help making her desire known, even if only privately.

By placing this cloth, this extension of herself and her unknown family, on the bed,
Fresne is also symbolically inserting herself into Gurun and Codre’s relationship. While Fresne
does not utter one word of protestation against the marriage of Gurun and Codre, she does stage
a silent and symbolic protest by placing her own silk on their marriage bed: she enacts a visual
representation of the love triangle that involves Gurun as the object of desire between his lover
and his wife. Moreover, by laying down such a fine, exotic piece of material, one that, as she
herself states, is finer than the original coverlet, she is asserting her own nobility; one that, with
the proof of this cloth, seems to surpass Gurun’s social position. There is no point in trying to
convince the barons that she should be Gurun’s wife, a notion they have vehemently rejected, but
laying out the proof of her nobility is Fresne’s disagreement with the decision to not allow her to marry Gurun.

Fresne makes it clear that, while she may not be allowed to marry Gurun legally, and while she may bear her pain silently and internally, she refuses to be completely written out of this story and out of Gurun’s life. The heroine’s quasi-rebellious action distances her from the patient Griselda model of femininity, to which this heroine has been often compared. When the threat of being replaced presents itself, Fresne takes action to ensure that she is not forgotten. She is depicted as essentially passive throughout the tale, yet, when annihilation is threatened, she acts, rebels, fights back. Her action stems from a conscious, independent choice; the choice to swap out her own coverlet for the inferior one already on the bed. She evaluates the old one, deeming it unworthy for her lover, placing her own on the marriage bed instead. In this brief moment, Fresne demonstrates her capacity for autonomy and choice. She exercises her free will, taking back some of the freedom denied to her through her abandonment. It is not coincidental that the exact moment that Fresne demonstrates her independence is when the mother realizes that this is the child she has abandoned. Marie constructs a meaningful scene in which her female character, having taken some initiative for the first time in her life, is rewarded with reunification with her family and marriage with Gurun.

As we have seen, it is because of this action, by putting her silk onto the marriage bed, that the mother comes to realize who Fresne really is. After Fresne recounts her story along with the information given to her by the abbess, she is welcomed back into her biological family. It is due to her moment of action, of rebellion, that Fresne is able to recover her original identity, be reborn as a noble woman and marry Gurun. But, as this is an equally selfless act, it is also the moment that solidifies her holiness. This moment is a blend of spiritual and secular actions,
motivated at once by spiritual grace and secular love: Fresne at once demonstrates her concern for her lover but also her unwillingness to completely give him up as well as her refusal to be forgotten. She is ultimately successful in this fight to remain relevant: she marries Gurun and earns a new place as a daughter and sister. She has managed to gain for herself a significant position in the narrative as the titular character, the only lai named after a woman: in Gurun’s life as his wife; in society as an accepted woman to produce Gurun’s heirs; in her biological family as heir to her father’s inheritance; and spiritually as the vehicle of redemption for herself and others. Ambiguity is dissolved and the once ‘barren’ Ash Tree reverses the original metaphor, becoming instead the promise of a fruitful continuation of her and Gurun’s family line. Moreover, through her subtle rebellion, Fresne overcomes the lack of courage displayed by Gurun in the face of his barons and in his manipulative seduction plan.

She merges two noble families as well as the two realms. She manages one final triumph after she regains her identity and marries Gurun: since he had purchased the land with the convent in which she was raised, Fresne, as Gurun’s wife, is now a beneficiary of this convent, placing her above the nuns and the abbess that reside within. Fresne’s social position has now surpassed that of the abbess, to whom she was once subject, both spiritually and secularly: as the beneficiary, she has political and economic superiority, and, as the vessel of grace and redemption, she is also spiritually superior to the abbess. Fresne, through her selfless moment of action manages to catapult herself into a realm of spiritual and social elevation that far surpasses anyone else in the narrative. She is granted a social, and spiritual, mobility usually denied to women. Her position as spiritually and secularly superior subtly subverts both

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104 Maréchal also discusses these opposing realms. She describes the wedding of Fresne and Gurun as the reconciliation of ecclesiastical and feudal definitions of marriage: “Au terme de l’aventure, en accord avec l’évolution de la pensée religieuse du temps de Bernard de Clairvaux, l’amour humain spiritualisé n’est plus en conflit avec l’enseignement de l’Eglise—Gurun et Fresne peuvent être à la fois amants et époux” (137).
ecclesiastical and patriarchal authority, as a woman capable of agency and autonomy becomes a model for holiness and womanhood.\textsuperscript{105}

Although Joïe remains silent about her origins and the nature of her wound, this does not suggest passivity on her part, where her authority- as queen, princess and spiritual model- is simply a fringe benefit of her sacrifice. As the patriarchal system breaks down to expose the weakness of the king and the corruption of religious representatives in Hungary, Manekine performs a rare act of self-mutilation.\textsuperscript{106} It is through this calculated act of familial and political defiance against her father, the king, that she seizes control by making a decision and taking action. In an aforementioned scene, she addresses her father and proves her knowledge of the law stating that she cannot be queen because she has no left hand since the king may not take a wife who doesn’t have all her limbs intact. Additionally, Joïe evokes the Sermon on the Mount in which the sin of lust is addressed and cautions the audience is better to cut off the body part that would cause a person to sin, as living in an imperfect body is better than losing one’s entire body in Hell.\textsuperscript{107} When Joïe cuts off her hand in front of her father, then, she is performing a proxy amputation: by cutting off her own hand, Joïe enacts this biblical instruction on behalf of her father. Rather than punishing her father corporeally in order to keep him from sinning, she takes it upon herself to remove the ‘sinful’ body part. Once removed, the sin can no longer be completed, for he cannot marry this maimed woman. In a daring move, she takes out her stump that is wrapped up and bloodied. This is a dramatic performance for its violence, but also for Joïe’s boldness as she addresses the king directly and shows him the proof of her deed. She is

\textsuperscript{105} See Hurtig for an in-depth discussion of how this text subverts twelfth-century marriage tradition.

\textsuperscript{106} Sargent-Baur discusses this in the introduction to her translation of \textit{La Manekine}, 113.

\textsuperscript{107} Matthew 5:29-30: “If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.” See also see also Matthew 18:8-9 and Mark 9:43-48.
thus guilty of disobeying her father and her king.108 This simultaneous sacrifice and act of defiance turns Joïe into an active force in her story and in her life, preventing her father’s sin as well as her own sexual objectification. As a maimed, and therefore, unworthy, body, she escapes the sexual gaze of her father, the barons and the corrupt clergy. Joïe overcomes the violence that is commonly performed upon the queen’s body, where, as Peggy McCracken states, “threats to the political stability of the court and to the boundaries that establish and maintain it are figured in the ritualized restriction and transgression of the body” (43). By taking control of her own body, Joïe overcomes these threats to it by marking it as unworthy for the intended incestuous transgression. As agent of her own suffering, Joïe is also no longer the typical woman-as-victim; rather, she is the director of violence upon herself. Because this self-inflicted violence preserves her chastity and leads to her father’s repentance, it supplants the broken patriarchal law with God’s law and elevates her as the exemplary model of the restored social order.

Similar to Joïe, Hélène manages to not only function within the secular realm, but to gain agency. While Hélène is certainly more passive than Joïe, and even Fresne, she is also the only one of these heroines to live for an extended period of time on her own. Moreover, she is not simply living alone, she makes a living for herself, learning to survive by her own wits. Fresne passes from the convent to Gurun’s home and Joïe, except for her aimless sea voyages, finds refuge first with her future husband and then with the Roman senator. Hélène, on the other hand, lives for a period of time in a convent, then with her husband in England, but for the majority of the text, she is a washerwoman when she is not in flight. She learns how to survive while remaining undetected; in fact, she is successful in this endeavor for over thirty years. Hélène is thus the only one of the heroines who learns how to live independently, to fend for herself.

108 Fenster points out that, additionally, his self-mutilation not only makes her unfit to be queen, but it also distinguishes her from her mother. Thus, Joïe no longer fulfills the parameters of the promise to his wife by which the father is limited (50-51).
relying entirely on herself. She is granted a considerable amount of mobility: socially, she crosses class boundaries to move from the highest echelon of society as a princess and then a queen to the lowest, as a manual laborer, but also as a nun in a convent and a saint-like beggar; geographically, she travels by land and by sea, from the easternmost to the westernmost point of Europe, in both Christian and pagan cities.

Hélène’s agency is not derived from a critical moment of rebellion as bold as the cutting off of the hand in LaManekine, rather, it stems from the situations where she decides to escape her current state or remain in place. While Hélène appears passive, not confronting her father or her husband, her decision to flee does not prove her passivity; in fact, it negates it: Hélène is unwilling to allow whatever horrible fate will befall her in her current situation so that she decides that fleeing, living as a concealed fugitive, is preferable. As with Guildeluëc’s decision to renounce her marriage, discussed in Chapter 2, the crucial aspect of Hélène’s flight is that it is her decision: she is not sent away by her father, her husband or her mother-in-law, she chooses to remove herself from the situation. The only scene where Hélène does not avoid violence to her body is when the count of Gloucester severs her arm as the proof that he fulfilled the King’s order to burn her at the stake. Her seeming non-decision can be viewed as intentional, wherein Hélène accepts the necessity of the violence done upon her body; in every other scene Hélène manages to escape the threat of violence. This violence that is willingly accepted to be done to and upon her body identifies her with Christ through her suffering, allowing her body to be marked by its loss, providing an easy marker for identification when she reunites with her family at the end, and providing the opportunity for a miracle to be performed upon that very body. This not only allows for her son to begin his miracle-working, it ensures that it is her body that will become the site of divine intervention and miracle.
It is clear that these three heroines become models of holiness through their selflessness, charity, forgiveness, suffering and connection to saintly models of their time. In this way, they participate in religious activity, overcoming the imposed limitations of their sex to establish a direct connection with the divine and become models of holiness for both men and women. Yet, these women do not end up in a convent, living a life of religious solitude; instead, they become wives and either actual or potential mothers. Their final level of female agency comes from the fact that, in becoming the vehicle of grace and redemption, the heroines establish the maternal genealogy as privileged over the paternal. Since these women are all touched or favored in some way by the divine, they become the conduit of passing on this divine privilege to their offspring. Fresne, Manekine and Hélène fit into a tradition of holy mothers that Anneke Mulder-Bakker discusses, the growing tradition of “holy mothers”—women who are not sainted because they are mothers, but are holy women who happen to be mothers—in the thirteenth century, stating that “entire genealogies of royal and princely lines were constructed around these holy mothers” (23). At the same time, Fresne, Joïe and Hélène also fit into a tradition of family romances where the feudal propaganda of continuing the family line concentrates on the maternal line. While women are typically denied control over land and wealth and are increasingly defined in terms of their masculine relatives—father, husband, sons—these women manage to carve out their own space, where they become independent forces of influence and autonomy. The heroines successfully use religious channels as the path to both spiritual and temporal transcendence, becoming a model of holiness while overcoming the limitations of their

109 Saint Anne, for example, was very popular in the thirteenth century as a model of feminine holiness. For more on Saint Anne, her popularity and cult, see Ashley and Sheingorn’s edited work *Interpreting Cultural Symbols: Saint Anne in Late Medieval Society.*

110 For more on models of holiness, the awareness of these models and maternal images associated with Church traditions, see Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages*; and the edition by Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Szell, *Images of Sainthood in Medieval Europe.*

111 For an in-depth discussion of the woman as the continuation of the family line, see Potkay and Evitt *Minding the Body: Women and Literature in the Middle Ages, 800-1500,* especially 66-67.
sex to be the source of restoration and stability among the social and political orders. They have brought a level of spiritual, and political, privilege to their lineages; they have secured the justification for their dynastic rule for generations to come.

These heroines are all at once victims, vessels, redeemers, relics, material, and sacred bodies. Their bodies are symbols of stability and rectitude, but also a source of trauma as the site of violence and injustice. It is through this violence that the protagonists find their path for their holiness, patiently enduring their suffering. They transform their suffering into a spiritual positive through their direct connection with Christ’s suffering. This suffering becomes the source for the heroines’ powers of redemption. Alternatively imagined, their selflessness simultaneously becomes their path to spiritual transcendence and a vehicle for agency. It is the way these women become autonomous beings with individual identities; the violence becomes the path through which they find a voice, carve a space for themselves and end with a privileged maternal genealogy. Their authors, whether intentionally or not, have created a path to both holiness and secular prestige through victimization, where an injustice originally outside the woman’s control is redefined and renegotiated for her benefit to gain spiritual and secular value and become a true agent in her own life. They are the embodiment of a perfect co-existence of spiritual and secular that allows women to live a life of religious activity while remaining in the secular sphere.
Chapter Four

The Ecology of Relics

This chapter explores the notion of divine touch within the secular texts *Le Roman de la Manekine, Ami et Amile, Le Moniage Guillaume, La Belle Hélène de Constantinople,* and *Robert le Diable*. I examine the instances in these texts where the divine intervenes to miraculously heal or restore an individual. The individuals or objects touched by the divine undergo a *relicization* process, wherein the living body becomes a relic due to its direct contact with the divine. As relics, these beings enter into arguably the most important material tradition of the Church, the cult of relics. This material tradition was privileged in both ecclesiastical and lay society, wherein relics were employed as objects of devotion, protection, and healing, serving as a material representation of a previously living holy person. These material bodies earn a privileged position among the religious elite as paragons of holiness and as religious material. Because they are touched directly by God, the individuals are designated as separate from the rest of the world in which they live, although the *relicized* bodies in these narratives often remain in the secular realm. In these texts, the touched bodies are often ‘inferior’ bodies—women, children and animals. It is in becoming materialized, then, that they transcend their secular cultural station in becoming the locus of divine touch and celestial privilege.

Scholars have noted that, albeit steeped in materialism, within medieval society relics are often treated and imagined as living objects; this mentality allows inanimate objects, such as bones, textiles, metal, wood, etc. to be considered not simply a tangible reminder of the saint, but

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112 Sargent-Baur convincingly dates the text to the second quarter of the thirteenth century in the introduction to Philippe de Remi’s *Le Roman de la Manekine*, 83-91.
an extension of the person him/herself.\textsuperscript{113} The relics encountered in this chapter are the literal interpretation of the medieval attitude toward relics, where the saints’ bones or objects with which they have contact are treated as if they are the saint him/herself. The bodies in this chapter are not remnants of deceased bodies, but rather actual living bodies that gain a secondary life as objectified relics. Considering relics in this way elevates nonhuman matter to the human realm, granting agency and vibrancy to inert material.\textsuperscript{114} Jane Bennett enlists this vein of thinking in her seminal work \textit{Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things}, wherein she highlights “the material agency or effectivity of nonhuman or not-quite-human things” through the exploration of \textit{Thing-Power}, “the curious ability of inanimate things to animate, to act, to produce effects dramatic and subtle” (ix; 6). Jeffrey Jerome Cohen advances a similar theory in his most recent work, \textit{Stone: An Ecology of the Inhuman}, in which he “plumbs the petric in the human and the anthropomorphic in the stone” (10). I discuss the texts in this chapter alongside Bennett’s and Cohen’s notions of the human as object, and, conversely, of the object as having human agency, establishing a network of human-object activity. I explore how the living entities become materialized, while the supernatural objects infiltrate the mortal realm. In taking on the life of an object the living bodies initiate an ecosystem of simultaneous living and non-living entities that function in both the natural/secular and supernatural/spiritual spheres. Becoming a material object grants agency and autonomy to the living bodies and elevates the objects to the status of human, enabling them to transcend their culturally constructed social and political stations: because they are relics, the living bodies are inscribed into a current, popular mode of devotion.

\textsuperscript{113} For example, Hahn, \textit{Strange Beauty: Issues in the Making and Meaning of Reliquaries, 400-circa 1204}, 8-9, states that “a relic is a physical object understood to carry the \textit{virtus} of a saint or Christ, literally "virtue” but more accurately the “power” of a holy person.” Geary, \textit{Living with the Dead}, 202, asserts that “relics \textit{were} the saints, continuing to live among men”; in \textit{Furta Sacra}, 202-203, he states that relics are "in a very real sense the saints themselves continuing to live among men... [R]elics concretely were described and treated as though they were the living saint.”

\textsuperscript{114} See Bennett, \textit{Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things}. I use her terminology of matter being vibrant or having vibrancy, indicating its efficacy in the human world.
and piety; they are seated among the religious elite and take on the privileged meanings and functions of relics: they have an intrinsic spiritual and economic value, bringing fame, repute, and wealth to a particular geographical site by attracting visitors and pilgrims; they serve as a source of authority for political leaders, granting legitimacy in the religious and secular realms; and they serve as intercessory and redemptive forces for those with whom they have contact. While materiality grants agency, it is the ecology, the living nature, of these relics that allows them to occupy a unique space where women, bodies, and animals as well as objects become sacred sites of devotion, divine power, political authority, and social stability capable of functioning both within and beyond the physical world in which they exist.

This chapter proceeds categorically. I will first discuss the human bodies that are divinely touched—Joïe, Hélène, Ami and Amile’s children; followed by the relicized animal bodies—the sturgeon in la Manekine and the horse in Le Moniage Guillaume; and finally, the supernatural entities that are inserted into the mortal realm—the armour and horse sent by God to the hero in Robert le Diable and the glove reliquary in la Manekine.

We have already seen in La Manekine that the titular heroine cuts off her own hand to avoid an incestuous relationship with her father, the king of Hungary, setting the entire tale into motion. Eventually, Joïe’s hand is miraculously reattached; what was not examined previously in this project is the fact that this reattachment results in the creation of four different relics: Joïe’s hand, since it is miraculously preserved and, moreover, the recipient of divine protection from another relic; the glove-shaped reliquary, arguably the most sacred object in the story, as it is mysteriously and divinely placed by the Virgin Mary (according to a heavenly voice) within the belly of the sturgeon; the sturgeon is a relic, emitting a sweet-smelling odour upon opening and,

115 See Geary, Living with the Dead and Furta Sacra. His works on relics and relic theft demonstrate the high spiritual and economic value accorded to relics throughout the central Middle Ages. See Bozóky for an in-depth discussion about how relics were used in the political realm as a source of royal authority.
as container of both the hand and glove-shaped relics, is also a reliquary; finally, Joïe’s entire body becomes a relic when the hand is miraculously reattached. At the moment of reattachment, Joïe’s body becomes the site of divine touch and healing, and her body becomes relicized. Joïe’s body does what all relics do: it recalls the life and suffering of the saintly person and takes on the common functions of relics at the time, bringing at once stability; religious and political authority, as well as renown, to a family dynasty; protection; and redemption.

As noted in the previous chapter, Joïe brings about the unification of three separate kingdoms- Scotland, Hungary, and Armenia- under one family; it is her body as a living relic functions as the source of authority and legitimacy in this new dynasty. The presence of her relicized body is essential as she travels in person to her inherited lands before returning to Scotland: in doing so, she is the visual evidence and the physical proof of God’s divine favour as a relic; to gaze upon her is to recall her saintliness and to be in proximity with the sacred. At the same time, she is a living, breathing individual that has returned to establish her family dynasty and directly rule the newly created kingdom. Having already earned favor with her subjects in Scotland, Joïe’s journey through Armenia and Hungary implicitly extends her protection to the entire kingdom as secular queen and source of divine touch. This divine favour carries with it the authority that brings peace to the three nations under a single ruler; this is particularly significant for Armenia, which was plunged into chaos and strife during Joïe’s absence: “Sans signeur avoient esté/ Et maint yver et maint esté;/ Si eut entra’aus grans

\[\text{116 See Hahn for a detailed study on the various uses and significances of reliquaries, including the fact that reliquaries are occasionally themselves regarded as at once reliquary and relic.}\]

\[\text{117 I use this term, which is my own to the extent of my knowledge, to denote the fact that the body is both a relic and still alive, a living relic still capable of performing human functions. I employ this term for the bodies—human, animal, supernatural— that are divinely touched in this group of texts.}\]

\[\text{118 See Geary, } \text{Living with the Dead, } 202: \text{ “[Saints] were available sources of supernatural power for good or ill, and close contact with them or possession of them was a means of participating in that power.”}\]
It is thus Joïe’s body that brings stability back to her maternal inheritance when the messenger, on behalf of the Armenian people, implores Joïe to return to her maternal land so the people can receive her and end the bitterness resulting from her prolonged absence:

“Car il sevent que revenue
Estes. Ice mout les conforte
Qu’il cuidoient que fuissiés morte,
Dont il menoient vie amere.
Car de par vostre bone mere
Devés avoir toute la tere.
Pour ce, vous sui ge venus querre.
Venés il vous recevront,
Et a vostre signeur feront
Joie, feste, hommage et honnour.
Or ne le metés en demour,
Car a veoir mout vous desirent ;
A envis de vous se consirent.” (8026-8038)

In restoring stability to her maternal inheritance, Joïe becomes the legitimizing object and representative voice for her family’s authority and reign; she, not her father or her husband, is the locus of convergence among the disparate nations united under one familial dynasty. As a

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119 See Moore, *Exchanges in Exoticism: Cross-Cultural Marriage and the Making of the Mediterranean in Old French Romance*, for a discussion about Joïe as the agent of uniting disparate kingdoms within the Mediterranean context. She discusses *La Manekine*, along with *La Belle Hélène de Constantinople*, to elucidate how the incest motifs in these stories bring to light the contemporary Mediterranean marriage politics, with these women directing their own exogamous unions to re-establish, in a fantasized way, the waning Western power within the Mediterranean and Eastern political spheres.
relic, Joïe brings about the unification of the newly established kingdom through her personhood—the restoration of her body and establishment of a sacred line—and provides the political legitimacy and stability through her authority as holy material (her ‘thing-ness’).  

Joïe’s body is thus the symbol for unification and for stability: when her body is fragmented, so are her family, the social order and political kingdoms; once her body is restored, healed, and stabilized, so are the familial, social and political problems that plague the kingdoms during her absence. Joïe grants a literal voice and autonomy to matter; as a non-relicized woman, Joïe is oppressed, silent, and victimized; it is only when she becomes a relic, a literal object, that she becomes an active force in the social, political, and religious arenas. Yet, as a living body, Joïe transcends a merely materialistic interpretation of her authority and privilege: it is the very nature of her multifunctional relicized body being alive that a powerful, unified kingdom is established; that she becomes a model of holiness; that she establishes a sanctified royal lineage to secure her family’s political power; and that she is able to become the site of spiritual, social, and political redemption. Joïe solidifies the restoration of the familial order by establishing a sacred genealogy, which legitimizes her family dynasty. Through her reproductive body, Joïe ensures the continuation of her family’s lineage, from both her father and mother’s lines, through Jehan as well as through the other children she bears, who all go on to become kings and queens:

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120 See Bozóky, La Politique des Reliques de Constantin à Saint Louis: Protection collective et légitimation du pouvoir. In the preface, Schmitt asserts that political power is underscored and legitimized by the spiritual power of a saint’s relics in the community: “Chaque fois qu’un pouvoir se constituait en un lieu donné du territoire, il lui fallait des reliques, traces matérielles et visibles d’un “patron” invisible …qui lui servait d’intercesseur permanent auprès de Dieu,”(3); while Bozóky states in her introduction about the lay attitude toward relics: “leur utilisation constituait un moyen exceptionnellement efficace d’accès au sacré, indispensable pour étayer, glorifier, voire légitimer toute autorité politique au Moyen Âge”(6).

121 See Bozóky 8, where she notes that during the emergence of new dynasties, relics were consistently used to legitimize royal power: “[L]ors de l’émergence de nouvelles dynasties—qu’il s’agisse de la maison de Saxe (futurs ‘ottoniens’), des Capétiens, des Plantagenêts, ou encore des rois d’Europe centrale, les reliques furent pour une part significative dans la légitimation surnaturelle du pouvoir royal”; and Klaniczay, especially chapters 5 and 6, where he discusses how medieval royal dynasties employed female cults to legitimize their authority. Thus, Joïe, similar to the historical Elizabeth of Hungary (1207-1231), is a female saint as well as relic, marking her as an undeniable authority for her familial dynasty as her sanctity becomes essentially an inheritable trait.
Et la roïne eut puis enfans
Pluiseurs, si com je sui lisans:
.II. filles eurent et .iii. fix,
Envers qui Dix fu mout bontix,
Car les filles furent roïnes,
Et tous jours vers Dieu enterines;
Et li troi malle furent roy;
Puis essaucierent bien la loy. (8519-8526)

Her children are born from a living relic: they are privileged not only for their political position as heirs to a vast kingdom that unites lands in the East and West, but additionally for their maternal parentage, becoming recipients of the divine touch bestowed upon Joïe by God and the Virgin Mary; Joïe successfully establishes a ‘hereditary sanctity’ for her descendants.122

Although Jehan is born before his mother becomes a relic, her body is already undergoing the *relicization* process (the penitential journey) due to her missing hand. Moreover, the author mentions that Joïe will be queen of both Hungary and Armenia for a short time, marking her, not Jehan or her husband, as the true heiress of her father’s land:

“Car de deus teres ert roïne
A brief tans, iceste roïne:
De Hongrie de par son pere,
d’Ermenie de par sa mere” (7229-7232).

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122 See Klaniczay, *Holy Rulers and Blessed Princesses: Dynastic Cults in Medieval Central Europe*, 229. I borrow his term ‘hereditary sanctity,’ of which he states: “It might be nearer the mark, thus, to see the late-medieval notion of hereditary sanctity as the manifestation of a new kind of dynastic/genealogic consciousness, though there was also the obvious prestige value of being able to boast several saints in the family.”
Her brief queenship in Hungary, while potentially subversive to the patriarchal system set forth at the beginning of the text, is, in this case, further evidence of the political authority that Joïe passes down to Jehan as the primary heir to the unified kingdom, backed by the religious authority of Joïe’s own *relicized* body. On the one hand, Joïe’s establishment of her dynastic legacy glorifies reproduction and motherhood, the culturally scripted roles assigned to a royal female figure. On the other hand, thanks to her sanctified, material body, she transcends these positions to become the privileged ancestor and initiator of a saintly genealogical lineage. Joïe becomes a powerful and prestigious agent, whose *relicized* body establishes a divinely privileged maternal line that ensures the continuation of her family’s influence and control. In favouring the maternal line, Joïe’s family tree recalls the Tree of Jesse, which establishes Christ’s mortal genealogy through his mother and serves as a model for legitimizing maternal ancestry while underscoring the increased interest in establishing powerful family trees during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Philippe de Remi positions Joïe as the initiator of a powerful line, backed by her own political and religious authority as a relic. Joïe, thus, earns a value for and emanating from herself, through her spiritual merits as a relic; her steadfast faith in God, particularly her faith in the Virgin Mary’s protection, is rewarded in her autonomous identity as a saintly secular personage who attains her own measure of power, independence and influence. Although Joïe is restored as a wife and mother, she is no longer valued *exclusively* for her reproductive abilities, nor is she reduced to being the intervening link to a more powerful masculine counterpart.

As asserted in the previous chapter, Joïe completes the final step for gaining total agency in her story when she cuts off her own hand. With this action Joïe initiates the *relicization* process; thus, her *relicized* body is the final stage of her autonomy. In transforming the once

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123 For a thorough analysis on the Tree of Jesse, the figures depicted, the texts that refer to it, and the development of genealogies starting in the twelfth century, see Guerreau-Jalabert, “L’Arbre de Jessé et l’ordre chrétien de la parenté.”
sexual objectification of her body by her father, the barons, and the corrupt clergy, she becomes the recipient of the respected devotional gaze upon her *relicized* body: to gaze upon her is to recall her saintliness and to be in proximity with the sacred. Joïe’s self-mutilation is a legitimate loophole to break free from the menacing familial and patriarchal chains that limit her mobility and attempt to turn her into a pawn in their political agenda.

As a relic, Joïe’s body is transformed into a literal object and enters into and functions within this material tradition of the cult of relics; she is inscribed into a current, popular mode of devotion and piety and is ascribed a spiritual value that places her among the religious elite. As such, Joïe’s body allows a unification of the spiritual and the secular. In the end, Joïe’s body is restored, but it is also changed; it is divinely touched and has thus transcended the mortal realm while remaining within it. It is through and upon her body that these two realms co-exist: she is a secular queen, divinely touched with spiritually granted, politically respected authority; her descendants inherit this divine privilege as they continue to reign in the temporal world. She is a model of holiness, whose body extends beyond its reproductive powers to become the key to redemption and salvation for herself and those around her. She is a model to follow and a relic that requires protection and reverence. She is the space of co-existence of spiritual and secular as a saintly queen, a model of perfection for women and men. She is the source of authority for a newly unified nation. Finally, she is a secular individual, as well as a woman, actively participating in the religious life, a growing desire for men and women during the thirteenth century. Joïe, as relic and redeemer, participates seamlessly and is lauded within both of these realms without betraying either. The co-existence of these spheres is thus essential for the stability of the nation, of the family and of the individual.  

124 Wrisley, in the abstract to his dissertation, “Hagiographic Devotion and Christian Historical Verse Narrative in Thirteenth-Century Romance: Philippe de Remi’s *Roman de la Manekine,*” focuses on the calendar markers in the
and actions were limited, the author grants a great measure of power, prestige, influence and real activity to his heroine, and he leaves his audience with an idealized model to emulate and follow. The author manages to bring a moral sense to a tradition of adventure story without creating a spiritual treatise (Wrisley “Violence et spiritualité” 573).

Hélène’s relicization is similar in nature to Joïe’s. The process is initiated when her arm is severed from her body and completed when it is reattached by her son, the future Saint Martin. It is at this moment that her body, like Joïe’s, becomes a sacred space, a bodily relic, the site of healing and miracle. As with Joïe, this implicates her body into the cult of relics, as an object of devotion and veneration; by undergoing this process of fragmentation and miraculous restoration, Hélène’s identity, though returning to its previous position as wife, mother, princess and queen, has also surpassed these temporal roles. When she is restored as a wife and mother, she returns to her former life, but she does not disappear into the background while the male stories take over. Instead, it is Hélène’s story, with its pinnacle in the healing moment that remains at the center of the text: it is Hélène’s body that provides meaning, embodying both the threat to society and the solution to this threat. Hélène, with her relicized body becomes the metaphor for the stability for all of Christendom in which vast, formerly pagan lands have converted; the Holy Land is under Christian rule; and new political kingdoms are being established.

Her body provides the justification for her family’s position of influence and power within this vast new realm, where her sons become the leaders of both worlds: Brice as the king of both England and Constantinople, and Martin as the saintly leader of the spiritual world as archbishop of Tours, succeeded by his nephew (Hélène’s grandson), the future Saint story, especially Holy Week and Easter; in doing so, he comes to a similar conclusion through different means: “the pious life of his protagonist Joïe, her marriage her court, and her children “resurrect” this-worldly values such as courtoisie, chevalerie, and clergie, which assure the sanctity of both couple and dynasty” (v).

125 The notion of conversion in La Belle Hélène will be explored further in the final chapter.
Brice. For both Joïe and Hélène, their suffering is validated when their bodies become materialized, granting them secular and spiritual agency and autonomy.

In *Ami et Amile*, the *relicized* bodies are those of Ami and Amile’s children, who attain these living material bodies through leprosy and voluntary sacrifice, respectively. Ami transforms from a highly regarded, respected knight into a diseased body repudiated by his wife, Lubias. This disease paradoxically incites both fear and longing, which situates Ami, as leper, as a site of suffering and vehicle of redemption. His *relicization* process begins when he is stricken with leprosy after having been warned by an angel that this fate would befall him if he went through with replacing Amile in the judicial battle. The process is completed when he is miraculously cured and his body is restored, transforming him into a divinely touched and healed *relicized* body. The children perform their sacrifice as a result of Ami’s leprosy, where their blood, according to the angel who appears to Ami, is the cure for his affliction. The children willingly sacrifice themselves, and their miraculously restored bodies become, like Ami’s cured one, sites of divine touch. As a result, leprosy is, in fact, a mutually beneficial affliction for both the leper and those around him. Leprosy as the locus of divine touch for Ami permits the author to insert the divine within feudal society, allowing the heroes to achieve spiritual transcendence without ever leaving the secular realm, and elevating the status of disadvantaged bodies—one diseased, the other, two children—beyond their imposed limitations.

Leprosy in the Middle Ages was thought to be highly contagious, making this disfiguring and fatal disease which, furthermore, lacked a cure, a source of great public fear. Seen as a very real threat to public health, anyone inflicted with leprosy was isolated from society, sent to hospitals, to leprosaria—places of seclusion that provided minimal care—, or religious houses.

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126 There was no actual cure, but certain recommendations or ‘medically’ endorsed treatments existed. For more on these recommendations and treatments, see Hamilton, *The Leper King and His Heirs: Baldwin IV and the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem* 254.
dedicated specifically for lepers to prevent its spread, a measure upheld by medical experts and theologians alike, as it was simultaneously a medical and spiritual affliction. As a medical condition it was debilitating for the physical body, and spiritually, it was a mark of infirmity of the soul, as it represented an outward manifestation of an inward transgression.\textsuperscript{127} Leprosy was at once a literal and metaphorical disease, both a secular and spiritual scourge. This only intensified the fear surrounding the leper as it showcased physical \textit{and} moral weakness. Ami, as leper, incites this type of public fear to the extent that his immediate family—his wife, Lubias, and his brothers—are so repulsed that they turn him away and deny him any charity. In exiling her husband to a hut outside the city walls, Lubias is adhering to the common practice of isolating the leper for quarantine; though her motives may be un-Christian, her remedy is socially sanctioned. Once stricken, Ami finds himself existing on the outskirts of society; he is no longer Ami the valiant knight, loyal husband, and feudal hero; rather, he is Ami the leper: marginalized, inferior, isolated, and feared.

Though the leper incited collective fear, he is also considered divinely touched, as leprosy is a punishment sent directly from God. Historian David Marcombe states that “leprosy was sometimes seen as a special mark of divine favour” and that there is actually a “‘positive’ image of leprosy…[because] lepers, by virtue of their sickness, ‘were seen as a category of the religious’ and…this was an attitude that was particularly prevalent in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries” (141). Their way of life almost mimics monastic life: removed from the rest of society and occupying a space between life and death, since monks are viewed as having one foot in the door to Paradise while still on Earth. But the leper’s state of limbo is unique in that he is considered already deceased, with no expectation of recovery or reintegration into society.\textsuperscript{128}

\textsuperscript{127} See Hamilton 245-6, for an explanation of how leprosy originally took on religious overtones. 
\textsuperscript{128} Hamilton 48.
While the monk is voluntarily removed from society to concentrate on higher spiritual pursuits, the leper is forcibly removed from society in order to live out his divine sentence as a living corpse. As art historian Christine M. Boeckl states: “[L]eprosy patients are defined by the curse of their illness. The imagery portrays the infected victims as completely isolated from families and having lost their place in society. With no hope for a cure, they can only aspire to a better life in the next world” (123). They may have no hope of recovery, but this is precisely what allows their full devotion to spiritual matters, elevating them to the ranks of other highly regarded religious men and women of the time.

This forced exile removes the leper from his secular life and sets him upon a new, spiritual path: in the text, Ami is forcibly removed from his duties as husband, father and lord of Blaye. He is granted two companions to accompany him, but his life is now consumed by his disease. The most important aspect of this disease is the viewable suffering upon his leprous body: it is this suffering that is partially responsible for the public fear; but it is also a period of purification that will lead the leper to heaven, and, as such, is the penance administered by God to the sinner. Ami’s affliction is thus a corporeal performance and proof of adherence to the newly sanctioned regulations of yearly confession and penance set forth by the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215. The disease speaks for the afflicted and is a forced confession, rendering both sin and penance visible for all to view, leer at, and recoil from. Ami’s leprosy reveals his sins to the public, and his suffering is sent directly by God as the penance toward the purification that leads to his redemption. Marcombe asserts: “Because leprosy became akin to a form of purgatory on earth, it ‘began to seem more like a privilege or mark of election than a curse.’

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129 It is interesting to note that this text is written around the time of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), where penance and Purgatory become focal points for the laity, promoted by the Church. These were notions that had existed long before Lateran IV, but it was at this council that the term ‘Purgatory’ was officially indoctrinated; it was also at this council that yearly public confession and penance were required from all Christian members.
Lepers who endured their affliction with fortitude were compared to Job, who was especially beloved by God; and in this way ‘leprosy begins as atonement… and ends as a state of grace’…”; this divine favor elevated the leper above religious men and women, since God guaranteed him the means to achieving the state of grace they sought in the monastery.

Marcombe continues:“‘For many, the leper was not simply elect of God: he was God, or at least an earthly reminder that, in putting on human flesh, Christ had become the most despised and rejected of men’” (8). In reality, the leper was not believed to be God; however, there was the belief that Christ took on the form and manifestation of a leper in certain miraculous narratives, establishing a privileged link between Christ and leprosy.

Herein lies the paradox of the leper: he is both sinner and Christ-like; separated from Christ through wrongdoing yet identified with Him through suffering; weak (both physically and spiritually) due to sin yet morally strong due to the penance; condemned to die, but saved by this death; feared by the public yet venerated for having been divinely favored. It is this paradoxical nature of leprosy that, while ostracizing its victims, also promotes them to a privileged position in both the religious and secular realms; the curse of the disease thus becomes an advantage. It is this suffering state, suspended between life and death, in which Ami exists for several years before making his way to Amile’s house. It is here that Ami’s divine touch and favor surpasses that of the typical leper in his privileged position; for it is here that Ami is miraculously healed with the blood cure. The children’s blood provides the substance for the baptism and rebirth of Ami, wiping away his transgressions from his previous life with their innocent blood. Ami is reintegrated into temporal society, but he has also transcended it as a divinely privileged relicized being. This catapults Ami into a category of religious favor beyond that of the typical leper. As a result, Ami remains separate from the rest of society; he is functioning again in the
real world, restored to his former feudal glory, yet he is also beyond the world in which he lives. Ami has become a living relic, one who has been two-fold divinely touched, being first stricken with, and then cured of, leprosy. He has received God’s divine grace and favor, and his spiritual influence can be seen in the secular realm, as evidenced by the author’s promotion of his tomb as a popular pilgrimage site.

Ami, through his leprosy, occupies a privileged position, and is highly regarded both secularly and spiritually. But the benefits that stem from his suffering are not limited to or within himself. Rather, leprosy provides a mutually beneficial relationship: while the leper receives care and compassion, the caretaker is afforded the opportunity to participate in the religious life and receive a privileged spiritual position for his exceptional devotion to the suffering individual, an action that mimicked Christ’s own ministry of tending to the sick. The fact that this time period saw an expansion of houses dedicated to St. Lazarus, the Lazarets, the very hospitals in which lepers were quarantined and cared for, lends credence to this reciprocal rapport. Moreover, since Christ was often referred to and depicted as the Suffering Servant, ministering to the suffering was akin to ministering to Christ himself. It is this occasion for Christian charity and generosity that incited the longing that accompanied the fear of leprosy. Those who administer to lepers are aware of the health risks, but the longing for spiritual elevation and, perhaps more importantly, proximity to the sacred, outweigh the fear.

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130 Boeckl, in *Images of Leprosy: Disease, Religion, and Politics in European Art*, comments on this notion, saying, for example: “Countless saintly men and women devoted themselves to the care of the leprous, kissing their feet and providing basic health care for them. History records many members of the English, French, German, and Hungarian nobility who were canonized as saints for their selfless dedication to caring for the leprous population” (45).

131 For more on the divided opinion among Christians about the theological significance of leprosy, see Hamilton 241-242.

132 Jesus states: “… ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me’”; and “… ‘Truly, I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me’” (Mathew 25:40 and 25:45).
Ami provides this opportunity to attain a higher level of holiness to both Amile and Amile’s children. Amile is first afforded an opportunity for charity as soon as Ami arrives at his house: Amile hears the leper’s rattle and, without knowing it is his dearest friend, orders his servant to bring him out food: [ll. 2681-2705]. Amile does not turn the leper away as Ami’s own wife and brothers had done. It is only after Amile sees the baptismal cup that he realizes the leper’s identity, after which he embraces Ami and welcomes him into his home, where he provides him with shelter, food, drink and comfort. His behavior toward Ami would have been sufficient to secure his saintly position in the Church, along with the myriad noble men and women who earned their veneration through care for lepers. Amile’s call for both Christian charity and loyalty to his friend are put to the test when Ami conveys the angel’s revelation about the cure: that Amile must murder both of his sons, capturing their blood in which to bathe Ami [ll. 2788-2810]. This sacrifice surpasses any standard form of Christian charity for caring for the sick, even that performed by canonized saints; it also surpasses the sacrifice of the martyrs, whose risk is limited to themselves. Amile’s sacrifice goes beyond sacrifice of the self to the highest degree of sacrifice, that of one’s children; he is being divinely instructed to give up something much more precious than his own life: his family line. By murdering his children, both sons, Amile is eliminating the guarantee that his lineage, his lands, his wealth, and his reputation will endure. He is being asked to sever the continuation of his legacy, which annihilates him to a greater degree than through the elimination of the self. This destabilization of his inheritance means failing in his feudal duties as he loses any potential social elevation and material gains through his son’s future marriages, and the passing of his lands become uncertain. He also fails in his religious duties: one of the principal expectations of a husband was to procreate, indoctrinate new members into the Church, and guarantee the continuation and
defense of the faith; thus, eliminating his progeny symbolically eliminates the continuation of the Christian community. Furthermore, in carrying out the sacrificial sentence, he is simultaneously breaking one of the Ten Commandments and committing a heinous crime. Thus, the notion of sacrificing his children goes beyond parental emotions: by annihilating his children, he is annihilating his family and its future as well as himself. By choosing to sacrifice his children, then, Amile is proving beyond any shadow of a doubt his dedication to his friendship with Ami as well as to an unforgiving form of Christian charity and adherence to God’s commands. Amile’s capacity for this level of charity stemming from Ami’s leprosy is rewarded with the restoration of his children who ultimately forgives the infanticide. This restores his lineage to an even greater degree, for it is now divinely touched.

Amile’s children occupy a unique position within this text: like their father, they benefit from Ami’s leprosy, wherein they demonstrate their Christian charity by giving up their life for the salvation of another; like Ami, they are miraculously healed and thus also directly touched by God. When Amile arrives at their room to murder them, the eldest boy wakes up; his initial fear is subdued when his father explains that he must collect their blood to heal Ami. The boy does not cry out or attempt to flee; instead he accepts his and his brothers’ fate and grants his father permission to sacrifice them [ll. 3000-3012]. The blood does indeed cure Ami, taking the ideal of tending to the leper to a higher degree, due to its extreme nature and effectiveness. Their sacrifice propels them beyond the saintly figure of caretaker to Christ-like: despite complete innocence, they are sentenced to death, a death they freely accept on behalf of sinners; moreover, after experiencing a very real death, they are restored to life, body and soul. Like Ami, the boys now occupy a rare place in the world: they are living both within and beyond the mortal realm, having transcended it and bearing the mark of divine favor. As divinely touched, they are also
living relics; they embody a sacred aura as the site of a miracle, and they extend this divine touch to their entire lineage, marking it spiritually, as well as feudally, privileged. They restore Amile’s lineage, initiating a sacred genealogy. The boys’ sacrifice profits more than just themselves, it renders them vessels of redemption for Ami and Amile: their blood has healed the leprosy, Ami’s sins are forgiven, and he is allowed to re-enter society, while Amile is forgiven the infanticide.

By redeeming Ami, the boys have now allowed all transgressions that lie at the heart of Ami’s leprosy to be wiped clean. Ami, like the boys, is a vehicle of redemption for those around him. Ami’s redemptive work is not as obvious or visual as the boys’; it is clear that Ami has been healed of leprosy, while his affliction works as a proxy, a penance done for the benefit of others, to forgive the transgressions committed by the women in the story. Ami’s wife, Lubias, belongs to a dubious lineage, being related to Hardré, the man who accused Amile and called for the judicial battle; on several occasions she slanders Amile to drive a wedge between the friends; and, when she discovers that her husband is stricken with leprosy, she is not content to simply quarantine him for health reasons: she denounces her marriage to him, publicly reveals his illness, has him exiled to a hovel outside the city walls, not allowing food to be taken to him and forbidding their son to visit him and, finally, she drives him away from his homeland entirely, only allowing two serfs to accompany him. After Ami is cured, he returns to Blaye and, though he reciprocates her treatment toward him by exiling her outside the city walls temporarily, he is quickly moved by pity and forgives her, inviting her back into the city and into his household. His forgiveness is essential for her: it is the only way that she will be accepted back into good standing in the town, while also allowing her back into the Christian community and restoring
her soul to communion with God. She may have rejected Christ by rejecting Ami, but Ami’s forgiveness of her has wiped this transgression clean.

The other woman in the story for whom Ami’s suffering acts as proxy for redemption is Belissant. Her sin is the source of all of Amile and Ami’s subsequent offences, including Ami’s leprosy sentence. Her sin is lust, which, uncontrolled, led her to seduce Amile during the night, pretending to be a chambermaid. Since Amile discovered that it was Belissant he had slept with after the liaison but before Hardé, who witnessed the event, went to the King, he was knowingly culpable of the accusation, rendering him unable to succeed in the judicial battle, which required Ami to fight in his place and swear the false marriage oath that brought on the leprosy as punishment. It was a traditionally held notion that leprosy was caused and spread by sexual activity; thus, it was a disease traditionally linked with sex and lust. Though Ami does not commit this sin himself, it is a direct result of it, initiated by Belissant, but enacted as well by Amile. Thus, it is fitting that he would be stricken with this illness. It is thus feminine lust that causes Ami’s transgression in both realms: in the secular realm, he has lied to his feudal lord by fighting under a false name and swearing an oath of betrothal while already married; in the spiritual realm, he has lied while swearing on sacred relics and, moreover, sworn an oath that, if upheld, would lead to bigamy, illegal in both spheres. He has managed to save his friend from inevitable defeat, embarrassment, and death, but has entered into his own cycle of secular and religious transgressions. The fact that God reveals the leprosy cure and allows him to recover is the proof of his divine absolution of not only his own transgressions, but everything that led up to the leprosy. Ami is thus a proxy for Belissant’s sin. As a result, when Ami’s leprous sores are wiped clean, wiping clean his sins, so are all the sins that led to his state of suffering, especially those surrounding sex and lust. Belissant’s lustful desire, forgiven through the penance
performed by Ami, allows her redemption as woman and mother through her now spiritually elevated family line.

This text deftly weaves the spiritual with the profane through the use of leprosy as divine touch. This divine affliction is the vehicle for suffering, charity, sacrifice and ultimate redemption not only for the leper himself, but for everyone around him. The central heroes, Ami and Amile, have made secular sacrifices that have merit and meaning in the religious world; they have proven their valor as feudal knights, their dedication to each other, and their capacity to embody, express and promote Christian ideals; ultimately, they have earned unsurpassed glory in both the spiritual and secular realms through their fidelity. What is remarkable is that the author places the divine entirely within the secular realm: the heroes do not take religious vows, seek out a holy hermit or donate to a religious organization; rather, the divine comes to them, and they achieve spiritual transcendence and a saintly reputation without ever leaving the feudal world.

Ami and Amile’s children, like Manekine and Hélène, serve as the vehicles of redemption for themselves and others. Their suffering is validated when they are divinely touched, and become religious material. Though they enter the material tradition of the cult of saints, they continue to perform their secular roles as wives, mothers, fathers, and children; their materiality privileges their familial lines and grants agency, both secular and spiritual, to each of them.

The next section considers animal bodies as locus of divine touch. Like the human *relicized* bodies, these animal bodies become at once material and living with both spiritual and secular value. Becoming material as relics, ironically, grants human agency to these animal bodies by equating their value with that of the human *relicized* bodies as well as through a transfer of humanness through physical contact with saintly human bodies; they are, thus, categorized along with saintly human bodies as holy material. Yet, they continue to function in
their animalistic stations even after transcending the mortal realm, confirming the duel nature of the living and sacred materialized bodies.

The sturgeon in *La Makekine* begins its *relicization* process when it swallows the severed hand after it falls into the river. Despite being a reliquary at this moment, the sturgeon continues to perform two significant and distinctive animalistic functions: traveling via waterways and becoming part of a significant feast as food. The fish transports the two relics within its body to Rome via the naturally connecting waterways from its starting point in Hungary, enabling the unification of Joë’s body. The sturgeon establishes geographical connections with its beginning and end points, which parallels the vast sea journey that Joë herself undertakes; her fractured body, then, simultaneously travels through both the Eastern and Western seascapes of Christendom, with the journey culminating at the institutional center of Western Christianity. With its connection to the water and its role in the text to bring about the rebirth of the heroine through her bodily reunification, the sturgeon is symbol for and reminder of baptism. It is the reattachment of the hand that allows Joë to be reborn; the sturgeon is thus the vehicle for Joë’s rebirth and thus symbolic baptism as a *relicized* body with her new, autonomous identity. Aside from sacramental evocations, the fish denotes biblical symbolism: the New Testament cites several miracles performed by Jesus involving fish, while in the early years of Christianity, the fish becomes the symbol for Jesus himself. In addition to biblical imagery, several hagiographic legends exist that feature fish swallowing a key piece of material evidence that eventually exonerates the accused woman, as with Saint Brigid and Queen Languoreth; or saints

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133 A few examples of biblical imagery of fish include Jesus calling his disciples to follow him as ‘fishers of men’ (Mark 1:16-18 & Matthew 4:19; Luke 5:10); and the story of the five (or seven) loaves and two fishes that miraculously feed the large crowd (Mark 6:38-43; John 6:11; Matthew 15:34). The fish became a symbol for Jesus early in the Christian tradition as a secret symbol among early Christians and as an acrostic from the Greek word for fish, “ichthys.”
preaching to and communicating with fish, as with Saint Anthony of Padua.\textsuperscript{134} The fish in its animalistic state, then, already enjoys an intimate rapport with biblical, theological and hagiographic tradition. This sets a precedent for the sturgeon in \textit{Manekine} to become the miraculous container and protection for the wrongly exiled heroine that becomes, upon rediscovery in the well in Rome, the evidentiary proof to clear Joë of any previously suspected misdeed that arose as a result of the missing hand. As in the hagiographical accounts, the fish serves as an intercessory being that holds the evidence for a prolonged duration, waiting for the critical moment to present the proof that is held inside its body. While the hand is expelled from the sturgeon prior to its discovery, the glove reliquary is found inside, proving the hand resided there during its separation from the body, and that the Virgin Mary is/was present in this fish to protect the integrity of the heroine.

The second crucial animal function that the sturgeon performs after its \textit{relicization} is as food. The sturgeon is served to the guests at the papal feast following the Maundy Thursday service. As a central feature of the celebratory meal, the sturgeon occupies the natural realm of food and feasting: it performs the basic function of providing sustenance as a meal. In a secular sense, the fish is part of the foodscape that makes up part of the larger banquet and allows for the communal and political exchange involved with feasting. Since the sturgeon was traditionally considered a royal fish, reserved for the highest ranks of society, it is delineated as privileged

\textsuperscript{134} St. Brigid protected a woman from a nobleman who entrusted her with a silver brooch, but secretly threw it into the sea in order to charge her with stealing it so he could take her as a slave; the woman sought refuge with Brigid’s community, and one of her fishermen hauled in a fish which, when cut open, proved to have swallowed the brooch. The nobleman freed the woman, confessed, and submitted to Brigid. With respect to St. Kildegurn, more popularly called Mungo, Queen Languoreth of Strathclyde was suspected of infidelity by her husband; King Riderch demanded to see her ring, which he claimed she gave to her lover, but, in reality, he had thrown into the River Clyde. Faced with execution, she appealed to Mungo for help, who ordered a messenger to catch a fish in the river; upon opening the fish, the ring was miraculously inside, allowing the Queen to clear her name. For the account of St Anthony of Padua preaching to the fishes, see Rinehart’s \textit{The Little Flowers of St. Francis of Assisi}, Chapter XL.
food. This privilege and royal food status is confirmed through its contact with two separate queens: Joïe, Queen of Scotland, Hungary, and Armenia; and the Virgin Mary, Queen in Heaven. The sturgeon fulfils its socially constructed role by becoming food at a royal feast; yet, as an object, it transcends this banal function as a conduit of spiritual transcendence. It is through this animalistic function of providing food at the feast that the sturgeon is able to provide sustenance for those present at the feast.

This natural, though mundane function of the sturgeon is complicated because the sturgeon is also itself a relic and reliquary. As a reliquary, the sturgeon is an intermediary object that transmits the salvific powers of both Joïe and the Virgin Mary to the diners at the papal feast who partake in consuming the sturgeon. As a contact relic, whose status is confirmed by emitting the sweet-smelling odor upon its opening, the sturgeon transmits its own salvific powers through consumption. Thus, the meal becomes a vehicle of spiritual transcendence for all those who consume it as food. Those who partake in the papal feast receive divine sustenance as a source of salvation, similar to receiving the consecrated Host during the Mass, where food (bread) becomes the medium for Christ’s redemptive powers by consuming the sacramental Eucharist. Because the Eucharist is considered the literal body of Christ through

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135 For more on the historical status of the sturgeon as royal fish in medieval Europe, both in Hungary and elsewhere in Europe, see Clapham, *The Medieval Fenland*, 28-29.
136 Hahn asserts: “reliquaries in their essence are mediations between relics and audiences” (9).
137 “Quant fu ouvers [le pisson],/ trestuit sentirent/ Une odeur si bonne et di douce/ Qu’a chacun le sien cuer adouce” (7646-7648). Emitting a sweet-smelling odour is a common motif that demonstrates a person’s saintliness or that a thing has been divinely touched. Concerning contact relics, Bynum in *Christian Materiality* asserts that they are holy matter, stating: “The faithful revered not only bodies and body parts but also pieces of cloth, dust, water, flowers, or herbs that had touched the saints or their tombs” (136). The sturgeon falls into this category of holy matter as a consequence of touching both Joïe and the Virgin Mary glove reliquary.
138 Bynum points out that relics were equated with the Eucharist, allowing the sturgeon relic to be compared directly to the Eucharistic Christ: “Although they have been treated by modern scholars as if they were different genres, relics, images, and the Eucharist were revered by the medieval faithful in similar ways—accompanied by incense and candles, displayed in cases of crystal and gems, bowed before, and prayed to” (126-7).
transubstantiation, every consecrated wafer is both holy material and a living body\textsuperscript{139}; those who consume the host consume a relic and a living body and benefit from its salvific powers.\textsuperscript{140} The Eucharist, then, is at once a literal and figurative meal: it is sustenance for the body as nutrition and for the soul as divine substance. Likewise, those who consume the sturgeon consume a relic whose salvific power comes directly from the Virgin Mary as well as from the saintly Joïe and its own position as relic/reliquary. As with the Eucharistic celebration, those who witness and consume the sturgeon become part of an interactive, food-based, transformative miracle that invites communal participation rather than simple passivity. By consuming the fish, the diners not only benefit from the redemptive force of the 	extit{relicized} food, they become reliquaries themselves as vessels that house the 	extit{relicized} sturgeon. The sturgeon provides the occasion for secular individuals to encounter the divine, experience divine touch, witness a miracle and undergo a mystical experience while remaining in the temporal realm. By transforming food into spiritual material, the author presents the sturgeon as the vehicle through which individuals come into contact with the divine, the path to spiritual transcendence for those who eat it. Ultimately, the author allows secular individuals to become an extension of divine material and to actively participate in the religious life, a growing desire among the laity at this time. The sturgeon’s function as food becomes a privileged one as the fish takes on the role of vehicle through which the guests at the feast come into direct contact with divine material. The originally banal meal

\textsuperscript{139} Bynum notes that by the time of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), which predates this text, transubstantiation as an explanation of Eucharistic change was required (157).

\textsuperscript{140} Bynum states: “A third type of holy matter, the Eucharist—understood to be Christ’s body and blood present to the faithful in every mass—was treated throughout the Middle Ages as if it were a bodily relic of Christ. Although theologians and ecclesiastical authorities were sometimes dubious about the practice, consecrated wafers were buried in altars, along with and in place of relics. They were used in healings and to authenticate oaths” (139).

Concerning the transformation of the bread into the literal body of Christ, Bynum points out: “[A]ll orthodox theologians agreed that the holy did reside in matter. After consecration, the Eucharistic elements were not only signs or mementos. They were Christ: Christ human and Christ divine” (158); and: “The bread and wine of communion were—so Christians were taught—the actual body of God available for incorporation into the adherent’s own body, even if they only rarely appeared as flesh and blood” (126).
thus becomes a spiritual meal that takes place, significantly, on Maundy Thursday, the annual religious commemoration of the Last Supper which the mass ritualistically recreates during every Eucharistic consecration, further underscoring the link between these two spiritual feasts.

The sturgeon is elevated from its inferior animalistic station by becoming religious material; as a holy object, it gains divine agency; and its proximity to two holy women allows it to gain a secular and spiritual value equal to that of Joïe and the glove reliquary. As both a mode of relic/reliquary transport, including the transportation of itself, and as consumed food the sturgeon both enacts and transcends its natural functions. It acts and is treated as a fish: it swims through waterways from one destination to another; it is consumed by larger beings for sustenance. Yet, these natural functions also register in the religious realm: as the sturgeon swims it aids in the miracle of Joïe’s hand, by housing the hand relic and glove reliquary; as food it passes along the divine protection and power of the reliquary to the guests. It is no longer an inferior being in the natural ecosystem as spiritual food; it is now relicized, redemptive, an extension of both Joïe’s and the Virgin Mary’s salvific powers while becoming itself holy material while maintaining its cultural significations. The sturgeon in La Manekine, like the heroine, has both human and material agency, cultural functions, and experiences its own spiritual transcendence while also being the vehicle of transcendence for others.

In Le Moniage Guillaume, William tears off the haunch his horse to fight off and defeat the robbers who ambush him as he returns to the monastery after purchasing the fish requested by the abbot. Once William emerges victorious, he prays to God, and the horse’s leg is miraculously restored, marking the horse’s animal body as a site of divine touch [ll. 1705-1708; 1715].
Though it is a relic, the horse retains its major cultural function as a work horse and form of transportation to carry William back to the monastery. As with the sturgeon that continues to swim and act as food and the Queens who continue to rule and reproduce, the horse continues its banal secular functions even after *relicization*. And yet, even this secular function makes an allusion to biblical functions: the horse in the text is called a ‘sommier’, which is the term to delineate both a pack horse and an ass, alluding to the episode in which Jesus Christ rides into Jerusalem on an ass.¹⁴¹ In this way, the humble animal is equated with the humble, non-noble animal chosen by Jesus to make his triumphant entrance into Jerusalem; just as the donkey on which Jesus rides becomes glorified by transporting Jesus, so William’s horse/ass transcends its original lowliness through its proximity to William and its own position as relic.

The horse’s status is raised not only because it transports the future Saint William; its status becomes elevated when William transforms the horse into a weapon of warfare. The animal’s secular value augments when William tears off its leg to employ it as a weapon. With this action, the animal enters the secular world of warfare; while the horse plays a crucial role in medieval warfare, this animal enters this realm as material, the defense mechanism akin to a club that allows William to defeat his enemies in the ambush. The violence done to the animal’s body not only initiates the *relicization* process, it allows the animal to move up in the secular hierarchy, bypassing the noble war horses to become an actual weapon, an extension of William as he wards off his attackers, replacing his former sword to denote his nobility and prowess. It is this animal that becomes the new symbol of William’s valor, as both a warrior and as a religious figure, surpassing its original banal status and functions. This intimate connection between William and the horse continues when William miraculously restores the horse’s body, denoting it as the site of a miracle; as such, the horse is now a relic, having been touched by God. It is also

a contact relic, having prolonged physical contact with the future Saint William, who is actually the one that performs the healing miracle. This scene recalls a hagiographic episode meant to prove the saintliness of the hero by showcasing his ability to harness divine power.\footnote{While this particular scene does not appear in the \textit{Vita}, it follows the pattern of a typical Saint’s Life, where miraculous feats justify the central figure’s saintliness.} There is a transference of power from William to the horse; when William prays and heals the horse, he channels both his own saintliness, his transcendence of humanity, along with his humanness into the nonhuman animal. Because William is sainted in the end, the horse is both a contact and full relic, like the sturgeon. The horse is living and nonliving, animal, weapon, transportation, relic. It is an extension of William and of his sanctity; although he is not named as a saint until the end, when his bones are called relics and his tomb is connected with healing miracles, it is his life that would lead to his sanctity, and thus his holiness is already present at the time he has contact with this horse.

While the horse’s animal body is like the sturgeon’s by nature of its animality, its experience is similar to Joïe’s, Hélène’s and Amile’s children’s, in which its physically fragmented body is restored to its original state. The horse shares in the experience of violence to the body as process of \textit{relicization}, where bodily suffering and fragmentation are necessary to enter into the material realm of religiosity as incontestable proof that these inferior bodies merit spiritual transcendence. The horse, then, is granted agency through its restoration: this animal is not discarded, abandoned (or eaten) when it can no longer perform its cultural function; rather, it is miraculously restored, proving its importance within the narrative. Once it is restored, it becomes also divine material, justifying the violence as it becomes holy material but also creating a privileged spiritual and secular space for the extraordinary animal.
These animals function in two of the most common ways medieval people would have classified animals: as food and property (Salisbury 7). Yet they have both surpassed being reduced exclusively to these roles. They manage to perform those cultural functions in the secular realm while attaining a level of transcendence that catapults them into the religious elite. What the sturgeon and horse manage to do, additionally, is destabilize the human experience and the assumed superiority in the human-animal hierarchy. These animals, as religious material, experience the same divine privilege as their human counterparts, in fact transcending human experience. This transgresses the limits of where humanity ends and animality begins, blurring the notions of what separates these two categories. While animal symbolism persists, these animals are not symbolic, they are true agents in the story, given human consideration and granted secular (economic) and spiritual value; they are both intercessory links to a human holy individual while being also entirely holy themselves. These texts project a close relationship between animals and humans in which agency can be transferred, humans are dependent on animals and the divine can be expressed on and through animal bodies. It shifts the traditional boundary that separates these two categories, rendering it ineffective and invisible. As loci of divine touch, humans and animals exist on the same plane, in the same space, as equal in their capacity for spiritual transcendence and pass on salvific powers beyond themselves.

Occupying an intermediate space between the living and non-living realms is the horse that God sends to Robert via an angel in Robert le Diable. As a living being sent directly from

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143 See chapters 1 and 2 in Salisbury, The Beast Within: Animals in the Middle Ages, for an in-depth exploration of animals as property and food, respectively.
144 Salisbury notes that during the twelfth century, there is a shift in how animals were viewed, and a breakdown of the rigid distinction between human and animal begins (7-8). These texts showcase this shifting attitude that is taking place during this time period.
145 See Salisbury 82: She states that by the thirteenth century, animals are used to give examples for human behaviors. This could partially explain the humanness attributed to the sturgeon and William’s horse, however, these animals are not acting as humans; rather, they are the actual extensions of the humans (and divinity) with which they have contact.
heaven, this horse in its inception has already surpassed its temporal cultural station. While it still performs this ordinary function by transporting Robert in battle in which he is repeatedly successful, it is never reduced to its animalistic station. Its bright white appearance sets it apart as a supernatural animal whose quasi-divine quasi-animalistic position recalls the dual character of Jesus Christ who, according to Church doctrine, was both entirely human and divine in nature. Unlike William’s horse that receives divine touch through the personage of William, Robert’s horse, being already divinely created, transfers its supernatural power to Robert. Robert, then, is transferred both supernatural and animalistic agency. Because Robert’s penance required self-abnegation to the point of animalism among the dogs, the animal agency he receives from the horse actually elevates his position as a human; it reintroduces him to the realm of warfare, it marks his nobility and signals his mastery over his diabolical nature so that he is able to reenter the Christian and human community as an exemplar of holiness.

Since the horse is sent directly from God, it, as well as Robert’s armor and the glove-shaped reliquary in *La Manekine*, does not undergo a *relicization* process, as its entirely supernatural character denotes it as a relic from the outset. Though entirely supernatural, the horse, as an animal, is a simultaneous living and non-living being. On the other hand, the armor and glove reliquary do not transfer living agency to those with which they have contact; rather, these non-living objects are entirely material in nature. As a result, they transfer their ‘thing-ness’, which is their divinity, to the living beings with which they have contact and receive a reciprocal transfer of human agency. They exhibit what Jeffery Jerome Cohen refers to as “nonhuman agency” to the extent that they are objects that exhibit a disruptive power within the

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146 At the time of Robert’s composition, the official position of the Church with respect to Jesus’ divinity and humanity had been in place for several centuries; at least since the Council of Nicea in 325. Despite official dogma, the contemporaneous heretical Albigensian belief system denied Jesus’ humanity, as all matter was considered evil, resurrecting the debate and defense of Jesus’ nature and essence.
These objects are disruptive in their role as intermediaries: the horse and armor are interjected into the world to protect Robert—both his physical body and his identity—while the reliquary protects the severed hand from the natural processes of decomposition and digestion. It is the disruptive nature of these objects that changes the character of the bodies with which they have contact, turning them into conduits of God and Mary’s salvific power. But, through their contact with living beings, their original nonhuman agency is transformed to include human agency. Robert’s armor provides a second level of divine power that channels into the person of Robert as he enacts his knightly prowess to defend the kingdom and Christianity against the invading Saracens. As with the horse, the supernatural power of God’s arms flows into Robert. A secular knight’s arms, armor and horse were considered an extension of the knight while in battle; in this way, the divinity of the armor and horse become an extension of Robert himself, enacting the transference of divine and ‘thing-ness’ into Robert, initiating his own relicization process that is confirmed at the close of the narrative when is sainted and his body, his bones, have indeed become officially recognized relics. On the other hand, the armor itself receives the human agency transferred by Robert.

While Robert’s horse and armor disappear from the narrative after the battles have ceased, the glove-shaped reliquary discovered in the belly of the sturgeon in Manekine has a known trajectory: after discovering this heaven-sent object within the belly of the fish, the Pope transports it to Saint Peter’s where, the author states, it may still be present if it has not been lost through our sins: “Encore est a Romme veüe,/ Se par nos pechiés n’est perdue” (7661-7662). This viewable object extends Joïe’s redemptive power and influence through a visual medium: it recalls her life, facilitating the spread of her story of suffering and redemption beyond her own

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147 Cohen, in Stone: An Ecology of the Inhuman, argues that ordinary objects gain agency when they exhibit a disruptive power (v). While the objects I feature are not necessarily ‘ordinary,’ Cohen’s reasoning is, nevertheless, applicable.
kingdom; by remaining in Rome it is available to all visitors, pilgrims, and travellers who pass through Saint Peter’s. This reliquary confirms her saintly status as an individual favoured and protected directly by God and the Virgin Mary as well as within the institutional Western Church in Rome, where the reliquary is housed. The reliquary becomes an intercessory object linked directly to Joïe to which all who view it can implore divine aid; however, it also retains the dynamic power of its creator: the living presence of the Virgin Mary exists within it, extending her redemptive powers to all come into contact with it.\(^{148}\) The supernatural character of the reliquary is affirmed by the heavenly voice and evidenced by the extraordinary craftsmanship with which the reliquary is made.\(^{149}\) The fact that it is impossible to identify the materials that comprise it or how it materialized in the fish’s stomach advances the reliquary beyond a materialistic interpretation; and yet, as a tangible, physical object inserted into the natural realm—it resides within the living body of the sturgeon—it cannot be separated from the materialistic world. Considering this relic/reliquary as not only a representation of its creator, but a literal extension of her, the Virgin Mary herself becomes inserted into the mortal world. This grants the reliquary human agency from the Virgin Mary, who, according to Church tradition was assumed, body and soul, into Heaven; as well as the human agency from the hand and

\(^{148}\) Bynum notes that “The faithful also revered contact relics of Christ and Mary (for example, pieces of Mary’s mantle or straw from the manger at Bethlehem) and effluvial (that is, exuded) relics (such as Mary’s milk). Indeed, associated relics were particularly important in the case of Jesus and Mary, because their actual bodies were assumed to be unavailable, having been taken up into heaven” (137). This reliquary surpasses even these relics because it is not a remnant from her mortal life left on Earth; rather, it is produced in and sent from Heaven, just like the armor and horse in Robert.

\(^{149}\) The heavenly voice reveals the existence of the Virgin Mary reliquary: “Vous trouverés en sa mulete/ En la guise d’un gant pourtrete/ Le liu ou la mains a esté/ Par maint yver, par maint estê/ Lueques a la Virge Marie/ Gardee la main de s’amie./ Bien en devés grant joie faire/ Car molt i a biau saintuaire” (7601-7608);“L’Apostole prist la mulete/ Qui la main avoit, bele et nete;/ S’a dedens la forme trouvee/ Ou la main s’estoit reposee./ Faite ert par itel maiestire/ Quë il n’est nus qui sace dire/ De coi ele est n’en quelle guise/ Ele puet estre lueques mise./ Mais mout par averd douce oudeur/ Et si ert de mainte couleur” (7649-7658).
The glove reliquary is more than a supernatural signifier: its human agency carves out a similarly unique space of simultaneous living and non-living, or, more specifically, beyond living, that Joïe and the sturgeon occupy.

The transference of power that recurs throughout this chapter produces distinct ecosystems that are created as a result of the relicization processes in which relicized bodies, living and non-living entities, exist in an interdependent network. In the case of La Manekine, Joïe initiates this network when she cuts off her hand, creating the initial hand relic that requires subsequent relic/reliquaries: the hand is swallowed by the sturgeon, who protects the hand but also functions to transport it from its point of origin in Hungary to its final destination in Rome; within the sturgeon, a layer of divine protection is inserted by the Virgin Mary to prevent decay. Whereas Joïe and the sturgeon are living beings that transform into material through their relicization, the Virgin Mary reliquary undergoes an inverse process, where, despite being inanimate and supernatural, it attains human agency through insertion into the natural and biological system as it evokes the memory of the living bodies of Joïe and the sturgeon. It receives its salvific power directly from the Virgin Mary, then transfers that power to two different living beings, the sturgeon and Joïe’s hand. In becoming living objects and vibrant matter, these relics surpass the traditional patriarchal hierarchy by becoming equally prestigious religious and political instruments as vehicles for redemption and political legitimation.

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150 See Courth, “Assumption of Mary,” 33-36. Although the doctrine of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary was not official dogma until 1950, the feast and recognition of her bodily assumption into Heaven has been part of Church and theological history since at least the sixth century in the East and the eighth century in the West.  
151 See Montroso, “Human,” 40: “We need to elevate inanimate objects to the same status within the multiplicity of discursive contexts that is normally reserved for the human, instead of always objectifying non-human things.” He explores the human from the position of music in Chaucer’s The Prioress’s Tale, but this notion applies to this text as well, where the inanimate armor and Virgin Mary reliquary are elevated, granted agency and pass from objectified non-human thing to the discourse reserved for the human.  
152 Here I am considering Joïe’s hand as a living entity, because it is part of a larger, living body. Additionally, since the hand never decays, it does, in fact, remain living, even when separated from the rest of its body.
When Hélène’s arm is removed and attached to her son, it creates an ecosystem between material mother and son, extending to all those who come into contact with Brice, whose originally bestowed name, Bras, evokes this ecosystem as he is named for the severed arm. While Brice transports this piece of his mother throughout the majority of the text, his brother, Martin, performs the reattachment miracle, which invites him into the relic network as the miraculous healer chosen by God; this, in turn, confirms his status as a saint. In *Amie et Amile* the ecosystem is a complex network that consists of the weak bodies of Ami and the children, as well as Amile, who initiates the children’s *relicization* process and bathes Ami, which completes his transformation into a relic. Amile is thus the connecting point between *relicized* bodies. Their ecosystem is one of charitable exchange that, in the end, includes the women through their redemption. The ecosystem in *Moniage Guillaume* is a closed system, existing between William and the horse, as William initiates and completes the horse’s *relicization* himself and solidifies his own holiness in the process. The ecosystem in *Robert le Diable* extends to all who witness him as the white knight in battle. Of particular importance is the Emperor’s daughter who witnesses, on all three occasions, the angel bestowing the horse and armour upon Robert. As a privileged member of this network, she becomes the key witness in revealing the truth of Robert’s role in the battles. While she remains mute for the majority of the text, it is her inclusion in this ecosystem that alleviates her affliction, as her first words announce Robert’s position as the true savior of the kingdom; this marks the fulfilment of Robert’s penance.

In the end, these relics do not exist merely among and for themselves: they insert themselves into a specific community and invite the participation from a reciprocal audience. The audience is a necessary piece of the ecosystem to keep the memory of the divinely touched individuals alive, spreading their influence beyond the confines of geography and time, rendering
these relics timeless. Throughout these texts, the relics employ the full spectrum of human senses to engage with their audience—seeing healing miracles; hearing heavenly voices; smelling the sweet odour of relics; tasting the sturgeon; and touching through various methods of physical contact, including riding divinely touched horses and wearing celestial armour.\(^{153}\) The audience, as a result, enters into the relic ecosystem, adding another layer of complexity and mutual dependence, since the audience supports and sustains the legitimacy, prestige and value (spiritual as well as economic) of these relics. This network dissolves the separation between the temporal and religious realms: the relics are religious material that exist and function in both the spiritual and secular realms as the source of authority for newly unified nations, the source of transference of human and nonhuman agency and the vehicle of various redemptions. As living entities, these relics move, engage, communicate, and participate in their contemporary world; as a complete system, the relics integrate a secular audience into the spiritual realm, allowing for active participation in the religious life by the lay audience, a growing desire for men and women during the thirteenth century.

In exploring the ecology of relics, what emerges is not only how a thing can become animate or a body can be considered a thing, but how the two classifications co-exist: the ecosystem of living relics occupies a unique space of simultaneous living and non-living, demonstrating the fluid nature of animate and inanimate matter in this text.\(^{154}\) The authors demonstrate how \textit{relicized} bodies redefine the classification of living beings and objects: a \textit{relicized} body that becomes a religious object can maintain its living/human status and functions

\(^{153}\) For example, in \textit{La Manekine}, the diners touch the sturgeon both externally and internally through ingestion; the Pope touches the glove reliquary; anyone in direct contact with Joë would have physical contact with her.

\(^{154}\) See Bynum, \textit{Christian Materiality}, 30, where she describes how natural philosophers of the Middle Ages viewed non-living matter as organic and alive; and how holy objects “referred beyond themselves or triggered a power other than their own,” implying a larger ecosystem of miraculous matter. She discusses this notion of fluidity between living and non-living, holy and banal objects.
while no longer being reduced to or valued only for these functions; and granting agency to inhuman objects elevates them to be on par with humanity. In doing so, the authors reimagine both humans and things as one in the same, dissolving the imaginary line that typically separates these two categories. By being both living and material bodies, these relics have taken an essential step toward ecological sensibilities by disrupting the traditional human-object hierarchy: it is ‘thing-ness’ that gives these relics legitimacy and prestige—in fact, for ‘inferior’ beings, like women, children and animals, entering into the material world is, ironically, what ultimately grants them autonomy, agency, and full human consideration—while their humanness allows them to function in the physical world as superior beings. I conclude by returning to the ecocritical scholars invoked at the beginning of this chapter: Bennett and Cohen work toward a common goal of neutralizing the hierarchy that places the human above the material. These texts accomplish this mission by establishing a relationship between humans and objects, where disparate woman/human, animal and supernatural bodies communicate, equalizing them on a horizontal plane by allowing humanness and ‘thing-ness’ to co-exist within a web of dependency and eradicating the need for a vertical hierarchy of human-object subjugation.\(^\text{155}\) In a move toward ecocritical sensibilities, these texts present bodies that are both human and thing, living materials that take on multiple functions in multiple milieus, having attained transcendence, autonomy and agency within the narratives.

\(^{155}\) See Bennett 10. She states: “to begin to experience the relationship between persons and other materialities more horizontally, is to take a step toward a more ecological sensibility.”
Chapter Five

Conversion

The final chapter focuses on the notion of conversion in the fourteenth-century narrative *La Belle Hélène de Constantinople*. This text details the religious conversion of several central characters, both men and women. While several conversions occur within this text, it does not read like a traditional or conventional conversion narrative; indeed, while several different conversion experiences play out within this narrative, they are by no means reflective of all, or even typical, conversion experiences. Instead, this chapter demonstrates how these conversions are, in fact, unusual in their mission and religious significance.

Karl F. Morrison, in *Understanding Conversion* as well as in his work on specific conversion narratives, *Conversion and Text: The Cases of Augustine of Hippo, Herman-Judah, and Constantine Tsatsos*, along with James Muldoon in his edited collection of essays *Varieties of Religious Conversion in the Middle Ages*, lay the foundation for the subject of conversion, in which they both posit that conversion in the central Middle Ages is not a simple, immediate or easily understood notion. Rather, there is a wide range of conversion experiences; what they all have in common is their transformative nature. Morrison discusses Augustine, whose experience becomes the model for conversion par excellence in the central Middle Ages; of this most famous conversion in the *Confessions*, Morrison states: “In the most general sense, conversion meant, for Augustine, one person’s turning toward another. Turning toward (conversion) and turning away from (aversion) were two aspects of the same act” (*Conversion and Text* viii). Each text in this project involves some type of transformative experience that I acknowledge as a conversion experience. In the end, these conversions blend secular concerns and values with spiritual ones, under the guise of a wholly religious experience.
While varying forms of conversion exist, I concentrate on interreligious conversion within this text to unpack the various meanings of converting to Christianity from a non-Christian religion. In undertaking interreligious conversion in *La Belle Hélène de Constantinople*, a text in which a range of conversions take place, we cannot fail to note that there is a lack of an interior process of transformation that occurs with respect to each convert. There is neither interior dialogue, nor learning about Christ through Scripture or from a religious leader, nor inspiration from witnessing a miracle; in fact, the central miracle of the text—the reattaching of Hélène’s hand—occurs only after all the conversions have taken place. Instead, it is through feudal prowess and military strength that the majority of converts are forced, coerced, or moved by fear to convert. What this elucidates is that while the individuals undergo the wholly religious and personal experience of conversion within a text that has a particularly hagiographic undercurrent with respect to its heroine—Hélène as well as her son, the future Saint Martin, and grandson, the future Saint Brice—secular concerns underscore the entire plot. The religious conversions that are experienced are, in a way, a mask for the shifting political allegiances and newly created dynasties that occur. Political and social concerns motivate the conversions, and the proven success of a convert leads to secular rewards in the form of land, power and prestige. There are spiritual rewards that the converts reap—some enter

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156 The text uses the terms pagan [*païen*] and Saracen [*sarasín/ sarazin*] interchangeably to refer to any non-Christian individual, regardless of ethnicity, geography or actual religious practice.

157 Head and Noble, *Soldiers of Christ: Saints and Saints’ Lives from Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, discuss this notion in the introduction to their hagiographic anthology: “The process of conversion had a secular aspect as well: it paved the way for absorption of these lands into the Frankish kingdom” (xxxii-xxxiii); and, moreover, “Tribal leaders resisted the changes, often violently. They recognized that conversion was simply a prelude to political domination by Christian kings” (xxxv).

158 Karras, in “God and Man in Medieval Scandinavia: Writing—and Gendering—the Conversion,” makes a similar assertion in her discussion of three Scandinavian texts:Saxo Grammaticus’s *Gesta Danorum*, Snorri Sturluson’s *Heimskringla* and *Njal’s Saga*. She states that just as a man could switch allegiance to another feudal lord if coerced or the lord is ineffective, so accepting Christianity is “the result of the realistic assessment that Christ would be a more powerful and effective overlord, patron, or instrumental friend than any of the other gods” (110). Calkin, in “Saracens,” likewise points out that in Saracen-Christian conflict, changing one’s religion is a change of allegiance (194).
into the eremitic life, die a Christ-like death, become saints or become the ancestor to a saint—yet even these spiritual rewards are accompanied by certain secular gains.

The discussion of interreligious conversion in *La Belle Hélène* is divided along gender lines, since the conversion of women from ‘paganism’ to Christianity is markedly different than that of the men: while the three female converts—Clariande, Plaisance, and Ludiane—are all already secretly and miraculously Christian when we meet them, the male converts must first encounter war or aggressive confrontation before submitting to conversion. This is because, as Muldoon states: “conversion came to be identified with a transfer of allegiance from one god to another, a process similar to the feudal relationship between lord and vassal, a relationship that involved only men and in which women played no part”(6). Moreover, while the women retain the same name throughout the narrative, the men, in the majority of the cases, change their name when they are baptized. Each man, with the exception of Amaury of Scotland, converts as a result of military defeat, or the threat thereof, fighting for their non-Christian side until the Christian army is victorious. It is in this moment, faced with the choice of conversion or death, that the men to be discussed choose conversion and, thus, switch their political as well as religious allegiance. It should be noted that, despite the similarities in the male conversions, several different patterns of conversion emerge: the military conversions that result in powerful positions within Christendom; the conversions that lead to renunciation of the secular world and entrance into the religious life; and Clovis’s conversion, which does occur within the space of battle, though not as a result of military defeat.

Robastre, the king of Bordeaux is defeated when Henry and Antoine encounter the pagan ruler en route to reunite with Henry’s sons in Tours. Robastre’s defeat is political: he must hand his city over to Henry and submit to him. His defeat is solidified when he, along with the rest of
the pagan city, renounces his old religion and converts to Christianity, in which he is baptized under the name Coustant [ll. 7405-7407]. Coustant is not only reborn in baptism into a new religious culture and with a new identity, he is also reborn as a vassal in Henry’s army. In fact, it is the language of conversion that seals Robastre’s submission in which he pledges himself to his new king: “Sire rois d’Engleterre, a vous mon corps se rent,/ Je me baptiseray a vo commandement,/ Me terre de vo corps tenray parfaitement” (7394-7396); it is via conversion and baptism that Robastre acknowledges Henry’s political control. As Coustant, he not only submits to Henry, he joins his army, fighting as a noble Christian soldier as part of Henry’s military campaigns and subsequent mass conversions. It is through his military prowess in Henry’s army that Coustant proves his steadfast loyalty to his new religion and lord, demonstrating his merits as a Christian soldier and is rewarded in the end with marriage to his lover, Plaisance and by being named emperor of Rome. He does not regain his former city, which remains under English control to this day [ll. 7399-7400]; rather, he is rewarded with a new city to rule. The importance of his new city surpasses the former as the seat of religious power in the West. His rewards are not exclusively secular, though: he is divinely favored when God sends Saint George, the patron saint of England, to aid him as he escapes the prison in Jerusalem. When Coustant asks the saint when he will see Plaisance again, he receives a prophesy that he will see Plaisance only after Henry is reunited with Hélène, which will take place only after Jerusalem, Castre in Lombardy, and Flanders are conquered and converted [\textquoteleft\textquoteright Quant Jherusalem avera conquestee/ Et dedens Lonbardie Castres qui est frumee/ Et il ara de Flandres conquise le contree,/ Adont raver ail Elaine s’espousee\textquoteright (9117-9120)]. This divine privilege extends after his death, where Coustant is rewarded spiritually in paradise, reflected in his canonization as Saint Constancien; his relics are still visible at Breteuil-sur-Noye where they continue to cure the insane [ll. 7415-7420]. He has
achieved the highest level of power and prestige in both realms, spiritual and secular, marking him as an exemplary feudal and religious hero. His religious position legitimizes his elevation from local pagan king to emperor of the most important city in Western Christendom while his political connections and power advance his family’s lineage and bring attention to the church in which his relics reside. In addition to his personal rewards, his son Joserant—who is renamed Jaserant when Clovis discovers him abandoned in the forest—becomes the father of the future Saint Riquier, who is the companion of Floovant, Clovis’ son [ll. 7421-7428]. Cousant thus establishes the paternal branch of a sacred genealogy whose descendants are politically well connected as well as spiritually elevated.

Ardenbourc, Plaisance’s father and king of Jerusalem, is defeated when the Christian army successfully takes the city, fulfilling the first stage of Saint George’s prophesy. The defeat of the city is announced when Amaury flies the English flag from the ramparts. Upon defeat, Ardenbourc converts and takes the name Amaury, establishing a Christian king in Jerusalem for the first time [ll. 10253-10256]. Ardenbourc’s choice of baptismal name serves a double purpose: on the one hand, he pays homage to an honorable man and makes a statement about his intent to follow his namesake’s noble and heroic example. On the other hand, it is a sign of complete domination by Christianity and Western rule. Amaury of Jerusalem is, in a way, an extension of Amaury of Scotland, dedicated to carrying out the Western agenda of Henry’s Christian army. As the birthplace and spiritual center of Christianity, victory in Jerusalem is a significant gain for Henry’s army: he has now introduced Western political rule and control to the Holy Land and has expanded his string of victories from one end of Christendom to the other. Amaury of Jerusalem’s conversion, then, is both a spiritual and secular coup for Christianity by establishing a Christian political leader at the helm of a newly converted city that will actively
maintain Christian domination in the city. The proof of his dedication comes when he aids the
army in taking Saint-Jean d’Acre. The Christian army even has the intention of attacking Mecca,
but a messenger calls on their aid with the attack on the pope by Hurtaut of Castre. Amaury of
Jerusalem’s willingness to fight with and among the Christians solidifies his position as Christian
ruler of Jerusalem. As a result of his religious dedication and his willingness to conform to
Western politics, Amaury of Jerusalem is allowed to retain his lands and rule as king. Jerusalem
is ruled by the same king and inhabited by the same people, and yet because of their conversion,
confirmed by the king’s name change, the city is transformed into a Western Christian model of
spiritual and political perfection.

After Henry’s army has conquered both Jerusalem and Castre, Maradin, Anthénor’s son,
ambushes Henry and Antoine as they continue on to Flanders. Henry is captured, but eventually
released, and Maradin is defeated, converts, and becomes Morant upon baptism. Like the
previous converts, he switches his religious allegiance by becoming an official member of the
Christian church and shifts his political allegiance by joining the Christian army as they
accomplish the final stage of Saint George’s prophesied military campaign by delivering
Flanders. He accompanies the Christian army as they besiege a strategically located fortress that
is guarded by a giant, aptly named ‘la Tour au Géant’ in the current city of Douai; he is also,
incidentally, Morant’s vassal. Morant proves his dedication to his new political and religious
system by fighting and killing his own vassal in order to aid the Christian cause of delivering
Flanders from the infidel. Moreover, Morant plants Henry’s banner on the ramparts of the
neighboring tower—held by the giant’s brother, who is also Morant’s vassal—which allows
access to the la Tour au Géant. Claiming a tower that technically belongs to him in Henry’s name
leaves no doubt about Morant’s new political allegiance. Morant’s reward for his conversion
comes in the form of founding the city of Rivière, which is later renamed Douai because it is the dowry of the mother of saint Maurant, a descendent of the converted Morant. Even though Morant gives up his power by handing his defensive towers to Henry, he regains more than he has lost by founding an entire city; his family’s power in Rivière is confirmed when it is renamed for his descendant. Morant’s conversion establishes a foundational tale for the city that glorifies its founder and his entire family tree: Morant is a legendary founder who chose Christianity and thus helped deliver his people from the enemy, while saint Maurant sanctifies the lineage.

During the battle against the giant of Douai, the giant’s brother Maloré, who holds a neighboring tower, observes his brother’s demise and the ensuing scene in which demons escape from his brother’s mouth in a cloud of smoke to carry his soul to Hell [ll. 14110-14132]. Witnessing such a frightening scene and recognizing the danger inherent in not converting prompts Maloré to surrender and convert after which he is baptized, takes the name Pierre, becomes a hermit, and founds the church of Saint-Pierre de Douai [ll. 14133-14140; 14230-14243]. His fate after baptism parallels that of the very first convert encountered in the text, Graibault, the pagan king of Bavaria. Antoine exorcises the demon from Graibault [ll. 4501-4504]; the fearful expelling of demonic forces persuades his subjects to convert along with him [ll. 4508-4511], after which he takes the name Louis and retires to a hermitage. Because these men are in such close proximity with the demonic, the only way for them to atone for their own as well as their relatives’ sins is to dedicate themselves entirely to the religious life. Leaving the world, however, has marked gains: first, they gain the opportunity for redemption through asceticism rather than military obligation; while the rest of the converts who join dedicate themselves to the Christian cause in Henry’s army, Louis and Pierre choose a path that eschews the threat of death in battle and avoids the feudal obligations imposed on the other converts.
They are forced to give up their military and political authority in the secular world, but by entering the eremitic life, they gain spiritual authority; their power and prestige is transferred from one system to another, relatively unbroken.\footnote{For more on the advantages of renunciation of the secular world, especially with respect to the eremitic life, see Chapter 2.} Louis and Pierre occupy the idealized position of the holy hermit, while Pierre leaves an even more marked legacy as the founder of a church named for him: he leaves behind an ecclesiastically approved institutional legacy that can trace its history and foundation back to an exemplary religious individual who, despite his demonic kin, successfully turned away from paganism and redeemed himself through his conversion.

Amaury of Scotland seeks out Henry on his own and asks to be baptized; he says to Henry: “Sire rois d’Engleterre, or soit me vois oïe!/ Je vous pry et requier me char soit baptisie,/ Que soie crestiens, pour Dieu je vous en prie” (5455-5457). Though Amaury is not forced to convert, his proper name is not mentioned until after he is baptized. Before his baptism he is “le gentil roy d’Escoche” (5452); thereafter he is referred to by his proper name: “Le roy fist baptissier... Amoris ot a non, le soie ame est saintie;/ Saint Amory d’Escoche a non, n’en doubtés mie (5459, 5462-5463). There is no definitive name change, but, in keeping with the conversion motif with respect to naming, his Christian name is not announced until after the ritual of baptism is performed. Amaury’s conversion is not the result of a military defeat by the Christian army, because he, like the women, is already Christian in his heart when he is introduced in the text. Amaury seeks out Henry and joins his army because he has been chased out of Scotland due to his religious beliefs, maintaining the strong correlation between conversion and military action that exists for each convert. In this case conversion to Christianity is the choice that incites the violence, rather than the action that brings it to an end. His choice to convert highlights the
tensions between Christians and non-Christians and presents non-Christians as a threat to those who would choose to convert. Amaury’s experience provides justification for Henry’s army to invade this country and defeat Amaury’s brother Gamaux and bring Scotland under his control; this extends to a more general sentiment that all non-Christians need to be converted by any means necessary.

Amaury’s dedication to Christianity is demonstrated, as with the other high profile converts, through his military prowess: he spearheads the taking of the Holy Land, flying the English flag from the ramparts as well as the siege of Castre; he loyally fights alongside Henry, Antoine and the rest of the Christian army during every battle; and he is paid homage when Ardenbourc chooses the name Amaury for his own baptismal name when Jerusalem is conquered. Amaury is a lauded military hero, but he also dies a martyr and a saint: he is taken prisoner by Hurtaut during the siege of Castre and, refusing to abjure his faith, is condemned to death by crucifixion, a move that mirrors Christ’s life closer than any other character in the text (Jones-Wagner, Text of the Female Body 92). Amaury’s crucifixion scene is miraculous: as he hangs on the cross, he prays to God and curses Hurtaut’s body, which turns to dust. When Hurtaut’s nephew stabs Amaury with a lance, a scene akin to the legend of Longinus piercing Jesus’ side, the blood that flows onto him and thirty of his subordinates incites such a homicidal fury that they turn against the inhabitants who kill them to end the carnage. Amaury’s martyrdom is also his divinely aided retribution against his murderers. In the end, Amaury’s body is placed in a shrine in a church that Henry commissions and is miraculously constructed in one night, where it continues to produce innumerable miracles [ll. 12728-12757]. Amaury’s military success is, similar to Coustant, legitimized in the religious realm by his canonization. Also like
Coustant, Amaury is lauded as a model of both military and spiritual heroism through his conversion.

The final male convert considered in this section is Clovis in La Belle Hélène. Similar to Amaury, Clovis converts of his own volition rather than as a mandate following a military defeat. As with all the converts examined, his conversion takes place within the realm of warfare: he is engaged in a battle with the pagan king of Castre, Hurtaut, while in Lombardy. In the midst of the battle, with the victor uncertain, Clovis experiences a crisis and decides to embrace his wife’s God, the God of Catholic Christianity and to pray for military victory, promising conversion and baptism in return. For the first and only time in La Belle Hélène, the reader is granted a glimpse at the internal process of conversion; in fact, it is the first time that conversion appears as a process at all, rather than an instantaneous announcement followed immediately by baptism. Clovis’ conversion is a three-step process: first, Clovis experiences a moment of inspiration in which God’s virtue enters his heart [ll. 9517-9518]. This inspiration is the realization that the old gods are ineffective and weak. Since they have ceased to be useful in his military activity, Clovis turns to a new source, just as a soldier would abandon a weak lord in favor of a stronger one. He turns to his wife’s God, addressing God and the Virgin Mary. He asks for proof that he can expect to receive divine aid during the battle:

Or me soiés aidans huy en celle journee!
D’ore mais en avant ert te loy amontee,
Exauchie par moy et tres bien gouvrenee,
Car bien scay que Clotaire, que est mon espousee,

160 I make the distinction of Catholic Christianity with respect to Clovis and Clotilde, because at the time of Clovis’ historical conversion Arianism, a denomination of Christianity deemed heretical, was a competing force during the Christianization of the Frankish kingdom and its neighboring kingdoms, even though Arianism is not specifically mentioned in the text. Nolte makes a similar distinction when discussing women’s role in conversion during the Merovingian era, which, naturally, includes a lengthy discussion about Clotilde and Clovis.
Y croit bien germement de cuer et de pensee.

Or verray au jour d’uy, ains que soit l’avespree,

Se ly dieux ma moullier feroit pour my riens nee. (9522-9528)

His intention is a strategic one: he recognizes the potential strength of God, but, before making a commitment to Christianity, he requires definitive proof. This comes in the form of a banner that depicts three fleur-de-lys on a field of azure, given by the angel, which replaces the old banner charged with toads [ll. 9532-9540]. Toads are considered pagan and devilish animals; by replacing this pagan symbol with one bestowed by Christ himself, the angel guarantees divine protection to Clovis on the battlefield, where this banner, which also become the symbol on his shield, would be displayed.161 In this way, Clovis is assured that he can rely on God for protection in battle and is free to abandon his old banner/gods. With the satisfaction of the miracle, Clovis completes the second stage of the process, announcing the promise that he and his subjects will convert:

“This Glorieux Dieux, peres de paradis,

Or scay et se conchoy que de toy suy amis

Car tu m’a fait grant grasse, tu soies benaïs !

Et se je puis vir l’eure que soie revertis,

Jou et trestous mes peuples en seray convertis

Et crerons en celuy qui en le crois fu mis,

Travilliés et penés par les felons Juïs.” [9549-9555]

This divinely bestowed banner does more than just grant Clovis confidence that he will emerge victorious in his fight against Hurtaut; it serves to attach a divine origin to the French

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161 See Pastoureau, Les emblèmes de la France, for details on this, and other, emblems of France. The legend of the banner begins in the thirteenth century and becomes widespread by the fourteenth century.
coat of arms, which begins in the thirteenth century and is widespread by the fourteenth. Incorporating this legendary tale establishes a tradition of protection granted by Christ to the French kings, and it confirms Clovis’ position as a quasi-sacred individual, as he is referred to as the “prumiers rois sacrés” (9487). This, in turn, establishes the French throne as a divine office in which the political leader is also quasi-sacred; Clovis literally embodies a blend of political and religious power and privilege, a trait that implicitly would continue to distinguish the French monarchs who succeed Clovis.

The third and final step in his conversion process, baptism, does not immediately follow Clovis’ intent to convert. It is only after his victory against Hurtaut that his conversion is accomplished and sealed in the ritual of baptism: “Et ly bons rois Cloevis don’t je vous senefie/ Fu baptisiés a Rains en l’eglise jolie” (9649-9650). Notably, Clovis retains his original name after baptism; instead of renaming himself, he renames his kingdom and his capital city, where Gaul becomes France [ll. 9579, 9633] and Lutèce becomes Paris [ll. 9627-9631]. By changing the name of his land, from which his political power emanates, Clovis confirms not only his personal conversion, but the conversion of his entire kingdom. This name change brings with it a change in the Christian topography, where Clovis enters his kingdom into the new Christian dynastic network and transforms his formerly pagan lands into a sacred space.162 With his baptism taking place in Reims, performed by Saint Remi, he establishes this city as a sacred site for royal coronations, from which each new king would receive his quasi-sacred status.163

162 See Howe, “The Conversion of the Physical World: The Creation of a Christian Landscape,” for specific examples of pagan sites that are transformed into sacred Christian sites. He notes that conversion, though typically considered deeply personal, literally transformed the Christian landscape by necessitating a reinterpretation of geography as sites converted from pagan to Christian (63).
163 The baptism scene in the text agrees on many points with the historical accounts: the ceremony performed by Saint Remi in Reims following military victory; recounting the details of his conversion to his wife, the Queen. While the text does not mention the holy oil, as do the historical accounts, it does refer to Clovis as the first sacred king, confirming his spiritual privilege as the head of the French state. See Medieval Sourcebook: The Conversion of
Because his conversion involves the accompanying mass conversion of his people, the final victory that results from Clovis’ conversion is delivering his own people from paganism; he leads the charge in turning away from the old pagan gods and turning toward the Catholic Christian God. He establishes the first Christian Frankish kingdom, thereby eliminating the need for Henry’s army to invade his lands; he also establishes himself as an equal figure that exemplifies the traits of chivalric and spiritual heroism.

Though Clovis’ appearance makes up a very small portion of La Belle Hélène, with only about 300 out of 15538 verses dedicated to recounting his conversion, its inclusion legitimizes the notion of considering this text as a conversion narrative, since it includes arguably the most famous and important conversion narrative in French history. It anchors the text with a recognizable historical figure whose conversion account is widely known at the time of the text’s composition. Clovis’ ability to blend the political and religious by establishing his seat of power as a sacred office lends justification to the other converts who likewise attain a position of both spiritual and political power, becoming a sort of exemplary model of kingly spiritual and secular power. It also stands out as the only conversion that incorporates a woman’s influence in the conversion process. Although Clovis’ wife is absent when he is inspired to turn to God for aid, her influence is still felt, almost like a shadow that remains behind Clovis that he cannot see, but surely feels. He acknowledges his wife by name when he asks for a demonstration of God’s ability to aid him in his cause. Right before he is baptized, Clotilde reiterates that it is God who granted him military success [“Sire rois, Dieu vous doinst bonne vie!/ Victoire avés eü, de quoy je suy tres lie” (9635-9636)], to which Clovis responds with his gratitude and intention to serve God faithfully: “Dame…le le mien corps en grassie/ Le Dieu ou vous creés; il m’a fait ceste aïe./

Se le vouray servir tous les jours de ma vie” (9637-9639). Though her role is reduced from her treatment in the historical account by Gregory of Tours, she nevertheless exists as an agent of conversion for Clovis.\textsuperscript{164} Her influence remains marginalized, appearing as an undercurrent throughout Clovis’ conversion process.

While several of the knights accept their defeat and subsequent shift in political and religious allegiance, there are three counterexamples that I examine in which the defeated soldier either does not accept conversion or is not afforded the opportunity to convert: Boulu, the giant of Douai, and Malotru. This is not to say these are the only three individuals who are killed without being afforded the occasion to convert; however, these examples stand out from the other military confrontations: Boulu and the giant of Douai are both otherworldly figures since they are both giants, while Malotru is offered conversion and rejects it.

Boulu is a pagan leader and a giant in the city named for him, Boulogne. When Henry is called upon by the pope in Antoine’s absence to aid him in Rome, which was being attacked yet again by the Saracen army, he kills Boulu en route to Rome, because he does not want to leave England vulnerable to Boulu’s attack during his absence. To seal his victory, Henry has the famous church of Notre-Dame built and sends a messenger to announce his success in Boulogne before continuing on to Rome. Because he is a giant as well as a pagan Boulu is a two-fold Other. The fact that he is not afforded the chance to convert suggests that he is too far removed from Christianity to become a good Christian leader, to join Henry’s army, or even to enter the religious life. As a result, Henry eliminates the threat entirely from his lands; defeating Boulu is Henry’s assurance that his kingdom will be safe from invasion by a pagan army while he and his best knights are away. Henry seems, on the one hand, justified in protecting his kingdom from

\textsuperscript{164} See Gregory of Tours and Nolte—“Gender and Conversion in the Merovingian Era”—, who treats Gregory of Tours’ inclusion of Clotilde’s fictional sermon: she posits that Clotilde’s preaching, though seemingly unsuccessful, nevertheless plays an influential role in his decision to convert (93).
the threat of violence; moreover, he manages to protect the faith in his kingdom. On the other hand, launching an unprovoked offensive attack is dangerous, since it risks a potentially large loss of life to satisfy Henry’s paranoia. Boulu may be a pagan and a giant, but even Graibault who had a demon living inside him that required exorcism was allowed to live, convert and retire to a hermitage. The fact that Henry does not afford a similar offer to Boulu uncovers Henry’s political agenda to acquire this strategic location for himself and establish political control on the Western European continent. Before he is called upon by the pope, Henry is able to defend England without entering Boulogne; but, using the vulnerability of his country during his absence as a pretense, he is able to expand his kingdom for the first time in the text.

In the case of the giant of Douai, who is killed in battle, his opportunity to convert is indirect and expressly political: it comes in the form of obeying his lord, the recently converted Morant who plans to turn his lands and defensive towers over to the Christian army, in his request that the giant surrender his tower. By refusing this request, the giant simultaneously violates the feudal code by disobeying his lord and violently rejects Christianity as well as Western rule when he sends the messenger back mutilated with his nose and arm cut and his eyes gouged out; the giant refuses to recognize his lord’s new allegiance to Christianity. The giant of Douai does commit a transgression by disobeying his lord when ordered to give up the fortress. However, his lord has now given up his previous authority by submitting to the Christian leaders. The giant of Douai, never having sworn an oath to these new lords, rejects his lord’s shifted allegiance. In the end, the giant’s evil nature is confirmed when the demons exit his mouth and take his soul to hell, justifying the action taken against him by the Christian army. Interestingly, the author notes that the tower occupies a privileged strategic location; it is surrounded by marshes and three underground tunnels that allow communication with and escape in three
different directions if attacked: toward Hainaut, Noble (the former name of Arras), and Cambrai. Thus, the army’s interest in this tower has nothing to do with converting the giant; it has everything to do with securing a strategic defensive stronghold. The giant’s demonic nature—both by default, since he is a giant, and when the demons are released from occupying his body—is the Christian justification for the militaristic and political purpose of taking the tower without concern for the religious conversion of the giant.

The final counterexample is Malotru who, unlike the situation with the two giants, is given the opportunity to convert to Christianity upon defeat but refuses; he is hanged as a result. He is contrasted with Béruir, lord of Buc, who fights in the company of Malotru; Béruir does convert upon defeat, is baptized and surrenders the citadel of Lille to the Christian army. Béruir represents the good convert who submits entirely to the new system: he accepts his new religion in baptism and submits politically to his new lord by entrusting his stronghold, the symbol of his military strength and prestige, to the Christian army. This highlights Malotru’s egregious transgression in not surrendering to the victorious lord/Lord, for which he is punished. And yet, Malotru lends his name to the city of Courtrai because of his short size, in a similar way that Boulu lends his name to Boulogne. While this might be intended as a way to permanently attach a negative quality to an enemy soldier who refused to convert, it nevertheless establishes a foundational history for the city; his memory might not be glorified through his nickname, but it does ensure his memory persists. His tale is perhaps cautionary: those who know the history behind the city’s name also know the stakes in being an enemy of Christianity. This example, as with Boulu and the giant of Douai, thus illuminates the ecclesiastically authorized institutionalized violence for forced conversion and domination toward non-Christians. Conversion, then, becomes a way to showcase knightly prowess and an outlet for unbridled
violence against an institutionalized Other while simultaneously being a source of redemption for the Christian knights.

While Boulu and the giant of Douai underscore the danger of being an infidel, Malotru in particular demonstrates a certain steadfast loyalty to his beliefs in his refusal to convert. Malotru is considered an enemy because he refuses to surrender, and yet he demonstrates the desirable attributes of a Western Christian knight: he is noble, a great warrior, and unwaveringly loyal to the cause for which he fights. In fact, his courage to accept death when faced with the imposition of a new political and religious system turns him into a martyr for his beliefs. Because these beliefs counter those of Christianity, he is portrayed as a threat and his elimination is required. However, his heroism in battle and unfailing fidelity cast a new light on all the defeated leaders and soldiers who convert when faced with defeat: from the Christian perspective, they make the right choice and follow the path to salvation; however, from a more secular standpoint they have chosen to give up their original beliefs and values, to give up their land, and to become subjects of a new political leader in order to avoid death. Malotru confirms that conversion is a choice, since it is one he rejects. The fact that the converts so eagerly switch their allegiance plants a seed of doubt with respect to the extent of their loyalty to their new lord/Lord; in a way, it opens up the space for weakness, cowardice, and being opportunistic. The text overcomes these seeds of doubt by including these converts in the institutionalized Church elite, where they become saints, martyrs, and hermits and wield a great deal of secular power. And yet, by the nature of the fact that they have turned their back on their beliefs in the past, it does not entirely erase the anxiety of apostasy in the future.

The conversions of the three non-Christian princesses—Clariande, Plaisance, and Ludiane—seem in opposition to the men’s conversion, which is built around a military
framework of shifting political allegiances and accepted to avoid death; conversely, the women choose to become Christian of their own volition and unprovoked, with a temporal gap between their decision to convert and their baptism. Despite these differences, there is a similar blend of spiritual and secular concerns wrapped up with their conversion: these women are spiritually elevated and even share characteristics with the saintly Hélène, and, at the same time, there exists an underlying political network at work, particularly with respect to marriage. Moreover, these women have a lot to gain, in secular and spiritual terms, by turning their back on the religion of their family and community and embracing Christianity.

While the men all convert, or choose not to convert, upon military defeat, each woman convert is already secretly Christian when we first encounter them. They do not fit into the categories that Jennifer Goodman delineates as the two distinct roles that women play in stories involving conversion in romantic literature of the late and early modern periods: the Christian wife who converts her pagan husband, as with the account of Clovis’ conversion; and the Saracen (or Amazon) princess who “becomes the object of her lover’s evangelism,” and thus converts because of her chivalric Christian hero-husband (115). The three princesses neither convert their husbands, as their husbands are already Christian knights, nor do they convert because of their Christian husbands, since they are secretly Christian when they meet them. While it is true that they do not undergo the institutional ritual of baptism until they meet their (future) husband, this is because they did not have the opportunity to be baptized earlier; they do not become Christian due to the love for their husbands. The validity of their internal Christianization is reflected by the fact that none of these women change their names upon

165 Although Clariande and Ludiane are not technically ‘Saracen’ princesses, I will consider them together as such, because, in this text, as is common in medieval literature, several terms denoting non-Christians are used interchangeably, including ‘Saracen’, ‘pagan’ and ‘Turk’. Thus, though these women hail from three distinct regions—Bavaria, Jerusalem, and Scotland—they are similar in that they are all from areas that practice some type of non-Christian religion and transition into the Western world through conversion and then marriage.
baptism; they retain their pre-baptism name because they already accept Christ despite their non-Christian upbringing, family, and community.

Keeping their pre-Christian name serves a practical purpose: for their own security, they have to convert secretly, leaving those around them unaware of their internal religious change, since their Christian identity is at odds with their cultural origins. This positions these women in an in-between stage of religious identity akin to Steven Kruger’s notion of the ‘already/not yet’ in his discussion of time with respect to conversion in the article “The Times of Conversion”; he states: “Already achieved, the conversion is—across long expanses of time and space—held in suspense, not yet susceptible to full achievement. This is the temporal mode of the already/not yet” (32). Because these women have accepted Christianity, but have not yet been baptized and/or immersed into a Christian cultural environment, their conversion is not complete. They straddle the Western Christian and pagan/Saracen world as not entirely Christian, yet no longer entirely pagan or Saracen. Because they hail from non-Christian lands, they retain certain aspects of the ‘Saracen’ princess, to whom an agency is given which is denied to Christian women who are born and raised in the West (de Weever xvi). This suspended identity serves as an advantage where these women are considered Christian, and thus, accepted into Western society; and non-Western, in which they are afforded a measure of autonomy reserved for non-Christian women. It is this blended identity that allows these women to be independent, to survive in different geographical regions, to easily marry Christian knights, and to establish political networks and sacred genealogies, achieving privileged spiritual and social positions as a result of conversion.

Clariande’s father Graibault, king of Bavaria, worships an idol and is possessed by a devil. In fleeing his court, she finds Antoine and begs him to help her, because her father intends to marry her. Clariande’s situation parallels Hélène’s initial conundrum, where she is helplessly
caught between patriarchal law that necessitates she follow her father’s orders and Christian law that prohibits father-daughter incest. Because Clariande’s father is not Christian, it is not entirely clear if this incestuous relationship is expressly forbidden on his end. While Antoine unquestionably transgresses Christian law by attempting to marry his daughter, Graibaut may not be transgressing pagan law. Being secretly Christian, Clariande cannot submit to marrying her father, whether permitted in Bavaria or not, because it transgresses the law of her secret religion. Christianity, then, is a pretense for Clariande to escape her father’s control and seek outside help to undermine his royal and patriarchal authority. With her father ousted from power and retired to a hermitage, she manages to inherit his land without having to marry him. As the ruler in Bavaria, Clariande is elevated to a politically and socially advantageous position; she occupies a rare position as a husband-less and childless female ruler, whose authority emanates from herself, rather than as a proxy for a male ruler.

Because of her conversion, Clariande is able to unseat her father from his kingdom. On the other hand, it is due to her non-Christian parentage that Clariande is free to control her father’s lands upon his abdication. Her independent reign is short-lived, however, bringing her under the more common motif of a Christian woman with limited power. Her independent rule is threatened when the Count of Gloucester attacks the city after she rejects his marriage proposal. Marriage to the count would force Clariande to transfer her land and power to her husband, which she attempts to avoid by refusing his offer. She retains her pre-Christian agency until she heeds the advice of one of her pagan subjects, who is concerned about the amount of food Martin and Brice generously distribute to the people from the palace reserves, and who suggests exiling the Christian knights. Rather than turning to God or supporting Martin and Brice’s charitable efforts, she removes Martin and Brice from the city. It is upon their departure that provisions run
out within the city, and Clariande must surrender and marry the Count [ll. 5804-6044]. Her final act as an independent ruler is a sacrificial one, submitting to an unwanted marriage which will reduce her power significantly in order to save her people, but her lack of faith in Martin and Brice, the Christian models of unsurpassed charity and saintliness within her city coupled with her impulse to follow advice based on greed rather than charity justifies the Count of Gloucester’s imposed marriage. In a paradoxical situation, it is Clariande’s conversion that allows her to rule Bavaria, but also what ultimately strips her of her power as well: when Clariande is accepted as a Christian woman who is held to Christian standards, she is punished when she fails to not only not uphold, but actively discourage, Christian charity, which explains why her power is transferred to a husband who has proven his loyalty to the faith. Her reduced power through marriage is a reflection of a more realistic and acceptable amount of independence that a Christian woman could experience; thus, it brings her even more in line with Christian feminine standards than simply acceptance of Christianity and baptism. Her marriage is what marks her ultimate acceptance into the Western Christian world.

Clariande is accepted into the Western Christian world, but she does not entirely conform to its regulations; there are traces of her pre-Christian origins: after she marries the Count of Gloucester in London, with Martin and Brice in attendance, she attempts, unsuccessfully, to seduce Martin. Jones-Wagner compares Clariande to the Egyptian Potiphar who tried to corrupt the young Israelite Joseph (Gen. 39. 7-20); of Clariande’s rather surprising behavior, she states: “she eventually learns to settle into the proper ways of a Christian wife, where adultery is not acceptable” (The Body of the Saracen Princess 84). Her behavior reminds us that, while she may be Christian now, her father, community, and upbringing are distinctly non-Christian; though she has accepted Christianity, she must learn Christian norms, laws in which her new husband can
educate her. This trace of her non-Christian origins and agency also positions Clariande as the connecting piece between an established Western Christian land—England, with which the count is charged during Henry’s absence—and a land that has just recently been rescued from paganism, requiring the guidance of a Western Christian, especially masculine, presence. This marriage allows Clariande to choose to bring the kingdom of Bavaria under the control of the Count, who is subject to Henry, albeit under duress. Clariande’s land is placed under England’s control, expanding Henry’s political hold throughout Europe, but with a woman who embodies both Western and non-Western, Christian and non-Christian attributes in order to transition this kingdom peacefully into the Western Christian fold. While nothing is said of Clariande’s descendants, she is the source of redemption for her father, Graibault/Louis, and she enters into the Count of Gloucester’s family, who is the uncle of Marie, the willing sacrifice which allowed Hélène to escape. Thus, though Clariande does not birth any saints directly, she does become a member of a highly regarded and steadfastly religious family. Clariande, then, enters into the Western political system, one in which her power is reduced, but in which her tangential religious affiliation is elevated and for which she is the source of mediating peace between the ‘East’ and the West.

Plaisance’s story resembles a typical tale of amour courtois: she is unhappily married to her father’s ally, Priant, king of Escalon when she meets and falls in love with the courtly Coustant. Her husband and her father Ardenbourc, the king of Jerusalem, are both Saracen while she is secretly Christian; she meets Coustant when he is captured by Priant when the Christian army invades in order to deliver the Holy Land from the enemy, as per Saint George’s prophesy. Plaisance and Coustant fall in love and Plaisance becomes pregnant [ll. 8732-38; 9107-08], but their love affair is disrupted when a pagan discovers the lovers and informs Priant, who is killed.
by Coustant in the ensuing confrontation. Like Clariande, Plaisance transgresses Church law by committing adultery. Plaisance’s adultery is not as severe as Clariande’s attempt to seduce Martin because Plaisance, though already Christian when she commits adultery, has not been formally initiated into the Church through baptism; when she commits this sin she is firmly in the ‘already/not yet’ stage between paganism and Christianity. Moreover, her husband is an infidel and an enemy of the Christian army, while her lover is an exemplary Christian soldier, justifying her decision to leave her husband for Coustant. In fact, since her marriage to Priant exists outside the Christian realm and beyond Church authority, it is possible to view her marriage as altogether invalid; and, since there is no marriage, Plaisance commits no crime. Her transgression, if there even is one, is thus forgiven. Unlike Clariande, who marries as a political and personal safety maneuver, Plaisance and Coustant represent a genuine love match. Their mutual affection and willingness to endure several obstacles and long separations in order to reunite in the end highlights the autonomous choice involved in Plaisance’s marriage to Coustant; this, in turn, underscores the lack of choice in her marriage to Priant, almost certainly a political union arranged by her father. In choosing Coustant, she defies her father and her husband as well as the entire non-Christian hierarchy in an act of patriarchal and familial rebellion. This rebellious quality, normally discouraged among Christian women but a common trait among Saracen women, becomes a positive attribute for Plaisance, for it allows her to escape her homeland to be baptized, and leads to her father’s surrender and conversion to his daughter’s religion.166

166 See de Weever, Sheba’s daughters: Whitening and Demonizing the Saracen Woman in Medieval French Epic, especially chapter 3, in which she discusses this very paradox of the Saracen woman betraying her family and yet described in an admirable way. She argues that on the one hand, Christianity would be considered a higher good than loyalty to the Saracen family, and, more importantly, that the higher good is empire building for the West.
It is after her rebellion that Plaisance, taking advantage of the resulting confusion after her husband’s death, escapes her homeland, only to be separated from Coustant; he flees to Rome, where she is baptized [ll. 9248]. At this point she is officially a Christian woman, and yet she retains a great deal of her Saracen autonomy, becoming a successful innkeeper for the several years between her escape from her homeland and the reunification with Coustant. Her fortitude and ability to support herself on her own parallels Hélène’s journey as a washerwoman; however, Hélène must remain hidden and keep her identity secret while separated from her husband while Plaisance is noticeably visible: seeking baptism in Rome, running an inn, being captured, speaking with the Christian army when they release her after conquering Castre. Hélène is allowed independence at the expense of her identity, while Plaisance is afforded a voice that allows her to construct her own identity. This voice is validated when the newly converted city is renamed for her, and Henry gifts this city to her and her future husband. Escaping her father’s and husband’s control in favor of conversion allows Plaisance to be seen and heard, it gives her a real presence in the narrative; rather than residing in the memory of the other individuals or being the object of a several-year search, Plaisance takes action, she speaks, she interacts. This self-directed autonomy is rewarded with control of her own city; because this city is named after her, her place is solidified in the history of the city and within the narrative. Because the city’s name is changed when the Christian army is victorious, it marks the conversion of the inhabitants and establishes the beginning of a new era for the city; Plaisance does not change her name upon conversion, but her conversion is validated when she lends her name to this newly converted city, establishing it as a Christian city.

While Clariande’s influence is reduced throughout her journey, Plaisance’s influence only increases: once she separates herself from her husband and father, she is able to construct
her own identity as an independent Christian woman, entering the economic arena with her business, the political arena with a city named for her, and the social/political arena as the Queen of Rome. She makes a seemingly lateral move, from the wife of the King of Escalon to the wife of the King of Rome, thus maintaining a similar position; however, the fact that her Queenship shifts from the East to the West, and from a pagan to a Christian city significantly increases the power of her position. In addition, she maintains control over Plaisance, formerly Castre, granting her a real stake in the political realm. Like Clariande, Plaisance manages to remove the male-male exchange when choosing a marriage partner, positioning her as the initiator of the East-West religious and political relations by joining her eastern heritage with Coustant’s Western heritage. She is still the daughter of the king of Jerusalem, which establishes a network of familial politics: Plaisance is the connecting point between the two most powerful religious centers of the Western Church, Jerusalem and Rome. She thus manages to establish not only an ideological link between these two cities, but a real, political link through the marriage that she coordinates herself.

The final layer of power and influence that stems from Plaisance’s conversion is the sacred genealogy of which she is the maternal initiator: her son Joserant/Jaserant becomes the father of Saint Riquier. Because her husband is eventually canonized, the couple emerges as the model of Christian royalty whose political authority is legitimized by spiritual merit. Having two converted Christians—both of whom, incidentally, having defied their family and escaped their homeland to pursue a Christian life—in control of the heart of the institutional Western Church validates their zeal and dedication to their new religion; it acts as proof and persuasion of what can be gained by converting and dedicating oneself to Christianity; and it combines political and spiritual concerns with respect to political leadership.
The final woman convert is Ludiane who, like Clariande and Plaisance, occupies a prestigious social position as the sister of Gamaux, the heathen king of Scotland who replaced their brother, Amaury; despite the king’s heathen ways, Ludiane is secretly Christian. When we first encounter her, the capital city, Hontonne, is under attack by the Christian army; the same army Amaury joined when he was deposed from Scotland. During the violent battle Brice, ironically, cuts off the arm of King Gamaux but is captured and taken prisoner along with Antoine and the archbishop of Tours. While in prison, Ludiane falls in love with Brice and convinces her brother to spare the Christians, who might be useful in negotiations; to avoid suspicion, she agrees to personally watch the prisoners. While visiting them, she offers to help them escape on the condition that Brice accept to marry her. Though Brice refuses at first, wishing to enter the religious life, Antoine and the archbishop convince him that marriage is the better order. Brice agrees to the marriage and falls in love with Ludiane; she liberates the prisoners and escapes with them at night. The army sets fire to and conquers Hontonne, Gamaux throws himself into the sea, Ludiane and Brice get married and conceive their son, the future Saint Brice, that night. In the end, Brice and Ludiane are named the Emperor and Empress of Constantinople and King and Queen of England.

Viewed one way, Ludiane falls in love with a Christian prisoner, and, being already secretly Christian herself, secures a marriage promise that will allow her the opportunity to practice Christianity freely in a new land and start a Christian family. Because she is dedicated to her faith and loves Brice, she risks being charged with treason. Viewed a different way, Ludiane secures a marriage promise from Brice to advance her political and social position and secure her bodily safety. In terms of physical security, if her Christian affinity were to be discovered, she would run the risk of exile like Amaury or death; while Amaury has the fortune to join the
Christian army and die a martyr for his faith, Ludiane, as a woman, is much more vulnerable and her safety uncertain. However, her homeland is under attack and already surrounded by Christian lands: England is under Henry’s rule; Bordeaux and Flanders are recently converted; and Clovis is newly baptized in Gaul. Though pagan lands remain, they exist in isolated pockets and any non-Christian armies would have to cross through Christian lands to provide any support to Gamaux. By embracing Christianity, Ludiane switches allegiances to the religion whose soldiers are quickly conquering the entire Western world. Thus, when the Christian soldiers are imprisoned, she detects her only opportunity to safely escape a pagan country which will potentially be defeated by the Christians. She aligns herself with the potential victors, guaranteeing her safety and salvation should Gamaux’s defeat occur. In terms of social advancement, by exacting a marriage promise from Brice, she secures her social position once she has successfully left the safety of her brother’s realm behind. As the sister of Gamaux, her marriage prospects are favorable, but Queenship is certainly not guaranteed. Thus, she makes an astute political move to advance her social standing by making an offer that Brice quite literally cannot refuse, since his, and his companions’, life is dependent on his acceptance of her proposal. By choosing Brice as her future husband, Ludiane secures the highest possible political office for a woman, wielding influence and authority in the geographical extremities of Christendom as well as in the various cities throughout Europe that Henry and his sons have conquered and converted.

While Clariande’s choice to marry the Count of Gloucester is motivated by her desire to save her people and her city, and Plaisance’s marriage to Coustant is a mutual decision, Ludiane initiates and manipulates her marriage to Brice. She devises the scheme to gain entrance to Brice by deceiving her brother rather than sneak in at the risk of being caught in the midst of treason,
reflecting a thought-out plan by a woman intelligent enough to take advantage of a dire situation. It also highlights the inevitable betrayal that comes with conversion, the turning away that accompanies a turning to. Clariande flees her father’s court, Plaisance secretly meets with Coustant, but Ludiane’s plan is, from the start, consciously directed to defeating her brother and securing her escape. In doing so, she not only eliminates the male-male exchange in marriage politics, she displaces her brother as the ruler of Scotland when it comes under English rule after it is conquered by the Christian army. As the Queen of England, Ludiane exerts authority in all of the recently annexed lands achieved by Henry, including her homeland. Where Plaisance, and even Clariande, serve as connecting points to merge the East and West through marriage, Ludiane is, in fact, from the geographical West. This distinction from the other two princesses is significant because through her union with Brice she solidifies Western domination in the East as the rulers in Constantinople. While Coustant and Plaisance merge the East and West in their rule of Rome, and the Count of Gloucester and Clariande merge East and West in their local rule within England, Brice and Ludiane impose a visible Western presence in the East.  

Similar to the other two women converts, Ludiane gains not only political and social standing through marriage to a Western Christian husband, but she also becomes part of a sacred genealogy: her brother is the sainted Amaury of Scotland; her husband has carried Hélène’s miraculously preserved arm for the entirety of her exile, ensuring the success of the miracle; her brother-in-law is the future Saint Martin, patron saint of Gaul; and her son is the future Saint Brice, who follows his uncle into the religious life as bishop of Tours; and, her mother-in-law is Hélène, the titular heroine, site of a miracle, and source of redemption and salvation for everyone in the text. She has thus managed to connect herself to the most powerful figures in both the

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167 While it is true that Brice does have Eastern blood, since his mother is from Constantinople, he is not aware of this connection until later in life, and he is born, raised, and formed in the West. He serves to continue the Eastern bloodline, but he is politically and culturally a representative of Western power.
religious and secular realms by marrying into and perpetuating a spiritually privileged
genealogy.

Conversion in this text is thus a complex issue. It is not a simple matter of choosing
Christ; nor is it only a political or military issue. Instead, conversion takes on a multi-layered
meaning, where spiritual and secular concerns converge: the male converts undergo a complete
change to their identity, turning away from their old life to embrace the new life of Christianity,
Christian law, and Western control. Their name change reflects and confirms the shift of the
multiple allegiances, marking the break from the old life to the new along with the
institutionalized ritual of baptism. As with the men, the women implicitly accept to submit to
Western politics by accepting Christianity; this shifted allegiance is solidified through their
marriage, which allows them to escape an undesirable situation in favor of a new system that
grants not only religious fulfillment, but also security: political, social and bodily. In a way, their
familial defiance opens up the space for Christians to invade and conquer by creating conflict at
the highest political level; however, they also represent the inevitable peace and unification that
comes with the new Christian laws and leaders as the first of their people to accept Christianity.
It grants the chance for agency and choice: they have decided for themselves to convert, and not
at the end of a sword. They pass into a new political, social and religious system that maintains
their influence and authority while opening up the possibility of new lands and subjects for their
new husband.

These converts, both men and women, become the new generation of Western Christian
power, leadership and authority. They find legitimacy from a combination of both their political
allegiance after their conversion, seen through their military zeal and dedication to their new life,
as well as through various spiritual merits like martyrdom, canonization and sacred genealogies.
These heroes and heroines enjoy a prestigious position in their new Western Christian system, establishing new networks of power by establishing new dynasties. The conversion of the princesses is, thus, integral in establishing the legitimacy of the Christian men to conquer and rule over their wives’ familial territories and to continue to spread Western dominance throughout Europe and beyond. These women, thus, bring Otherness, usually under the blanket term “Saracen,” into the Western fold. Their authority is, in a final move, solidified by their established sacred genealogies as the ancestors of saints and other blessed individuals.

This text reads differently than a ‘traditional’ conversion narrative, for example, of Augustine of Hippo, the apostle Saul/Paul or the twelfth-century account of the converted Jew Herman-Judah, because La Belle Hélène, like the other texts in this project, is not an explicit standalone conversion narrative. The conversion of each character is part of a larger story that includes hagiographic, epic and romance elements. Considering this work as a conversion text unites the various threads that make up the complicated plot: the fictional hagiography of Hélène; the historical hagiography of Saints Martin and Brice; the epic vein of military and political domination; and the elements of courtly love that appear with respect to Hélène and Henry, Plaisance and Coustant, and even Brice and Ludiane. Scholars have often noted that this text is a blend of different literary genres, but the notion of conversion binds them all together, as each individual is affected by conversion in some way; each undergoes his/her own conversion, i.e. transformative, process. It is through conversion that the genres blend, but also that the spiritual and secular elements converge: conversion becomes a veil for political motivations and shifts while political authority is legitimized through spiritual merits and religious prestige. This text, through conversion, expresses not only the need for steadfast dedication in one’s new
religious life, but also explores the potential for a fantasized political unification under one religion throughout Europe and as far east as the Holy Land.

This idealized fantasy of a unified Christendom under centralized political control is a response to certain frustrations during the time of the text’s composition. Robert Allen Rouse, assessing the impact of the fall of Acre in 1291 in literature, states: “Contributing to the inward turn of this post-crusade Zeitgeist, crusade-romance provided a vehicle for the expression of the frustrated desire for crusade in the fourteenth century (174).” La Belle Hélène falls into this category of crusade-romance, and thus the preoccupation with converting pagan, or Saracen, cities and large populations reflects the frustrations of Western authority becoming severely limited in the East; this text is a way to channel the longing for a crusading zeal and keep it ingrained in the collective memory of the European West. Megan Moore likewise asserts that this text is written “during a time period of Frankish frustration with and elimination from access to Byzantium… in a time in which the hybridity of the colonies threatened to undermine the western families who ran them” (100-101). The three princesses become a way to address cross-cultural exchange: the marriages of Clariande Plaisance, and Ludiane spread Western rule and domination throughout all of Europe as well as into the East and the Mediterranean.

The Western rule that this text portrays is English. It is Henry who leads the Christian army, joined later by his sons, and thus it is England who expands its kingdom throughout Europe and into the East. It is Saint George, the patron saint of England, who announces the prophesy that converts Jerusalem, Castre, and Flanders and is, thus, divine intervention that positions the English army as the instrument through which Christianity is spread. This text presents England as a dominant military force, as the English flag flies on the ramparts of each

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168 Rouse, in his article “Crusaders,” discusses mainly English texts, but his arguments apply to La Belle Hélène, as it is part of the tradition of crusade-romance and is written during the same time frame. Moreover, La Belle Hélène is a text whose themes are widely known in England and used in many variations in Middle English literature.
newly conquered and converted city and tower. England is also the dominant political force in the text, as it is the English king who inherits the religious center of Eastern Christianity, Constantinople in addition to the lands taken by force. The favorable portrayal of England and the English king at a time when relations between France and England are tense is perhaps another layer of the text’s idealized fantasy of a unified European Christendom, where all Christian lands join forces to combat the common enemy: non-Christians. Conversion, then, becomes the goal for unification, both religious and secular.
Conclusion

The conclusion to this project will consider one additional text and reconsider one text already discussed in the main body of the study. Thus, it functions on the one hand as an extension of the final chapter of this project and, on the other hand, as a method to reconsider all of the texts discussed in a new light. While the final chapter focuses on interreligious conversion from either Islam or paganism to Christianity, the focus of the conclusion is to examine intra-religious conversion in two texts: Chrétien de Troyes’ *Le conte du graal ou le roman de Perceval* and *Robert le Diable*. In both of these texts, the converts in question—Perceval and Robert—are already Christian. During the course of their lives, they each undergo a series of events, obstacles or tests that allow each to move upward in their religious dedication, and, at the close of the text, each has succeeded in transcending his original station to become an incorporated, and perhaps elevated, member of the Christian community.

In *Perceval*, Perceval is not a pagan or Saracen individual that converts through warfare or force, as do many of the men in *La Belle Hélène de Constantinople*. Rather, he is always a Christian individual as the son of Christian parents. However, because of his dubious childhood and education—being raised in isolation by his mother, without any contact with the chivalric or religious world—he lacks basic knowledge and understanding of both the feudal and the spiritual systems. This causes his naïveté, which proves to be a danger to him when he leaves his mother's house to become a knight at Arthur's court. While Perceval does not convert in the sense of renouncing a former faith to accept Christianity, which is solidified in baptism, his journey is akin to a conversion experience in that it allows him to gain knowledge, transforming from an ignorant individual to one indoctrinated in the Church. Perceval’s transformation is, in a unique way, both secular and spiritual. His intra-religious conversion experience reaches its pinnacle
during the hero's stay with the hermit, where he learns the truth of his lineage, of (some of) the
Grail castle mysteries and the ways of religious asceticism.

Though Perceval comes from a Christian family, his lack of exposure to institutional
Christianity is dangerous. When Perceval first hears the knights in the ‘Gaste Forest’, he believes
them to be devils; upon seeing them, however, he believes them to be angels. When he first hears
the knights approaching, he states:

‘‘Par m’ame,
Voir me dit ma mere, ma dame,
Qui me dit que deiable sont
Plus esfraee chose do mont’’ (109-112).

In this particular case, his belief that the knights are devils demonstrates his lack of experience in
the secular world—not recognizing the sounds of knights and weaponry— but it also
demonstrates his lack of religious sensibilities. As they approach, Perceval remembers that his
mother taught him about the sign of the Cross as a defense mechanism against evil [‘‘Et si dist
por moi ensaignier/ Que por aus se doit enaignier’’ (113-114)]; yet, Perceval purposely decides
not to invoke this lesson and, instead, to strike down the strongest ‘devil’ with his
unsophisticated javelin, which will prove his ability and keep the other devils from approaching
him. He states:

‘‘Mais ja voir ne m’en seignera
Que cest ensaig desdaggerai
Ainz ferrai si tot lo plus fort
D’un des javeloz que je port
Que ja n’aprocheront de moi
His reaction to believing he is able to single-handedly defeat the approaching ‘devils’ demonstrates his arrogance, but it also underscores the dire consequences that have resulted from his mother’s decision to isolate her son from society. She may have taught Perceval about making the sign of the Cross, but it is clear by his misunderstanding of the power of the devil, coupled by his rejection of invoking the Cross as a protective sign, that the mother’s attempt to education her son in religious matters was entirely ineffective; this educational failure leads him to believe he does not need God for protection or aid, especially against an evil force against which God alone can protect. Ewa Slojka posits that Perceval’s mother has fallen into despair, isolating her son from all knowledge of Jesus, and preventing him from salvation through liturgy and sacraments as the way to transmit and mediate Christian meanings (67). This despair, which itself is a sin, has caused her son potential damnation through their separation from the Church.

Perceval’s fundamental misunderstanding of celestial beings continues when, upon seeing the knights, he no longer believes them to be devils, but rather angels: “Biaus sire Dex, merci!/ Ce sont ange que je voi ci” (131-132). It is at this point that Perceval reveals the extent of his religious formation by his mother: she told him angels were the most beautiful of all creatures, except for God; and one must believe in God and worship him, bow down and honor him [ll. 136-148]. Perceval does, in this instance, follow his mother’s advice, throwing himself to the ground and reciting the prayers that his mother had taught him [ll. 149-152]. While Perceval states that he fears nothing due to his faith in Jesus, the Savior, he also declares that the knight with whom he speaks is more handsome than God: “Mais vos estes plus bes que Dex” (173).

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169 Tan, in “From Bede to Orderic Vitalis: Changing Perspectives on the Role of Women in the Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Norman Churches”, asserts that this act of refusing to cross himself establishes Perceval’s “careless attitude that has put him on the path to sin.” This aligns him with Bernard of Clairvaux’s notion of culpability in sin, despite ignorance (143).
Lacking the capacity to distinguish between mortal knights and celestial beings exposes the potential for inadvertent idol or false prophet worship; in fact, Perceval does begin worshiping the knights in adoration until they inform him that they are knights, not angels. Perceval, as a result, is guilty of breaking the first commandment, worshipping a false god that is not the God of Judeo-Christian tradition. Even when this misunderstanding is corrected, Perceval makes a blasphemous statement by declaring these secular knights to be more beautiful than God. Thus, although Perceval has received a rudimentary spiritual education from his mother, it is clearly insufficient for Perceval’s personal salvation and true acceptance in the Christian religion. It is apt, then, to consider Perceval’s quest, or a major aspect of his quest, as a discovery of his belonging to a larger Christian community and an understanding that “the physical, finite world paradoxically opens to the infinite” (Slojka 81); a true understanding of Christianity beyond his mother’s rudimentary lessons.

The final proof of Perceval’s lack of knowledge of both institutional Christianity as well as feudal society comes to light as he is leaving his mother to go to Arthur’s court to ask to be dubbed a knight. She first advises him in courtly ways, telling him to honor and serve ladies and maidens; she teaches him that he must receive a woman’s consent when obtaining kisses from a woman, a lesson he ignores during his first encounter with a lady, and to receive her ring [ll. 497-520]. Next, she advises him to ask the name of any man with whom he shares company and that he must consort with honorable men [ll. 521-530]; again, he ignores this advice when he fails to ask the identity of the hidden host at the Grail Castle. Her final piece of advice is the most important: she begs him to go to churches and abbeys and to pray to God to that he will grant Perceval honor and salvation [ll. 531-536]. It is ironic that the mother considers this an important piece of advice for her son to follow while she herself has neglected to take Perceval
to any church. As a result, he has no idea what a church or abbey is, prompting him to ask her: “Mere, fait il, que est eglise?... Et mostiers qu’est?” (537, 541). Yet again, Perceval fails to follow his mother’s advice, as he never enters a church or monastery; in fact, his first encounter in a religious space is in his hermit uncle’s hut on Good Friday. While Perceval is guilty of ignoring his mother’s parting advice, the fault of this lack of knowledge lies squarely on the shoulders of Perceval’s mother. The potentially dire consequences would, and do, resonate with Perceval when he fails to follow her hasty lessons as he is preparing to leave her. Her own sin of isolating her son and withholding the knowledge of Christian practice, ritual and the sacraments is punished when Perceval, with seemingly no compassion or thought to his mother’s well-being, departs from his home to take up the very vocation from which she had so desperately tried to shield her son.\(^{170}\)

Adding to Perceval’s lack of Christian knowledge is the fact that he is marked by his Welsh origins, which have associations with being wild and untamed, the opposite of the refined and self-disciplined Christian knight. In a way, then, Perceval’s childhood and life with his mother can be considered a form of pre-Christian existence. While he has learned some basic ideas about God and prayer from his mother, it is clear from the aforementioned episodes that he continues to lack a true understanding and real belief in the tenets of Christianity. From the time he leaves his mother’s house, he embarks on an educational journey that teaches him about both chivalric and religious morals—his transformational conversion journey. While his mother leaves him with a courtly and religious ‘crash course,’ the hastiness and briefness of these

\(^{170}\) Several scholars note that Perceval leaving his mother’s house demonstrates a lack of compassion. Many cite this as Perceval’s sin, as stated by the hermit, although it is perhaps, as I suggest here, not entirely Perceval’s fault. While he may commit a sin for which he must do penance, his initial departure is, first of all, a natural part of his growth and maturation; and, second, a direct consequence of the mother’s neglect of his spiritual formation. Perceval’s fundamental selfishness and pride, if we view his departure in this way, is a direct result of never having been taught Christian compassion or humility, which would have been an integral part of not only spiritual, but also chivalric, education.
lessons is not fully comprehended by the hero, perhaps because these lessons are given by a woman. He has not been taught the lessons of chivalry, courtliness or religion by those men that are in control of these male-centric systems; rather, he is being taught about patriarchal society by a person doubly marginalized: first, as a woman, and thus, outside the masculine power structure; and second, as a woman living literally on the margins of society, in a state of voluntary segregation from the very society about which she attempts to inform her son. It is no surprise, then, that her lessons and advice would be misinterpreted or entirely ignored, because she is not a credible source, having proven herself unfit or unwilling to function within the society Perceval seeks to join.

When Perceval leaves his mother’s house, he begins his journey from an essentially pre-Christian figure to a member of the Christian community; thus, he initiates his intra-religious conversion process. This process involves the complementary parts of education formation: the secular, i.e. chivalric, followed by the religious. His first encounter solidifies the ineffectiveness of his mother’s lessons and demonstrates his complete ignorance of any organized social structure outside the Gaste Forest. He mistakes the beautiful tent that he sees for a church; he enters, believing he should worship and pray to God, finding instead a beautiful maiden alone in the tent. Invoking his mother’s teachings yet again, he forces kisses from the girl and steals her ring [ll. 619-679]. He misinterprets the ideals of courtliness, having no previous experience with young maidens; thinking himself required to kiss the girl and entitled to her ring, he violates the courtly code by dishonoring the maiden and her lover. Thus, the education provided by his mother, a woman, is entirely ineffective and, moreover, dangerous, for Perceval. It is only after Perceval receives chivalric training from his male teacher, Gornemant, that he encounters the maiden again, redeeming her lost honor by defeating her lover in combat. Perceval spares the
knight, instructing him to serve the maiden whom Kay struck at King Arthur’s court; in this way, Perceval is able to redeem himself from his initial sin against the lady and provide a service to the lady unjustly mistreated by Kay. Thus, it is only after receiving proper chivalric instruction from a credible, i.e. masculine, source that Perceval can begin to overcome his pre-Christian formation and failures to become a full member of the Christian community. It is also only at this point that he can begin to atone for and redeem any past sins that he has committed, even those committed unconsciously or out of ignorance.

After Gornemant’s instruction, Perceval continues his pursuit of chivalric prowess, though there is still a fundamental lack in his knowledge; the proof of this lack arrives during the famous Grail Castle scene, wherein Perceval fails to ask the key questions about the mysterious objects and people that he encounters, as well as the unseen host served by the Grail. It becomes clear that Perceval was mistaken in remaining silent while in the presence of the bleeding lance and the dish that served the unseen host when he is chastised by two different women—his cousin, whose lover was killed due to Perceval’s misinterpretation of his mother’s courtly teachings and the Hideous Damsel. While it is never made clear how these women know the questions that Perceval should have asked, their discourse is eventually confirmed and supported by the hermit-uncle.\footnote{Of course, the discourse of the hermit uncle has been called into question. Cazelles, for example in The Unholy Grail, casts doubt on the reliability of the hermit in this text.}  After the encounter with these women, Perceval undertakes the mission to find the mysterious castle again.

The next time that Perceval is discussed in the text, five years have passed. While Perceval has becomes arguably the best knight in the realm, having sent several defeated knights to Arthur’s court, his chivalric prowess continues to lack the spiritual element needed for him to be fully accepted into society. It is, significantly, on Good Friday that Perceval intercepts a group
of penitents who scold him for bearing arms on such a holy day [“Certes, ce n’est rasons ne biens/ D’armes porter, ainz est grant torz,/ Au jor que Jhesu Cristz fu morz” (6185-6187)]. It is at this moment that Perceval is granted the occasion for his full intra-religious conversion. Having attained the highest level of secular, feudal and chivalric prestige, his spiritual formation is the final piece of his conversion journey. As Sylvester George Tan points out in his work, the penitents signal for Perceval his first opportunity to recognize that he is committing a sin, even if he is not aware of this sin. Tan views Perceval’s religious conversion as a parallel to Bernard of Clairvaux’s monastic theology in which a person, even if s/he is not aware of the sins s/he is committing, is still culpable for these sins. He does not assert that Perceval should be condemned for his sins, but rather the importance is that he recognize his sins in order to return to God’s favor through confession and penance [ll. 143, 146]. While I do not dispute the conclusions of Tan’s article, I do think there is an important missing piece to this view of Perceval’s conversion. It is true that through the help of his hermit-uncle Perceval becomes aware of the sins that he has committed, even if these sins do not seem overtly wrong or evil. At the same time, it is not only the recognition of his sins that is important in the final stages of Perceval’s journey, but rather the fact that he is following the correct, official and institutionally sanctioned steps that will ensure his return to grace and spiritual salvation. When Perceval encounters the penitents, they explain to him the regulations set forth by the Church dictating that knights should not bear their arms on Good Friday and explain the importance of confession [ll. 6223-6240]. By deciding to follow the penitents’ lessons and seeking out the hermit to confess, Perceval is, for the first time, following an official ecclesiastical rule rather than the hasty lessons delivered by a woman.

172 Tan finds Perceval’s major sin to be pride, for it is pride that causes him to dismiss crossing himself when he thinks devils are approaching and pride that lies at the root of the abandonment of his mother. While the argument still exists that Perceval was correct in leaving his mother to forge his own path, as remaining with his mother forever could lead to sloth and cause him to neglect the primary duty of reproduction, Tan focuses the sin on the attitude with which Perceval departed rather than the act itself.
who herself has neglected to participate in the Christian realm for several years, or exclusively chivalric rules that he learned from Gornemant. His willingness to follow Church law is coupled by the signs that he is ready and willing to fully experience his intra-religious conversion: he is ready to repent in front of God and one of God’s earthly representatives; he demonstrates his repentance by crying and disarming himself as soon as he arrives at the hermitage [ll. 6257-6267].

When Perceval arrives at the hermit’s hut, he begins a formal spiritual education delivered by an official member of the institutional Church who is, moreover, a man. For the first time, Perceval says confession, admitting that he has ceased to love and believe in God, very grave sins [“Sire, fait il, bien a .V. anz/ Que je ne soi ou je me fui,/ Ne Deu n’amai ne Deu ne crui,/ N’onques puis ne fis se mal non” (6290-6293)]. The penitence prescribed by the hermit that will assure Perceval’s absolution actually mirrors the teachings given by Perceval’s mother: he states that Perceval should go to church every morning; to believe in and love God; to honor men and women; to come to the aid of people, especially women, in need [ll. 6358-6398]. Thus, though the mother’s teachings may have been the correct teachings, it is not until they are administered by an officially sanctioned masculine religious figure that they resonate with Perceval. Additionally, the hermit leads Perceval in an ascetic way of life: Perceval remains with the hermit for two days eating in an ascetic fashion as another layer of his penance. It is at this moment, with the hermit in the forest, that Perceval completes his educational formation and is fully integrated into the Christian community, and thus, all facets of society. Perceval does not end up a sainted or extraordinarily holy individual, nor does he experience significant religious

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173 Bonnie Buettner stresses the importance of Good Friday and contact with the penitents on that day, which leads Perceval to his hermit uncle in her article “The Good Friday Scene in Chrétien de Troyes’ ‘Perceval’”.

174 Foulon, in “Les quatre repas de Perceval,” notes how the four primary meals in which Perceval partakes occur at significant educational moments for the hero. The change in his comportment parallels his chivalric and, particularly, spiritual journey.
Rather, his intra-religious conversion comes as a result of simply learning the rituals and practices set forth by the Church, highlighting the true nature of successful conversion: while the fundamental understanding of Christianity’s meanings and mysteries are important for Perceval to learn, it is equally, if not more, important for him to learn and actually participate in Christian practices. It is for this reason that Perceval’s conversion is completed at the hermit’s hut when he finally undergoes confession and carries out penance for the first time in his life.

Perceval’s intra-religious conversion, then, resides at the meeting of the three-point trajectory of his life journey: in the Waste Forest, the violent and secular Arthurian world and in the hermitage. While it is in the hermitage that Perceval completes the final step necessary for his full acceptance into the Christian community, this final step does not negate the importance of his childhood isolation or his formation as a knight; in fact, it can be argued that these secular experiences directly result in his spiritual formation as they lead him to the completion of his quest. Perceval, then, is a prime example and embodiment of the overarching aim of this entire project: to show that in searching for and reaching holiness, secular heroes do not, should not and, often, cannot deny the importance of their secular values and life. For Perceval to be considered a successful knight, he had to come to a full understanding and appreciation for both the feudal/chivalric rules as well as the regulations set forth by the Church.

The final textual example is a reconsideration of Robert le Diable as an intra-religious text. Like Perceval, Robert has Christian parents, although the circumstances of his conception are entirely within the diabolic realm. As a child Robert is cruel, abusive and violent, mistreating both lay and ecclesiastical men and women. His violence knows no bounds, which he proves

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175 In fact, the closest ‘mystical’ experience he has is the trance-like state into which he falls while staring at the drops of blood on the snow. In this scene, he is reminded of his lover; thus, this experience is entirely secular.
through burning abbeys and acting at tournaments as if he were actually engaging in war. Robert, through his actions, complete disregard for Christian law and finds himself entirely separated from the Church. In this way, he has manifested his devilish lineage and become evil incarnate.

In Chapter 2, “Renunciation,” I detailed how Robert was able to redeem himself, and even his mother, by renouncing the secular life and adhering to the hermit’s penance, becoming a saint after his death. It is this renunciatory journey from being an extension of the devil to an exemplary model of Christian living that can be considered a form of intra-religious conversion. Robert is not a pagan or Saracen, but he renounces his distinctly unchristian life with the promise to dedicate himself to the tenets of the Christian faith. Like the zealous military leaders who convert in *La Belle Hélène*, Robert wholeheartedly devotes himself to his new life: he follows the hermit’s bizarre penance without fail, not even breaking his silence when an imposter tries to take credit for saving the kingdom against the invading Turks. Even after his penance is fulfilled, Robert commits himself entirely to his new, converted form of life, following his hermit confessor into the eremitic life and continuing this legacy after the hermit’s death. Robert’s conversion is sanctified and solidified when it is revealed that he is a saint and his remains continue to perform miracles; this is the evidence that his conversion was achieved and conferred by God.

While Robert’s conversion proves his success in the spiritual realm, this story is not devoid of political issues. The line of succession in Normandy is disrupted when Robert converts and becomes a hermit. This is a valid political concern, as a messenger appears at the end offering Robert his father’s land as his son and heir, despite having been exiled by his father during his youth. Now that Robert has been accepted back into the Church, he is granted back his inheritance rights. Robert’s spiritual failure and separation from the Church, then, is directly
linked to his right and ability to rule his father’s kingdom. As a convert, his ability to rule his father’s land is restored. The same logic applies to the Emperor’s kingdom: Robert has proven himself to be valiant as a knight in battle and as a religious individual, thus he is the best choice to marry the Princess and rule and protect the empire. It is naturally disappointing, then, when Robert turns down the occasion to rule both Normandy and the empire; in doing so, he prevents the occasion to expand both his familial lands and the Emperor’s lands. In doing so, he would have strengthened the power of the future Norman dukes, who would have also been Emperors in Rome. By rejecting these inheritances, then, he limits the scope of power for both Normandy and the empire in Rome; he also institutes a new lineage in Normandy. While the author does not reveal who ends up succeeding Robert’s father in Normandy, since Robert is an only child, it is without a doubt not a direct descendent of the deceased duke. However, due to the dubious nature of Robert’s conception, it is possible to argue that Robert is not actually his father’s progeny, but rather the Devil’s. Though he has been absolved of his diabolic origins and redeemed as a member of the Christian church, his lineage is nevertheless still attached to the Devil; hence the title of his narrative continuing to allude to his diabolic roots. Thus, if he had ascended the Norman throne, it would have been as an arguably ‘illegitimate’ heir. In rejecting the inheritance, he is allowing an indisputable full blood relative to rule Normandy, even if it is not the direct descendent of Robert’s father. In this way, Robert becomes an exemplary holy individual and the succession of Norman dukes is not tainted with any suspicion of illegitimacy, rendering its political line pure and stable.

The considerations of intra-religious conversion given to these texts, Perceval and Robert, can, in fact, extend to reconsider all of the texts discussed throughout this project. Through their renunciation, which, like Robert’s, can be viewed as a form of conversion,
William of Orange and Guildeuëc achieve the means of transcending the secular world to become models of holiness. Joïe, Hélène and Fresne, though they are faultless from the outset, become further elevated spiritually by means of their victimization; through their proxy penances they undergo the conversion experience that elevates them from faultless victim to saintly individuals. Moreover, Joïe and Hélène, along with Ami, Amile’s children, the sturgeon and William’s horse, undergo another form of intra-religious conversion that involves a bodily transformation as well; during this process, their bodies undergo a literal conversion during the *relicization* process as proof of their spiritual integrity. Yonec’s parents do not undergo a conversion experience to the same extent as the aforementioned individuals; however, Muldumarec in particular is transformed from an entirely pagan, even demonic, figure into a sympathetic and Christianized one. The final consideration of this project, then, is that by appropriating various spiritual, religious, sometimes dogmatic elements, sensibilites and overlays, the nine texts discussed in this project allow the secular characters to create an alternate route through which they can convert through various methods and achieve spiritual, as well as secular, transcendence. The results of this conversion is the attainment of spiritual transcendence and spiritual privilege without sacrificing secular deeds, prestige or values. In this way, the authors have successfully carved out a unique space for their secular characters in which both spiritual and temporal concerns are equally considered and blended to demonstrate to a contemporary audience how a co-existence of spiritual and secular values could be achieved and, more importantly, that this co-existence is desirable, attainable and best suited for their time and place.
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Appendix

*Summary of each text*

*Ami et Amile:* (anonymous, 13th century)

The title characters are born and christened by the Pope on the same day; they resemble each other in every way, though they are not related. As adults, they become noble knights in Charlemagne’s court. After they have both proven their valor in battle, Ami marries Lubias- a noble lady with treacherous family ties- to become the count of Blaye, while Amile remains at the court as seneschal, where he is tricked and seduced by the emperor’s daughter, Belissant. The lovers are betrayed by Lubias’ uncle, and, unable to find the support to clear his name, Amile is challenged to the judicial ordeal of trial by combat. Since he is guilty of the charge, he rightfully fears losing the battle. Ami agrees to take his friend’s place in the duel to save his life and is successful, killing the traitor. Charlemagne offers his daughter Belissant as reward to the victor, to whom Ami swears a false marriage oath in the name of Amile, even though an angel warns him that he will be stricken with leprosy for doing so. Ami and Amile switch back their identities, with no one aware that a switch had ever occurred. Soon after, Ami is indeed stricken with leprosy as the angel had promised. Ami is repudiated and exiled by his wife, and likewise by his brothers, eventually making his way to Riviers, where Amile welcomes him into his home. Here, an angel reveals the cure for the disease: Amile must kill his two sons and wash Ami in their blood. Amile, though horrified, sacrifices his children; Ami is cured; and the beheaded children are miraculously restored to life. Ami forgives and reunites with his wife. The friends travel to Jerusalem to confess their sins; they both die on the return trip at Mortara [in Lombardy, Italy], and their tomb remains an important pilgrimage site on the pilgrimage route to the Holy Land.
La Belle Hélène de Constantinople (anonymous, mid 14th century)

The narrator situates the story within a quasi-historical framework, stating it begins after the fall of Jerusalem by Titus, under the pontificate of Clement. Richard, emperor of Rome and brother of the pope, has a beautiful daughter. The Sarrasins attack Rome and the pope asks Antoine, emperor of Constantinople, for aid. Antoine defeats the Sarrasins and marries Richard’s daughter. She dies after giving birth to a daughter named Hélène, named for Saint Helen, Constantine’s mother. Antoine has several portraits painted of Hélène and has her sleep with him in his bed. When she turns thirteen, Antoine decides to marry her. The Sarrasins attack Rome again, and the pope calls on Antoine for help yet again. Antoine refuses unless the pope authorizes the marriage to his daughter. The pope, pressured by the cardinals, grants the authorization. Antoine defeats the Sarrasins and has Hélène’s portrait painted on the pillars of the pontifical palace. The pope is assured by God to grant the marriage request, assuring the pope that it will never come to fruition. Antoine returns home and informs his daughter of the impending marriage. Hélène, horrified, flees with the help of her governess, Béatrice. Hélène escapes by boat while Béatrice is burned at the stake for her suspected role in Hélène’s disappearance. Antoine declares his quest to find his daughter; a quest that takes 34 years to complete.

Hélène lands in the pagan country of Vautembron (ancient name for Flanders), where she finds a monastery of nuns. Upon her arrival, the convent bells spontaneously and miraculously ring. When the king of the country insists on meeting Hélène, she flees once again by sea with some merchants. The boat is attacked and Hélène is captured by pirates. As she is about to be raped,
God causes a terrible storm which smashes the boat. She survives, reaching Newcastle, where she encounters the king of England, Henry, who declares his love for her and offers to marry her. Hélène pretends to be a poor woman, but Henry persists in his wish to marry her, despite his mother’s opposition. Hélène becomes pregnant with two sons, the future Saint Martin and Brice, father of the future Saint Brice.

During this time, a huge pagan army attacks Rome. Antoine is unavailable due to his quest to find Hélène, thus Henry’s aid is requested in exchange for the annulment of the annual tax. He leaves England with a large army with portraits of Hélène painted on his shield. He leaves the count of Clochestre (Gloucester) to rule in his absence. As Henry’s army passes through Boulogne, he defeats the pagan giant Boulu, has the famous church of Notre-Dame built and continues toward Rome. When he arrives at the papal palace, he recognizes his wife’s face on the pillars; the pope recounts the story to Henry, who is now aware that he has married Antoine’s daughter. He successfully defeats the enemy; after the battle, he intends to return to England.

While Henry is away, the Queen Mother manages to steal Hélène’s seal and has a replica made. After Hélène gives birth to the twin boys, the Queen Mother fabricates letters: the first falsely stating that Hélène has given birth to two monsters; the second stating that Hélène and the children are to be burned at the stake. Despite the assumed royal decree, the count of Clocheatre disobeys and saves Hélène: he has her arm amputated and has his niece, Marie, burned in Hélène’s place. The count puts Hélène and her children, one of whom has his mother’s severed arm, wrapped in a protective cloth, attached to him, on a boat and sends them out to sea. They arrive on a seemingly deserted island, named Constance. Hélène falls asleep. While she sleeps a wolf takes the boy with the arm attached; a hermit, Félix, sees this and saves the boy through prayer. Meanwhile, the other boy is taken by a lion. Hélène wakes and, not knowing what has
become of her children, embarks on a Sarrasin boat that lands in Nantes, which was still pagan at the time. On Constance, the hermit discovers the boy taken by the lion. He raises the children, calling them Lion and Bras.

During Antoine’s search for his daughter, he comes to Bavaria where he encounters the Sarrasin king Graibaut who is adored like a god and wishes to marry his daughter, Clariande. Clariande, secretly Christian, decides to flee, encountering Antoine during her flight. Antoine defeats Graibaut, who converts, takes the baptismal name Louis and becomes a hermit, leaving his daughter to rule the kingdom. Antoine leaves and continues his quest.

Henry returns to England and discovers his mother’s conspiracy, condemning her to death by burning at the stake. Antoine arrives in England; upon learning of his daughter’s “death”, he has doubts, and the count reveals the truth about how he helped Hélène escape. The two kings decide to join forces and search for Hélène together. As they leave, they are joined by Amaury of Scotland, who wishes to convert to Christianity, the reason for which he was chased out of his homeland by his subjects.

When Hélène’s sons turn sixteen, they decide to look for their parents. They reach Bavaria, where Clariande is ruling. While they are at her court, the count of Clochestre asks Clariande to marry him. She refuses, and he mounts an attack on her city with a powerful army. When a pagan counselor reports to Clariande that Lion is distributing the palace reserves to the hungry townspeople, she banishes the boys, who are welcomed by the count’s army. Eventually, Clariande relents and marries the count to save the people of her city; they marry in London. When Clariande tries to seduce Lion, they depart from the city, continuing the search for their parents. As they pass through Boulogne, which is besieged by the pagan king Anthénor of
Flanders, they defeat the king and chase out the pagans. They continue on, arriving in Amiens, where Lion, being asked by a poor man for alms and having no more money, gives him half of his coat. The poor man is Jesus Christ, testing the charity of the future Saint Martin. The boys are then baptized by the archbishop of Tours and renamed Martin (Lion) and Brice (Bras).

During this time, Hélène lived in the pagan city of Nantes, begging for food and working as a washer woman, but eventually she decides to return to a Christian land. She goes to Tours, continuing to beg and work as a washer woman.

After 22 years, Antoine and Henry come across the hermit Félix on the island, who recounts the history of the children he raised. Henry realizes these are his sons, and the kings follow their route to Bordeaux, a city ruled by the pagan king Robastre. They conquer Bordeaux and Robastre converts, taking the name Coustant. He is eventually canonized under the name Saint Constancien; his relics are still honored at Breteuil-sur-Noye. Coustant’s son, Joserant, is the father of Saint Riquier, the famous friend of Floovant, Clovis’ son. Coustant joins Henry’s army, and they go to Tours. Here, Henry reunites with his sons, recognizing them due to the arm attached to Brice. Henry leaves his children in the care of the archbishop of Tours while he and his army depart on Crusade to deliver Jerusalem.

The army arrives in Jerusalem, which is defended by King Ardenbourc, who is helped by Priant, King of Escalon, who is married to Ardenbourc’s daughter, Plaisance. Plaisance, however, is secretly Christian. Coustant is captured and imprisoned by Priant. Coustant and Plaisance become lovers while he is imprisoned. He eventually escapes and returns to the Christian army, while Plaisance, pregnant, must flee, arriving in Rome, where she is taken in by the wife of a Roman senator and gives birth to a son, Joserant. The senator, in love with Plaisance, orders his
cousin to take the child to the forest and kill it. The cousin is killed by thieves as he was journeying to the city of Castre, governed by the pagan king Hurtaut, who was currently besieging the king of France, Clovis, who himself was pagan, but whose wife was Christian. The thieves leave the child, who is rescued by Clovis, renaming him Jaseran due to the covering in which he was found. Clovis experiences an inspiration and addresses his wife’s God, promising to convert if victorious; an angel appears, inspiring a new coat of arms; Clovis defeats the pagans; he returns to the capital city of Lutèce, which he renames Paris; and he is baptized at Reims. Meanwhile, Plaisance flees Rome, finding refuge in Castre, where she lives off of alms. Eventually, the Christians are successful in capturing Jerusalem: Ardenbourc surrenders, accepting conversion and adopting the baptismal name Amaury in homage of Amaury of Scotland, who defeated him.

Hélène hears of Henry’s death and decides to go to Rome. She passes through Castre and meets Plaisance, who has bought and runs an inn for Christian women. Hélène falls ill and is cared for by Plaisance, to whom she recounts her story. When Hélène is summoned to court by king Hurtaut, she flees Castre and goes to Rome, where she refuses all comfort and lodges under the stairs of the pontifical palace. Here she learns that Henry is not dead, as she had believed.

The Christians receive word from the pope, besieged by Hurtaut of Castre, is in need for their help. Near the Roman coast, they encounter Hurtaut’s brother, defeating him in a naval battle. During the land battle, the Sarrasins are defeated and those remaining return to Castre. Hélène, convinced she will be put to death if discovered, leaves Rome, but leaves behind a message reveling her identity. To avoid future attacks, the Christian army decides to seize Castre. During the battle, Amaury is taken prisoner and condemned to crucifixion. The Christians are victorious after two months. They liberate several captured Christian women, including Plaisance, who is
recognized by Henry and Antoine. They rename the city of Castre Plaisance in her honor, making it a dowry to her and Coustant.

Henry and Antoine head toward Flanders, but they are ambushed along the way by the count Maradin, son of Anthénor. Henry is taken prisoner, but assured by an angel that he will be delivered by his sons and will find Hélène in Tours. Antoine besieges Bruges and asks aid from the archbishop of Tours, who sends an army along with Martin and Brice. The army is incessantly attacked by Maradin, with Malotru as a particularly redoubtable fighter. The Christians are victorious against Maradin’s army, and Malotru is hanged for refusing to convert. Another pagan lord, Beruir, is baptized and gives over his citadel of Lille to the Christians. Martin prays to God, and the Christian army successfully takes Bruges; Maradin accepts conversion and is baptized under the name Morant. He accompanies the army, who besieges a fortress guarded by a giant that is in an advantageous strategic situation near present-day Douai. Morant orders the giant, his vassal, to turn over the tower, but he refuses. He giant of Douai is killed, after which hundreds of crows— which are devils—come out of his mouth and take his soul to Hell. Afraid, the Saracen end the fight, and the giant’s brother, Maloré, accepts conversion; he is baptized and takes the name Pierre. Pierre becomes a hermit and founds the church of Saint-Pierre de Douai, while Morant founds the city of Rivière, which will be renamed Douai.

The Christian army travels to the city of Hantonne, capital of Amaury’s former kingdom, currently governed by his brother, the pagan Gamaux. The king’s sister is Ludiane, who is secretly Christian. Brice, Antoine and the archbishop of Tours are taken prisoner. Ludiane falls in love with Brice and convinces her brother not to kill the prisoners; she agrees to personally watch them. She agrees to help them on the condition that Brice accept to marry her. He refuses at first, wanting to consecrate himself to the service of God, but Antoine and the archbishop
convince him to accept the deal. Ludiane liberates the prisoners and escapes with them. They take Hantonne and Gamaux, full of rage and desperation, throws himself into the sea and drowns. Brice and Ludiane marry, conceiving the future Saint Brice the same night.

The entire company returns to Tours to find Hélène. Félix, visited by an angel, also travels to Tours. Though Hélène is in hiding, she is recognized by a servant of Henry. She is brought to the court where she is reunited with her children, her husband and her father. During the celebratory reunion, a voice is heard commanding Martin to rejoin the arm to Hélène’s body. They all go to Rome, stopping in Plaisance, where the queen of the same name decides to accompany them to Rome. Along the way, they deliver Coustant from the prison in which he had been held for a long time. They celebrate the marriage of Coustant and Plaisance. In Rome, there is a grand reception and Coustant becomes emperor of Rome. Antoine regains Constantinople; Brice is made emperor of Constantinople and King of England. Years later, when Henry and Hélène die in Rome, they are buried in the Church of Saint-Pierre. Martin lives in Touraine as a hermit for many years, becoming archbishop of Tours upon his predecessor’s death. Saint Brice, his nephew, succeeds him.
Eliduc: (Marie de France, late 12th century)

Eliduc is a noble knight who becomes the victim of slander, which results in him being exiled by his Lord. Eliduc travels abroad and swears fidelity to a new King after saving the kingdom from an attack. He meets the King’s daughter, Guilliadun, and they fall in love, engaging in a purely emotional, not physical, relationship, allowing Eliduc to remain innocent of adultery, although he hides that he is already married from Guilliadun. Eventually, Eliduc is summoned back to his original court and pardoned, but not before vowing to return to Guilliadun. Eliduc makes good on his promise, returns to his lover, and sneaks her out of her kingdom to return home with him, all the while still married. It is on the journey back to his homeland that a sailor reveals Eliduc’s prior marriage, causing Guilliadun to faint, though everyone believes she is dead. Eliduc, overcome with grief, throws the sailor overboard, steers the boat to safety, and places his lover in a chapel on his lands, where he visits her every day. His wife, Guildeluëc, follows him to the chapel and discovers the girl. When she witnesses a weasel resuscitating its fatally wounded mate by using a flower, she uses the remedy to revive the girl. Guilliadun admits she has escaped from her home with Eliduc, but that she did not know he was married; Guildeluëc reveals that she is Eliduc’s wife, and that she is not angry with either the girl or with her husband. She then announces her decision to renounce her marriage in order to take the veil, which allows the lovers to legitimately marry. Eliduc, grateful for his wife’s selfless act, grants her leave and gives her a portion of his own land for the foundation of a convent, as she had requested. She enters it as the abbess, along with 30 nuns, and establishes her own Rule. Eliduc and Guilliadun eventually turn to God, with Eliduc entering a monastery that he founds and placing Guilliadun into Guildeluëc’s convent, where they live as sisters. The three live their remaining years in perfect harmony, writing letters to and praying for each other, all three living primarily for God.
**Fresne**: (Marie de France, late 12th century)

A woman, hearing the news that her neighbor is expecting twin sons, slanders the pregnant neighbor by claiming the children had to be fathered by two different men. When the slanderous woman then gives birth to twin daughters, she decides to secretly get rid of one of them to preserve her own reputation. She decides to leave the baby at the door of a convent, where she is discovered, named ‘Frense’ for the tree in which she is found, and raised as the abbess’ niece. Years later, a local knight, Gurun, hears of Fresne’s beauty and falls in love with her. He eventually seduces her and persuades her to leave the convent to live with him as his mistress. His vassals, wanting Gurun to produce a legitimate male heir, insist that he marry to a woman of high rank and from a noble family. Gurun agrees to the marriage with the noble woman who happens to be Fresne’s twin sister, Codre. While Fresne prepares the marriage bed for Gurun and Codre, she replaces the worn coverlet with her own silk that she had been wrapped in by her mother when she was abandoned. The mother sees the silk coverlet, recognizes it and discovers that Fresne is the daughter she abandoned years ago. The mother begs forgiveness from Fresne and her husband. The marriage between Codre and Gurun is annulled, and Gurun and Fresne, now with proper family connections, are married.
William’s wife, Guiborc, has died, and William is directed by an angel to withdraw from secular life and enter a monastery. William enters the monastery at Aniane, only to find the monks to be hypocritical and stingy. Their corruption is so extreme, that they plot a conspiracy that sends William on an errand to buy fish that requires him to pass through an area noted for violent robberies; the monks tell William he must not fight using weapons, in hopes that he will be killed. When he returns from the errand alive—having defeated the robbers with his horse’s leg, which is miraculously restored after the scurmish— he kills several of the monks, spares those who beg for mercy, and decides to leave the monastery for a more ascetic eremitic life.

After a short stay with his cousin, where he helps his cousin fight off attacking thieves, he builds his own hermitage, which also has a garden and chapel. He lives an ascetic life until he is captured by Saracens, who put him in a prison cell in Salerno for seven years. He is eventually freed by King Louis’ army, who defeat the pagan army in the city. William returns to his hermitage, but Ysoré comes to France with his pagan army to avenge his uncle, who was killed by the Louis’ army. William is informed of the impending attack by a messenger; he goes to Paris secretly, retrieving the arms and horse he had left at the monastery several years earlier, defeats Ysoré and returns to his hermitage.

Back at his hermitage, William builds a bridge over the rapids, which is destroyed every night. Eventually, he catches and defeats the devil that repeatedly destroyed the bridge, allowing him to finally complete it. He lives the rest of his life there as a hermit until he dies and his soul goes to Paradise. His hermitage is henceforth known as St. Guillaume-du-Désert, a popular stop on the pilgrimage route to Santiago.
**Perceval:** (Chrétien de Troyes, late 12th century)

I only summarize Perceval’s narrative; I leave out the adventures of Gawain, as they are not discussed in this project.

Perceval, a young Welsh man, has grown up in isolation in the “Gaste Forest,” raised by his mother, ignorant of his noble roots, his lineage, knighthood, the feudal world, institutionalized religion and society. When a group of Arthur’s knights pass through the forest one day, Perceval is in awe, thinking them to be angels. When Perceval tells his mother that he has met these knights, she is upset and reveals to her son the story of his brothers who died in combat as knights and his father, who was wounded and died from grief after losing his sons. Despite his mother’s cautionary tale, Perceval wishes to become a knight, leaving his mother to seek out Arthur. As he leaves, his mother imparts hasty advice; she falls as Perceval rides away.

Perceval then has a series of chivalric adventures. He encounters a magnificent tent and enters it, thinking it to be a church. Inside he discovers a beautiful lady. Perceval misinterprets his mother’s advice, forcing kisses from her and taking her ring without her permission. When the damsel’s lover eventually returns, he accuses her of infidelity due to the missing ring and punishes her by making her travel almost naked and on foot.

At Arthur’s court, Kay mocks Perceval and challenge him to get the Red Knight’s armor; Arthur rebukes Kay, causing a maiden to laugh for the first time in six years. Kay strikes her, since a jester had prophesied that she would only laugh again when the future supreme lord of all knights arrived. Perceval accept the challenge and defeats the Red Knight.

Perceval departs from Arthur’s court and arrives at a castle where he meets Gornemant of Gohort, who becomes his mentor. Gornemant teaches Perceval how to be a knight, gives him
clothing and a sword and confers knighthood upon him. He advises Perceval not to be too talkative, to console women, to go to church and not to tell people he was taught by his mother. Perceval, concerned for his mother, decides to find her.

He encounters another castle, Beaurepaire, where he meets Blancheflor, Gornemant’s niece, whose people are engaged in a losing battle. At night, she climbs in bed with Perceval and he promises to fight in the imminent attack of Anguingueron. Perceval is victorious; he spares Anguingueron’s life, sending him to Arthur’s court to serve the maiden Kay struck. In a subsequent attack, Perceval is, yet again, victorious, sending the defeated to serve the maiden. He departs from Beaurepaire to continue looking for his mother.

At a river, he sees two men fishing in a boat. Perceval is unable to cross and accepts the Fisher King’s offer of lodging. Inside the castle, he meets the lord, the Fisher King, who is unable to rise to greet him; the Fisher King gives Perceval a sword. Perceval joins the Fisher King for a sumptuous meal that involves a mysterious procession: a squire carries a white lance whose tip oozes blood; several squires carry candelabras; a maiden carries a gold grail/ serving dish set with precious stones that illuminates the room as it passes; another maiden carries a silver carving platter. Remembering Gornemant’s advice, Perceval keeps silent—he does not inquire about the Fisher King’s injury, whom the grail serves in the hidden chamber or why the lance bleeds. The next morning, Perceval wakes to find the castle deserted and leaves.

He meets a crying maiden whose lover has recently died. This woman informs Perceval that the Fisher King was wounded in battle and rebukes him for not asking why the lance bleeds or who is served by the Grail. At this point, Perceval guesses his name as Perceval the Welshman. The
maiden reveals she is his cousin and was raised with him for many years; she also informs Perceval of his mother’s death.

Perceval leaves the maiden, only to encounter the girl from whom he forcibly took the ring. Perceval assures her lover, the Haughty Knight, of the girls’ faithfulness and innocence; he proves this to be true when he defeats the knight when challenged. Perceval sends them both to Arthur’s court. Arthur decides to find Perceval, who keeps sending him defeated knights. One day, while Perceval is lost in thought upon seeing three drops of blood on the snow, he is reminded of Blancheflor. Sagremor and Kay both challenge him, thinking him asleep on his horse, but Perceval easily defeats both. Gawain approaches Perceval peacefully and befriends him.

Later, Perceval encounters a Hideous Damsel with a beard and humpback on a mule. She taunts Perceval for not asking the questions at the Fisher King’s castle. Perceval decides to undertake the quest to learn who is served by the Grail and why the lance bleeds.

When Perceval reenters the narrative, he has not entered a church in five years. He encounters penitents on a trail; they chastise him for bearing arms on Good Friday, informing him of the necessity to confess and do penance. They send him to a holy hermit, who reveals that he is Perceval’s uncle (the brother of his mother) and tells him how his mother died from sorrow as he left, for which he must repent. He cites this sin as the reason Perceval failed to ask about the Grail. He reveals that the man served by the Grail is the hermit’s brother, and that the Fisher King is that man’s son. He informs Perceval that the Grail bears a single consecrated host which has sustained the king for several years. Perceval undergoes penance, shares ascetic meals with
the hermit, acknowledges Christ and takes communion. At this point, Perceval’s adventures are finished.
Robert le diable: (anonymous, late 12th/early 13th century)

There is a noble couple from Normandy who is childless for many years. The woman, losing hope in her prayers to God, prays instead to the Devil for a child. That night she conceives a son, Robert. Robert is an evil child, biting his wet nurses and governesses. He grows to be massive in size, and as he gets older he begins needlessly killing and joins a band of criminals. The height of his evil actions peak when he burns a monastery, killing all the monks inside. He realizes one day that he is feared by all and forces his mother to reveal the secret of his conception. Realizing he is evil, Robert decides to repent, seeking forgiveness and absolution in Rome. The pope, hearing Robert’s confession, sends him to a nearby hermit for his penance. The hermit tells him he must act like a fool, humiliate himself and eat only what the dogs eat. He becomes the fool in the emperor’s court. When the emperor is attacked by Turks, an angel sends white armor and a horse so that Robert can fight, with the restriction that he must remain anonymous. Robert as the anonymous white knight defeats the enemy. The city is attacked two more times, with the same sequence of events. Meanwhile, the emperor’s mute daughter sees Robert in his white armor and knows he is the savior of her father’s kingdom. When the emperor announces that he will reward the white knight with marriage to his daughter and the inheritance of the Empire, another knight claims to be the white knight; the mute daughter, who knows Robert is truly the white knight, tries to tell her father the truth, to no avail. Finally, the hermit arrives to tell Robert that he is free of his penance, after which Robert reveals the truth. The emperor offers his daughter and Empire, and a messenger who has come to announce the death of Robert’s father and confer the paternal lands, but Robert refuses both offers, choosing to follow his hermit-confessor into the eremitic life. When the hermit dies, Robert continues his legacy, performing many miracles, and dies as a
saint, whose body is ceremoniously processed and buried in Rome. After some time, his bones are translated into their current place, the abbey in Le Puy now referred to as Saint-Robert.
Le Roman de la Manekine: (Philippe de Remi, sire de Beaumanoir, early/mid 13th century)

The King and Queen of Hungary have one child- a daughter, Joy. The Queen dies, having first secured the king’s promise to remarry only if it is with a woman resembling herself. To keep the promise, the barons and clergy urge the king to marry his now sixteen-year old daughter. When Joy learns of the forced marriage to her father, she chops off her left hand, which falls into the river below. The king condemns her to death, but she is secretly freed and a mock execution is staged. Joy ends up in Scotland, where she marries the king who nicknames her “Manekine” due to her missing hand. Joy gives birth to a son while the king is absent, and, through falsified letters, his men believe she is to be put to death. For a second time, Joy/Manekine is freed and a mock execution is staged. After learning the truth, the king sets out to find his wife and son, reuniting with them several years later in Rome. Meanwhile, the king of Hungary regrets his actions and travels to Rome for absolution. At the Maundy Thursday service, at which Joy/Manekine, her husband and son are all present, he makes his confession. Hearing her story made public, Joy identifies herself, reunites with her father after granting him forgiveness and recovers her original name. Joy’s perfectly preserved hand is discovered in a nearby fountain, and the Pope miraculously restores it to Joy’s body. A heavenly voice directs Pope Urban to open the sturgeon that had swallowed the hand when it fell into the river, finding inside the sweet-smelling glove-shaped reliquary that the Virgin Mary placed there to protect the hand, which is carried to St Peter’s. After a papal feast where all dine on the sturgeon, Joy and her family journey to Hungary, where her father abdicates to his son-in-law, after which they travel to Armenia to claim Joy’s mother’s inheritance. Joy, her husband and son all return to Scotland where they have more children. The final lines attribute Joy’s salvation to her constancy and avoiding despair.
**Yonec:** (Marie de France, late 12th century)

The lord of Caerwent, a rich and jealous old man, marries a young noble woman in order to produce an heir. Moved by his jealous nature and his fear of adultery because she is young and beautiful, he locks her alone in a tower and charges his sister with guarding her. His jealousy is so extreme that he allows her no human contact, keeping her in strict isolation. His cruelty is so extreme that he does not even allow her to attend Mass or receive the Eucharist. The wife laments her situation and suffering, cursing her family for arranging the union. She wishes for a lover, at which point a hawk enters her chamber through an open window, and turns into a handsome knight, named Muldamerec. To prove his faith and that he is not evil, he recites the Credo and receives the Eucharist, having shape-shifted to look like the lady. The husband and sister notice a change in the lady’s complexion that reflects her state of newly found happiness. When the sister reports that her happiness is due to the visits from the hawk, the husband sets up a deadly trap for the bird. The bird-knight is mortally wounded by the trap, and flies away, leaving a trail of blood. The lady jumps out the window and follows the blood trail to a kingdom of silver, where she reunites with the dying Muldamerec. He announces that she will give birth to their son, who will be named Yonec; he gives her a sword destined to avenge his death, and a ring that will allow her husband to forget the entire affair. Years later, the lady, her old husband and Yonec set out to attend the feast of St. Aaron, eventually finding themselves at the bird-knight’s castle, which has become an abbey housing a religious order. They see a tomb that appears as a holy shrine, and the abbot explains it contains the lord of the land, who was killed as a result of his relationship with a lady, and they are awaiting the arrival of his son. The lady realizes they have come upon Muldamerec’s tomb. She reveals the truth to her son, and immediately faints and dies on the tomb of her lover. Yonec takes the sword and beheads his
stepfather, completing the vengeance prophesized by his father. Yonec becomes the lord of the kingdom.