

**Christina of Markyate's Biographer and His Work**

by

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### ABSTRACT

Since Charles Talbot's 1959 edition and translation of *The Life of Christina of Markyate: a Twelfth Century Recluse*, Christina's experiences have attracted the attention of scholars working in several historical and literary fields. There has been a marked tendency within the scholarship, however, to emphasize the role of Christina in the telling of her story. Some critics have even considered the life to be autobiographical. Christina, so this theory goes, related her experiences to an anonymous St. Albans monk, who committed them to writing more or less as he received them. The idea of Christina as the author of the *Life* is attractive and has been used as a way of attempting to understand medieval women's experiences, and especially their spiritual lives. In my view, however, there has been a certain naivety in the readiness of critics to assume that Christina was primarily responsible for the writing of her biography. The evidence for such a belief depends on plausibility, rather than on any evidence that can be adduced from the text itself. A change in emphasis is, I believe, due. The *Life* falls within the conventions of biography, or more precisely, hagiography, not of memoir or autobiography. A major goal of this study then, is to bring the anonymous author into the light, to show as far as possible the conditions that produced him, the problems that interested him, and his skill as a writer. Therefore, to begin with, I provide a context for Anonymous, the Benedictine monk of St. Albans Abbey. I examine the historical milieu in which he lived, as well as some of the issues that appear to have interested him. The effects of Gregorian Reform are evident in the writer's concern over topics such as the moral integrity and spiritual commitment of the clergy. That these very qualities are exemplified by Christina's defiance of her parents over her private vow of virginity is a potent commentary on some of the more wayward clerical characters in the story. Moreover, the portrayal of the relationship between Christina and Abbot Geoffrey of St. Albans Abbey in terms of spiritual friendship seems to have been an important purpose of the biographer. Spiritual friendship between men and women was an ideal that had been part of the Christian tradition since Gospel times, into the Early Church and throughout

monastic history. It was always a controversial subject, however, and as an ideal was in decline in the twelfth century, which may account in part for the almost complete neglect of the *Life* during the medieval period.

In addition to establishing a historical setting and cultural perspective for Anonymous, I also explore the practice of authorship in the twelfth century. From a consideration of what authorship in practice meant to twelfth-century writers, I turn to the skill shown in the *Life* by Anonymous in literary form, and rhetorical strategy, and in his use of dramatic writing and visions in constructing Christina's story. My hope is to draw more attention to the writer of the text, not as an alternative to studies on Christina herself, but as a complement to those studies. Although his fascinating subject has to a great extent obscured his own presence as the author of her *Life*, that single work, I believe, clearly establishes him as an accomplished author. In my view, it is to be deeply regretted that we have identified no more of his work.

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## *Christina of Markyate's Biographer and His Work*

### INTRODUCTION

The *Life* of Christina of Markyate exists in only one manuscript copy, the fourteenth-century Cotton Tiberius E I, which has been edited and translated by Charles H. Talbot.<sup>1</sup> Excerpts copied from her *Life* are also found in Section I of the *Gesta Abbatum* of Saint Albans Abbey, perhaps added by the anonymous compiler of Section II or by Thomas Walsingham.<sup>2</sup> These extracts would thus be thirteenth or fourteenth-century additions to the *Gesta Abbatum* (Riley xiii). Although Talbot, in 1959, was of the opinion that these excerpts were later additions, copied from the Cotton Tiberius manuscript, Rachel Koopmans in a recent study of the contemporary political situation at St. Albans has shown that this could not actually have been the case. The Saint Albans excerpts derive certainly from a different and, she believes earlier manuscript (673-674). One even wonders whether the writer of the *Gesta Abbatum* may have been working from the original twelfth-century manuscript of Christina's *Life* once held at Markyate Priory. The date of composition has been disputed. Talbot suggested that the *Life* was composed during the years after 1155 because he believed that it was commissioned by Robert Gorham, abbot of St. Albans Abbey 1151-1168, and was begun toward the end of Christina's life and finished after her death (c.1155-66). Koopmans has suggested "a

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<sup>1</sup> *The Life of Christina of Markyate: a Twelfth-Century Recluse*, edited and translated by C.H. Talbot, was first published by the Clarendon Press in 1959. It was reprinted with Talbot's revisions as an *Oxford Medieval Text* in 1987, and again reprinted, by the Medieval Academy of America and the University of Toronto Press in 1998. Quotations of Latin and English are from the 1998 reprint unless noted. I have, occasionally, suggested alternate translations, which appear in italics. Italics appearing elsewhere indicate emphases. The *Gesta Abbatum Monasterii Sancti Albani*, v.1 was edited by Henry Thomas Riley in 1867. I have used the Kraus reprint of 1965. For convincing arguments demonstrating separate sources for the texts of the Cotton Tiberius MS and the *Gesta Abbatum*, see Rachel M. Koopmans, "The Conclusion of Christina of Markyate's *Vita*."

<sup>2</sup>The relationship among these texts is clearly summarized in Koopmans' article.

conservatively broad estimate of c.1140-50" (695), since she believes it was closely tied to the abbacy of Geoffrey. I am inclined as well to believe that the story was composed, at intervals, during Geoffrey Gorham's abbacy (d. 1146), after he became convinced of her spiritual gifts. Talbot suggests that Christina and Geoffrey first met around 1124 (*Life* 15).<sup>3</sup> Anonymous may have made a beginning, if only in notes, at any point after this meeting.<sup>4</sup> This interpretation of events would explain some of the references in the work to events which sound as though Christina and Geoffrey were both still living at the time of writing. Furthermore, I believe there is direct evidence in the text that Anonymous was writing at the behest of Abbot Geoffrey. At the point in the text where Anonymous describes Christina's soul-searching before her decision to make her profession at St. Albans, he gives one of her particular reasons thus: "also because, as you have learned by experience, she revered you more than all the pastors under Christ" ["tum quia te super omnes sub Christo pastores in terra fortissime diligebat sicut [iugi] experimento probasti"] (ch. 50).<sup>5</sup> Later in the text, the "you" is identified: Christina decides to make her profession, being "persuaded by the frequent pleadings and humble sweetness of the abbot already mentioned," ["crebris supplicationibus. et humili dulcedine memorati abbatis devicta assensum prebuit suggerentibus"] that is, Geoffrey (ch. 62).<sup>6</sup> Christina was formally veiled in c. 1131 (Talbot 15), having known and shown

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<sup>3</sup>In this study, unless otherwise noted, the dates used for the events of Christina's life are those given by Talbot (*Life* 14-15). Although these dates are an estimate only – Talbot calls them provisional (14) – they at least provide a starting point for discussion, and have been used in that spirit by many scholars.

<sup>4</sup> The author of the *Life*, for convenience, will be referred to throughout as Anonymous.

<sup>5</sup> References given are to the chapter divisions in the *Life*.

<sup>6</sup> This decision-making prior to her consecration is described twice in the story, once before Geoffrey is actually introduced as a character (ch. 50-51), and once after she has become friends with him (ch. 62). To me, this seems to be an instance where the author has not completed the revision of his text.

care and affection for the abbot since around 1124. They continued their relationship until the Abbot's death in 1146. It seems evident that it was Geoffrey who ordered the writing of Christina's biography. We need not think, though, that the text was developed to its present state in a short time. Although it is a reasonably coherent piece of work, it is evident that the *Life* is unrevised in many places, as well as being incomplete. The safest estimate is that it was begun at some point after Geoffrey and Christina became friends and likely discontinued, as Koopmans has vividly demonstrated, shortly after Geoffrey's death, although the *Life* does not mention that event.

The Cotton Tiberius manuscript, then, is incomplete. The manuscript comes to an abrupt ending, covering events only to about 1140.<sup>7</sup> Various reasons have been suggested for this. Paulette L'Hermitte-Leclercq has said that it was natural for the monks to lose interest in Markyate after its official foundation as a priory, in 1145, under the protection of the canons of St. Pauls, London ("De L'ermitage" 53). Koopmans, however, using a variety of historical sources, has revealed that there was something more dramatic happening at Saint Albans at the time of Abbot Geoffrey's death and for several years thereafter. A number of Saint Albans monks had disapproved of Geoffrey's reliance on Christina and his financial support for the priory. Koopmans has summarized evidence which suggests that there was a considerable power-struggle after Geoffrey's death, over his successor and over the future administration of the Abbey. Sometime during this uproar, she believes, the association with Markyate was deliberately cut off and the *Life* discontinued (693-694). It is my belief that signs of rapid composition in the

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<sup>7</sup> The last event that can be independently dated is the council of Winchester, attended by Geoffrey in 1139.

second part and especially toward the end of the biography are consistent with this view and may indicate that incidents were being hastily recorded after Geoffrey's death but before the writer was finally forbidden to continue. Whether the anonymous author remained at St. Albans is not known. We may be grateful that his manuscript survived and was at some stage passed on to the nuns at Markyate, and that it later sparked the interest of at least two monks, who copied from it into the *Gesta Abbatum*, or one of its sources, and the Cotton Tiberius manuscript.

The subject of the biography, Christina, was born approximately 1096 (that is, about 30 years after the Norman conquest of England) as Theodora, daughter of Beatrix and Autti, wealthy Anglo-Saxon merchants in Huntingdon. (I will refer to her as Christina, the name she took when she went into hiding, throughout.) The author calls her family noble ("orta nobiliter"), although that may refer more to aspiration than reality. It may be that they had been thegns before the Conquest, as Talbot suggests (10), with business interests in Huntingdon.<sup>8</sup> Certainly it seems that they were powerful in the area and had plans to improve their dynastic fortunes.<sup>9</sup> Christina was the eldest daughter in her family and was highly prized by her parents. According to Anonymus,

Christina was conspicuous for such moral integrity, such comeliness and beauty, that all who knew her accounted her more lovable than all other women. Furthermore, she was so intelligent, so prudent in affairs, so efficient in carrying out her plans, that

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<sup>8</sup> For a discussion of the activity of thegns in towns, see Robin Fleming, "Rural Elites and Urban Communities in Late-Saxon England." "Thegns of all ranks held rights and property in the towns" (37), and many were active entrepreneurs.

<sup>9</sup> Christina's biographer tells us that "she came of a family of ancient and influential English nobles, and the whole of that district about Huntingdon for miles around was full of her relatives" ["ea duxerat originem ex antiquis anglis nobilibus atque potentibus. quorum stirpe multipliciter propogata: omnis illa regio circa Huntendoniam longe lateque repleta est"] (ch. 29).

if she had given her mind to worldly pursuits she could have enriched and ennobled not only herself and her family but also all her relatives.

[Christina iam tunc eluxit tanta morum honestas. tale decus. tanta gratia. [ut] omnibus qui nossent eam merito super reliquas feminas esset amabilior. Insuper inerat ei tantum acumen in sensu. talis providencia in gerendis. ea efficacia in deliberatis. ut si seculi rebus tota vellet incumbere crederetur non se tantum suamque familiam. sed reliquum genus suum posse divitiis et honoribus ampliare] (ch. 20).

She was the bolt they wished to shoot into the future, binding their family wealth to that of Burthred's family. Probably they reasoned that a marriage alliance of two wealthy families would provide more security for both in what were still uncertain times for Anglo-Saxon families. From an early age, Christina demonstrated an avid interest in religion, and was given her religious training by an Augustinian canon named Sueno, from the local priory. Unknown to her parents, Christina made a private vow of virginity at mass one day, and later had Sueno confirm this choice. When they learned of this, her parents rejected her desire to be a nun and attempted to force marriage upon her. This vow of virginity is the focus of action especially in the first part of the story. After many tribulations, with the help of her religious friends, she ran away from home and hid until it was possible for her to publicly fulfill her vow. In due course she became first prioress of Markyate, a priory established specifically for Christina and the women who had joined her there. The second part of the story deals with her spiritual development and her close friendship with the previously mentioned abbot of St. Albans Abbey, Geoffrey Gorham.

We read historical biography for many reasons. Through reading biography, we can often confirm what the history books tell us, but biography also frequently

complicates what we've been told.<sup>10</sup> We gain in these stories the details of individual lives and relationships that are not found in general histories. Conventions of hagiography, of course, add another layer of interest, as we assess the narrative use the author makes of such conventions. The *Life*, it seems to me, falls between these two categories of biography and hagiography, and is perhaps best considered as part of a new tendency in the writing of saints' lives remarked on by David Farmer. Traditional hagiography focussed on the saint as a conduit of God's power, rather than as a person.<sup>11</sup> While the purposes of hagiography required demonstrations of holiness and supernatural abilities, Farmer finds that "in the Lives written in the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries an effort was made to provide a vivid personal portrait of the saint" (*Saints* xiii). Certainly what attracts readers today is the abundant detail we are given about Christina's mundane life. As well, as we will see in the next chapter, the picture presented of middle-class family life is a valuable addition to our knowledge of the social history of the period. For this reason alone, the *Life* is a valuable addition to the twelfth-century sources for England. Through the writer's emphases we add to our picture of various elements of twelfth-century life. For example, the story of the friendship Christina shared with Sueno, with Roger and finally with Geoffrey, adds considerably to our knowledge of such relationships and helps to show that the strict polemical literature of the period regarding association between male and female religious does not give a

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<sup>10</sup> Useful sources for the study of biography in this period include: Marjorie Chibnall, "Introduction," *The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis*, v. 1; Walter Daniel, *The Life of Ailred of Rievaulx*, ed. M. Powicke (and especially, "Walter Daniel's Letter to Maurice"); Hippolyte Delahaye, *The Legends of the Saints*; Thomas Heffernan, *Sacred Biography*; R.W. Southern, *Saint Anselm and His Biographer* and M. Winterbottom and R.M. Thomson, "Introduction," *William of Malmesbury: Saints' Lives*.

<sup>11</sup> This point is discussed more fully below, pages 107-111.

complete idea of the possible range of individual associations.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, the relations among the various clerical groups are shown to be very complex and perhaps less strictly organized at this time than they later became. A telling example is the visit paid by Eadwin, a hermit of the Huntingdon area to the Archbishop of Canterbury, on a matter that had already been judged by the diocesan. Why does the hermit visit the Archbishop? The reason given by Anonymous is that Eadwin recognizes the Archbishop as a man “acceptable to all for his piety” [“gracia pietatis omnibus amabilis” ] (ch. 29). The story seems to inhabit a time, real or imagined, before bureaucracy began to dictate channels of access to higher authority. The account here may be idealistic, or even fabricated; however, even if we take into account the author’s desire to edify, that he can imagine such an incident is significant.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, the portrait drawn of the eremitical movement itself is lively and quite independent of the ideas and rules laid out in contemporary instructional writings in that it values first of all the religious integrity of the individual hermits and recluses. Another significant feature of the *Life* is the record of the unique visionary experiences throughout the story. An informed reading of the later visions particularly reveals how little they depend on previous or contemporary visionary writing or imagery. As I will suggest later, many of these visions are unique to Christina’s own spiritual existence so far as we can tell, and seem to be bound up with her psychological response to her experiences. The portrait Anonymous paints of her visionary experience thus furthers our understanding of the variety of twelfth-century religious life.

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<sup>12</sup> As Koopmans notes, these “contrary impulses” concerning the relationships between men and women religious “were characteristic of the twelfth-century religious climate” (694).

<sup>13</sup> A more flexible approach among hermits, however, was not completely unknown at this time. See below, pages 86-87.

Finally, the *Life* in its unfinished state provides us with an example of a work in progress. Christina, as Koopmans concludes, is only “half-hewn from the block” (698). Ironically, that the text lacks a prologue and a proper conclusion is to our benefit. Since the work is only partially revised, it retains names, incidents and many details which might not have survived later scrutiny by the author or by his patron. Emphases too, which come through as the story stands, may have shifted under revision to enhance a more standard style of edification. We know that texts, even when completed, were frequently revised later by their authors. These revisions are usually most evident when there are several manuscript versions of a work, although it is often difficult to distinguish scribal from authorial revision. As an example of an author moderating his views during later revision, we might consider two passages by William of Malmesbury, which not only show an author at work, but also provide a valuable contemporary parallel to opinions expressed by Christina’s biographer. The editor of William’s *De Gestis Pontificum Anglorum*, N.E.S.A. Hamilton, working with what he shows to be William’s autograph copy, has found that in two passages, one about Robert Bloet and the other about Ranulf Flambard, William has erased some highly critical statements about these bishops. The passages are still partially visible and are retained in copies made and distributed before the erasures were made. It is worth quoting these passages at length, as both men also play roles in Christina’s *Life*, and like William of Malmesbury, Anonymous would eventually have had to decide how much detail his account should retain. The following passage on Robert Bloet is particularly interesting because of its

reference to Roger and a “virgin” who, although unnamed, is likely none other than our Christina.<sup>14</sup>

His name was Robert Bloet, [*who never hesitated at the guilt or infamy of any form of lust. The holiness of monastic life he held in contempt, and this led him to order the monks to be removed from Stow and settled at Eynsham. Wicked from wantonness, and through envy of his illustrious predecessor, he pretended that he was inconvenienced by the neighbouring monks; therefore if the monks of Eynsham, by God’s gift, were favoured with a happy increase, small thanks to him, for whom he boasted he had done more than enough if he only allowed them to live.*] He lived to enjoy the bishopric a little less than thirty years, and died far from his see, at Woodstock, cut off by a sudden fate, while riding out at the king’s side in company with a certain other bishop. To his inferiors he was sufficiently condescending, but wanting in authority withal. Preeminently a man of the world, he was an inferior churchman. He decorated his cathedral with the most costly ornaments. After his death his body was disembowelled that it might not pollute the air with its offensive odours; his viscera were buried at Eynsham, the remains at Lincoln; for during his lifetime he had caused the monks of Stow to remove to Eynsham. *And there it is well-known that the wardens of the church were disturbed by nightly visions, in order that they might purify the place by masses*

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<sup>14</sup> The two passages are quoted from N.E.S.A. Hamilton’s edition of the *Gesta Pontificum Anglorum*. The passages in roman type are those remaining in William’s autograph copy, which is the basis of Hamilton’s edition. The italicized passages are those that have been erased in William’s autograph copy. These passages are supplied in notes by Hamilton from other copies made from William’s first recension, that is, before the erasures were made. The passage on Robert Bloet is on pp. 313-314. The translations of the passages are by Hamilton and appear in the preface of the edition, pp.xv-xvii.

*and almsgiving. For the rest, I have not the heart to recount the visions which were currently reported, lest I should seem too hard upon one who had been an enemy of monks: as for instance, at the time when he drove the monks from Stow, the Blessed Mother of Our Lord, appearing to one of them in his sleep, threatened to visit the bishop with no slight vengeance; and again, the same Blessed lady appearing to the same monk upon the night preceding the day of his decease, complained to her Son of the injurious acts of the bishop. The next morning as the monk was relating his vision to his fellows news was brought in of bishop Robert's death.*

*The manner of his death had been foretold him in an ambiguous prophecy by a holy hermit named Roger, who dwelt in the forest near St. Albans, and led an austere life, seldom heard of in our times. On a certain occasion, the bishop, in his usual insolent manner, demanded why he harboured a virgin who having forsaken her suitor for the sake of celibacy, had sought refuge with him. The hermit gave a fitting reply, when the bishop broke out, "Bold and insolent is your answer; your cowl alone sustains you." To which the hermit with equal point retorted, "Despise the cowl as you will, a day will come when you will sorely wish to have one, and words shall be wanting to you in which to ask for it." But [however readers may bear this,] it is known that the monks of Eynsham were devoted to our Lady and loved by her.*

*[Rotbertus Bloet homini nomen, [qui nichil unquam pensi fecerit, quominus omnis libidinis et infamis et reus esset. In cunctam religionem protervus, monachos Stou summoveri et apud Egnesham locari juisit. Gratis*

*malus et gloriae antecessoris invidens, a vicinis monachis sua commoda praeverti causabatur. Quocirca, si monachi Egneshamnenses Dei dono pulchram incrementum acceperint, procul illi gratias, quibus eximium se gloriabatur commodum inferre si vel illos sineret vivere. Vixit in episcopatu annis paulo minus .xxx<sup>ta</sup>., decessitque procul a sede apud Wdestoche, cum regio lateri cum alio quodam episcopo adequitaret, subito fato interceptus. Caetera satis suis hilaris, et parum gravis, negotiorum scientia saecularium nulli secundus, ecclesiasticorum non ita. Ecclesiam cui sedit ornamentis pretiosissimis decoravit. Defuncti corpus exinteratum, ne tetrus nidoribus vitiaeret aerem. Viscera Egnesham, reliqua Lindocolinae sepulta sunt. Monachos enim qui apud Stou fuerunt vivens Eglesham migraverat. Stisque constat, ecclesiae custodes umbris nocturnis exagitados, quo admissis et elemosinis locum piarent. Decetero, visiones quae vulgo ferebantur hic scribere non fuit cordi, ne monachorum insectatorem premere et urgere videar. Qualiter quando monachos de Stou effugavit, beata Domini mater, cuidam eorum apparens in sompno, non leves in illum minas intorserit. Qualiter eidem, eadem nocte que diem mortis antecedebat, visa, de pontificis injuriis apud Filium conqueri. Itaque diluculo, monacho visionem referente sociis, de Rodberti morte nuntius allatus est. Predixerat ei, sed ancipiti oraculo, genus mortis anachorita quidam sanctus, Rogerius nomine, qui in silva quae juxta Sanctum Albanum est, rigidam vitam, et nostro tempore parum auditam, duxit. Quem cum episcopus, proterve admodum pro sui more, argueret cur virginem tueretur, quae, relicto proco, celibatus studio ad eum confugerat, illeque arguenti congrue responderet, tandem erupit episcopus:*

*'Multum audacter et contumaciter respondes. Quo fretus nisi cucullo quod geris.'* Retulit anachorita par pari: *'Cucillum,' ait, 'spernis, sed illud cum maxime habere volueris veniet dies, deeruntque tibi verba quibus illud depreceris.'* Sed hoc quomodocumque legentes ferant, notum est autem monachos Egneshamnenses Dominae nostrae devotos, et ab ea dilectos.]

Hamilton suggests that William, on later consideration, thought the passages “too severe, or impolitic” (xv). They are certainly specific as to Robert’s offences and his reputation in monastic circles. The passage about Ranulf Flambard, as Hamilton notes, retains more disapproval, but “a calmer judgement, or policy” led to the erasure of the more “passionate censures of the first recension” (xvi-xvii).<sup>15</sup>

This is Ranulf, formerly chaplain of king William, of doubtful origin, but advanced by reason of his craft and eloquence to the chief place, and made procurator of the whole kingdom. Whenever a royal edict went forth taxing England at a certain sum, it was his custom to double it. [*He was the plunderer of the rich, the destroyer of the poor, the confiscator of inheritances. He was unsurpassed as a mercenary advocate, exceeding all bounds both in his actions and language, and treating suppliants with a violence fit only for rebels.*] Whereupon the king would laugh and say that he alone could set his wits to work in such a fashion, and that he cared not for the hatred of others so long as he pleased his master. [*At his instigation the holy preferments of the church were put up to auction.*] By these acts he won the bishopric of Durham, [*and justified his*

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<sup>15</sup> The passage on Ranulf Flambard is on p. 274; the translation is on p. xvii.

*pretensions to the see by the payment of a thousand pounds.] He came then to Durham, and in the first instance bore him modestly, fearing to offend the Saint (Cuthbert), who is especially renowned as a reprover of evil doers. But, when he found his first and second misdeeds remained unavenged by the Saint, he boldly proceeded to tear suppliants from the shrine, and commit a crime unknown in former ages. [Need I relate how he caused his unwilling monks, who were most devout, often to dine in his hall, placing openly before them forbidden viands, and, the more scandalously to set at nought their sacred vows, how he would order comely damsels of wanton form and feature, with garments revealing their figures and hair falling down their backs, to serve them with liquor. Then was there, I say, a mockery to be seen. For whether you cast your eyes modestly to the ground, or rivalled the bishop in the broadness of his jokes, you were at all events rebuked, and charged in the one case with hypocrisy, in the other with irreverence. But the doer of these and similar things in mundane affairs was indolent in spirituals, and strove to bury or cast into shade the ornaments of his church.]*

[Is est Rannulfus quondam regis Willelmi capellanus, (ex quo ambiguum genere), lingua et calliditate proventus ad summum, et totius regni procurator effectus. Iste, si quando edictum regium processisset ut nominatum tributum Anglia penderet, duplum aditiebatur. *Expilator divitum, exterminator pauperum, confiscator alienarum hereditatum. Invictus causidicus; et tum verbis tum rebus immodicus, juxta ut in rebelles sic in supplices furens.* Subinde ridente rege ac dicente: Solum esse hominem qui sciret sic agitare ingenium, nec aliorum curaret

odium dummodo complacaret dominum. *Hoc auctore, sacri aecclesiarum honores venumlocati.* Quibus artibus fretus, episcopatum Dunelmensem meruit *ut sanctius ingrederetur, datis mille libris.* Venit ergo Dunelmum, et primo quidem timidius se agebat, Sanctum verens offendere, qui fertur peccantium severus inprimis correptor esse. Sed uno et altero delicto commiso, nec vindicato, eo processit, ut reum, si quando ad ecclesiam Sancti confugeret, abstrahere non dubitaret, ausus scelus omnibus retro annis inauditum. *Quid quod monachos sane invitos, quia religiosissimi sunt, secum in aula sua prandere non semel fecerit, cibos eis vetitos publice apponens.* Et, ut magis religionem irritaret, puellas speciosissimas, quae essent procacioris formae et faciei, eis potum propinare juberet, strictis ad corpus vestibus, solutis in terga crinibus. Ibi ergo erat videre ludibrium. *Si quis modeste in terram oculos deiceret, vel si quis impudentiam episcopi liberioribus jocos eluderet, neuter irreprehensus abiret, dum alterum hypocrisis alterum irreverentiae argueret.* Sed haec et talia quid esset in mundialibus efficax, in spiritualibus deses, conabatur aecclesiae suae ornamentis obruere vel obumbrare.]

Again, it is primarily the specific details of Ranulf's misconduct that are suppressed: his simony and his temptation of the monks away from their vows. It is not impossible, then, that on later reflection by Anonymous, or by his patron, the passages in the *Life* depicting specific details of Flambard's attempt on Christina's virginity, or Bloet's corruption, to give two examples, might have been modified to more general - if still edifying - remarks, as William of Malmesbury's harsh opinions of the same men were. For our purposes, we are lucky to have the more detailed accounts, which reveal so much about

authorial strategy, as I intend to show.

Although the *Life* is not a work that resonated through the writings of contemporaries, it has certainly been an important addition to the documents available to modern scholars. Specific research on the biography did not begin immediately, although since Talbot's publication of *The Life of Christina of Markyate: a Twelfth-Century Recluse*, many scholars have found occasion to use the biography to provide fresh examples and illustrations for their studies on various topics, and many thoughtful readings have resulted. The following survey, therefore, comprises both works which, although not focussed on Christina, include insightful material on the *Life*, and studies dealing specifically with Christina and her biography. Following this survey, I will discuss how the present study departs from previous work on the biography.

The steadily increasing interest in Christina's story is reflected in the biography's publication history. First published by Charles Talbot in 1959, it was reprinted with a brief addendum of Talbot's corrections in 1987. Michael Winterbottom, in his 1987 article, "The Life of Christina of Markyate," supplemented this addendum with further suggestions "for some passages of the *Life* that still cause difficulty," although he makes it clear that "Talbot's transcript is almost without flaw" (281). Most recently, in 1998, the work has been reprinted again as part of the series, *Medieval Academy Reprints for Teaching*. This reprinting is an indication of the attention the text has received from both researchers and teachers of medieval literature. It has been a great benefit to many scholars to have a reliable edition of a text which is otherwise difficult of access. As for more dedicated research on Christina, Talbot himself could be said to have started the ball rolling with his 1962 essay, "Christina of Markyate: a Monastic Narrative of the Twelfth Century," a

summary of the story, demonstrating how it blends romantic characteristics with those of hagiography. However, Christopher Holdsworth's 1978 article, "Christina of Markyate," was the first substantial piece of scholarship after Talbot's work to be written specifically on Christina. Holdsworth takes a historian's view of the narrative, detailing the sources of evidence for Christina's life. He especially spends time showing connections between episodes in the *Life* and the pictorial art of the *St. Albans Psalter*, which has been associated with Christina. He also suggests that hermits, such as Christina herself, and others mentioned in her biography, filled a need for religious guidance felt by local populations particularly in the period following the Conquest.

The *Life*, of course, is an important historical document in its own right, with references to people, events and customs, as well as evidence of ideological movements that have been verified elsewhere. Sharon Elkins, for example, in her 1988 book, *Holy Women of Twelfth-Century England* finds in it useful documentation of the twelfth-century eremetical movement in England and the relationship between groups of female recluses and monastics. She finds that monastics at this time were not as reluctant to come to the aid of religious women as may have been thought. Christina of Markyate is given as one of the best known examples of the development of an informal community of religious women into a priory. As part of this phenomenon, Elkins details the individual relationships that Christina had with various clergy. Both Sally Thompson and Paulette L'Hermite-Leclercq have also shown great interest in the process by which Markyate hermitage became a more conventional establishment once Christina inherited it, although each scholar is attracted by different aspects of the story. Sally Thompson in her 1991 book, *Women Religious: the Founding of English Nunneries after the Norman Conquest*, examines the evidence of the

text with contemporary charter evidence to describe the transformation of Markyate from hermitage to priory. She also makes the intriguing suggestion that the author of the *Life* may have been one of the hermits who lived near Roger and under his supervision.<sup>16</sup> The eremetical movement is again taken up in Paulette L’Hermitte-Leclercq’s 1992 article, “De l’Ermitage au Monastère, Genèse d’une Institution: un Exemple Anglais de la Première Moitié du XII<sup>e</sup> Siècle.” L’Hermitte-Leclercq focusses specifically on the stages whereby Roger’s hermitage eventually became a priory of nuns under St. Paul’s, London. She details the relationship between Markyate and St. Paul’s in an attempt to counter the wide-spread notion that Markyate, as a priory, was a dependency of St. Albans, and also outlines the disapproval that has been documented among St. Albans monks with regard to resources spent on Markyate and Geoffrey’s dependence on Christina. Her article is particularly interesting in light of later historical investigations by Rachel Koopmans.

The MS itself of the *Life* has lately come under closer scrutiny. As has already been discussed, Rachel Koopmans in her article published in 2000, “The Conclusion of Christina of Markyate’s *Vita*,” has presented fascinating and detailed historical research on the writing of the *Life* and the reasons for its suppression after Abbot Geoffrey’s death. Using documents that have not hitherto been cited with regard to Christina studies, she portrays events at St. Albans at this time and gives a new perspective on how the relationship between Christina and Geoffrey was viewed by his monks.

The *Life* has also provided material for political analyses. R. I Moore, in his 2001 article, “Ranulf Flambard and Christina of Markyate,” searches in twelfth-century practices

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<sup>16</sup> This would not change the identity of the patron, whom most scholars now identify as Abbot Geoffrey. This idea of a hermit-author has not, as far as I know, been taken up by anyone.

of patronage for explanations concerning Flambard's close association with Christina's family and also for his attempt, as portrayed in the *Life*, to seduce Christina. He suggests that Christina re-interpreted for herself Alveva's previous role *vis-à-vis* the Normans and became, finally, much more influential than her aunt. Robert Stanton, in his 2002 article, "Marriage, Socialization, and Domestic Violence in the *Life of Christina of Markyate*," studies the *Life* as a piece of political writing. In his article, he analyzes the domestic violence detailed in the biography as a commentary on the larger issue of the violence required to maintain the aristocracy in twelfth-century England. In this respect his position complements previous work by Jocelyn Wogan-Browne (discussed below). He sees the biography as polemical, a criticism of the violence used by the aristocracy to enforce conformity among subjects. Christina's family is portrayed as a microcosm of this political reality.

Some historians, however, have found Christina's *Life* particularly fascinating as an illustration of rhetorical technique in the service of historical writing. Ruth Morse, in her 1991 book, *Truth and Convention in the Middle Ages: Rhetoric, Representation and Reality* discusses, at some length, the clear literary art of the biographer in form and in sacred and secular allusions. She is particularly struck by the literary realism exhibited in the *Life*. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne's article published in the same year, "Saints' Lives and the Female Reader," deals with audience expectations. Although it has been difficult for modern readers to understand how medieval readers could relate to the extreme violence in martyr stories, let alone consider them as suitable for emulation, Wogan-Browne uses Christina's biography to remind us that life was often violent in the middle ages and that the need for control, which drove pagan authorities in martyr stories to savagely suppress

early Christianity, was not entirely different in kind from that which fuelled, for example, Christina's parents. Although Wogan-Browne favours a rather late date for the composition of the *Life* ("shortly before 1166" (316)) and her martyr examples are thirteenth-century versions, the point she makes about the conjunction of art and life is extremely thought-provoking and useful. Nancy Partner, in her 1999 article, "Medieval Histories and Modern Realism: Yet another Origin of the Novel," gives a fascinating and specific overview of the narrative methods of medieval historians. In illustration, she gives a perceptive reading of the episode in which Christina hides behind a tapestry in her room from Burthred and his companions. Again, it is the verisimilitude of the scene and the psychological plausibility that attracts interest. Margaret Hostetler, in her 1999 article, "Designing Religious Women: Privacy and Exposure in the *Life of Christina of Markyate* and *Ancrene Wisse*," looks more specifically at how the "representation of space" in the *Life* is used by Christina's male author to demonstrate a particular kind of female religious experience (201-202). She discusses the story in terms of spaces that Christina inhabits – in reality and in visions - and stresses the author's control of the reader's experience. Douglas Gray, in his 2002 article "Christina of Markyate," discusses the Augustinian aspects of the story, as well as the literary techniques used by the author. In the end, he finds that "the *Life* seems larger than any characterization as a 'romance' would allow, just as it transcends the boundaries of the traditional saint's life" (41). This remark seems to hark back to Talbot's 1962 essay. These studies, showing as they do such an interest in the author of the biography, are rare and important in their analyses of the author's art.

Art historians as well have shown an interest in Christina because of her relationship with the *St. Albans Psalter*. Interest has not only been shown in the pictorial art of the

*Psalter*, but in the dramatic and liturgical aspects of monastic devotion, for which the *Psalter* provided support. I purposely limit the representation of art historians here, since *Psalter* studies form a wide field, one that lies outside the interests of this particular study. However, one aspect of the *St. Albans Psalter* that is most interesting with regard to my work is the Alexis poem, since that poem has been taken as a kind of analogue for Christina's experience. In Rachel Bullington's 1991 book, *The Alexis in the Saint Albans Psalter: a Look into the Heart of the Matter*, she suggests that "no one could be more likely than the Abbot Geoffrey to execute such a project [i.e. the *Saint Albans Psalter*]: he had the authority, the means and the temperament" (225). This identification is significant, especially in view of the connection that has been made between Christina and Alexis. Bullington's careful analysis of how such a poem may have been used liturgically is revealing of twelfth-century ecclesiastical custom. It should also be said that the idea of association between Alexis and Christina has been influential in both general and specific studies. Often it is simply assumed that the *Psalter* was designed and made for Christina. The making of the *Psalter*, however, was a more complex project, as Kristine Haney has shown, in her 1995 article, "The St. Albans Psalter: a Reconsideration." Sifting through the physical evidence of the manuscript, she demonstrates that "since the *St. Albans Psalter* is a composite book, the issues of patronage, intended recipient and date must be dealt with separately for each section of the manuscript" (24). In the end, although she does not rule out the association between Christina and the *Psalter*, she seems not to be particularly impressed by the evidence so far used to support the connection. Elizabeth Carrasco, in her 1999 article, "The Imagery of the Magdalen in Christina of Markyate's *Psalter* (St. Albans *Psalter*)," concurs with Haney that the manuscript developed as four separate parts (67),

although she finds a strong association between Christina's life and the images in the *Psalter*. She has very useful things to say about Christina's *Life* as early evidence of affective piety: "The intensified appeal to the affective emotions characteristic of the work of Aelred, Anselm, and the Alexis Master suggests that the *St. Albans Psalter* and its recipient stand at the beginning of a process whereby visual images were increasingly accorded the close meditative reading traditionally reserved for the written word" (74-75). Carrasco especially explores the link she sees being made in the *Life* between Christina and Mary Magdalen, which she also sees reflected in some of the art in the *Psalter*. She reports opinions of art historians that the *Psalter* was intended as "prescriptive": a guide to Christina's spirituality, even as it reflected her holiness (68). Although I find the idea of this reciprocal influence convincing, I think we must also take into account the interests of the *Psalter's* patron. As will be discussed later, it seems to me that there were differing if complementary views on what stories and imagery best captured the ideals shown in the events of Christina's life.

The vivid characterization of Christina and her struggles against both social and ecclesiastical tradition has attracted those who study the increasing interest shown in individuals in the twelfth century and the effect individuals had on the atmosphere of religious reform. It is perhaps revealing of the unconventional nature of the biography that the earliest studies making use of the *Life* should be by students of twelfth-century individualism and the rise of romance. Raymond Cormier's 1973 book, *One Heart, One Mind: the Rebirth of Virgil's Hero in Medieval French Romance*, seems an unlikely place to look for Christina. In his introduction, however, Cormier turns to hagiography, and specifically to Christina's experience, which he sees as an example of "a struggle for the

right to direct one's own life in the face of the arbitrary exercise of power and the hypocrisy of conventional morality" (72). He finds her actions "completely in character . . . with the social movements, the spiritual revolution of the period, and with the move to greater strictness in the twelfth-century monastic reform" (72). His focus is the rise of interest in the individual and the "special influence" of women in the late eleventh and twelfth centuries (69), both tendencies which are illustrated by Christina's life. Robert Hanning, in his 1977 book, *The Individual in Twelfth-Century Romance*, likewise reads *Christina's Life* in terms of the conflict between the individual and society. In a long section discussing Christina's difficulties, he demonstrates that "the tensions created by the age's new forms and insights of religious life gave rise to new styles of behaviour and new conflicts between personal imperatives of conscience and the priorities of ecclesiastical institutions" (35). The portrayal of Christina's determined defense of her moral stand against religious leaders who should have been her guides is most unusual for the time, and yet, as these studies show, does reflect contemporary tendencies toward greater reliance on the self as moral arbiter. As Colin Morris has shown, Christianity had from the beginning provided for the element of individualism (10-11). The individual is responsible for his or her own salvation. The early martyrs, for example, individually chose to become "outlaw," to join a small, if growing, group of believers, actually putting their lives on the line in so doing. This insistence on the right to a personal belief in God, even if it resulted in death, was what marked out early Christianity. This early purposeful conversion was, of course, just what twelfth-century reformers wished to recall. However, the legacy of that monolithic institution, the Church, was a legacy of fixed dogma combined with local custom; these forces worked together to shape society and how individuals behaved. The shock-value in Christina's story is, I have

come to believe, her reversion, as a woman, supposedly subject to that legacy, to apostolic self-responsibility before God.

In discussions of medieval marriage customs and laws, Christina's situation provides an example which both illustrates and tests what are considered to be the norms of early twelfth-century England. The issue of virginity is necessarily bound up with this discussion. The first to deal specifically with the issue of virginity in Christina's story is Thomas Renna. In his 1985 article, "Virginity in the *Life* of Christina of Markyate and Aelred of Rievaulx's *Rule*," Renna maintains that both the biographer of Christina's *Life* and Aelred focus on "the negative side of virginity (as the abstinence from sexual sins)" (79), and that "the theme of the virgin as *sponsa Christi* is not particularly emphasized in . . . the *Life* of Christina" (91). (Both views have been disputed since.) The *Life*, he believes, looks back to the desert fathers as an ideal, where endurance of severe testing was the key to union with God. The *Life* certainly looks back to the ideals of the early Church; Thomas Head has suggested that Renna has difficulty in identifying the *sponsa Christi* theme in the biography because the author uses the concept in a novel, very concrete way (79).

Christopher Brooke uses Christina's difficult matrimonial experience as a "case-study" in his 1989 book, *The Medieval Idea of Marriage*. In a few pages he discusses the episode between Christina and Flambard, as well as the legal circumstances of her marriage to Burthred. He says that the events related in the *Life* show "the attempt to balance proper parental authority and the free exercise of consent in marriage" (148). He discusses the various authority figures who took an interest in her case, showing that authority in these matters was more fluid than it later became. Christina's marriage was both an important narrative element and a defining theme of her story. In Thomas Head's

1990 article, “The Marriages of Christina of Markyate,” medieval ideas and customs concerning marriage, as reflected in the biography, are explored. He finds that Christina thought of her relationship to Christ in concrete terms: that it really *was* a marriage, was not just metaphorically *like* a marriage. Head’s detailed analysis of contemporary custom helps us to make sense of Christina’s situation, and his care in distinguishing Christina from both Cistercian imagery and from later female mystics is extremely important to a correct understanding of this unique work: “The use made of marriage as a means of describing a relationship to Christ in the *Life of Christina of Markyate* differs sharply both from the spiritualized nuptial imagery of the Cistercian tradition and from the extremely sensual unions of female visionaries in the later Middle Ages” (78). In 1992, Paulette L’Hermite-Leclercq published two articles which considered Christina’s marriage. “Enfance et Mariage d’une Jeune Anglaise au Début du XII<sup>e</sup> Siècle: Christina de Markyate,” seeks to set the issues surrounding Christina’s marriage into their socio-historical context, and emphasizes how courageous her acts of defiance were in the circumstances. In “Gestes et Vocabulaires du Mariage au Début du XII<sup>e</sup> Siècle dans un Document Hagiographique: la *Vita* de Christina de Markyate” she focusses much more on the particular words and actions used by the characters with regard to the marriage. Neil Cartlidge’s 1997 book, *Medieval Marriage: Literary Approaches, 1100-1300*, provides a wealth of information on the legal aspects of medieval marriage arrangements and applies this specifically to literary works, such as the Alexis story, the story of Guy of Warwick and also that of Christina. He points out that because Burthred rejects the Cecilia model for his relationship with Christina (which is the only one Christina would have allowed) she is forced to take up the model of Alexis. The relationship between

Christina and Geoffrey redeems the failed relationship Christina had had with Burthred, since Geoffrey filled the role of chaste spouse that she had sought with Burthred (112). Moreover, the biographer's purpose in devoting so much space to the relationship between Christina and Geoffrey, Cartlidge finds, may have been, at least in part, to document the link between Christina and St. Albans.

The *Life* finds itself as well among works of literature on friendship. In the first part, Christina is instructed and befriended by several clerics, while the second part of the *Life* is a tribute to the friendship that developed between Abbot Geoffrey and Christina. The important theme of spiritual friendship in Christina's biography is taken up by Ruth Mazo Karras, in her 1988 article, "Friendship and Love in the Lives of Two Twelfth-century English Saints." Both Aelred and Christina engaged in loving, non-sexual relationships with particular individuals, friendships which were unlike monastic *caritas*, which was to extend to all impartially. Spiritual friendship, often using the language of erotic love, she finds, was an outlet for emotions among cloistered religious. Friendship among monastics is a theme which Jean Leclercq also explores in his 1994 article, "Christina of Markyate: a Witness to Solitude and Solidarity." The theme of friendship in the *Life* is, of course, fraught. Leclercq undertakes to illumine one theological problem of friendship suggested by the text: whether one should put others before self - in true friendly fashion - in spiritual as well as temporal things. Leclercq explains the significance of this theological problem as detailed in the text and also the solution given there, typically, by vision. The interest in the relationship between Christina and Geoffrey is briefly discussed by Elisabeth Bos in her 1997 article entitled, "Patterns of Male-Female Religious Friendships and Their Influence on the Construction of the Literary Identities of Medieval Women." The article is part of a book

on the relationship between misogyny and mysticism, and perhaps predictably finds that the Christina of the biography is constructed according to male views on the ideal female vocation (320). (Certainly the monkish filter through which the story is told must be admitted.) Thus the relationships Christina has with male clerics are examined. There was, of course, always the background notion of scandal, affecting each of these relationships, and especially her friendship with Geoffrey. Bos perceptively suggests, however, that the fact that the friendship Christina shares with Sueno, Roger and Geoffrey can be celebrated in writing is perhaps an indication of the acceptability of such relationships between men and women in this period (314, 318). C. Stephen Jaeger devotes a chapter of his 1999 book, *Ennobling Love: in Search of a Lost Sensibility*, to Christina's relationships with men, which he views, rather idiosyncratically, as "a series of love relationships" (174). The stories of these relationships are, he maintains, "of rising spiritual value" (175). It is odd, then, that Sueno is left out of the equation, while the unchaste cleric finds a place. The thrust of his book - that the ideal of "ennobling love" is one to which we now have limited empathetic access - is fascinating; however, it is occasionally difficult to reconcile this idea with the remarks he makes about Christina's *Life*.

Gender itself, apart from relationships between men and women, is an issue that specifically occupies Clarissa Atkinson in her 2002 article, "Authority, Virtue, and Vocation: the Implications of Gender in Two Twelfth-Century English *Lives*." She uses gender to compare the biographies of Anselm and Christina as regards authority. Christina's gender, Atkinson finds, constantly put blocks in her way which Anselm never had to face. He was able to follow a well-trodden path to a position of great authority, while she had to struggle at every step simply to fulfill her vocation, even though that vocation

was perfectly legitimate for a woman.

Christina's *Life* is not an easy text to place in the development of medieval mysticism although scholars are greatly attracted to it. Elizabeth Petroff, somewhat surprisingly, includes Christina in her 1986 book, *Medieval Women's Visionary Literature*, an anthology of excerpts from women's writing. Her chapter, "Visionaries of the Early Twelfth Century" includes, besides Christina, Hildegard of Bingen and Elisabeth of Schönau. Christina seems an odd addition here. Petroff is, I believe, the first to develop Talbot's idea that Christina must have related her experiences to her biographer into a theory of "autobiography-biography," a theory that several later writers have accepted. The idea is discussed more fully later in this chapter. However, in her introduction to the anthology selection for Christina, Petroff makes some discerning comments on the iconography of Christina's visions and their relationship to the liturgical calendar. Petroff discusses Christina's *Life* again in her 1994 book, *Body and Soul: Essays on Medieval Women and Mysticism*. Here, she discusses Geoffrey's various attempts to test Christina's prophetic abilities and compares this element to similar attempts in romance literature to discover the real nature of the beloved lady (31). She perhaps softens her earlier idea of the autobiographical nature of the book, although she still maintains that Anonymous often "transcribed her first-person accounts" (10). Still, she gives more credit to the writer here than in her earlier work. In his 1987 article, "The Beginnings of Mysticism Experienced in Twelfth-Century England," Peter von Dinzelbacher is concerned that some scholars "interpret records of charismatic events in autobiographical and biographical texts not as evidence of mysticism experienced but as mere metaphorical expressions and genre-inherent topoi, brushing away in such a way the

texts' own statements and reducing them to mystology" (111). While intellectuals without any psychic experience wanted to construct purely intellectual systems of spiritual ascent and downplay the role of psychic experience, he maintains that discussions of mysticism should include "all phenomena and sensations" leading to union with God as well as that union (112). He refers to these psychic phenomena as "premythic" and says they can be cumulative. Christina's experience is an example of such a development. Further he discusses a "new spirituality" which begins to appear in literature of the twelfth century, although its roots are in the eleventh, characterized by an emotional reaction to the divine. This phenomenon parallels the ideas of courtly love and individualism (126). He finds that it is a change in mentality, not literary mode alone. Finally, Christina's Englishness comes to the fore in Lynnea Brumbaugh-Walter's unpublished 1996 dissertation, *Visions and Versions of Identity in the Texts of Three English Holy Women: Christina of Markyate, Julian of Norwich, and Margery Kempe*. As she discusses the *Life*, Brumbaugh-Walter focusses on the inter-relationships between Christina's visions and her identity as an Englishwoman.

From the above survey, it is evident that most studies have focussed for the most part on Christina's social milieu and issues arising from her situation and experiences. Although the attention to Christina has resulted in valuable scholarship on various sociohistorical aspects of twelfth-century England, it has meant that the biographer and his work have often been ignored. In some cases, it has been suggested that his role is merely that of recorder. Charles Talbot, in the very thorough and erudite introduction to his edition of the *Life*, suggested that "the whole tone of the story is autobiographical rather than historical," and, as will become apparent, this idea has been most attractive to

later scholars. Talbot points to many very personal episodes concerning Christina, and concludes that Anonymous “must have heard these things from her own lips” (6-7). His introduction is so useful that it seems wrong to quibble about one opinion, especially as, in context, it is quite reasonable. However, as Robert Stanton has said, “the binarism in his description of the tone as ‘autobiographical rather than historical’ is unfortunate, since it seems to have encouraged subsequent critics to view the *Life* as emanating transparently from Christina herself” (259). Elizabeth Petroff, for instance, as noted above, has developed Talbot’s idea that Christina must have related her experiences to her biographer into a theory of “autobiography-biography” (*Visionary Literature* 137). She includes Christina in her *Medieval Women’s Visionary Literature*, an anthology of excerpts primarily from women’s writing, although also including men’s writings about women (50). She groups Christina with Hildegard of Bingen and Elisabeth of Schönau as one of those who “dictated their works to men” (39).<sup>17</sup> “It is clear that [the writer] knew Christina well,” she says, “and that he often transcribed her own first-person accounts of her adventures” (136). Of one vision she says that “one comes to perceive it as dictated autobiographical material that had been meditated upon for years” (137). If we compare the *Life*, however, to the writing of the two contemporary women just mentioned, who are known to have dictated their compositions to men, we will see that there are significant differences in the resulting works.

One difference, perhaps the most obvious, is the use of the first-person. Both Elisabeth of Schönau and Hildegard of Bingen, although working with amanuenses, took

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<sup>17</sup> Of course, Hildegard also dictated some of her works to the nun Ricardis, but Petroff’s point here seems to be the dependence of these women on men for the recording of their words.

ultimate responsibility for their work by using first person narration. Christina's story, on the other hand, is consistently narrated in the third person. Very occasionally we have a glimpse of Christina's way of speaking, but otherwise the style of narrative is that of Anonymous. Another difference lies in the purpose of the writing. Both Elisabeth of Schönau and Hildegard of Bingen believe that they have been ordered by God to write of their experiences for the edification of others.<sup>18</sup> Each woman feels she has a direct and specific message from God which must be committed to writing. No such specific compulsion drives Christina's *Life*. The writer addresses someone directly that we may assume has commissioned or at least encouraged the writing (ch. 50). Otherwise, the author says that his purpose is "to describe quite simply the simple life of the virgin" ["simplicem virginis vitam simpliciter describere"] (*Life* ch. 69). He writes within the conventions of hagiography, not of memoir.

What Petroff sees as the autobiographical aspects of the *Life* are important to the concept of her anthology. Other scholars have made similar remarks about the *Life* as autobiography in the course of introducing work on quite different topics. That is, the supposed autobiographical aspect of the work is not their main focus of study. With force of repetition, however, the idea of Christina as author has become quite mainstream. Christopher Brooke, in a chapter on the history of St. Albans Abbey, states that "a good deal of [the *Life*] was *evidently* dictated by Christina herself" (italics mine). He then remarks, "I fear Christina romanced more than a little" ("The Great Abbey" 60). In his book, *The Medieval Idea of Marriage*, he makes a similar kind of statement: "Most of the story is

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<sup>18</sup> For Hildegard of Bingen's *Vita*, see *Corpus Christianorum: coninuatio medievalis*, vol. 126, ed. Monika Klaes; for her other works, see *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 197. For Elisabeth of Schönau, see F.W.E. Roth, ed. *Die Visionen und Briefe der heiligen Elisabeth*.

palpably – *can only be* – a faithful transcript of reminiscences given to the author by Christina herself” (144), and then adds, “It would be credulous to believe all *she tells us*” (145) (italics mine). This sort of statement leads one to expect some support, even of a general kind, such as Petroff gives, but none is forthcoming. The idea of Christina as autobiographer has become so general in some respects that it has led to a circular form of reasoning. C. J. Holdsworth, for example, in his excellent introduction to the historical aspects of the *Life* suggests that the story “reads *as though* she had told [the biographer], perhaps many times, what had happened, doubtless somewhat embroidering the original events with each repetition” (“Christina of Markyate” 195). However, in response to Brooke’s comment about Christina’s “romancing,” he says, “I am convinced by the simple directness of most of *her account*” (196, n.57) (italics mine).

Most of these remarks depend on plausibility rather than on textual evidence. I would now like to complicate this assumption of autobiography. The main idea seems to be that Christina herself told her experiences to Anonymous, “perhaps many times” (Holdsworth 195) and that he recorded these reminiscences more or less as she related them in the course of constructing the *Life*. Ever since Talbot’s “Introduction,” some scholars have taken for granted that Christina had to have been the *only* source for many of the incidents the author relates. This is of course possible, but it is not necessarily so, and I believe it is most unlikely. Christina had several intimate friends, and, from what we read in the *Life*, she made a habit of confiding in them. Several candidates come to mind, but Anonymous specifically mentions two by name. To both Sueno, her childhood mentor, and Margaret, her sister, and a nun of Markyate Priory, she confides her most private thoughts, her secrets [“secretorum suorum”] (*Life* ch. 26, 61). What secrets are these? Quite

probably, the secrets had to do with those incidents which seem to us so personal that they could only be told to the biographer by Christina. For example, she immediately tells Sueno in detail about her vision of the Virgin Mary as Empress. She tells Margaret of predictive dreams, so that Margaret can later confirm her sister's prevision. Certainly some aspects of the story encourage us to think of Christina as the primary or even main source for the author. She is the focalizer for many episodes and, of course, the conventions of hagiography put us, so to speak, on Christina's "side". However, there has been a certain naivety in the readiness critics have had in assuming that Christina was primarily responsible for the writing of her story. This readiness is evident in comments such as those of Brooke and Holdsworth quoted above. It is simply not provable that Christina kept these stories to herself until she told them to Anonymous. She may have done so. In the absence of other evidence it seems a slim foundation upon which to make the assumption of autobiography. There is nothing stopping us from considering the equally possible idea that Anonymous was told a few or many of Christina's experiences by one or several people other than Christina, with or without her knowledge. Certainly, as Robert Stanton has said, we may profitably focus on Christina's experiences to understand the cultural history of twelfth-century England more fully, but the "assumption of impulsive personal expression neglects the important work done by the hagiographer and its social utility in the twelfth century" (260).

In this study I hope to shift our attention as much as possible onto the anonymous author of the *Life*. Chapter one provides some historical context for the discussion. The first part of the chapter explores the cultural setting of Christina and her family, especially with respect to Anglo-Norman relations. Following that, we look at the

situation and perspective of Anonymous, the monastic culture he was part of and the effects of Gregorian reform on that culture, and his characterization of the many clerical figures in the story. The range of the writer's interest and information concerning clerical roles is remarkable. Chapters two and three provide a study of twelfth-century authorship. Chapter two looks at what it meant to be an author: the practical issues authors faced and an appreciation of the art of Anonymous in this regard. In chapter three, I continue the consideration of authorship by investigating the author's use of dramatic writing and also of the visionary experience of his subject. Finally, I attempt to come to some conclusions about the purposes of the work.

Although his fascinating subject has to a great extent obscured his own presence as the author of her *Life*, that work, even in its unrevised and incomplete state, clearly establishes Anonymous as an accomplished writer. A major goal of this study is to bring Anonymous into the light, to show as far as possible the conditions that produced him, the problems that interested him, and his authorial abilities.

## CHAPTER 1: CULTURAL BACKGROUND

### A. CHRISTINA'S FAMILY CULTURE AND ANGLO-NORMAN RELATIONS

#### England

The events recounted in the *Life* occurred in a period of transition in England, both nationally and at the local level. Christina's story opens about thirty years after the Battle of Hastings. Hers was, technically, the losing side, even if Norman apologists maintained the legitimacy of William's accession to the throne of England. Speaking of the Conquest, Frank Barlow outlines the tricky political position of the Norman Duke: "William was both the lawful successor of King Edward and a foreign conqueror ruling, at first precariously, by military power" (*Feudal Kingdom* 88). The resolution of this dual role into confident kingship took until 1086, when his "Domesday" project symbolically confirmed the reality: William's feudal ownership of England (99).

There is no doubt that for many Anglo-Saxons the Conquest was a disaster. Lands of those, now considered traitors, who had fought and died on Harold's side against their country's invasion, were forfeit, and many Anglo-Saxon families were destroyed. Yet, however much the invasion disadvantaged the Anglo-Saxon population, William I certainly always strove to present his succession as legal: he was the legal successor to Edward and God's punishment on the usurper Harold, who had originally sworn to support William's claim to the English throne. This was the Norman line, although, as Marjorie Chibnall points out, the story of William's legal succession and Harold's broken oath was not immediately perfected. She suggests that the story was advanced as an explanation only after William had thoroughly established Norman control (20-21). Eadmer, a contemporary English writer, tells a more complex story in

his *Historia Novorum in Anglia*, giving some context for Harold's actions, although not condoning them, and presenting the Norman case as the Norman view, promoted as history by successful victors. He seems resigned to England's fate, if ambivalent about it (7-9), even though it resulted in the promotion of Canterbury interests. William of Malmesbury, of mixed English and Norman blood, likewise presents a balanced view of events, praising the valour of both sides. He points to the cooling of religious fervour and the bad habits of many of the English, both clerical and secular, during the years just prior to the Conquest, but also maintains that many remained pious. "Many clerics in those days trod the narrow path of holiness in simplicity of life, that many laymen in this country of all sorts and conditions led lives pleasing to God" ["Clericos multos tunc temporis simplici uia semitam sanctitatis triuisse . . . multos laicos omnis generis et conditionis Deo in eadem gente placuisse"] (*Gesta Regum Anglorum* 458-459). He characterizes the Norman victory as a manifestation of God's will, reflecting that "as in tranquil times God's serene kindness often fosters bad and good men equally, so in the hour of captivity His stern judgement sometimes grips good as well as bad" ["sicut ubi tranquillitate malos cum bonis plerumque Dei serenitas, ita in captiuitate bonos cum malis nonnumquam eiusdem constringit seueritas"] (458-461). William I himself was always careful to portray his succession as legitimate and regular, and "many of his acts express a sense of lawful continuity" with the reign of Edward the Confessor (Barlow, *Feudal Kingdom* 88).<sup>19</sup> King Edward's laws were confirmed and English nobles were kept at court both to demonstrate this continuity but also likely to keep them from their

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<sup>19</sup> Notice that Harold's reign is ignored by this stratagem. Marjorie Chibnall, in *Anglo-Norman England*, shows that although Harold governed for nine months, William dated the beginning of his reign with Edward's death (20-21).

home bases (89). Intermarriage of Normans with English widows and heiresses eventually provided hereditary authority for new lords, and in time, the cultivation of native saints helped legitimize Norman religious authority.<sup>20</sup>

Normanization of upper nobility and ecclesiastics was gradual, but was obviously a goal and was eventually completed. The existing Archbishop of Canterbury, Stigand, was allowed to remain at court until suspicion of treachery fell on him during the rebellions that followed shortly after William's coronation (Chibnall, *Anglo-Norman England* 39). Stigand's own consecration had been considered irregular by Pope Alexander II, and since papal support of William's English adventure was contingent on a promise to reform the English Church, an opportunity was afforded to depose Stigand and replace him with Lanfranc of Bec, a monk and scholar already long-known to William. Although elderly when appointed, Lanfranc embarked on a systematic reform of the English Church.<sup>21</sup> Many Norman bishops were recruited right away; in fact, for political reasons, William had already begun the Normanization of the upper clergy. Abbacies were filled with Norman candidates when they became vacant.

According to the Abbey's own history, the *Gesta Abbatum*, Saint Albans, which figures so significantly in Christina's story, retained its English abbot, Frederic, for several years after the Conquest. Frederic opposed William's coronation and gave aid to

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<sup>20</sup> For intermarriage, see Chibnall, *Anglo-Norman England* 208-210 and Leyser, *Medieval Women* 72-74; Leyser sees Geoffrey's veneration of Christina as an example of Norman "co-opting" the support of English saints (200); also see Southern, *Medieval Humanism* 137-138 for the change in attitude with regard to earl Waltheof, first scorned by Normans as a traitor, and afterward venerated.

<sup>21</sup> According to William of Malmesbury, Stigand, a greedy and ambitious man, had found an opportunity in 1052 to seize the archbishopric of Canterbury. Because of his reputation, bishops refused to be consecrated by him, as did William I (*Gesta Pontificum* 35-36, 252). He was deposed and imprisoned by the reforming Council of Winchester in 1070 (37). This council also marked Pope Alexander II's formal acceptance of the legitimacy of William's accession. See Barlow, *English Church*, 57.

rebellious English nobles; he was Edgar Etheling's man. Edgar, although apparently charming, was no serious threat to William (Chibnall, *Anglo-Norman England* 18-19). William seems to have tolerated Frederic, exacting by means of Lanfranc an oath of loyalty. Frederic, however, became nervous about his safety and fled to Ely, where he died in 1077 (44-51).<sup>22</sup> He was replaced the same year by a relative of Lanfranc, Paul of Caen, but according to the Saint Albans chronicler, not before the King had taken significant financial advantage of the vacancy. Lanfranc finally intervened on behalf of the Abbey (51). Abbot Paul established the abbey's scriptorium, hiring professional scribes for the purpose (Thomson I:13). As well, under Paul, St. Albans was thoroughly reformed along the lines Lanfranc had set for the English Church, and it adopted the customary which Lanfranc had written for Christ Church, but which he wished to see universally adopted in England (Barlow, *English Church* 189; *Gesta Abbatum* 52). Thereafter, St. Albans had a succession of Norman abbots.

Christina would have first visited St. Albans around 1111-1112, when Richard, who followed Paul of Caen, was abbot (Talbot 14). At that time, there were still nuns at the Abbey as well as monks. The presence of religious women at St. Albans has not often been acknowledged. The *Gesta Abbatum* record says that Abbot Paul reformed the way of living for both nuns and monks and, perhaps because discipline had become somewhat lax (at least from the Norman point of view) insisted that the nuns not stray far from the Almonry and adjacent spaces, where they had been housed from the time of the fourth abbot, Wulnoth (11). He also made or reaffirmed regulations concerning the nuns.

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<sup>22</sup> Knowles believes that the monks' record strayed into legend in its account of Abbot Frederick, perhaps through desire for a more heroic finale to Anglo-Saxon control of England. "Everything it says about Frederick seems to be legend except his name" (*Heads of Religious Houses* 66).

He also drew the assembly of nuns together through holy and honest rules: to gather in the Almonry and adjacent areas; to instruct that they take part in divine services day and night and make it a daily priority; to determine also for them appointed clothing, that is black mantles, and other appointed things. Indeed he ordered silence in its proper time and times of quiet and vigils and places of wandering; he assigned them their diet and daily allowances under a settled limit.

[Coetum quoque sanctimonialium quibusdam regulis sanctis et honestis coartavit, in Eleemosynaria, vel locis illi propinquis, collacando; ut interressent divinis obsequiis nocte dieque, et cotidie Mandatum facerent, praecipiendo; vestes quoque ordinatas, scilicet, mantellum nigrum, et caetera ordinata, eis determinando. Silentium vero, suo tempore, tempusque quietis et vigilarum, et loca evagationis, limitavit; dietamque earum, et diaria, sub certa quantitate, eisdem assignavit.]<sup>23</sup>

Scholarly tradition has it that the nuns were likely moved to the newly built priory of Sopwell when Abbot Geoffrey established it in 1140.<sup>24</sup> Contemporary confirmation of this tradition is not to be had, although the move does make sense. It seems to me, however, that it might be equally possible that some of the nuns chose rather to join Christina at her hermitage, even before it became a priory, and before the establishment

<sup>23</sup> *Gesta Abbatum*, p.59; translation by Linda Olson.

<sup>24</sup> Knowles and Hadcock, in their entry for St. Albans in *Medieval Religious Houses: England and Wales*, say that “the nuns who lived near the almonry . . . were apparently moved to Sopwell c.1140” (75). In their entry for “Sopwell,” they say that the nuns “doubtless moved here” (265). Rodney Thomson finds this “an inference reasonably drawn . . . though not stated” in the Abbey’s *Chronicles* (131, n.21). Sally Thompson believes that “a site in the vicinity of the abbey may have been thought preferable to having women more closely associated with the monks in the almonry” (*Women Religious* 57). She also sees a connection between the nuns of the almonry and Markyate, although she does not elaborate the point. Sopwell’s foundation allowed for no more than 13 nuns (“tresdecim”).

of Sopwell. In fact, this eventuality is strongly suggested in the *Life* by the visits made by Margaret, Christina's sister, and Lettice, another nun, between St. Albans and Markyate, and then by Margaret's continued presence at the hermitage. Margaret's presence at her sister's priory has been noticed before, but the text seems to imply that Margaret and Lettice were first nuns of St. Albans and that afterwards Margaret, at least, joined Christina at her hermitage.<sup>25</sup> For example, we see Margaret and Lettice, on separate occasions, leaving St. Albans very early in the morning, even "at daybreak" ["diluculo"] (*Life* ch. 59), which certainly would not have been practical unless they had spent the previous night at the Abbey. The reasonable assumption is that they are nuns of the Almonry.<sup>26</sup> Lettice is a relative of Abbot Geoffrey, and one morning, on rising, he calls her to him since he knows that she is going to visit the hermitage. He wants her to carry a message to Christina about his previous night's vision. Again, since the Abbot knew that he would be able to speak with Lettice on rising, and knew, moreover, of her plans for the day, reason suggests that she was resident at the Abbey and under the authority of the Abbot (ch. 67). There is also the charming portrait of the convalescing Abbot, attended by both monks and nuns, including Margaret. It is Margaret who bears news of the Abbot's health to Markyate, and then takes an edifying reply back to St. Albans (ch. 59). At this point, it seems likely that Margaret is still a St. Albans resident.

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<sup>25</sup> The formation of groups of disciples around a recluse or hermit was not uncommon. In the *Life* itself, we read that Roger supervised five hermits in the vicinity of his own cell, as well as the recluse Alfwen of Flamstead before he took charge of Christina. On the continent, Hildegard of Bingen was given as a small child to the anchoress Jutta of Sponheim, a cell connected with the monastery of Mount St. Disibod. She apparently was the first acolyte, but by the time Jutta died, the cell had grown into a community (Baird and Ehrman 5). For a detailed assessment of this phenomenon in England, which includes specific reference to Christina's circumstances, see Sally Thompson, *Women Religious*, pp. 16-37.

<sup>26</sup> I grant that the text is not at all conclusive on this point. However, I find the evidence, although circumstantial, suggestive of such a situation, and it seems to me important to take the St. Albans nuns into consideration when dealing with the relationship between St. Albans and Markyate.

Later though, Margaret is identified as one of the young women residing with Christina and is called on to verify an instance of her sister's prevision (ch. 61). Thereafter she is associated only with Markyate. When Christina visited St. Albans, then, in Abbot Richard's time, she would have seen both monks and nuns in the Church and, being impressed by what she saw, she expressed a wish to join them one day, a wish that would not have seemed unreasonable except that her family had other plans for her future.<sup>27</sup> The association she maintained with St. Albans seems to have been through the nuns living there, one of whom, at least, joined her at Markyate, as well as through the monks she "cherished" and, of course, Abbot Geoffrey.

### Huntingdonshire

The last Anglo-Saxon earl in England was Waltheof, earl of Huntingdon. Although he retained his earldom under William I, he became embroiled in two rebellions against the new regime. After the suppression of the first rebellion, in 1069, William showed mercy, and gave Waltheof his own niece, Judith, as wife, perhaps hoping thereby to encourage a more loyal earl. The earl, however, was persuaded to join, or at least acquiesce in, another rebellion in 1075. When this rebellion, too, was suppressed, Waltheof was counselled to give himself up to the King's mercy; but this

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<sup>27</sup> That there were nuns at the Abbey also helps to explain two otherwise puzzling statements in the *Life*. First there is the remark, dropped early in the story, that the author had seen Helisen, Christina's childhood friend, take the veil "for the purpose...of expiating this criminal behaviour" (ch. 7), that is, of trying to convince Christina of the joys of matrimony. We need allow the author no particular freedom of movement to accommodate this if she took the veil at his own monastery. Later, Christina has trouble deciding how to fulfill her religious life. She finally makes the deliberate choice of affiliation with St. Albans, and takes her vows there. Again, since the nuns would still have been in residence in 1131, this choice is not untoward, and her position at that point is parallel to Roger's former position. She chose St. Albans as her "home," but followed her religious life at Markyate hermitage.

time there was no mercy: the earl was executed for treason (Barlow, *Feudal Kingdom* 92-95; Chibnall 36). The earldom passed, through Waltheof and Judith's daughter, Matilda, to Simon Senlis, of the knightly class, and then, when Simon died, to David, later David I of Scotland. The Anglo-Saxon tone of Christina's story is in keeping with an earldom that had retained its native earl until only twenty years or so before her birth. Waltheof's rebellion and execution, grim reminders of Norman supremacy, would have been within living memory for many Huntingdon residents.<sup>28</sup> This much we glean from the history books. That the new earls had not had time, by the close of the eleventh century, to change the character of Huntingdon, even had they so desired, is also evidenced in the *Life*. It seems, however, that if all things were going smoothly, local customs were generally left alone, and even encouraged in the spirit of continuity (Chibnall, *Anglo-Norman England* 168; *English Historical Documents*, II 400). As we shall see, Huntingdon also benefited from the association of Autti's family with an important courtier. The crucial events of the early part of the biography – Christina's rebellion and escape – take place around 1115-17, during Henry I's reign. At that time, the most immediate royal official for Huntingdon was the sherrif, Gilbert, who was "well-loved by the people" (Dickinson 155), which would hardly have been the case if he had been particularly disruptive of local custom. His single appearance in the *Life* shows him to be aware of Christina's family troubles, and he engages directly with her in a bantering way

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<sup>28</sup> There was also, for a time, a local cult of Waltheof, whose tomb at Crowland was the site of miracles (Chibnall, *Anglo-Norman England* 210; Levy 191 and following). Orderic Vitalis has left a detailed account of the failed rebellion and Waltheof's execution and career as a saint (*Ecclesiastical History* II, 310-323; 346-351). According to Orderic, the crime of Waltheof lay in not reporting the rebels to the King. See also Brian Levy on a verse romance about Waltheof, composed in the late twelfth century, "Waltheof 'Earl' de Huntingdon et de Northampton: la Naissance d'un Heros Anglo-Normand."

(ch. 32).

In Christina's biography we find the effects of Anglo-Norman relations worked out at the family level. As has been mentioned, Norman nobility often consolidated their claims on English property by marrying English heiresses and widows. It was not only Norman nobility, however, who profited thus from the newly conquered kingdom. In the feudal scheme of things, loyal service was rewarded with land tenure, and occasionally those of non-noble birth might ennoble themselves by means of service.<sup>29</sup> Ranulf Flambard is a rather famous example of this kind of career. Born the son of a priest, an unpromising beginning for a Norman of that time, he became a clerk, and through hard work and with perhaps more than the usual share of luck, he eventually came to be a highly valued servant of Rufus, and his devoted service was rewarded eventually with the lucrative bishopric of Durham. That, however, was after he had already amassed considerable land and wealth, through perquisites in the service of Rufus, and had a family. For it was during those pre-ecclesiastical days that Flambard, as Anonymous says, "had taken to himself Christina's maternal aunt, named Alveva, and had children by her" ["Christine materteram Alvevam nomine habuerat. de qua filios procrearat"] (ch. 5). Very likely, as R. I. Moore suggests, the relationship was intended as a way into the very influential kinship that Autti's family represented in the Huntingdon area, providing connections within the Anglo-Saxon community that would not have been available to him among the Normans, with whom he could not easily sidestep his base birth (233-

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<sup>29</sup> That this practice may have been more than "occasional" is suggested in Eadmer's *Historia Novorum in Anglia*: "[King William] made bishops, abbots and other nobles throughout the whole country of persons of whom (since everyone knew who they were, from what estate they had been raised and to what they had been promoted) it would be considered shameful ingratitude if they did not implicitly obey his laws, subordinating every other consideration" (9).

234). Autti and his kin, in return, would have had the friendship, that is, the feudal patronage, of a powerful courtier, and at least the deference, if not the help, of his friends. During the years just prior to Christina's birth, Flambard was, in our author's words, "justiciar of the whole of England, holding the second place after the King" ["*tocius Anglie iudex, secundus post regem*"] (ch. 5). A friend of this stature could provide a reason for the stability and wealth Autti's family seems to enjoy, at least in the first part of the story.<sup>30</sup> Flambard retained the friendship even after formally giving up his relationship with Alveva. The general outlines of Flambard's career and his high estimation by William Rufus, who depended on him for his fund-raising, are confirmed in historical documents. What we have in the *Life* are some details of the relationship with Alveva, which are only hinted at elsewhere. Thus the author explicitly states the relationship between Alveva and Flambard, mentions their children and also Flambard's provision, when he became bishop, of a Huntingdon man as husband for Alveva. He describes the continuing friendship with Alveva and her family. When Flambard travels between Durham and London, he stays with Alveva, and Autti, "*amicus suus*," brings his family to visit. It is Flambard, the Norman, whom Anonymous "credits" with setting Christina on her troubled path to Markyate.

Norman officialdom impinges on the family in quite a different way when Bishop Robert Bloet, making the rounds of his diocese, is called on to adjudicate between Christina and her family in the matter of her marriage. We notice the deference shown to the Bishop, both by Fredebert, the prior of the local Augustinian house where Autti first

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<sup>30</sup> Later, the author says, things went badly for the family, perhaps after Flambard's death in 1128 (ch. 20).

presents his case, and by Autti himself. This deference is undercut, rather viciously, by Robert, dean of Huntingdon, and “certain others,” who reveal to Autti Bloet’s susceptibility to bribery. The effect of this incident (which will be discussed in more detail later) is to put Bloet into a very bad light, which, however, is only in keeping with his contemporary reputation among monks. In recounting the story, the author underlines the deep gulf he sees between the integrity of local and what we might call “career clergy.” Fredebert respects Christina’s resolution and virtue and advises Autti to do likewise. Autti however, to his surprise, finds in Bloet someone who respects his own concern with material wealth and authority.<sup>31</sup>

Aside from these examples, which show interaction between aristocratic Normans and the local wealthier Anglo-Saxon populace, more mundane older custom is evident, and the first part of the story, focussed as it is on Christina’s family, is often very Anglo-Saxon in tone. Let us look first at a custom which, although not limited to Anglo-Saxon families, is well-established for Anglo-Saxon culture and moreover has significant symbolic importance in the *Life*. This is the matter of the keys, which Christina has charge of, but which belong to her father, that is, to the household. In Anglo-Saxon custom, it was the wife, or among the wealthy, the housekeeper, who held the keys to certain household areas, likely storage rooms and chests for valuables.<sup>32</sup> In the *Life*, the

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<sup>31</sup> The divide cannot be clearly drawn, I think, between upper and local clergy, nor between English and Norman clergy, for there were certainly important Norman clerics who assisted Christina, such as Ralph the Archbishop of Canterbury, Thurstan, Archbishop of York, and of course, Abbot Geoffrey. As well, to be fair, we must note the perfidy of the Austin Canon Robert, who advised Autti to bribe Bloet. The division seems, rather, to be a matter of *conversatio morum*, “moral conduct or behaviour; way of life” (Constable, *Reformation* 15). This matter is discussed more fully below.

<sup>32</sup> For women’s care of household keys in Anglo-Saxon society and its legal implications, see Christine Fell, *Women in Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 59-61 and Helen Jewell, *Women in Medieval England*, p. 34.

first mention of household keys carries with it an explanation of the situation in Autti's household: "Now Autti was very rich and always entrusted to Christina his silver and gold and whatever treasures he possessed" ["Porro Aucti ditissimus argenti et auri. queque preciosissima habere poterat: fidei Christine custodienda securus credebat"] (ch. 23). The keys then, symbolize Christina's position in the family, her responsibility for the family's moveable wealth. She was not the lady of the house, nor yet the housekeeper; still, that Autti had entrusted her with his keys shows that she was being primed to take charge of a household, and that she had proved herself in this capacity. In the incident referred to, Autti has become violently angry because of Christina's refusal to abide by the Bishop's decision that she should accept Burthred as her husband. From his point of view she is flouting his authority, overturning his plans for the welfare of his family.<sup>33</sup> The biographer tells us that he stripped her down to her shift and took her keys. Autti is prepared at that moment to throw Christina out of his house to, as he says, "Christum nuda sequere," and is only restrained from doing so by a houseguest (ch. 23).<sup>34</sup> He repents of his haste next morning and prevents her voluntary exit from the family home. The keys then, represent the status in the family that Christina will be giving up should she persist in rejecting the marriage her parents have arranged. They also represent the power Autti has (or at this point thinks he has) over Christina's status and future.

Christina must have been reinstated at some point, for she is again in possession of the keys on the day she finally runs away. With the hermit Eadwin's help she has

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<sup>33</sup> See Georges Duby, *Medieval Marriage*, on the lengths to which aristocratic heads of households would go to ensure the continuance of the family line and wealth.

<sup>34</sup> For more on this scene, and on Christina's association with the Old Testament Joseph, see pages 115-116.

arranged her escape down to the hour, but through some miscalculation perhaps, she is left waiting. Finally she changes into her disguise – a man’s clothing – and conceals herself in a long cloak. Matilda, her sister, spots a man’s sleeve dangling outside the cloak, and Christina, to put her off the scent, pretends that she meant to leave that sleeve at home and asks Matilda to take it and also her father’s keys in case he returns while Christina is at Church, whither she then turns her steps. The keys here, at the point where Christina is about to mount a horse and go into hiding, symbolize very effectively the complete break she is making with the world. She was quite willing, when her father took the keys, to leave her household. Here, she resigns her position, hands in her keys.<sup>35</sup>

A direct evocation of Anglo-Saxon custom comes with the first “banquet” episode, where Christina is presented as the “eldest and most worthy daughter” [“maior natu atque dignior filia”] of Autti and Beatrix at the feast of the Gild Merchant (ch. 9).<sup>36</sup> Speaking of this period in England, R.W. Southern has remarked, “nostalgia is a symptom of decline . . . for Englishmen the present was a falling away from the past” (*Medieval Humanism* 154). Among the wealthy Anglo-Saxon burgesses of Huntingdon, it may be that the old customs were kept, as being symbolic of a more heroic time, and especially, perhaps, among those who aspired to a higher social rank, or at least sought to maintain, in uncertain times, the rank they had achieved. Cup-bearing historically was often the duty of the Anglo-Saxon lady. The classic example in heroic poetry is the

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<sup>35</sup> The key is evoked again symbolically later in the story, when Christina is being tempted and harrassed by dreadful apparitions. She prays to God, who tells her that he has the key of her heart in his keeping. The symbolic presence of the key ever afterwards provides her with comfort (ch. 54).

<sup>36</sup> For a discussion of the Gild Merchant in English towns, see Charles Gross, *The Gild Merchant*, especially Chapter VII. The Gild Merchant at Huntingdon seems to have been a very early association (Talbot, *Life*, p. 10, n. 3).

Queen in *Beowulf* who serves her husband and his guests.<sup>37</sup> The Gild Merchant feast was a public show of solidarity and wealth; it was not a heroic banquet, nor is Autti an Anglo-Saxon lord. But for one evening Autti and Beatrix are guests of honour, and appointing their daughter as cupbearer would be seen as powerfully symbolic; the parallels to a more heroic age would have been clear to the guests. Christina must lay aside her mantle, roll up her sleeves and take “little sips of wine” to welcome each guest as she serves. Under guise of this venerable custom, of course, the parents are trying to soften Christina up a little, hoping that she will be more receptive of Burthred’s advances. The episode serves within the story to show how Christina can both obey her parents and defend herself against their stratagems. She passes by a doorway from which she can see the Monastery of St. Mary as she works. The thought of the Virgin gives her strength, and a shield against flattery. She only pretends to sip wine, holding off until a quiet moment when she can quench her thirst with water. All in all, her parents in this instance were “outwitted” by their daughter (*Life* ch. 8-9). But while the episode serves within the overall story to show Christina’s resolution and resourcefulness, it also gives us a glimpse of how post-Conquest Anglo-Saxons, in Huntingdon at least, tried to maintain an exalted memory of their past.

Finally, let us look more closely at the matter of Christina’s status as heiress. When it comes to defending his authority to arrange his daughter’s marriage, Autti says to the canons of St. Mary’s that he and Beatrix are willing to bequeath everything to Christina if she marries as they wish. We could, I suppose, take this as hyperbole,

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<sup>37</sup> The description of Queen Wealhtheow as cupbearer is in *Beowulf*, lines 1230-1263 (ed. Benjamin Thorpe). See also Christine Fell, *Women in Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 50.

whether on Autti's part or on the part of the author, who may be seeking to create a more dramatic contrast between the earthly position and wealth that Christina scorns and the heavenly marriage she hopes to attain through voluntary earthly poverty. However, if we take Autti at his word, he is declaring that he wishes to settle his substance on his eldest daughter. We might ask, why?

Christine Fell has argued that historically, primogeniture was not the only acceptable rule of inheritance among the Anglo-Saxons. Existing wills show a variety of patterns (75 ff). Primogeniture became more important after the Conquest, as feudal relations in England became more fixed and military service had to be provided. Although the process was slow, by the time the collection of law and custom known as "Glanvill" was compiled (1187-89) inheritance in England was decided according to primogeniture (Chibnall 174-175). At the time of Autti's statement, however, around 1114-1115, older custom was not immediately set aside for the newer ways of the Normans. Furthermore, since land tenure among the barons in England was not completely resolved even late in the twelfth century, it is unlikely that a merchant in Huntingdon would encounter very much interference in distributing his wealth among his kin.<sup>38</sup> Let us consider the family situation.

Christina is the eldest daughter, perhaps even the eldest child of the marriage, and she has been groomed to run a wealthy household. She has siblings: at least two sisters and two brothers. Matilda, who acted as her jailor when she was being kept in close custody, we later find married to a Huntingdon man and still on speaking terms with

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<sup>38</sup> For thorough discussions regarding the effects of Norman feudalism on English family custom, see J.C. Holt, "Feudal Society and the Family in Early Medieval England: I. The Revolution of 1066," and Pauline Stafford, "La Mutation Familiale: a suitable case for caution."

Christina in spite of her earlier role. Margaret, the other sister, became a nun and joined Christina at her priory. One brother, Gregory, became a monk at St. Albans, and seems to have been particularly close to his sister. It is perhaps Gregory who is alluded to in the vision during which Mary promises to deliver both Christina and “her companion” from her father’s house (ch. 26). Another brother, Simon, witnessed the grant of land made by the canons of St. Paul in 1145 for the priory of Markyate (Talbot 30). With suitable provision for siblings, an Anglo-Saxon family of Autti’s wealth at that time might seek to consolidate its position through the strategic marriage of its “star” child, increasing the family wealth and business prospects and providing for the family line. Christina’s qualities, shown early, made her a prize on the marriage market. It is not too much speculation to think that the plan to marry her was made early on, as it was often in other families, although the choice of bridegroom was not made at that time.<sup>39</sup> We know that shortly after she was born, Rufus died and Flambard entered a period of disgrace and exile under the new king.<sup>40</sup> A family plan such as the one outlined might have seemed prudent to Christina’s parents in the circumstances, with their Norman patron absent. The idea of Christina as heiress does not seem remarkable to the author, and may reflect a society still Anglo-Saxon in many of its family customs, including inheritance.

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<sup>39</sup> Marriage practices of this period are discussed in some detail in chapter three.

<sup>40</sup> He was first imprisoned in the Tower, but escaped to France in February, 1101 and lived there, an advisor to Robert, Henry’s brother, until the Treaty of Alton was struck later that year between the feuding brothers. As part of the agreement, Robert suggested the re-enfranchisement of Flambard. This was agreed to; however, Flambard remained in France a further five years, which brings some historians to speculate that the whole business was stage-managed from the outset to have Flambard keep an eye on Robert (Barlow, *Feudal Kingdom* 176) or that Henry, after the treaty, arranged with Flambard to be his agent in Normandy in exchange for restoration of his property and status (Southern, *Medieval Humanism* 197-198). Whatever the circumstances, thereafter Flambard steadily regained what had been lost during his absence, so that by the time of his appearance in the *Life* he seems to have recouped most if not all of his wealth and status.

The record left of Christina's life adds greatly to our impression of a fascinating period of history in England. Most records that survive deal with the aristocracy. It is therefore invaluable to have this rare contemporary portrait of a middle-class, urban family, particularly as it also shows the interactions between Autti's Anglo-Saxon family and named Norman officials. Huntingdon had attracted negative attention from William I through the rebellion of its earl. However after 1087, with Rufus on the throne, things perhaps became calmer as Flambard, through his relationship with Alveva, had the effect of sheltering her relatives and friends.<sup>41</sup> The exile of Flambard at the beginning of Henry's reign meant a period of insecurity, but by the time of Christina's adolescence, around 1114, Flambard had recovered his position as Bishop of Durham, and was again influential both with Autti's kin and in royal circles to a certain extent as Bishop of Durham, even if he was never again a close advisor to the king (*Southern Medieval Humanism* 199). The England Christina was born in had seen great upheaval, and as we see in her biography, relations between Normans and English were still being negotiated throughout her life. In the next section we consider a different set of circumstances, looking at England after the Conquest specifically in ecclesiastical terms, to try to understand more comprehensively our author's perspective.

## B: BIOGRAPHER'S MONASTIC CULTURE AND REFORMIST PERSPECTIVES

We must not let the unfortunate fact that we cannot name the author of Christina's *Life* dampen our interest in him. In fact, as I hope to show, we can know more about

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<sup>41</sup> The mention of Autti's guild is interesting in this respect, since protection may have extended to the Guild members as well, as associates of Autti and influential in their own right in the area.

Anonymous than we might have expected. We know, for instance, that he was a monk who lived during the twelfth century at St. Albans, a major Benedictine abbey. From that fact, even if we did not have an example of his work in the *Life*, we could conjecture certain attitudes and beliefs. Although some of our assumptions will necessarily be speculative, they will give us an idea of the milieu in which he worked.

We cannot know for certain if Anonymous was English or Norman, or indeed, from elsewhere. Thomas Head has suggested that he must have been a Norman because of his use of Norman saints in dating events (84). However, by the time of writing, Norman calendars had been in place for a long time, and even an English monk would have used the saints' names with which he was familiar through everyday use.<sup>42</sup> Typically for this time, he would have begun his education at a "reading school," likely under the tutelage of his local priest (Barlow, *English Church* 228; Orme 60). He may then have become a scholar at a monastic school or an urban secular school, or even, at this period, have entered a monastery as an oblate.<sup>43</sup> From the twelfth century, secular schools became more important and numerous, while Benedictine monastic schools, which had, in a minor, incidental fashion, also catered to the children of the nobility, became increasingly less important to that clientel, while they still maintained the

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<sup>42</sup> Even if Head is correct and Anonymous was a Norman, who could fault him for giving Christina's birthday saint as St. Leonard, the saint called upon by pregnant women to ease their delivery? The attention given to Beatrix's pregnancy reaches a fitting conclusion when she puts herself in the saint's care and goes home to deliver her child.

<sup>43</sup> Although Lanfranc's *Monastic Constitutions* (1070s-1080s) provided for the care and education of oblates, the practice of oblation became increasingly uncommon by the mid twelfth century (Orme 225). Anonymous was a monk at a transitional time, it seems, when oblation would still have been a possibility for him, if unusual.

education of their own.<sup>44</sup> Even that responsibility decreased, however, as child oblation became less countenanced. During the twelfth century the two kinds of schools, secular and monastic continued, the former increasing, the latter decreasing in general importance.<sup>45</sup> Anonymous could have attended either, although the normal route to the monastery during this time became a secular education. Anonymous may, then, have remained in the secular schools for some time before conversion to a monastic life.<sup>46</sup>

However he got his training, his writing shows an imaginative engagement with the events he relates and he displays also an interest in the motivation behind characters' actions. His reading reflects Biblical and theological rather than classical study, and his writing reflects intense involvement with the liturgy,<sup>47</sup> for although even future monks would at an early stage study the writings of Ovid and Virgil in order to perfect their Latin writing, the intention behind fluent Latin, from the monastic perspective, was "a life to be spent in routine devotional services and meditation on religious themes, in commenting on the *sacra pagina*" (Barlow, *English Church* 245). He speaks of the early Fathers, quotes Psalms frequently, and draws analogies to Old and New Testament stories, as well as to saints' lives.<sup>48</sup> In his Biblical emphasis, of course, Anonymous is

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<sup>44</sup> See Marjorie Chibnall, "Introduction," *The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis*, pp.14-16 for a traditional monk's cloistered education.

<sup>45</sup> This point is discussed by Nicholas Orme in *English Schools in the Middle Ages*, 224-226.

<sup>46</sup> Although it is not possible to be more precise in the case of Anonymous, we do have a contemporary example in Geoffrey Gorham. We know that Geoffrey's original aspiration was to be the master of the secular school of St. Albans, whose *magister* was appointed by the Abbot (*Gesta Abbatum* 73). Anonymous may have followed a similar path, as a secular scholar, before becoming a monk.

<sup>47</sup> His involvement with the liturgy does not seem to have had any great effect on actual syntax. A detailed analysis of the syntax used throughout the biography may prove rewarding. At the present time, I hold the opinion that the variation in syntax is another indication of the incomplete revision of the work. This point is taken up in chapter two. There is, of course, the possibility that the variation in syntax of the fourteenth-century Cotton Tiberius MS is a result of purposeful or accidental abbreviation in copying.

<sup>48</sup> An interesting omission is any mention of the story of St. Alexis. That an illustrated version of this

not unusual, for the “monastic language is, first of all, a biblical language, entirely fashioned by the Vulgate” (Leclercq, *Love of Learning* 181). As we will see later, his meditation on saints’ lives had a significant effect on how he understood and structured the events of his heroine’s life.

St. Albans maintained an important place among the great abbeys of England following the Norman Conquest. Its early and close association with Lanfranc and then Anselm and thus to Norman monastic ideals is largely responsible for this status, and its scriptorium, established with professional scribes by its first Norman-appointed abbot, Paul of Caen, assured that the library, the foundation of intellectual activity was developed (Thomson I: 13, 78-79). From evidence in the *Life*, it is clear that Anonymous was a monk of St. Albans. He makes several proprietary references to the Abbey. He speaks, for example, of Roger the hermit as “a monk of ours” [“noster . . . monachus”] (ch. 28). Describing the location of Roger’s hermitage at Markyate, he uses St. Albans Abbey as his point of reference: “The position of the hermitage where he dwelt was on the right hand near the road as you go from our monastery towards Dunstable” [“Porro locus heremi quem inhabitabit: gradientibus de nostro monasterio Dunstapulam apparet a dextris secus viam”] (ch. 28). As well, he is able to report many incidents from Geoffrey’s point of view, and to include Geoffrey’s thoughts and feelings about events. As already discussed in the introduction, it seems that the most reasonable assumption is that Geoffrey Gorham commissioned the writing of the *Life*, and intended to supervise its completion. This assumption helps to explain the apparent freedom Anonymous seems

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story is included in the St. Albans Psalter has been considered a proof of the psalter’s association with Christina, even of her ownership. This point is considered more fully below.

to have enjoyed both at St. Albans and at Markyate.

Especially remarkable is his obvious familiarity with Christina and her hermitage. He writes vividly of incidents at Markyate; either his sources are able to provide sufficient details for this or, as is very possible, he was a frequent visitor there.<sup>49</sup> Talbot suggests that Anonymous may have been somehow connected with Markyate officially, “as chaplain or confessor” (7). The nuns would have needed someone to celebrate mass for them. The *Life* only mentions Geoffrey and Christina’s brother, Gregory, as celebrants, but Anonymous may also have performed this service or acted in some other capacity. A connection of this sort makes sense, and would have been a good solution to the problem of gathering material for the work in progress. Certainly his knowledge of details of incidents at the hermitage suggests a “long familiarity” with Christina and her establishment (7).<sup>50</sup>

Finally, the biography shows us that Anonymous had a good knowledge of the area and of the people in Huntingdon, more than would be the case if he simply questioned individuals in the course of gathering information for his biography.<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, his range of knowledge of the area and of incidents further emphasizes the fact of his authorship. Episodes such as Autti’s bribery of Bishop Robert or Sueno’s reproach of Beatrice were not likely learned from Christina. This knowledge of the

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<sup>49</sup> For example, he mentions in passing being among those sharing a meal with Christina (ch. 83).

<sup>50</sup> A relationship of this kind is documented in Hildegard of Bingen’s own correspondence and in her *Vita*: her chaplain, Volmar, became her advisor and secretary. See Sally Thompson, *Women Religious*, 19-20 for the idea that Anonymous may have been one of Roger’s hermits.

<sup>51</sup> It is also possible, it must be said, that Anonymous received all of his information less directly than I maintain here. Some incidents noted in this section seem, however, to suggest a more intimate knowledge of the people involved, rather than anecdotal knowledge. The sources described here, then, I believe are plausible, if not provable.

Huntingdon area may indicate that he was a local man, or at least had lived in the region for some time before entering the monastery. He knows about the members of Christina's family and about the family's reputation, for example, and is able to draw inferences about the motivations for their actions and also about their influence and support in the region around Huntingdon (ch. 20 and ch. 34). His knowledge of the hermits of the region ranges from Guido, consulted regularly by Christina's parents, to the peripatetic Eadwin, who eventually arranges the physical means of Christina's escape. His knowledge of Roger's spirituality would have been common to the monks of St. Albans, but he seems also to be aware of Roger's forceful character, and the influence he exerted on his circle of disciples. As well, he seems to know and approve of the canons of St. Mary's, Huntingdon, and shows their interactions with Christina's family. The author's knowledge of Huntingdon is particularly intriguing, since the town is quite a distance from St. Albans.

As a learned monk living in a major monastery, Anonymous could not have been unaware of currents of thought in monastic circles, and in fact, this is borne out in his writing. An important influence on monastic life in the twelfth century was the spirit of reform. It is in early eleventh-century reforms that we can see the seeds of later Gregorian reforms. Leo IX attempted the moral reform of clergy with some success, especially in relation to simony, as was seen at the Council of Rheims in 1049.<sup>52</sup> His efforts,

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<sup>52</sup> The council of Rheims, where Pope Leo IX had called a council of bishops and abbots in 1049, was scene to a dramatic instance of the concern over simony. Although, in fact, attendance was poor, the influence of this council was wide-ranging. Each of these men was asked at the beginning of the Council to confirm publicly that no money had been paid to obtain his office. The effect was "spectacular" (Reuter 195). For a brief summary of these proceedings, see Southern, *Making of the Middle Ages*, pp.125-127; for an analysis of the act of renunciation and reinstatement, see Timothy Reuter, "*Pastorale pedum ante*

however, may have been most effective in disseminating the *idea* of reform: the idea that clergy should live according to canon law, be celibate, be vigilant against the taint of simony, and receive their offices from churchmen. The actual implementation of reforms, however, depended on the “good will of local lay rulers” (Lynch 140). These reforms, especially those curbing the purchase of office, involved disrupting traditional economic arrangements, and often met with solid resistance. Similarly, celibacy of the clergy, although relatively easy to enforce among the upper clergy, using the carrot-and-stick method, was not always accepted at the local level, where priests’ families were part of the communities they served. As for lay investiture, although reformers discouraged it, again they were for a long time thwarted by arguments of tradition and power. Still, moral reform of the clergy remained an ideal, and as that ideal was disseminated among both clergy and their congregations, reforms did take place. Although it must be remembered, then, that the ground had already been prepared, it is with Gregory VII we see the most decisive blows made on behalf of reform. It was a long process, continuing through Gregory’s time (d.1085) until around 1200, and therefore of great significance when Anonymous was writing. This is most evident in how Anonymous highlights particular issues in his account of Christina’s life.

As Giles Constable has noted in his book, *The Reformation of the Twelfth Century*, the idea of reform could apply to the individual Christian, seeking a holier way of living (3), and we may think of examples in the twelfth century of men and women

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*apostolici posuit*: Dis-and Reinvestiture in the Era of the Investiture Contest.” On the topic of simony see below, n. 76.

whose sole purpose was self-reformation.<sup>53</sup> The beginning of reformation was in *conversio*, a “turning around.” A monk living under obedience had already, of course, had a conversion from the world, even if he had entered the monastery as a child with no worldly experience. His formal consecration marked the conversion. The same applied to nuns. Some lay people converted later in life and entered monasteries (sometimes only just in time to receive the habit before dying). These were the *conversi*, who gave up their worldly lives in order to save their souls.<sup>54</sup> In the *Life*, Anonymous carefully describes the stages of Christina’s childhood conversion. The episode is given importance by Anonymous by the amount of space and detail given. She is first attracted to the religious life (it seems, quite naturally) and is then instructed in it by Sueno. One night, however, while lying in bed, “she imagined herself lying on her deathbed (as if the future were already present) and she reflected that after life had departed from the body no one could foretell the abode of the freed spirit. One thing, however, was certain - that if she lived well it would enjoy bliss, but if wickedly it would be given over to torments. Thenceforward she lost all interest in worldly ostentation and turned to God with all her heart” [“prescripsit secum in animo quasi iam fuisset quod futurum erat se mortuam emponi. examini cadavere locum exaluti spiritus non licere prenosci. Pro certo tamen habebat in bonis illum fore si bene fecisset. sin autem male deputari tormentis. Proinde omnem pompam seculi fastidivit et ad Deum toto corde conversa”] (ch. 4). It is the contemplation of death and damnation that precipitates her conversion. She is convinced that only by devoting her virginity to God can her soul be saved (although she later

<sup>53</sup> See also his “Renewal and Reform in Religious Life: Concepts and Realities.”

<sup>54</sup> See Constable, *Reformation of the Twelfth Century*, 77-82 for a discussion of the instability in meaning of the term *conversi*.

concedes to Fredebert that even mothers of families may be saved). The next day she makes what is, in her mind, a formal vow to Christ. Thomas Head, in his article, “The Marriages of Christina of Markyate,” describes the contractual nature of Christina’s vow, and says that “she conceived of her marriage to Christ, and thus her religious vocation, in extraordinarily concrete terms. Being the bride of Christ was not a metaphorical expression of her spiritual intimacy with her savior, rather it was a contractual relationship involving mutual privileges and obligations which bound her to him – and him to her” (76). Her fervour never lessens, and she takes up the life of a recluse at first because of the necessity of hiding from her family.<sup>55</sup>

The story of Geoffrey Gorham provides us with examples of two variations of monastic conversion. As an adult layman, Geoffrey became a *conversus* after some St. Albans property in his keeping was accidentally destroyed. He offered himself to the monastery in reparation.<sup>56</sup> Later as abbot, having become, we are to understand, complacent and even headstrong, he experiences another conversion when he first ignores a heavenly warning sent to him by Christina and then has a frightening dream which convinces him of her religious power. His life after this second conversion is completely different. At several points after this incident the author tells us how Geoffrey gives up hope in the world and devotes himself to good works. Anonymous never mentions the first conversion. Perhaps he had never been told of it.<sup>57</sup> More likely,

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<sup>55</sup> Several of her contemporaries turned from a monastic life to that of the “desert” or to a stricter life, whether monastic or eremetical. Eve, for example, left the convent at Wilton to become a recluse. See Talbot’s edition of “The Liber Confortatorius of Goscelin of Saint Bertin.” in *Analecta Monastica*, 3<sup>rd</sup>. ser.

<sup>56</sup> See chapter three for a description of this incident.

<sup>57</sup> There is also the possibility that the first conversion was described in the original version, but was omitted by a later copiest.

I think, he wanted nothing to distract from the story of Christina's effectiveness in converting the abbot from worldliness. His conversion, after all, proved to be her major life-work, although she had already been responsible, Anonymous tells us, for converting several people, in particular several men, to the monastic life (ch. 50). Geoffrey, already a monk and abbot, was moving from good to better, spiritually speaking. In a society where all are Christian, conversion needed to show individual commitment. Always in Christianity, there is the idea of personal responsibility for the salvation of one's soul.

Although individual conversion was an important aspect of reform, "in the eleventh and twelfth centuries [the term] was also applied to institutions, including the church, the empire, and society as a whole" (Constable 3). The same spirit which caused Eve of Wilton to fly to a hermitage in France, caused groups of monks to break away from their monasteries in search of a stricter, and thus holier way of life. Moreover the inter-political realities cannot be escaped, especially when speaking of the Gregorian reforms, which, strictly speaking, applied to the Church, but which quickly developed into ideological conflict with regard to lay investiture and also, to a lesser extent and locally, to clerical marriage. In England, reform was, from the beginning, a joint royal/episcopal project, and as such, it entailed compromise on either side.

As mentioned above, reformers focussed their attention on moral principles: "the abolition of simony and clerical marriage, and, more generally, the spiritualization of the church" (Barlow, *English Church* 60). It was, however, not a grassroots movement, at least to begin with in England, but a process of institutionalized reform. Lanfranc, who was drawn from Bec to become Archbishop of Canterbury in 1070, had attended Leo IX's council at Rheims in 1049, and was both able and ready to undertake the systematic

reform of the English Church.<sup>58</sup> After his reforming councils in the 1070s, the English Church was stronger and more in line with the continental Norman Church. Moreover, its Norman character, at least in its upper offices, was firmly established. Indeed, as Barlow points out, “the Norman treatment of the national churches was clearly imperialistic, and most of the features associated with imperialism can be seen” (311). Upper positions – those of archbishops and bishops- were fairly soon filled with Norman candidates, and since these positions came with both ecclesiastical and feudal powers and duties, ultimate royal control was inevitable under a strong feudal monarch, such as William I and both sons who followed him. Abbots as well as bishops “looked to the king as the effective head of the church and their real master” (Barlow, *English Church* 315) at least until the later years of Henry I. In addition, Barlow finds that the “traditional social cleavage” between aristocratic upper clergy and lower class local clergy was deepened by racial difference as the Normans carried out their programme, and that this was still evident in the years described by Christina’s biographer (311). Certainly it has been noticed that the local clergy and sympathetic hermits with whom Christina was associated are Anglo-Saxon, and that two major villains of the piece are Norman (Talbot 12).<sup>59</sup> Abbots were replaced more gradually, usually on the death of the abbot (Barlow, *Feudal Kingdom* 96). The development of St. Albans after the Conquest is a case in point, as we have seen in the previous chapter.

A logical development given the spirit of reform was a desire of monastics to seek what they saw as the roots of their way of life, the *vita apostolica*, summed up in Acts

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<sup>58</sup> As previously noted, a crucial point to remember is that reform was a requirement for Papal approval of William I’s accession to the English throne, approval the Conqueror was anxious to receive.

<sup>59</sup> See above, n.28.

4:32-35:

And the multitude of believers had but one heart and one soul: neither did any one say that aught of the things which he possessed was his own, but all things were common unto them. And with great power did the apostles give testimony of the resurrection of the Jesus Christ our Lord: and great grace was in them all. For neither was there any one needy among them. For as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them, and brought the price of the things they sold, and laid it down before the feet of the apostles. And distribution was made to every one according as he had need.

[Multitudinis autem credentium erat cor et anima una. nec quisquam eorum quae possidebant aliquid suum esse dicebat sed erant illis omnia communia. et virtute magna reddebant apostoli testimonium resurrectionis Iesu Christi Domini. et gratia magna erat in omnibus illis neque enim quisquam egens erat inter illos quotquot enim possessores agrorum aut domorum erant vendentes adferebant pretia eorum quae vendebant et ponebant ante pedes apostolorum dividebantur autem singulis prout cuique opus erat.]<sup>60</sup>

This was not an entirely new phenomenon. From time to time, Christianity has looked back and imagined a simpler, holier way of following its course, often conveniently forgetting its necessary relationship with Caesar. As Constable warns in his book *The Reformation of the Twelfth Century*, the rhetoric of twelfth-century reform was not new; the twelfth century did, however, receive and use this rhetoric in a new way (127). In

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<sup>60</sup>Except for passages of the Bible quoted in the *Life*, I have used the Vulgate, with English translation from the Douay-Rheims version.

England, I think we see that reform is linked, to some extent opportunistically, to a monarch anxious to vindicate his claim to the throne of England, and to demonstrate a correctness with regard to the Holy See, while at the same time maintaining feudal control of both the spiritual and the temporal elements of his new kingdom. This is not to downplay the religious aspirations of Lanfranc and his clerical generals. It could be, however, that Lanfranc saw his best chance at ecclesiastical reformation in England in co-operation with the King. Until the death of Henry I, this would seem to have been the wisest choice for an Archbishop of Canterbury. (Anselm's unfortunate experiences with William II may be seen as proving the rule.)

The desire for a simpler mode of religious life manifested itself variously. At one level, Benedictine monasteries laid claim to it as their rightful heritage. Certain monks, however, found the current customs too lax. Some broke off to form more ascetic groups, striving to follow the Benedictine rule more closely and sometimes criticizing what had now become traditional Benedictinism. The development of Clairvaux under Bernard is perhaps the most well-known and successful of these movements. Even among these reformed groups there were sometimes disagreements about what constituted the apostolic life. A famous letter of Peter the Venerable, abbot of Cluny, in response to an anonymous Cistercian letter of criticism is an example, as is Bernard's *Apology*, written in response to Benedictine criticism of Cistercians.<sup>61</sup> That there were, or seemed to be, several paths by which one could fulfil one's vocation seemed dangerous to some, even scandalous. And, of course, the existence of these alternatives

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<sup>61</sup> For a discussion of the various polemical works of c.1120-1160, see Giles Constable, *The Reformation of the Twelfth Century* pp.131-135. He makes the important point that "the dispute was essentially among reformers" (133).

raised the question about where the line should be drawn (Constable, *Reformation* 158-159).

The desire for the apostolic life is also one reason for the increase in the number of hermits and recluses, many of whom, having found the simple life, attracted disciples and ended by founding houses of their own. This “slide” from solitary asceticism to monastic stability has been documented by Léopold Genicot (66) and also by Sally Thompson (35). The foundation of Markyate priory is, of course, a major example of this phenomenon, as is the establishment of Sopwell Priory. Monasteries sometimes considered an association with a hermit fortunate. St. Albans, for example, was very proud of the hermit Roger and of Sigar, both former monks of the house. Both were buried at St. Albans and, for a time at least, attracted pilgrims (*Gesta Abbatum* 105). It is likely that Abbot Geoffrey saw his association with Christina in this light. Certainly, as will be discussed in the conclusion, one of the writer’s purposes was to emphasize the connection between Christina and St. Albans.

Another consequence of reform was the monasticism of secular canons, and the establishment of houses of Augustinian canons. Canons were not monks but priests. Secular canons retained their independence, while performing various duties, especially for cathedrals and wealthy churches. The reformers sought to monasticize or regularize canons, imposing celibacy and the common life, conditions that were not always welcome. These groups of regular canons often lived by what was known as Augustine’s Rule, which accommodated their pastoral duties, as Benedict’s Rule did not. Pastoral work in the community was a primary though not exclusive duty of canons, and in fact, “the regular canonical ideal was not necessarily solely contemplative or solely active, but

might be either or both” (Dickinson 196). Christina’s biographer provides a contemporary view of canons at work in the community at Huntingdon.

The foundation date of the priory of canons at St. Mary’s, Huntingdon is not known, but since Merton was colonized from St. Mary’s around 1092, J. C. Dickinson thinks that there must have been an establishment of regular canons in Huntingdon from about the middle of William II’s reign (104). As is evident in the *Life*, the canons were involved to a significant degree in the lives of the people of Huntingdon, as teachers and advisors. Christina loved to pray in the chapel at the monastery, and her family attends services there, including a relative’s funeral (ch. 8, 14 and 31). The canon Sueno seems to have been a fairly close associate of Autti’s family, entrusted with Christina’s religious education. Sueno’s reproof to Christina’s mother, after her daughter’s flight, is an echo of the freedom the canon had perhaps previously enjoyed in the household during Christina’s childhood (ch. 36). Moreover, we note that it is to the canons that Autti comes when he cannot bring his daughter to obedience, rather than, for example, to the local priest, although the local priest, Burthred, was the one who blessed Christina’s enforced betrothal.<sup>62</sup>

Christina’s biographer shows a thoughtful interest in issues of reform as they apply to his abbey and to England. We will see later in this chapter how he deals with the issue of clerical integrity in the course of his narration. Integrity is not only important to the *Life* thematically, however, but was of prime concern generally at the time of the

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<sup>62</sup> In the case of Christina’s betrothal, we may be seeing a definite class split between the nobility on one hand and the local, lower class priest on the other. Autti, as a powerful member of the local community may have been able to browbeat Burthred the priest, as he and his wife had Burthred the groom, in order to have the betrothal solemnized, even if it must have been obvious that the circumstances were, at the very least, out of keeping with the spirit of *sacramentum*.

story. Simony and celibacy, both important reform issues, are after all both matters of integrity. In reality, however, integrity was often sacrificed to expediency, as Lanfranc attempted to root out the worst excesses while regulating practice throughout the Kingdom. The situation became particularly difficult under William Rufus, as an aging Lanfranc tried to support and restrain a monarch who, unlike his father, was not even conventionally religious (Barlow, *Feudal Kingdom* 147).) Lanfranc's death in 1089, and the strategic five-year vacancy of Canterbury gave time for Rufus to assert his style of kingship. Anselm, a devoted son of Rome who had been nourished in the austere atmosphere of Bec, coming reluctantly to Canterbury in 1093, had difficulty encouraging reformist ideals in a system which the king could already work to his own advantage (152). Even Henry I, whose coronation oath promised the freedom of the Church, still generally treated bishops as barons. The controversy over lay investiture in England ended in a compromise that did not upset this view greatly.<sup>63</sup> Under Stephen, whose reign particularly impinges on the life at Markyate, bishops were imprisoned as barons, an event reported with disapproval by Anonymous, although it was not an entirely novel occurrence.<sup>64</sup> This particular political climate is very important to the ethos of the biography. Through it we understand more clearly the author's concern with the behaviour of the many clerical characters who come into Christina's story.

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<sup>63</sup> Finally Paschal II and Henry I came to a compromise on the matter of investiture. Bishops or abbots approved by the king, would receive investiture from the Archbishop, but would still do homage to the king for any temporalities associated with the see or abbey. Bishops in England would still be barons too. For a lucid discussion of this affair, see Uta-Renate Blumenthal, *The Investiture Controversy*, pp. 142-159.

<sup>64</sup> William Rufus had arrested William of Calais, bishop of Durham, and brought him to trial in 1088. See Barlow, *The Feudal Kingdom of England*, 145-147 for an account of the affair.

### C: REFORM AND THE BIOGRAPHER'S CHARACTERIZATION OF CLERGY

We turn now to the issue of clerical integrity as perceived by Anonymous. That is, I would like to investigate how the writer perceives the sincerity of vocation and the *conversatio morum* of the numerous clergy who come into the story. His characterization of clergy with and without what he perceives as genuine religious vocation is dramatically different. As mentioned earlier, reformers sought to do away with simony and with clerical marriage entirely, and generally to improve the spirituality of the clergy. The issue of simony is key to an understanding of the author's concept of vocational sincerity. The first indication of one's vocation could, after all, be surmised by the arrangements surrounding acquisition of office, especially in an age arguably oversensitized to the dangers of abuse. From the many records of disputes over this very issue, we know that high office especially came under scrutiny, although even entry into a monastery or nunnery became hedged about with restrictions.<sup>65</sup> With this in mind, before looking specifically at the clergy in the *Life*, I would like to give some consideration to the cultural climate that necessarily complicates any discussion of clerical behaviour in twelfth-century England.

#### Ambiguous Gifts

Quite aside from the fact that negotiation by way of gifts is the kind of human behaviour that does not require very much teaching, there seems to have been a particular cultural predisposition which can be discerned in early twelfth-century England that

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<sup>65</sup> Joseph Lynch deals thoroughly with the effects of Gregorian Reform on monasteries and convents in this period in his book, *Simoniacal Entry into Religious Life from 1000 to 1260*.

encouraged it. I think two influences contributed to this mind-set. One is what H. D. Hazeltine has called the “deep-seated Germanic idea that a gift required a counter-gift or counter-performance,” an idea that “seems in fact to permeate much of English medieval law and custom” (xxv-xxvi). This idea was firmly rooted in Anglo-Saxon custom. A gift is never free of obligation (xx). This is the kind of arrangement that is very easily brought into the mode of negotiation, particularly when the gift encompasses service or office or favour. The other related influence is the ethos of feudalism, particularly the custom of grant of land and/or office by a lord for a vassal’s service, and of a “relief” or gift given by a vassal on coming into his feudal inheritance (Barlow, *Feudal Kingdom* 115). The imagery of a lord and his vassal was very strong, and when people thought of duty, they thought of it in this way. The cult of saints was couched in similar terms. The saint was the patron. Those bringing a gift to the saint’s shrine could expect to be taken under the protection of the saint, to become in fact, part of the saint’s *familia* and so to come under his or her protection. As Thomas Head has pointed out, the exchange of gift or service for protection and healing was understood by medieval people concretely, not merely symbolically (80).<sup>66</sup>

Because of the circumstances engendered by these two factors, Germanic and feudal custom, gift-bargaining continued to be ubiquitous in post-Conquest society. Even ordinary bargaining in this period involved the exchange of gifts, and I think we can safely conjecture that a gift easily becomes ambiguous, according to the context in which it is given and the

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<sup>66</sup> In “The Marriages of Christina of Markyate,” Head details the convention of patronage, by which people, through giving gifts to a saint, or to the community in whose care the saint was, created a bond or contract with the saint, with obligations on both sides. Hazeltine, in his introduction to Whitelock’s *Anglo-Saxon Wills*, explains a similar sense of bargaining inherent in agreements between layfolk and clergy, where earthly goods are exchanged for spiritual service after the donor’s death (xix-xx).

character of the people involved. The use of gifts in bargaining - even when innocent - provides a precondition for misuse, and this was especially so in twelfth-century England because of the ambiguity of gift-giving in many situations. What shows this mind-set up particularly well is the effort made by the Church and sometimes by the King to oppose at least the more blatant forms of misuse. For example, although fiefs were inherited and, by Norman custom usually by male primogeniture, there is the reminder in the payment of the relief that ultimately, the land belonged to the king. The abuse that these fees could be subject to is suggested for us in the Coronation Charter of Henry I. In this charter, Henry condemns his brother and predecessor William Rufus for demanding unreasonable reliefs from his barons and for taking material advantage from the vacancies in bishoprics and abbeys. The condemnation does not mean that Henry was willing to forego reliefs; however, William Rufus had been notorious for greed.<sup>67</sup> Henry, in his charter, promises that only “just and lawful” fees will be henceforth required (*English Historical Documents, 1042-1189* 400-402). Thus he began his reign with the appearance, at least, of concern over venality. Bishops by custom paid a gift to the king on receiving their bishoprics, underlining the idea that bishops too were vassals, holding land of the king, and that their elevation was ultimately under his jurisdiction. This customary gift was also abused, although not often as blatantly as it had been by William Rufus. The size of the proposed gift in Rufus’ reign often helped determine the suitability of the candidate for office. For example, even Ranulf Flambard, the King’s premier fundraiser, paid a thousand pounds to be made Bishop of Durham (Barlow *English Church* 72). The outright purchase of any

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<sup>67</sup> See Barlow’s discussion of William II’s feudal policies, *The Feudal Kingdom of England*, pp. 149-153.

spiritual thing was, of course, simony, and the Church had fought a hard battle from early days trying to eradicate simony in all its forms. It even went so far as to ban the negotiation of dowry or gift from those entering monasteries. The clergy was eventually sensitized to any ambiguity arising in the giving and receiving of gifts in connection with ecclesiastical office or monastic profession.

Most of the evidence, of course, for the use of gifts in negotiation of benefit is from the upper classes, because it is the members of the upper ranks of society who attract the attention of chroniclers. Bishops especially came under scrutiny, and because of their sometimes strained relations with the monasteries in their jurisdiction, would come in for criticism. It is therefore an uncommon benefit for us to have the biography of Christina, an Anglo-Saxon woman of the burgess class, living in the generation after William Rufus. His reign thus provided the immediate environment for her life. It is apparent to me, at least, that the effects of Rufus' hunger for gold and his methods of satisfying that hunger were long in duration and that his example was emulated throughout the administration of his government.<sup>68</sup> I would suggest as well that this ethos, because it resonated with a mind-set in tune with gift-bargaining, permeated all classes of society. Even in official levels, however, real evidence is difficult to interpret. Unpopular people tended to attract stories,

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<sup>68</sup>Although it was the age of William Rufus which was notorious for its misuse of custom in this regard, it should be noted that in the opinion of some contemporaries, the Normans, for all their good qualities, were prone to corruption by bribery. For example William of Malmesbury gives them this character: "they charge the enemy with spirit, and if force has not succeeded, are equally ready to corrupt him with craft and coin. At home the programme is great buildings . . . and low expenses. They look askance at their equals and wish to overtake their superiors; they fleece their underlings themselves but protect them from outsiders; loyal to their lords, and then on some slight cause of offence disloyal. Fortune changes, and fidelity is in the balance too; coin changes hands, conviction changes with it" ["in hostem impigre procurrere, et ubi uires non successissent, non minus dolo et pecunia corrumpere. Domi ingentia . . . edifitia, moderatos sumptus moliri; paribus inuidere, superiores pretergredi uelle; subiectos ipsi uellicantes ab alienis tutari; dominis fideles, moxque leui offensa infideles. Cum fato ponderare perfidiam, cum nummo mutare sententiam?"] (*Gesta Regum Anglorum* ch. 246).

and it is often difficult to distinguish facts from a good story. The evidence in the *Life* in this case is not at odds with what historians have told us about this period.

It is in this context that I would like to consider the biography of Christina first of all to illustrate this cultural tendency toward gift-bargaining. What I hope to demonstrate first is that, as the biographer shows, the idea and practice of bargaining was innate to English culture, as exemplified by Christina's family and associates, and that the practices of Norman feudalism found there a welcoming environment. From our perspective some of the resulting behaviour may seem dubious, but in its own time it would often seem a most natural reaction to circumstances and had besides its own protocol. Having perused the evidence for this more general practice in the *Life*, I will then investigate more closely how Anonymous treats the various clerical characters in his narrative.

So, remembering that the giving of gifts during negotiation of all kinds was normal for this time and place, we will now turn to particular incidents from the biography involving gift-bargaining. Gifts, as mentioned above, were tokens of relationships. An accepted gift implied an obligation. I would like to consider these incidents in terms of three kinds of relationships. The first discussed will be spiritual and will deal with Christina's relationship to Christ and Christ's family. The second concerns an official relationship and takes place in an ecclesiastical hearing. Finally we will look at several demonstrations of bargaining or attempts at bargaining by Christina herself for more personal ends.

It may seem a little odd from our perspective to consider gift-bargaining in any relationship with God, and indeed these negotiations are often best understood by us on a symbolic level. To the religious mind of the time, however, the relationships involved and the promises undertaken were indubitably real, if supernatural. In his article, "The

Marriages of Christina of Markyate,” Thomas Head has shown clearly that Christina thought of her vow of chastity specifically in terms of a personal betrothal to Christ, and that this betrothal mirrors earthly marriage agreements. Marriage in this period involved gifts at every stage from the betrothal to the morning following the celebration.<sup>69</sup> In this period too, the relationship between Christ and the Church was often described in nuptial terms. Christina, however, applied this language to her personal relationship to Christ. Thomas Head sees her offering of a penny when she makes her vow of chastity as symbolic of a bride’s gift; the reciprocal gift of Christ the groom, is salvation (82, n.22). We see also that Anonymous emphasizes Christ’s marital obligations to his spouse. He speaks of Christ “guarding” his spouse’s vow and actively frustrating her parents’ attempts to bring about a wedding with a rival. At one point in the narrative, Christina asks Burthred what he would do if someone tried to take her away from him. Burthred replies that he would kill any rival. She retorts “Beware then of taking to yourself the spouse of Christ, lest in his anger He will slay you” [“Et tu ergo cave sponsam Christi velle tibi tollere. ne in ira sua interficiet te”] (ch. 22). Anonymous consistently describes Christina’s relationship with Christ in terms of a nuptial agreement: she has her obligations as a spouse and He has His.

At a later moment, after Christina has had a particularly difficult time with her family, Christ wishes to comfort his spouse and sends a vision of his Mother, for whom Christina had a particular reverence. This vision provides a further example of the symbolic use of gifts in relation to promises. The setting of the vision is courtly, as is the language. A priest is saying mass. The priest calls to her, gives her a “branch of most beautiful leaves and

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<sup>69</sup> For the role of gift-giving in marriage, see Jewell, *Women in Medieval England*, pp. 27-28; 123; Fell, *Women in Anglo-Saxon England*, 56-57; on marriage customs in this period generally, see below, n. 135.

flowers” [“ramum frondium speciosarum et floram inestimabilium”] and tells her to offer it to Mary. The Virgin is enthroned as an Empress, and Christina is admitted to the court. Christina bows to Mary and gives her the branch. Then, Anonymous says, “the lady, taking the branch from Christina’s hand, gave back to her a twig and said, ‘Take care of it for me *diligently*’” [“Susciens autem illa domina de manu Christine ramum: de ipso sumens redonabat offerenti ramasculum. et dicebat. Custodi michi hoc diligenter”]. Mary then questions Christina and, hearing how difficult her circumstances have become, promises to deliver her. Christina then withdraws “full of joy...carrying in her right hand the little branch of blossoms” [“leta. portans florentem ramasculum in dextera”] (ch. 24). In this vision we see what appears to be a feudal relationship, but transposed into the feminine, with Mary as the lady receiving a symbolic gift from her servant Christina in return for the promise of deliverance from her persecutors.<sup>70</sup> In Christina’s spiritual relations then, we see two distinct parallels: one with marriage arrangements and the other involving feudal associations, between a lord (or lady) and servant.

The idea of giving a gift in expectation or in payment of promotion to ecclesiastical office was clearly disapproved of by the Church as simony, yet the relationship between lord and vassal provided a niche in which such a negotiation, if handled discreetly, could sometimes take place without too much criticism.<sup>71</sup> The use of gifts to shape the outcome of a judicial case would, however, be a much trickier matter. Where the dispute was between lord and vassal, a fine might be given in the guise of a gift, forestalling more severe penalty. Where the dispute was between two vassals,

<sup>70</sup> This vision is discussed in more detail in chapter three.

<sup>71</sup> Ecclesiastics, as noted above (n.48), were becoming more sensitized to simony, and as we saw in the introduction, Rufus was criticized for his methods.

negotiation of either one with the judge by gift could easily be seen as subversion of justice. You needed to know the reputation of your judge to succeed, and secrecy of course was of the utmost importance. Hence there are proportionally, perhaps, fewer recorded examples.

The report of Christina's experience thus provides us with a valuable case, even if it is only anecdotal, and from a monk's pen at that. It was heard by bishop Robert Bloet of Lincoln, having been passed on by local clergy. Marital matters fell under ecclesiastic jurisdiction, and they wanted him to rule on the legitimacy of Christina's marriage in light of her childhood vow of virginity. When the case first came before him, he seems to have had no particular knowledge of the people involved. His response is in keeping with the interpretation of canon law current at the time. What he said on this first occasion was, "I declare to you, and I swear before God and His blessed Mother that there is no bishop under heaven who could force her into marriage, if according to her vow she wishes to keep herself for God to serve Him freely and for no man besides" ["*Et Deum ac Dei genetricem iuro. quia non est episcopus sub celo qui ad nuptias illam constringere possit. si iuxta votum suum Deo non alteri viro servare se voluerit. domino libere famulandi*"] (ch. 19). The Church had an interest in ensuring that vows made to God were kept, and this was enough for the bishop to uphold Christina's prior vow of chastity. Autti accepted the decision at first. However, one Robert the Dean and other friends knew of Bloet's reputation (which Anonymous describes through canon Robert with great disapproval) and of his power. Autti was persuaded to try to negotiate with Bloet. Anonymous says, "By saying little but by giving him large bribes they shaped his mind to their will" ["*Et ei pauca loquendo sed multam largiendo pecuniam inclinaverunt facile cor illius ad voluntatem suam*"] (ch. 21).

Bloet recalled Christina and Burthred and gave judgement this time in Burthred's favour.<sup>72</sup>

After this reversal of fortune Christina was returned to virtual imprisonment in her father's house. We want to say, Why did someone not appeal? Why did someone not question procedures? The answer must be, because of the power on one hand of the Bishop of Lincoln, who, true to his purchased word, in our story harrassed Christina almost until his death in 1123, and on the other of Autti, whose power locally was such that he was able, when Christina finally escaped, to issue a death warrant for anyone found helping her. Perhaps also, Bloet had learned of Flambard's interest in the area, and hesitated to offend a fellow bishop. Bloet's actions here reflect a concern with possible political repercussions, locally and at court. The large gift, although it shocks us, is actually simply an acknowledgement that this is happening, that is, the issue has become political rather than religious. Cynical, we may say, but the story is full of ambiguous gifts, and as we will see, even Christina lavishes gifts and bribes in the course of her escape. It is interesting that she is not really shocked so much by the bribe to Bloet; she seems annoyed at having been out-manoeuvred.

The last area I would like to look at is that of personal negotiation, that is negotiation for personal ends. These stories would not normally be recorded. To distinguish these episodes from the others, I see personal ends as those without official impact and without any particular spiritual significance. Some negotiations of this kind are general in nature, and find their way into cautionary tales. The first two examples are of this sort. They concern gifts offered to Christina in expectation of acquiescence in acts of which she

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<sup>72</sup>The implications of this secret meeting are explored in more detail in chapter three.

disapproved morally.

Ranulf Flambard, thwarted in his first attempt to seduce Christina, considered that she might be brought around to his way of thinking with suitable gifts. So, on his next trip through the area, he brought gifts of silken garments and precious ornaments to offer to Christina, under the guise of benevolent uncle no doubt, but according to Anonymous, attempting again to seduce her. She rejected the gifts. The author tells us that “she looked on <all of> them as dirt and despised them” [“omnia tanquam lutum respexit atque despexit”] (ch. 7). Later, when her parents became aware of her vow of virginity, they considered it an adolescent whim. They tried various methods to persuade Christina to marry Burthred, including gifts and promises, but she refused these. In view of the fact that customarily, as I have indicated, the acceptance of a gift was not without strings, Christina shows by her rejection of gifts from Flambard and from her parents that she does not wish to enter into negotiation on the matter of her vow.

The last three examples from the biography concern gifts offered by Christina herself to facilitate her escape from Huntingdon. These incidents are intriguing since they show that Christina also knew how to deal. One of the methods used by Christina’s parents in an attempt to break her will was keeping her under “house arrest.” She had keepers, including her sister Matilda, who watched her movements and kept her friends from seeing her. In spite of this, she acted as housekeeper to the family and, as eldest daughter, had charge of the keys, probably to storage rooms and chests - perhaps even to chests of money. After she had been ordered by the Bishop to marry Burthred, she resolved to escape somehow. By giving bribes to her keepers she was permitted to consult Eadwin, a nearby hermit. He promised to help her escape, and it is he who went to Canterbury for advice.

The author does not quail at calling these bribes (“mercede”), but he insists, on this first occasion, that bribery was the only route open to Christina (“hec namque sola via erat”) (ch. 28). When Eadwin returned, Christina asked her sister Matilda to send for him, so that she could learn the outcome of his journey, but Matilda refused. Again, Christina gives a bribe (“mercede”) and is allowed limited access to Eadwin through a servant. Finally, on the day of her escape, Christina is left in the custody of her aunt while her parents are away from home. Christina has been in the habit of giving gifts to this aunt, so that, as the author says, “far from betraying her niece, she would expedite her escape” [“non solum neptem non proderet. sed ad fugiendam expedieret”] (ch. 32). The aunt, who is in charge for the day, looks the other way while Christina makes her escape, dressed as a boy, astride a horse.

It is a little difficult to know what to make of these last activities. Anonymous himself seems a little uneasy about Christina’s actions at first, insisting that there was no other way for Christina to gain access to help, and he is probably right in this. In the case of Matilda, the keeper had learned to expect something in exchange for co-operation. In these first two cases, then, the bribe was required, and Christina had to pay if she wanted to escape. It was extortion really. In the last instance though, there is a different kind of negotiation going on. Christina has apparently been giving gifts to this aunt for some time, not for anything as specific as permission to talk to someone, but to gain her affection and sympathy.

The *Life*’s portrayal of gift-bargaining in action, confirming what we know of the cultural milieu of England in this period, provides a backdrop for Anonymous’ characterization of the clerical figures in the story. Central to the biographer’s treatment of clergy in the text is what we might call the “atmosphere” of reform. As discussed

earlier, eleventh-century Gregorian reforms had, by the time Anonymous was writing, permeated both monastic culture and general society as well. The laity had become more aware of the ideals of reform and came to expect their priests to be virtuous in their lives. A parallel effect was felt in monasteries with regard to their spiritual leaders. There seems to have been ongoing tension between monasteries and the bishops to whom they owed allegiance, and monasteries often tried to seek exemption from their bishops (Constable, *Reformation* 176, 241-6). One cause of this tension lay in the monastic perception of hierarchy and governance. The monks lived as brothers under their father the Abbot, under God. The very vows taken at profession “were inevitably compared to oaths of loyalty to a superior in secular society” (Constable 182). There was not a lot of room in this scheme for another lord. Even the King, if he imposed himself too closely, would come in for monastic criticism (if only in-house) (Barlow, *Feudal Kingdom* 147-148). The monastic life, in intention, was unworldly, a communal life of renunciation, of poverty, of chastity.<sup>73</sup> This was how monks interpreted the *vita apostolica*. Bishops, on the other hand, had a dual role. As secular lords, they were vassals of the king, and would even engage in war if required.<sup>74</sup> As such they often lived in splendour and were territorial and jealous of their rights. If an abbey was within his jurisdiction, a bishop would be most loathe to see it gain a Papal exemption from episcopal jurisdiction. The long battle of St. Albans to maintain its exemption from the Bishop of Lincoln, granted

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<sup>73</sup> In reality, of course, many monasteries were wealthy landowners, a fact which caused much internal and external criticism in this period.

<sup>74</sup> They could also be tried as secular barons, saving their bishoprics, although this would always be a controversial procedure. An example that shows the difficulty of sorting out the two roles of a bishop is the trial, in 1088, of Bishop William of St. Calais, described by Barlow in *The English Church, 1066-1154*, pp. 281-287.

first in 1122, is a case in point (Sayers 59).<sup>75</sup> But bishops were also priests able, in fact obliged, to handle the sacraments of the Church. It was difficult for monastics to reconcile these worldly and priestly roles in one man and the best solution, in their view, was the elevation of an abbot. Yet, the office of bishop required an able administrator, someone who knew his way around Court and therefore a member of the King's household was more often chosen. The resolution of this contradiction was difficult and perhaps never satisfactory.

The situation became exacerbated when bishops were appointed, as they sometimes were, on the basis of worldly power or fame, for then a man who may have been seen as unworthy, or even sinful, could be placed over monks. Monastic concerns over these bishops concerned simony, sexual sins, worldliness and other vices. Simony was a major sin, and also often easier to trace than other vices. Reformers had fought hard to root out simony in all its various forms.<sup>76</sup> It was not just the outright purchase of office, however, that sealed a bishop's reputation. A bishop appointed as a reward, or for political rather than spiritual reasons, would not easily find approval among those who had renounced the world for the cloister. Moreover, because bishops were also, in fact, barons, they were expected to render the feudal "relief" to their temporal lord, the King. Such payments could be misconstrued; they could also be misused. And of course, the

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<sup>75</sup> At an even earlier date, the abbey chroniclers blame Abbot Richard for acknowledging subjection to the Bishop of Lincoln (*Gesta Abbatum* 71-72). Rachel Koopmans, in "The Conclusion of Christina of Markyate's *Vita*," explains how Abbot Geoffrey's patronage of Markyate may have compromised the Abbey's exemption from Lincoln (685). The Abbey chroniclers also report in detail on an extensive debate between the Bishop and the Abbey, waged before the King in the time of Abbot Robert (1151-66) over papal privilege (*Gesta Abbatum* 137-157).

<sup>76</sup> For treatment of simony in its various manifestations, see Uta-Renate Blumenthal, *The Investiture Controversy*; Joseph H. Lynch, *Simoniacal Entry into Religious Life from 1000 to 1260: a Social, Economic and Legal Study* and R.A. Ryder, *Simony: an Historical Synopsis and Commentary*.

King's own reputation reflected especially on his close advisors, whether secular or ecclesiastical.

Thus, lack of religious vocation in a high office often led to criticism and gossip about the incumbent, whose worldly ways were antithetical to monastic values, especially during a period of reform. Of course, the perception of worldliness was difficult to avoid at high levels of the hierarchy, where office had the dual responsibility alluded to above. Some were able to achieve an aura of holiness; however, if the vocation was perceived in terms of financial progress or political ambition, less religious virtue might be expected and certain kinds of stories and language might become associated with the man in the office. And, of course, well-known figures, then as now, attracted gossip and criticism. In the *Life*, two clerics, both bishops, come in for disapprobation of such a severity as to border on caricature. Both Ranulf Flambard, Bishop of Durham, and Robert Bloet, Bishop of Lincoln, are men around whom disapproving monastic stories clustered. We have already seen William of Malmesbury's views. Anonymous, writing his story several years after both men had died, sees no reason to moderate monastic judgement. Both were men out of the King's household, advisors primarily; holy orders were added on. In addition, both men were Norman. As noted previously, although we cannot in all honesty make a clear moral divide in the *Life* between good Anglo-Saxon clerics and evil Norman clerics – it is much more complex than that – it is interesting as Talbot has remarked, that two villains of the piece are Norman, and bishops as well. William Rufus sold offices quite blatantly and because he sold them in this manner he attracted buyers, even for church offices, who were worldly men, in love with power and all the profit power could bring, and would willingly negotiate with all the means at their disposal to achieve their ends. Two of the appointments

that he made come into Christina's story directly and with unfortunate consequences (but without them we may not have had a story at all).

The first of these was Robert Bloet, who was appointed as bishop of Lincoln in 1093. He had been one of William I's chaplains, and had travelled with William Rufus from Normandy after the Conqueror's death to speak for his son's claim to the throne of England. Frank Barlow describes the character of Bloet thus: "He was an exceedingly worldly prelate, a great man in royal affairs, a justiciar and, when necessary, a soldier, who lived in ostentatious splendour surrounded by knights and noble youths . . . [He] does not seem to have changed his ways at all when he took major orders and a bishopric" (*English Church* 71). He was not well-liked by his contemporaries, except, as we have seen, by those of his own household to whom he was generous. (Henry of Huntingdon, for example, who spent his youth in Bloet's court, gives him a good review, although he also uses him as an example of worldliness, in his *De Contemptu Mundi*.)<sup>77</sup> Anonymous certainly had no respect for the man in the office. He gives the following speech to one of his characters, describing Bloet. "Are you not aware of his greed and his vicious nature? Either of these would be sufficient; how much more when both are together! His greed will teach him to pervert justice and his vice to hate other people's virtue. When he hopes to get money from anyone's friendship, he will take that man's side" ["An ignorans cupiditatem ipsius pariter et in[continentiam]? Quodlibet horum satis erat. Quan[to] magis, ubi simil sunt? Avaricia per[suade]bit iudicia pervertere. incontinentia castimoniam aliis invidere. Cuius igitur

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<sup>77</sup> For Henry's glowing epitaph for Bishop Robert, see *Historia Anglorum*, p. 470; even his account of Robert's worldliness and miserable end (pp.586-589) shows great affection for the man.

am[icitia] munera speraverit; eiusdem consilio totus erit.”] (ch. 19).<sup>78</sup> (He might have been describing Bloet’s first master, William Rufus.) We have seen how Anonymous illustrates the venal nature of Robert in action. It takes only a few words along with a large bribe, to bring the bishop to a change of opinion.<sup>79</sup> Following this incident, Bloet remains a constant physical menace in the story until his death.

Flambard, as Southern has noted, was “a new phenomenon in English government” (*Medieval Humanism* 186). He was not born noble, being the son of a Bayeux priest, but by virtue of his wits, along with a ruthless ambition, he made his way eventually to the side of William Rufus, where he made himself indispensable by devising ever new ways of drawing royal profit from the kingdom. After serving Rufus as a kind of Procurator until 1099, he was allowed to buy the bishopric of Durham for a thousand pounds.<sup>80</sup> This was outright simony, an offence particularly under scrutiny at the time. Nor did Flambard show any particular vocation; this was a reward for service, as were many of the upper ecclesiastical posts at the time. In Flambard’s case, however, monks were scandalized, whether because of his background or because of his unsavory work for the king, which had squeezed many abbeys. William of Malmesbury cites both of these reasons in his *Gesta Pontificum Anglorum* (273-274; xvii). Moreover, although he was technically single on taking office, with his former mistress, Alveva (Christina’s maternal aunt) safely married, their sons continued to be a carnal tie and, according to Anonymous, he still visited Alveva’s house on his way to and from Court (ch. 5).

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<sup>78</sup> This is not so very far from the opinion of William of Malmesbury, quoted above in n.68, of the Normans generally.

<sup>79</sup> The significance of this secret meeting is explored in chapter three.

<sup>80</sup> As discussed in the introduction, William of Malmesbury reports this incident of simony in his first version of *Gesta Pontificum*, but erases it in later versions.

Flambard attracted stories. William of Malmesbury, as already noted, tells us that he tormented his Durham monks by forcing them to dine with him, providing wine and maidens, to their great discomfort, and, one senses, his own glee (*Gesta Pontificum Anglorum* 274). Another story is told of his routing of the Papal Legate, John of Crema. The legate threatened Flambard because of his notorious way of life. Flambard invited the legate to dinner, where he became intoxicated and was easily seduced by Flambard's niece. Flambard and some of the other guests broke in on the couple later, bringing them a chalice of wine. The legate left without following through on his threat.<sup>81</sup>

These stories are of a type, and it is difficult, especially now, to separate fact from monastic spleen. Certainly, monks seemed to believe the worst about Flambard. The incident related of Flambard in the *Life* is of the same sort as those just mentioned, involving not only personal wickedness, but also the attempt to corrupt others. Flambard's role in the narrative is completely dishonourable. The damning incident Anonymous relates follows immediately Christina's vow of virginity and is put down to the envy of the Devil following that vow. Flambard thus becomes the tool of the Devil. In the incident as related in the *Life*, Flambard, while visiting Alveva's house overnight, is visited by Autti's family. Satan puts it into his mind to seduce the young Christina, and he invites her to his private chamber to view some tapestries there. Anonymous highlights Flambard's position as bishop and his unworthiness to fill that role, and also the power of that position in relation to his innocent niece. When Flambard's servants leave, the "wolf" is left alone with the "lamb". At the

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<sup>81</sup> R.W. Southern describes the incident in *Medieval Humanism* 203. The version is that of *Annales de Wintonia*, ch. MCXXV. This story is reported differently by Henry of Huntingdon, who says that the legate, after preaching clerical celibacy, was discovered with a whore (*Historia Anglorum* 474-475). It must be said that Henry was a married archdeacon, and was somewhat defensive on the subject of married priests.

crucial moment of the scene, Flambard “*irreverently* took hold of Christina by one of the sleeves of her tunic and with that *holy* mouth which *was accustomed to celebrate the divine mystery*, he solicited her to commit a wicked deed” [“per alteram tunice manicam irreverenter arripuit et ore sancto quo misteria [divino solebat] conficere. de re nephanda [solicitavit]” (ch. 5). The author shows no hesitation in pinpointing this incident as the catalyst for the following events. Later Anonymous notes with some irony that Christina, in defence of her virginity, “did not hesitate to repulse even a bishop” [“episcopum quoque spernere non dubitavit”] (ch. 6), the very person toward whom she should have been able to look as her spiritual leader. Flambard, stung, according to the author, not only by Christina’s rejection, but because she had tricked him in such a way as was bound to cause embarrassment either before his servants or his hosts, was prompted to urge a local youth, Burthred, to ask for Christina in marriage, and to encourage her parents to accept. The acceptance of Burthred by her parents on Christina’s behalf was, although they did not realize it at the time, the first arrow, as it were, in the battle about to be joined.

Part of the author’s strategy, of course, in the case of Bishops Bloet and Flambard has to do with the hagiographic need for villains in high places, as well as monastic disapproval of worldly prelates. Anonymous needed to pit Christina against particular authority figures in order to show her chastity and fortitude. The characters he picks reflect the monastic perceptions already noted. Both stories show the bishops as tools of the devil and show that at an early stage of the narrative, Christina is tested against representatives of the established Church, who ought to be shining examples of virtue, or who at least should encourage virtue when they find it. The incidents also show her in combat with the Devil, who can use even highly-placed clerics in his schemes. We might wonder why both bishops

who appear in the story are depicted as lacking religious integrity, and in such specific ways: Flambard is portrayed as a lascivious man, Bloet as venal. The answer lies, I believe, at least partially in the author's monastic perspective, and a bishop's perceived relationship with the monasteries in his jurisdiction. Bloet was an especially easy target, perhaps, because of his ongoing dispute with St. Albans over its exemption. However bishops, because of the dual role imposed on them, had to try harder to cultivate a religious reputation. Bloet and Flambard, starting out as the King's advisors, were already perceived as worldly men, rich – in Flambard's case, through perceived oppression – and ostentatious in power and wealth.<sup>82</sup> Whether or not the incident in the *Life* involving Flambard is factual, it is true to the narrative and to the author's perception of the world. Flambard's reputation, coupled with his involvement with Autti's family, sets him up for a scurilous role in the *Life*. Flambard had truly helped the family materially. Anonymous acknowledges this. His position with the king had been an effective shield during the uncertain years after the Conquest, and his sons by Alveva were, of course, half Anglo-Saxon. He made sure they did well. Worldly success, however, is an easy mark for monastic writers, and Flambard's reputation assured his role in Christina's story.

However, if he shows us Bloet and Flambard, who lack a true religious vocation, he also shows us many clerics, of all ranks, whose vocations are undoubted and unrelated to ambition, and who reflect reformist trends. Flambard and Bloet are worldly clerics and therefore unlikely to understand Christina or her own calling. "Good" clergy demonstrate

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<sup>82</sup> This is certainly the view of Paulette l'Hermite-Leclercq with regard to Robert Bloet. She believes the characterization of Bloet in the *Life* is likely unhistorical, finding that the biographer has blackened Bloet's character for political reasons: "[Bloet] n'aime pas les moines: ils le lui rendent bien" ("De l'Ermitage au Monastère" 53).

their integrity by giving aid to Christina; their own vocations are unquestioned in the narrative because they work to advance Christina's vocation. They are on the "right" side in the *Life's* value system. (If the characterization seems a bit black-and-white, we must remember that this is, after all, hagiography.) Helpful clerics are presented chronologically and also, geographically speaking, as radiating outward from Huntingdon: the canons of Huntingdon, the hermits dwelling in the surrounding areas, and finally the distant (both physically and hierarchically) Archbishops of Canterbury and York.

The canons of St. Mary's, Huntingdon, are the first clergy Christina has contact with, and they remain important in her story until her escape. As discussed above, St. Mary's was one of the first houses of Augustinian canons in England. The way that Sueno, Christina's childhood mentor, assumes his role, and in some respects, oversteps the normal boundaries of the role, gives a glimpse into the active ministry undertaken by canons in the community at this time. Sueno first meets Christina when she is a very small child (ch. 3). We are not told whether this meeting occurs at church or in her home, although Sueno certainly seems to have been on visiting terms with the family. We are never told whether the relationship is formal, that is, whether the family had specifically requested Sueno to instruct Christina. It would be normal practice for a noble girl of the time to receive religious training, usually from a local cleric. Certainly he becomes her mentor, and the text gives some idea of the kind of teaching he engages in, both directly, as when the author describes his teaching on virginity (ch. 3) and indirectly, when we see Christina meditating on religious ideas, and also in her constant use of the Psalms as commentary on her experiences. Sueno, as Christina's first teacher, is shown to be fundamental in the formation of her character, although he is always shown following her inclination. It is

Christina, for example, who first desires a life devoted to God. That he is an Augustinian canon, and, even within that reform-minded group, known for exceptional holiness, helps to explain the values we see in Christina. It might be objected that Christina's values, as we know them, are filtered through the mind of a Benedictine monk, for whom the canons represent a competing order. However, the author writes with great admiration of Sueno, emphasizing his significant role in Christina's education, and showing him prophesying doom on her family for their blind antagonism to her ideals. It is reasonable to assume that the values we see in the *Life*, which are consistent with the reform movement espoused by canons, although by no means foreign to other religious, developed early in Christina's life, under Sueno's tutelage. Sueno also plays an active role in the story by supporting Christina's desire to remain a virgin, and in confirming the private vow she makes, giving it more authority, in her mind at least, than it would have had as a truly secret vow. He is thus instrumental in setting up the conflict which ensues between Christina and her parents.

The hermits are Christina's next helpers. The hermits are not so much a group as a loosely connected network of individuals.<sup>83</sup> We see in the *Life* that they are not consolidated in their way of life or their views. For example, Eadwin, even when reprimanded by Roger for his efforts on behalf of Christina (because she is married) perseveres, consulting the Archbishop of Canterbury on the case. When the Archbishop gives his moral authority to

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<sup>83</sup> Useful studies on the eremitical movement of this period include: Rothma Mary Clay, *The Hermits and Anchorites of England*; "Further Studies on Medieval Recluses"; L. Genicot, "L'Eremitisme du XI<sup>e</sup> siecle dans son contexte economique et social"; Christopher Holdsworth, "Hermits and the Powers of the Frontier"; Henrietta Leyser, *Hermits and the New Monasticism*; Henry Mayr-Harting, "Functions of a Twelfth-Century Recluse" and A.K. Warren, *Anchorites and Their Patrons in Medieval England*. Studies with relevant discussion on Christina of Markyate include Sharon Elkins, *Holy Women of Twelfth-Century England*; Henrietta Leyser, *Medieval Women*; Sally Thompson, *Women Religious*, and especially Paulette L'Hermite-Leclercq, "De l'ermitage au monastere, genese d'une institution."

the scheme, Eadwin and Alfwen (a recluse under Roger's guidance) between them spirit Christina away and hide her at Alfwen's cell without Roger's knowledge. Roger himself, to cite another example, even though supposedly obedient to the abbot of St. Alban's Abbey (ch. 28), does not seem to have much contact with that house, and when he needs advice later on about Christina's future, he goes to the Archbishop of York (a known supporter of religious vocations). The hermits are thus shown seeking out individuals of known piety and authority. Hierarchy seems not to be of primary importance. Hermits are involved in the community as are canons, but are freer of movement and can thus take the issue of Christina's vow into a larger context. Eadwin's journey from the local community to Canterbury is illustrative of this freedom of movement and purpose, and may be contrasted to the canon Sueno's less potent efforts on Christina's behalf.<sup>84</sup>

The Archbishops of the story, the highest rung of clerical influence in England, are sought out because of anticipated sympathy. Anonymous sets up Eadwin's visit to Archbishop Ralph by giving the archbishop a glowing introduction: "At that time the archbishop there was Ralph, a man deeply versed in both the divine and civil law, as a man in his position should be and acceptable to all for his piety" ["Ra[dulph]us erat tunc illic archiepiscopus in utraque sciencia divine scilicet legis et seculi sicut decebat personam apprime eruditus et gracia pietatis omnibus amabilis"] (ch. 29). Ralph d'Escures had been a monk and then an abbot before coming to Canterbury (Barlow, *English Church* 81-82). His monastic career path no doubt made a favourable impression on Anonymous. The Archbishop, as anticipated, finds the whole shady business of Christina's marriage

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<sup>84</sup> Giles Constable provides other examples of hermits visiting those in high places; see *The Reformation of the Twelfth Century*, especially pp. 61-62.

horrifying and gives his direct permission, as the deputy of Christ, for her to flee. Later Roger, although under obedience to the abbot of St. Albans, and thus indirectly accountable to the Bishop of Lincoln, goes to the Archbishop of York, Thurstan, for advice on Christina's future. Thurstan, although not from the monastery, had developed a reputation as one who encouraged conversion from the world, and he himself became a monk at Pontefract at the end of his life.<sup>85</sup> Unlike the bishops of the story then, who actively try to corrupt those who come within their sphere, he encourages those with holy aspirations. Thus the author introduces Thurstan as a "promotor of such *vocations*" ["*talium fautor studiorum*"] (ch. 43). Again, as expected, he is sympathetic to Roger's concerns for Christina. The approval Anonymous shows for both archbishops is, I believe, an indication of his general optimism with regard to the reform movement. His biography of Christina, with its record of the friendship between his subject and Abbot Geoffrey is a manifestation of this optimism, as it seeks to show their friendship as part of a continuum of such male-female relationships from Apostolic, and even Gospel times.<sup>86</sup>

One aspect that is interesting, especially as regards the higher ranking clergy, is the politics involved in their reaction to Christina's circumstances. As we have seen, Flambard, by means of his powerful position as Bishop of Durham and servant of the King, afforded some protection to Christina's family during uncertain times. On the other hand, his influence in the family also made it easier for Bloet to be persuaded to support Autti's side, since that position avoided the possibility of contention with a

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<sup>85</sup> For Thurstan's efforts on behalf of those who wished to leave the world, see Nicholl, pp.192-212. Thurstan entered Pontefract in January, 1140 (x, 237).

<sup>86</sup> I return to this subject in my conclusion. It is worth noting here that Anonymous completely ignores the dispute between Canterbury and York, which was particularly intense at this time. See Barlow, *The English Church*, p.83, and Nicholl, p. 41 and following.

fellow-bishop. Archbishop Ralph gives moral authority to Christina's flight and to those who aid her to it, although he is in no position to antagonize a close advisor of the King. At this period, Bishop Robert was still in the King's favour, and the Archbishop here is perhaps seeking an opportunity to assume primatial authority over Bloet, even if the action is not openly taken. Archbishop Thurstan too, although he takes Christina under his wing, does not openly oppose Bloet, but tries to find a hiding place for her and uses his influence with the Pope to have her marriage annulled. Moreover, it is of interest that archbishops Thurstan and Ralph were by no means friendly with one another. The contention between Canterbury and York over primacy in England was at its worst during this period. However, each man found himself able, within his clerical role, to give aid to Christina, and in return, Anonymous is able to write with admiration of both. These relationships among high-ranking clergy, though not expressly described by Anonymous, nevertheless form a background to his account, and help to make some sense of what might otherwise be a confusing portrayal of actions on Christina's behalf. The lines of authority in this period appear not to be defined as clearly, at least according to this account, as they would later become.

The author's characterization of clerics who come into Christina's biography is in line with his monastic perceptions of the state of clergy in England at the time in relation to the reform movement. He has a tendency to idealize hermits, canons, and those upper clergy who are known to be helpful to monastics, but this is also helpful to his narrative strategy, which is to show Christina as part of the eremitic movement, embattled against worldly clergy. Later, she undertakes the spiritual reform of Geoffrey, Abbot of St. Albans, in the same optimistic spirit.

## CHAPTER 2: AUTHORIAL STRATEGIES I: PRACTICAL ISSUES

We now turn more specifically to the practical issues Anonymous faced as an author. That we have only one work, and that only in a fourteenth-century copy, is more than a slight disadvantage. Unlike studies of Eadmer of Canterbury, for example, or William of Malmesbury, our investigation cannot compare this work with others by the same author; we cannot seek out patterns and inconsistencies or development of ideas from one work to another. By looking at twelfth-century authorship generally, however, we can to some extent describe the kinds of circumstances that Anonymous would have encountered as a writer; some of these, after all, were part and parcel of the author's craft. Other aspects of authorship varied from one monastic situation to another and depended on the support of the abbot and the requirements of the house. For those we can only look at examples and suggest likely possibilities in light of what we know of Abbot Geoffrey and of St. Albans Abbey in the twelfth century. In all of this, we will try, through the text of the *Life*, to come to some understanding of the likely experience of Anonymous.

First, then, let us consider some of the challenges a twelfth-century monastic author had to negotiate. To begin with, becoming an author at all could be difficult, even if one had the talent and inclination. Monastic life theoretically allowed for and encouraged study and writing. A monk, however, was not an autonomous person; he was bound by a vow of obedience to his abbot. Although typically study had to be fitted into the busy schedule of prayer, the rule did lay down a certain obligation to read, and in a major monastery such as St. Albans, lay help would have released the brothers from

many mundane tasks. Much depended, of course, upon the will of the Abbot. Benedict's *Rule* was very clear that monks should not consider anything their own; all of their needs were to be supplied by the Abbot. Chapter thirty-three is very specific: a monk does not own anything, "neither book nor tablets nor pen nor anything at all" ["neque codicem, neque tabulas, neque grafium, sed nihil quippe quibus"].<sup>87</sup> The distribution of all writing materials was under the control of the abbot. Moreover, time for designing and composing a work, as well as gathering information, had to be approved. As will become evident, however, this rule was quite flexible in reality, and its application, as well as supervision, especially with regard to writing materials, varied from house to house. As Barlow has suggested, "different views on the amount of time available for study, authorship, private prayer, etc. depend basically on how strictly it is believed that the rules were enforced" (*English Church* 189-190, n.55). At Cluny, for example, the elaborate liturgy made study and writing more difficult. Anselm, as Heffernan has noted, chose Bec over Cluny for this very reason. As Eadmer reports, Anselm felt that the "districtio ordinis" at Cluny would interfere with his studies (Eadmer, *Life* 9; Heffernan, *Liturgy* 85). Certainly there would be some variation in how the Rule would be interpreted and in how generous the abbot would be in apportioning time and materials for projects, and this seems to have been especially the case in the twelfth century. Since, however, there is plenty of evidence for authorship in the sheer number of works produced, we must assume that authorship was esteemed in the monastery and that time and space could be found. What we do not know is how much effort an individual had

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<sup>87</sup> The Latin here is quoted from *The Rule of St. Benedict: The Abingdon Copy*, edited by John Chamberlin. The translation is mine.

to expend in order to be allowed to write at least semi-independently, how much checking of his work was done and how many potential authors were thwarted by authorities who read Benedict narrowly. It may be that the number of successful authors hides to some extent the many works which were stillborn due to a failure of vision on the part of some abbots.

One determining circumstance might be the social position of the would-be author. For William of Malmesbury, as an example, who came from a wealthy family and who, as librarian of his monastery, contributed many volumes, there seems to have been no difficulty in establishing a long authorial career. There are other instances as well where there seem to have been no hindrances put in the way of would-be authors. Monks with, perhaps, less social weight, depended more on their abbots' generosity, in both material and allowed time. Sometimes, however, authors, in defence of what is, after all, a noble undertaking, resorted to cunning to achieve ends for which we are still grateful. Guibert de Nogent tells us in his *Memoirs* that once, having been given permission to write a brief guide to writing sermons, he embarked, in addition, on a thorough commentary on the Book of Genesis, and he continued this work in secret even when his abbot specifically told him to stop.<sup>88</sup> Guibert does not sound very repentant about his subterfuge. Eadmer's conscience gave him more trouble. He had written the bulk of his *Life of Anselm* (whose secretary he was) when Anselm himself discovered his work and, after at first assisting Eadmer with revision, finally ordered him to destroy "those quires."

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<sup>88</sup> The study of the Heptateuch was considered to be unsuitable for a young monk, such as Guibert then was. Its reading was forbidden to all monks at bedtime in Benedict's Rule (cap. 42). As Benton tells us, these books were forbidden, by both Jewish and early Christian tradition, to anyone under thirty years of age (*Self and Society*, 91, n.14).

Eadmer did so, but only after copying the work to *other* quires, which he brought out after Anselm's death. He still felt remorse for his deception at the end of his life.<sup>89</sup> How much poorer we would be had Eadmer been a sincerely obedient monk in this case. From these examples we see that the fruits of authorship were far from secure even when carefully recorded on parchment. The survival of Christina's *Life*, therefore, is a salutary reminder to us of the precarious existence medieval texts had. If the scenario sketched by Rachel Koopmans is accurate, after Abbot Geoffrey's death the work was either abandoned or was confiscated by the next abbot, who had to try to calm his wrangling monks. How easy it would have been for the work to vanish entirely. Instead it was somehow preserved and transmitted to the nuns at Markyate.

The aspiring author, having permission or perhaps even a direct commission to write a book had then to gather material.<sup>90</sup> Often, especially in the case of saints' lives, the primary source would be previous versions of a life, supplemented if possible from other records or oral tradition. The older version of the life must have authority; the oral witness need not be eyewitness accounts, but must be from persons of impeccable moral standing. Moreover, the writer of a saint's life had to be keenly aware of oral tradition so as not to alienate his audience. "The audience's understanding might at times be incompatible with the written text, since their understanding may have been dependent on the flexibility of a collective oral tradition" (Heffernan 22). An awareness of his

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<sup>89</sup> For a Latin edition of Guibert of Nogent's memoir, see *Autobiographie*, ed. Edmond-Rene Labande. This episode is related in Book 1, chapter XVII. For an English translation, see *A Monk's Confession: the Memoirs of Abbot Guibert of Nogent*. Trans. Paul. J. Archambault. Eadmer's account of his deception and his remorse can be found in the *Life of St. Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury*. Ed. and trans. R.W. Southern, pp. 150-151.

<sup>90</sup> On the composition of medieval saints' lives, an excellent guide is Thomas Heffernan's *Sacred Biography*. For references to other works about biography in this period, see Introduction, n.10.

audience would greatly affect the author's choice of source material.

Many *vitae* written of contemporaries in this period are of potential saints, written in commemoration shortly after the subject's death, in the expectation of compiling further documentation toward canonization. A contemporary example is the *Vita Brevior* written of Gilbert of Sempringham shortly after his death. Given the modesty topos convention of the period, writing a life while the subject was still living required tact, diplomacy and occasionally subterfuge. We have seen how Eadmer was forbidden to continue his life of Anselm. Eadmer says that Anselm "considered himself far too unworthy for future ages to place the least value on a literary monument to his honour" ["indignum profecto sese iudicans, cuius laudem secutura posteritas ex litterarum monumentis pretii cuiusvis haberet"] (*Vita Sancti Anselmi* ch. lxxii). Certainly the monkish quality of humility would make such a project problematic for a tender conscience, such as Anselm appears to have possessed. William of St. Thierry considered that it would be better to write Bernard of Clairvaux's *Life* after his death, "for then he would not be too embarrassed when praises were heaped upon him, and the work would not give rise to so much unpleasant argument and disagreement" (10). It is as though he has already experienced such difficulties with his subject. Later, however, he orders that what he is writing be kept secret until after Bernard's death because it was "written without his knowledge or consent" (11).

In this regard it is interesting that Anonymous says that Christina, on one occasion, expressed the view that a record of her visions would be edifying to those coming later. Of one vision she is reported to have remarked that "If such a thing had happened in the time of blessed Gregory he would have preserved it for posterity, even

though it was a small thing” [“si tale quid in tempore beati Gregorii accidisset: mandasset illud memorie. quamvis res parva sit et memoria parum digna”], upon which her sister reassured her that the vision had not been a small thing, but “marvellous and worthy to be remembered” [“mirabile: posterisque memorabile”] (ch. 67).<sup>91</sup> It is interesting to speculate whether the project Anonymous undertook would have met with resistance or encouragement from Christina; however, aside from this remark there is no direct indication of her particular interest in the recording of visions.

It appears then, that Anonymous, because of his close association with Geoffrey and with Markyate, had sufficient leisure and freedom of movement, both to gather information and to design and compose the *Life*. The *Life* of Christina lacks an authorial prologue, which might have outlined the author’s strategy and sources. We must work from the story itself to discover what we can of these. Strategy and literary influences will be discussed later. As for sources, Christina herself has always been considered a primary source, and indeed, the only original source for some of the detailed anecdotes and the reports of her own visions, although Anonymous may actually have received some of these at second hand. Especially remarkable is his obvious familiarity with Christina and her hermitage. He writes of incidents at Markyate that suggest his frequent presence there. Some of these are small incidents that may not, in the end, have survived a final edit. Talbot suggests that Anonymous may have been somehow connected with Markyate officially, “as chaplain or confessor”(7). As discussed in the previous chapter,

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<sup>91</sup> Here we can see a subtle distinction between the biography of an important figure, such as Eadmer wished to compose and the record of visionary experience, such as Christina suggested should be undertaken in this scene. Eadmer felt Anselm was worthy to be remembered; Christina felt that the proof of God’s power was worthy to be remembered. Christina, in the end, may not have wished to have her personal example set down, except as a vehicle for recording God’s work through her.

the nuns would have needed someone to celebrate mass for them. Anonymous may have performed this service or acted in some other capacity. The problem of gathering material for the work in progress could thus be partly ameliorated.

Geoffrey, too, was of course a source. Anonymous is able to report many incidents from Geoffrey's point of view and to include Geoffrey's thoughts and feelings about events. As an example, let us consider an episode Anonymous reports of a meeting attended by Geoffrey and a threatened journey to Rome which was stopped by Christina's prayers. This episode is interesting in that the views recorded by Anonymous (and we suppose received from Geoffrey) are somewhat at odds with other records of the same events. In 1139, King Stephen, fearful of invasion, imprisoned two bishops who were reluctant to surrender castles to him. These clerics were Roger of Salisbury and Alexander of Lincoln. Their refusal made them seem disloyal. Stephen took possession of the castles as he would have done from barons in time of war. The incident caused great uproar in the English church, which was divided over the king's authority to take such action against clergy. At the council held at Winchester in September, the Archbishop of Rouen, specially summoned, gave the King's position canonical force, and the King, having heard that some of the clergy contemplated taking the case to Rome, preempted that move by threatening, via his chamberlain, to confiscate the properties of any who did so. In the event, the matter was resolved between the King on one side, and the papal legate and archbishop of Canterbury on the other, to the King's satisfaction (Barlow, *English Church* 306). Castles, in the end, were deemed not to be the business of

bishops.<sup>92</sup> Anonymous has left an interesting, if compressed, picture of the Winchester meeting:

The king was cited on his promise to undergo sentence: but he refused to submit to any judgement on these matters unless it were favourable to himself and his party. The king's mercy was requested, but refused: ecclesiastical censure was threatened, but despised. In short the enemies of the church attempted to bring about a split between the king and the clergy: when suddenly the king, feeling that he was being overborne by the machinations of certain people whose cunning was abnormally deep, was compelled to appeal to Rome in order to avoid the sentence of immediate excommunication.

[Convenitur rex de sponsione subeunde censure. sed abiurat nullum in hiis<a> se subeundum iudicium. nisi<sibi> sueque parti sit consonum. Attemptatur regis clemencia nec ostenditur. ecclesiastica proponitur censura. Sed contempnitur. Quid plura? Discidum regni sacerdocilique hostiles moliuntur ecclesie inimici. cum ecce rex quorundam profundioris astucie consilio se senciens pregravari. ne presens anathematis multaretur baculo. Romam appellare compellitur.] (ch. 73)

This is quite a different picture, putting the king on the run. The author goes on to tell us that both sides prepared to send representatives to Rome, but that the king then threatened

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<sup>92</sup> For this episode see Barlow, *English Church*, pp.305-306. His analysis is based on William of Malmesbury's account in his *Historia Novella* cap. 468-477. The archbishop of Rouen said that for bishops to build castles was against canon law, and that even if the King permitted it, he was entitled to require their possession in times of danger to the country: "aut enim secundum canonum scita iniustum est ut habeant castella; aut, si hoc ex indulgentia principali toleratur, ut tradant claues necessitati temporis debent cedere" (*Historia Novella* cap. 475).

with forfeiture of property any of the Churchmen who went on this mission.<sup>93</sup> Geoffrey had, unfortunately, been selected. He was concerned that his health was too poor to undertake such a journey, and that, should he lose his property, he would no longer be able to care for those poor who had come to depend upon him. Christina prayed, and he was released from duty. Geoffrey's view of these events, as we see them through the account of Anonymous, is in keeping with monastic views. King Stephen, according to Anonymous, acted "on the wicked instigation of some of his favourites" ["ex quorundam satellitum suorum consilio. sed perverso"] (ch. 73). Moreover, the story, as Anonymous tells it, highlights the local repercussions of the incident and also contributes positively to the portraits he has been creating of Geoffrey and Christina. According to Anonymous, Geoffrey, since his conversion from worldliness by Christina, has been diligent in his care of the poor. The *Gesta Abbatum* confirms that this is likely an accurate portrayal of the Abbot. It relates several instances in which Geoffrey's generosity to the poor plays a part. In one case, Geoffrey even had the materials intended for the decoration of St. Alban's shrine sold to feed the hungry during a lean year (82).<sup>94</sup> As for Christina, she has already successfully kept Geoffrey from journeys to Rome through prayer, and in this case she again succeeds. Her power of prayer is shown to trump the plans of powerful ecclesiastics.

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<sup>93</sup> Barlow considers this "the point of the story" in the *Life*. See *English Church*, 306, n.133.

<sup>94</sup> Rachel Koopmans quotes from a letter which seems to have been written only a short time after Abbot Geoffrey's death (688). In it the writer describes "a crowd of wailing and sobbing poor people . . . they were weeping, beating themselves, for the death of your father and friend Abbot Geoffrey" ["conquerentium et lacrimantium pauperum turba me coram imprimatur. Qui . . . decessum patris et amici tui abbatis Gosf. plangentes collacrimabant" ("Epistola ad Amicum," *Analecta Dubliniensia*, ed. Marvin L. Colker, ix). The letter goes on to describe how Geoffrey had helped "clerics, nuns, anchorites, and all the poor" ["clericorum sanctimonialium anachoretarum omniumque indigentium"].

Certainly Geoffrey, as abbot, would have had final say over the *Life*, and it is likely that even though the work has not been entirely revised, Geoffrey's attitudes have had influence throughout, perhaps especially because the author is in complete sympathy with those views. Talbot thought that the work's criticism of Geoffrey meant that the abbot was not likely to have been involved. However, as Koopmans rightly reminds us, Geoffrey's conversion from worldliness was considered to be "one of [Christina's] greatest achievements" by the writer, and presumably, by Geoffrey (680, n.67). As well, we note in the *Life* that Geoffrey's conversion brought with it a great sense of humility. It is unlikely that he would have objected to the record of his enlightenment. If anything, converts are more apt to emphasize their previous faults.<sup>95</sup> We must not forget, though, that in its unfinished state, the *Life* had not likely been read yet by Geoffrey, although it seems probable that Anonymous had discussed its contents with his abbot and perhaps read parts of his work in progress to him. It is impossible to know what revisions the abbot might have deemed expedient.

Aside from these two very important sources, the author seems to have ranged rather widely in his pursuit of examples and details. In St. Albans itself, he was in a position to hear from those close to Geoffrey of events from the beginning of his association with Markyate, or perhaps he himself witnessed these events. He seems often to have been at Markyate himself. He was also able to hear of some events through those coming from visits at Markyate. For there is a lot of coming and going between St. Albans and Markyate detailed in the *Life*. Geoffrey of course visits Christina, but

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<sup>95</sup> See chapter one, pp. 58-59, for a discussion of Abbot Geoffrey's conversions. The conversion genre is an important and not unexpected phenomenon in a period of reform.

Gregory, her brother and a priest, also visits and celebrates mass for Christina and her companions. Other monks as well come at various times with messages, or to visit when Christina is ill. Of particular interest, as has already been noted, are the visits of St. Albans nuns to the hermitage. As well, there was, of course, communication among monasteries. For example, in the *Life* is the priest, Simon of Bermondsy, apparently a close friend of Markyate, who sends a message of a vision of Christina to Abbot Geoffrey by means of a visiting St. Albans monk (ch. 77).

Christina's sister, Margaret, another "who knew her secrets" ["secretorum suorum consciam"] (ch. 61), could have been a major source, as could her brother, Gregory, as witnesses to her early family life. His informants, however, must also include many other people of Huntingdon. Either Anonymous knew her family quite intimately himself, or knew someone who did.<sup>96</sup> Certainly Anonymous is able to describe in detail Beatrix's feelings about her pregnancy with Christina and the sign she thought she had received of God's blessing, and says that Beatrix told him this story herself (ch. 1). This is an interesting comment, because Beatrix would hardly have wanted to remember this anecdote while the family feud was underway. It indicates that perhaps he learned of it later when, as he tells us, the parents fled to Christina for refuge (ch. 20).<sup>97</sup> At the very

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<sup>96</sup> Certainly, as I maintain below (pp.146-148) the truth-value of his story is heightened by his personal association with those about whom he writes.

<sup>97</sup> Clarissa Atkinson maintains that the anecdote of the dove visiting Beatrix "seems wholly inappropriate, as if it belonged in another story" (175). The genre of hagiography required a sign during the saint's infancy, but Beatrix was so antagonistic to her daughter's desire to devote her life to God that it does seem rather as though Anonymous tacked this bit on for effect. However, since we do not know when the story was related, or even if it was related as Anonymous maintains, we cannot sort out the circumstances for certain. If Beatrix was later reconciled to Christina, the story may have been told in hindsight, with the moral meaning in place. Beatrix's repentance may not have been very important to Anonymous; his focus, after all, would always have been on Christina. On the other hand, he may have intended to revisit some of these matters in a final revision.

end of the text as we have it, Christina's sister, Matilda and her husband, residents of Huntingdon, are able, during a visit to Markyate, to confirm for the author Christina's miraculous knowledge of their private conversation. Finally, the canons of St. Mary's, Huntingdon are certainly a source. It seems likely that Sueno was a family friend, and was entrusted with Christina's early education. He is another of Christina's confidants ("secretorum suorum consilio") (ch. 26). The canons apparently maintained their interest in Christina, acting as witnesses to the grant made by St. Paul's London at the foundation of the priory (Talbot 30).<sup>98</sup>

It is my opinion that the sheer number of the biographer's sources, even if some of them are indirect, precludes the notion, discussed in the Introduction, that Anonymous was, in effect, recording Christina's autobiography. We cannot even be sure that for the very personal anecdotes, such as the incident with Flambard and her many visions, there was not some shaping in the telling, and we cannot be sure either that all of the shaping was done by one person only. Christina must at some point have told her experiences, visionary and otherwise, to someone, and in this telling, as Heffernan has perceptively remarked of the recording of Perpetua's visions, there would have been an "attempt at coherence, at translating from the primal experience in light of her present situation" (*Sacred Biography* 202). I also maintain that Anonymous sought, through the selection and ordering of material, coherence for her life events. So, to suggest as Brooke famously did, that Christina "doubtless romanced a little" ("St. Albans" 60), or to state,

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<sup>98</sup> The charters relating to the grant of land to Christina and her nuns, and of the arrangements for the elections of Christina's successors as prioress have been published in *Early Charters of the Cathedral Church of St. Paul, London*, ed. Marion Gibbs, pp. 119-122, charters 154 and 156. Also printed are several petitions from the nuns of Markyate regarding their elections (no. 155, 161 and 236).

like Holdsworth, that we “accept . . . the directness of her account” (“Christina” 196, n.57) is surely beside the point, or at least unhelpful, since the portrait of Christina is a complex creation, the raw material coming from many sources, and then at some point given form by her biographer. As Stanton points out, the notion of the *Life* as autobiography “neglects the work done by the hagiographer” (264).

Material, time and sources were essential, of course, but finally, writing was labour, which is one reason that both copying and authorship could be acceptable occupations in the monastery (Clanchy 269).<sup>99</sup> Peter the Venerable, in a letter to a hermit, Gilbert of Senlis, used the metaphor of ploughing to describe suitable physical labour for an enclosed religious.

Since your perpetual reclusion prohibits the planting of trees, watering of seeds, and performance of rural work, the hand can be turned, what is more useful, from the plough to the pen; pages can be ploughed with holy letters in place of ploughing fields; the seedbed of God, sown on the sheet of the word, can fill the hungry readers with the ripe crops of perfect books and multiplied fruits; and the celestial bread can thus drive out the deadly hunger of the soul.

[Plantari nonpossunt arbusculae, rigari nequeunt sata, neque aliquid ruralis operis exerceri, reclusionone perpetua prohibente, sed quod est utilius, pro aratro conuertatur manus ad pennam, pro exarandis agris, diuinis litteris paginae

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<sup>99</sup> The interdependent practices of reading and writing during this period have been thoroughly investigated. Major studies include Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory; The Craft of Thought*; M.T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record, England 1066-1307*; Janet Coleman, *Ancient and Medieval Memories*; M.B. Parkes, *Pause and Effect: an Introduction to the History of Punctuation in the West*; “Reading, Copying and Interpreting a Text in the Early Middle Ages” and Paul Saenger, “Reading in the Later Middle Ages”; “Silent Reading: its Impact on Late Medieval Script and Society and *Space Between the Words: the Origins of Silent Reading*.”

exarentur, seratur in cartula uerbi dei seminarium, quod maturatis segetibus hoc est libris perfectis, multiplicatis frugibus esurientes lectores repleat, et sic panis caelestis laetalem animae famem depellat.] (*Letters* 38)

(Trans. Constable, *Reformation* 213 )

The image of ploughing the pages of parchment with a pen is apt, and suggests the physical effort expended in such a task, whether the copying of authorities or the creation of new works. But pen on parchment was the final effort, or nearly the final effort of the writer, for all writing could be revised. Medieval authors were adept at taking notes and the medium they used for this task was often the wax tablet. Orderic Vitalis gives us a sense of how versatile these tablets were, while also demonstrating how physically exacting the use of pen and parchment was.

And since I have happened to mention St. William, I will now insert a brief account of his life in this book. I have found it very hard to come by in this region, and a true account of the life of such a man will delight many. Anthony, a monk of Winchester, recently passed this way with a copy, and showed it to our eager eyes. . . . But in truth, since the bearer was in haste to depart, and the winter cold prevented me from holding a pen, I made a full and accurate abbreviation on wax tablets, and now I gladly copy it on parchment, so making known the fame of this valiant marcher lord.

[Nunc quia de sancto Guillelmo nobis incidit metio. libet eius uitam breuiter huic inserere opusculo. Noui quod ipsa raro inuenitur in hac prouincia. et nonnullis placebit de tali uiro relatio ueridica. Hanc etenim Antonius Guentoniensis monachus nuper detulit. et nobis eam uidere sitientibus ostendit. . . . Verum quia portitor

festinabat adire, et brumale gelu me prohibebat scribere. sinceram adbreuiationem sicut tabellis tradidi compendiose, sic nunc satagam membrane summatim commendare, et audacis marchisi famam propagare.] (Vitalis III:218)

Writing with ink on expensive parchment with cold hands was a risky use of resources. Wax tablets were a more forgiving medium. Tablets were used both to make notes and to draft compositions. Not everyone used them, however. For example, Guibert de Nogent tells us in his *Memoirs* that he worked directly to parchment, although this information is part of the episode in which he is hiding his writing from his abbot. Perhaps he considered that less writerly paraphernalia would be easier to hide (Labande 144-145). Anonymous speaks once of using wax tablets, when hearing about Christina's trials with the unchaste cleric selected by Thurstan as her temporary protector. The writer's protest at the cleric's behaviour is all the more vivid since it purports to be taken down as notes. We are to understand, perhaps, that this is the first time he has heard the story and he is shocked. The wax tablet provides the imagery he needs to emphasize his outrage.<sup>100</sup> But the passage brings up another point, for he speaks of telling the story aloud, which could be taken to mean dictation. Anonymous says that the cleric "behaved in so scandalous a manner that I cannot make it known, lest I pollute the wax by writing it, or the air by saying it" ["tam nefando genere se agens: quod a turpitudine non possum illud prodere <ne> vel scribendo cera<m> vel eloquendo aerem ipsum polluam"] (ch. 43). The verb being translated as "saying" is "eloquendo" – which in Latin includes the idea of speaking eloquently, or composing. Having gathered their information on tablets, authors

<sup>100</sup> He does, however, recover himself sufficiently to end the chapter with a rhetorical flourish or two: "Unde nonnunquam virum illam non feminam esse dicebat quem virago virtute virili predata recte effeminatum appellare poterat" (ch. 43).

could, if they were fortunate enough to have access to such a resource, dictate their compositions to professional scribes. The author would dictate the composition to a scribe from previously taken notes; the scribe would then read back the composition, making note of any changes the author wished to make. It is an intriguing question to consider: did Anonymous take up the pen himself or did he dictate the story from the notes he had taken on his tablets?

It is rare to be able to discern the scribe in a piece of revised writing, at least when the scribe is under the control of the author. (“Scribe” here is being distinguished from “amanuensis”, a person who had a more extensive function. Certainly, aside from this one reference to wax tablets, there is no reference made in the biography to the physical aspects of writing. Our first impression may be to assume that Anonymous acted as his own scribe, and there are contemporary examples to indicate that this was not uncommon. In fact, Southern has suggested, with regard to a manuscript which he thinks was probably written, that is, penned by Eadmer, that “the day had not yet come when the roles of the author and the scribe were clearly distinguished” (*Anselm* 371). He refers also to the examples of William of Malmesbury and Orderic Vitalis as authors who wrote their own works, and we may recall the distress of Guibert de Nogent when finally he had to dictate his work to a scribe because he could no longer see (*Tropologiae*, col. 340).<sup>101</sup>

The practical invisibility of a scribe at work makes the modern reader inclined to assume

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<sup>101</sup> “Hactenus enim non tam perpetuitate legendi quam nimia continuatione scribendi, utpote qui non solum dictator extiteram, sed et laboris indefessi notarius, oculorum meorum aciem undecunque obtuderam, unde ad hoc mea immoderantia me redegit, ut exceptore adhibito, quod mihi nunquam moris fuerat, sola memoria, sola voce, sine manu, sine oculis praesens opusculum cogeret explicari.” It is interesting too, that several of our most prolific medieval authors acted as scribes for themselves. It may be that a degree of independence was thus achieved which would increase the likelihood of one’s works surviving.

that the “I” of the work is wielding the pen. As Saenger reminds us, however, most medieval compositions were group efforts (“Silent Reading” 382). There is thus a strong case to be made for Anonymous’ use of a scribe, and not only in order to suggest all possibilities. St. Albans, of course, had professional scribes in its scriptorium, and if the *Life* was commissioned by Geoffrey, as seems most likely, the Abbot may have made a scribe available for the work.

Anonymous, then, had an abundance of detail and credible contemporary witnesses. He likely had authorized leisure to write and may even have had a professional scribe at his disposal. Especially he was able to spend time with his subject. If the subject of his biography was to become part of the “life” of the saints, however, a historical foundation was needed, which Anonymous found in scriptural analogy to be sure, but also in the revival of an older form of hagiography, the virgin-martyr story. It is in the form of the *Life* as we have it that I believe we see the hand of Anonymous most clearly.

The idea that medieval writers used models is a commonplace. It may be said that writers of all periods do so, but from our perspective, the patterns of medieval biography become very clear, perhaps in some cases hackneyed, a problem that a medieval monastic audience would not likely have acknowledged, since the re-affirmation of their faith through repeated pattern was something for which they had a high tolerance. For the monastic mind, the stories of saints, especially, were designed to show the power of God through holy individuals. The vicarious experience of God’s power was edifying. In the end, the individual was less important than the revelation of God’s power, although the physical presence of a saint, even after death, facilitated tapping into that power. As a

result of this basic assumption, narrative details and episodes could migrate from earlier to later tales without any loss of effect. Nor did writers have difficulty justifying this practice, as the following example shows. Moreover, direct speech is reported, giving a sense of immediacy which is often clearly at odds with what we would call realism. The famous passage from Gregory of Tours gives the acknowledged rationale for this authorial approach:

Whence it is clear that it is preferable to speak of the life of the fathers than lives, because, although there is a diversity of merit and virtue, in the world one life nourishes all bodies.

[Unde manifestum est, melius dici vitam patrum quam vitas, quia, cum sit diversitas meritorum virtumque, una tamen omnes vita corporis alit in mundo.]

(*Liber Vitae Patrum* 662-3; translation Heffernan 7)

In this, writers showed that they were less interested in biography as the life story of an individual than in providing an edifying ideal. If God could work a miracle through one, so He could through another, and if these miracles look suspiciously similar, that is because they both participate in the same sacred life. The important element is always God's power, and the individual's willingness to channel that power. Because of repeated patterns in narrative and symbolic terms, in modern assessments of saints' lives it is common to speak of hagiographic convention or topos, as being less reliable or genuine, whereas medieval writers would have considered such patterns an essential element of

verification.<sup>102</sup> As Heffernan points out, “the new sacred model reclaims past models and in turn is authenticated by them as these past lives are reintroduced in the present” (20). Thus Malmesbury makes the claim that a contemporary miracle actually provides proof of an ancient one. Speaking of a monk who criticized Wulfstan for preaching, Malmesbury says that the monk’s vision, during which he was beaten for his criticism of Wulfstan, proves the truth of the old story of Jerome’s vision, during which *he* was beaten for neglecting Scriptures in favour of pagan authors: “Let antiquity then win credence from modern instances, and be freed of all doubts. For in the case of Jerome it exhibits for us a similar event” [“Fidem ergo de presentibus exemplis mereatur etomni ambiguo liberetur antiquitas, quae nobis simile factum in beato Ieronimo representat”] (*Vita Wulfstani* 38-39). In both cases the beating’s physical marks remained for all to see, proving the reality of the vision.<sup>103</sup> Elsewhere, speaking of contemporary events, William says, “There were at that time in England many persons distinguished for their learning and famous for their religious life. . . . By their admirable lives they made the stories of the past time seem credible; we cannot accuse old tales of being untrue, when recent facts prove that they might easily have happened” [“Erant prorsus tunc in Anglia multi scientia illustres, religione celebres . . . Laudabiliter igitur uiuendo fidem preteritis fatiebant historiis, ne uetera possint falsitatis argui, cum nouorum exemplo probentur

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<sup>102</sup> The strategies used by Anonymous to enhance the truth-value of his story are discussed below, pp.142-147. My view on this matter is that the episodes in the story are true to the spiritual universe they depict, and that their value is in elucidating that universe to us. Incidentally, they also make real to us many features of twelfth-century culture. As Mary Carruthers has said, “Tropes cannot be discussed as ‘mere’ formulas, for they indicate the values of a society and the way in which it conceives of its literature” (*Book of Memory* 13).

<sup>103</sup> In Christina’s *Vita* Abbot Geoffrey is convinced of the reality of his dream of being beaten when he sees that the marks are still there next morning. Christina herself believes in her dream of the Virgin when she finds that her pillow is soaked with tears; in her vision she had wept before the Virgin.

potuisse fieri”] (*Gesta Regum Anglorum* ch. 445).

Still, the actual construction of saints’ lives as biographies of identified individuals shows that the impulse to record God’s manifestation in human affairs was not entirely a generic endeavour, and that there was also a literal interest in the individual who is called by God. Thus, even in the earliest vitae and passiones, the saint is named, often given a locale, a family and sometimes individuating traits, none of these elements, strictly speaking, necessary for the demonstration of God’s power. During the twelfth century, as David H. Farmer has shown, this clear interest in the human subject of the story resulted in what we would consider true biography, that is, the presentation of “the known historical facts of the saint’s life and the way he acted as material for human portraiture as well as edification” (xiii). Robert Hanning, in his book, *The Individual in Twelfth-Century Romance*, calls this form of biography, “individualized hagiography” (35), and applies it specifically to Christina’s *Life*. Anonymous, he finds, “infuses the *Life* with a spirit of individual, not exemplary, achievement, portraying Christina as a unique person of strong character whose quest for her private destiny puts her at odds with the established forces – both lay and ecclesiastical authorities – of her world” (35).<sup>104</sup> It seems to me that this new interest in the individual signals a kind of opening up of hagiographic composition, and authors now felt emboldened to approach their writing differently. Some began to compose more intimate lives; others re-wrote older

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<sup>104</sup>Studies dealing with the concept of individualism in the Middle Ages include John F. Benton, “Consciousness of Self and Perceptions of Individuality”; “Individualism and Conformity in Medieval Western Europe”; Caroline Bynum, “Did the Twelfth Century Discover the Individual?”; Colin Morris, *The Discovery of the Individual 1050-1200*; R.W. Southern, “Medieval Humanism” and Walter Ullmann, *The Individual in Medieval Society*. Studies with significant discussion on Christina are Raymond Cormier’s *One Heart, One Mind: the Rebirth of Virgil’s Hero in Medieval French Romance* and, as cited above, Robert W. Hanning’s, *The Individual in Twelfth-Century Romance*.

lives and passions, and in doing so reflected contemporary concerns and ideas. Anonymous, as I hope to show, in writing his very personal portrait of Christina made use of a well-known form to depict his contemporary's life.

It is my view that Anonymous' use of the virgin-martyr form as the foundation for a contemporary biography is unique, and we will never know how it might have affected hagiographic writing had the work actually been disseminated widely. Certainly, there cannot have been many contemporary subjects for whom such treatment would have been appropriate. Although there were, of course, many conversion stories in monastic circles, Christina's case was not usual, was in fact, very unusual. Most children fell in with family plans, either through filial piety or fear. The power of the male head of a household in this period was significant. The isolation, beatings, temptations and persuasions that Christina faced over a long stretch of time at the hands of her family and family friends would have been enough to bring most young women to heel. Heroines are not, by definition, common. Christina was unusually determined, a trait she had in common with her family. The most important fact, however, is that she succeeded. There may indeed have been many other young women who began with the determination Christina had but whose aspirations were crushed by more ruthless families. Anonymous' immersion in the literature of the Church, both Biblical texts and saints' stories, which formed a significant part of the Divine Office, prepared him to view the events of Christina's life in a particular way and to make use of elements of a form which fulfilled his need, both to describe his subject's life in individual terms and to situate her life in the *life* of the saints (in Gregory of Tours' sense). Here was a living example of a virgin heroine. If she was not literally martyred, she had made a heroic

escape from the world and was living in his own day a martyrdom of asceticism.

Anonymous' immersion in the literature of the Church, mentioned above, was not fortuitous. Rather, as Mary Carruthers has shown in her two works on medieval culture, *The Book of Memory* and *The Craft of Thought*, people, and particularly monastics, were thoroughly trained to see associations between their world and the past. The medieval practice of reading was a systematic undertaking which was especially well-developed in monasteries where it was a sacred duty. Novices were first set to read and thoroughly memorize texts by rote. Memorization of large portions of scripture through oral repetition was a significant activity of monastic life. The idea was to divide each text into small portions: phrases and clauses, and these portions would be dwelt upon until thoroughly assimilated (*Book of Memory* 50). Scripture learned in this way was available to the mind later on for private meditation (Saenger, *Silent Reading* 383). Reading and meditation were thus part of the same activity. "Active" reading involved slowly saying the words aloud, thus also hearing them. Scripture memorized in this manner became intrinsic to the monk, rather than something outside himself to which he referred. Thus vocabulary used to describe this form of reading was often connected with chewing and digestion. In fact, "metaphors which use digestive activities are so powerful and tenacious that 'digestion' should be considered another basic functional model for the complementary activities of reading and composition, collection and recollection" (Carruthers, *Book of Memory* 165-166). The texts thus learned could be built upon, as on a foundation, adding meaning to each portion of text through exegesis, rendering the text useful (*Craft of Thought* 90). The recollection of one text would bring to mind other texts through association. A complex edifice of thought could be built once the necessary

materials were properly stored in memory.

Divine reading (*lectio divina*) was primarily Biblical and Patristic, although Classical texts were also read and assimilated into what Jean Leclercq has described throughout *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God* as the “monastic culture.” Saints’ lives were very popular and early on became part of monastic reading, finding their way also into the liturgy. Nor were written texts the only available resource to the mind. Everything encountered as experience, whether read or lived, became part of a complex of carefully integrated and cross-referenced material in the memory. The monks’ discipline of meditation worked continually on this material, making connections, moralizing and adding commentary. In the activities of reading and meditation, then, the monk “collected” what would later be available to him when he came to composition. Such reading resulted in “deep impregnation with the words of scripture” (Leclercq 91) which caused the monastic mind to supply “spontaneously” the allusions, quotations and examples for whatever circumstance of reading or living was encountered.

What this means with regard to authorship is that “the act of invention, carried out by cogitation, was thought to be one of combining or ‘laying together’ in one ‘place’ or compositive image of design the divided bits previously filed and cross-filed in other discrete *loci* of memory” (Carruthers, *Book of Memory* 197). Composition was thus a further rumination on and gathering of things held in memory (198). The practice of meditative reading of sacred texts resulted in a “sanctification of the imagination” (Leclercq 93), so that the mind itself created, as it were, the image or allusion needed to understand the present. To be sure, this kind of association did often result in digressive writing, but not to the point of incoherence; the relational thread was there for the

initiated reader to follow. Writers knew what to expect of their audience. As Heffernan has shown, in his book *Sacred Biography*, monasteries ensured the “existence of a very literate audience deeply learned in an established canon of texts; the common practice of monastic readings would have supplied this common ground of literary experience” (115).

The Book of Psalms was especially valued during the Middle Ages as commentary on life and as formulations for prayer. It would be impossible to overstate the importance of psalms to the monastic mind. They were memorized and used for meditation; moreover the weekly recitation of these poems was, after all, a *raison d’être* of monastic liturgy. They were, however, also studied and recited by pious layfolk. Peter the Venerable’s mother, Raingard, for example, memorized her psalter while still in the world, in preparation for her later monastic profession (*Selected Letters* 6, 39). Christina is shown making constant use of psalms, often as spontaneous prayer during the time of her family trials. Later, when she is in hiding with Alfwyn, she is said to have had the psalter “open on her lap at all hours of the day for her use” [“in gremio . . . propemodum omnibus horis iacebat expansum in usum”] (ch. 37). Memorization of the psalter is likely to have formed a major part of her early instruction by Sueno.<sup>105</sup>

Psalms were thus readily available to the devout mind seeking guidance and understanding. Often, a tag from a psalm is all that is needed to bring an analogy to

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<sup>105</sup> Of course it is impossible to know whether Christina actually made as much use of psalms as is portrayed in the *Life*. Hiding from Burthred and his friends behind the tapestry in her bedroom, did she say to herself, “I wish they’d leave!” or pray, “Let them be turned backward, that desire my hurt” (ch. 11)? For myself, I believe that since her vocation was very early, and was moreover steady, that she would have sought to prepare herself by repetition and memorization of the psalter, and that the words of the psalter would have influenced her prayers and expressions, much as they did those of monks. The prayer, of course, is completely in keeping with the moral meaning of the situation.

mind. Sometimes, though, a direct reference is made to a psalm, as being appropriate to the moment, such as when Christina is said to take as the first psalm after her escape five verses of the thirty-seventh psalm, beginning, “Lord, all my desire is before thee” [“Domine ante te omne desiderium meum”]. Anonymous comments that this is “a very suitable passage and one that described the situation of the reader” [“apta quidem lectio conveniensque fortune legentis”] (ch.34). The psalm’s references to those seeking the poet’s life must have seemed eminently pertinent to the young woman hiding from her family and husband. There is the fear, which she expressed to Loric, that those helping her might come to physical harm, but there is also her own fear that her parents will find her and take from her the life of devotion that she has chosen. This is also the psalm she recited the night before she made her vow of virginity, expressing thereby her decision (ch. 4 ). At Alfwen’s cell we see her making good her original resolve.

Other scripture is used in this way as well. For example, after Christina’s enforced betrothal, she is put under a form of house arrest and made to associate with “those whose evil communications corrupt good manners,” [“quorum mala collo[quia] corrumpunt mores bonos”] says the author (ch. 8), neatly bringing to bear the passage where Paul asserts the existence of an afterlife, subject to God: “if . . . I fought with the beasts at Ephesus, what doth it profit me, if the dead rise not again? Let us eat and drink; for tomorrow we shall die. Be not seduced: evil communications corrupt good manners” [“si . . . ad bestias pugnavi Ephesi quid mihi prodest si mortui non resurgunt? manducemus et bibamus cras enim moriemur. Nolite seduci: corrumpunt mores bonos conloquia mala”] (I Cor. 15:32-33) Before making her decision to commit her virginity to God, Christina has contemplated this very subject and her desire to achieve heaven has

led her to make her vow. “In that hour she imagined herself lying on her deathbed (as if the future were already present) and she reflected that after life had departed from the body no one could foretell the abode of the freed spirit. One thing, however, was certain – that if she lived well it would enjoy bliss, but if wickedly it would be given over to torments” [“Denique prescripsit secum in animo quasi iam fuisset quod futurum erat se mortuam exponi. Pro certo tamen habebat in bonis illum fore si bene fecisset. sin autem male deputari tormentis”] (ch. 4). She is on her guard against the worldly visitors of her parents; she will not be deceived.

Aside from verbal allusions to Biblical texts, Anonymous on two occasions, makes a direct analogy between Christina and a Biblical character. The first time, Burthred has been teasing her that he has “bested” her with two bishops and will not try a third. Christina asks Burthred what he would do if another tried to lure her away from him. “I would slay him with my own hands, if there was no other way of keeping you” [“Meis ipse manibus interficerem illum. si te aliter habere nequirem,”] comes the reply. To this Christina retorts, “Beware then of taking to yourself the spouse of Christ, lest in His anger He will slay you” [“Et tu ergo cave sponsam Christi velle tibi tollere. ne in ira sua interficiet te”] (ch. 22). With this parting shot, Christina rises to leave. Angered, Burthred catches hold of her mantle, but she unclasps it and escapes leaving Burthred with the cloak. Anonymous makes a direct comparison of Christina with Joseph, who in the Old Testament story, likewise escapes the sexual advances of Potiphar’s wife by leaving his coat behind in her hands. Like Potiphar’s wife, Burthred is able to use the incident to provoke the head of the house. Autti is so incensed that he is only with difficulty restrained from throwing Christina into the street shouting, “If you want to have

Christ, follow Him stripped of everything” [“Si enim Christum vis habere: Christum nudum sequere”] (ch. 23), an allusion to current reform rhetoric.<sup>106</sup> Like Joseph, Christina refuses to compromise her integrity, and suffers unjust punishment. Joseph, for the Western Church, was one who renounced the alures of the world, symbolized by the temptation of Potiphar’s wife, and thus could symbolize the monastic life. Bede said of him, “leaving his cloak behind in the hands of the adulteress, he ran outside, preferring to serve God naked than to serve the whore clothed in the lusts of the world” [“relicto in manibus adulterae pallio foras exiuit malens Deo nudus quam indutus cupiditatibus mundi meretrici seruire”] (*In Marcum* 4, 14).<sup>107</sup> Furthermore, Joseph was associated with the contemplative life, like Mary of Bethany (Constable, “Mary and Martha” 36). In the Gospel story, which was of great interest to monastics at this time, when Christ visited the house of Mary and Martha in Bethany, Mary sat down at his feet and listened to what he had to teach, while Martha prepared a meal. The sisters became associated with the contemplative and active lives respectively, and within the monastic world, this could come to mean those devoted to prayer and those devoted to good works, often in support of their contemplative brothers or sisters.<sup>108</sup>

It is therefore of great interest that the other direct analogy Anonymous makes is between Christina and Mary of Bethany. At the same time he casts Christina’s sister, Margaret, as Martha. The scene takes place at Markyate priory. A pilgrim arrives, and

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<sup>106</sup> For this and other reform rhetoric, see Constable, *Reformation*, chapter 4, especially pp.146-150 for the idea of poverty in imitation of Christ. On a more literal level, Autti is referring to her desire to be a nun, giving up all worldly goods and aspirations. He has already told her that she can expect no assistance from her family in that vocation (ch. 19).

<sup>107</sup> Translation by Linda Olson.

<sup>108</sup> The identification of Mary and Martha was not static throughout the period, however. For a discussion of the evolution of associations with these figures, see Constable, “The Interpretation of Mary and Martha.”

the sisters are so captivated by his authoritative, yet humble bearing, that they ask him to dine with them. The author sets the scene: “He sat down whilst she and her sister Margaret prepared the repast. Christina paid more attention to the man, whilst Margaret was busily moving about concerned with the preparations of the meal, so that if it had been possible to see Jesus sitting down you would recognize another Mary and another Martha” [“Discumbit ipse illa cum sorore .M. dulce parat edulium. Cristina tamen attentius assidet viro. Margareta laboriosius circa necessaria discurrit, ita ut aliam Mariam. aliam videres et Martham, si Ihesum discumbentem daretur conspiciere”] (ch. 80). Markedly absent from this tableau is any criticism of Christina on Margaret’s part such as occurs in the Gospel story, where Martha complains of Mary’s laziness to Jesus. “Mary” and “Martha” at Markyate are well-integrated. Very shortly afterward, the author is directly making the identification of the pilgrim with: “either Christ or an angel” [“Dominum Ihesum aut eius dicemus angelum”] (ch. 81). Thus by associating Christina with both the patriarch Joseph and Mary of Bethany, Anonymous firmly establishes the association of Christina with the reformed and contemplative life. These scenes involving the pilgrim-Christ are important to him as the climax of his portrait of her spirituality, and may also be seen as a heavenly benediction on the work at Markyate and its association with St. Albans Abbey.

Before discussing just how Anonymous uses and transforms an older form to describe the life of his contemporary, it will be useful to demonstrate that events, of themselves, were capable of triggering a number of associations in the medieval mind, and in fact, we can see that the events of Christina’s life do so in at least two cases. Even monastic reading could not create a single “sanctified imagination,” but individuals

approached texts and life events with what they had, with the stories that particularly resonated.

Christina herself is shown as associating her predicament – an unwanted groom – with the story of Cecilia.<sup>109</sup> As Anonymous tells the story, focusing on Christina’s perspective at this point, during the time she is kept in close custody by her family after her enforced betrothal, her parents sneak Burthred, her intended husband, into her bedroom late at night, in the hope that he will find her asleep and be able to consummate the marriage, and thus thwart Christina’s ambition to become a nun. Through Providence, however, the author tells us, Christina is found up and dressed. She welcomes Burthred, “as a brother” and entertains him with stories of chaste saints; in particular, she tells him in detail the story of Cecilia who converted her new husband Valerian to a Christian and chaste life. She urges Burthred to take a vow of virginity with her, and proposes that they live together in a chaste marriage for some time and then enter religious houses. We are not told what Burthred’s thoughts are as he leaves her, but when her parents find out what has happened (or rather has not happened) they are very hard on him, calling him a “spineless and useless fellow” – one, nevertheless, that they still want for a son-in-law, and their efforts toward that end are redoubled.<sup>110</sup>

Christina’s apparent use of the Cecilia story is intriguing. Obviously, the story

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<sup>109</sup>We cannot know for certain, of course, whether the episode reflects Christina’s actual actions and words, or is placed here to emphasize Christina’s fortitude and to make an association with a saint. Given the parallels in imagery which I discuss here, we may be tempted to think of the entire episode as an authorial construction. However, it is true to the character we have come to know as Christina, and moreover, is plausible as a reaction to her circumstances.

<sup>110</sup> The idea of a chaste or spiritual marriage, which seemed to Christina the ideal solution to her family problem, was not often acceptable to society, and, in fact, the reaction of Christina’s family to the proposal and Burthred’s confused reaction, was likely typical for the time. See Dyan Elliott’s *Spiritual Marriage*.

spoke meaningfully to Christina, and it is the story that she strives to emulate directly when she attempts to convert Burthred to celibacy. Christina would have been quite willing, if Burthred had co-operated, to continue to fulfil Cecilia's story, seeking her martyrdom through virginity, first in a chaste marriage, and afterwards in a convent. Looking carefully at some of the elements in the Cecilia story, I think we see how Anonymous acknowledges the association between Christina and Cecilia. The Cecilia legend generally begins with the wedding banquet, and it is this scene which gave rise to the famous linking of Cecilia with music, for one of the antiphons sung at Matins on St. Cecilia's day began "Cantantibus organis cecilia domino decantabat dicens fiat cor meum immaculatum ut non confundat."<sup>111</sup> While the music played [cantantibus organis] Cecilia repeatedly sang to God [cecilia domino decantabat]. That night, she convinces her groom that her chastity is being guarded by two angels, which he will be able to see if he becomes a Christian. She sends him to Bishop Urban for instruction. Valerian returns, newly converted, sees the angels and receives, along with Cecilia, a crown brought from heaven. The crowns, made of roses and lilies, are doubly significant: they commemorate both the couple's chastity, and also their coming martyrdom.

In the *Life*, the explicit reference to Cecilia's story comes in an analogous "bedroom scene," but if we look more carefully, we see that Anonymous has suggested the preliminary scenes of the legend from events in Christina's life, preparing the reader for the Cecilia association. Immediately prior to the "bedroom scene," we are told about the Gild Merchant banquet that Beatrix and Autti attend, taking Christina with them. Since they are

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<sup>111</sup> All quotations from the breviary are from the *Monastic Breviary of Hyde Abbey, Winchester*, ed. J.B.L. Tolhurst.

guests of honour, they require their daughter to act as cup-bearer to the company. There is music at the banquet, “where the alluring melodies of the singers were accompanied by the sounds of the zither and the harp” [“ubi cythare lireque melodiis illecebrosa respondebant modulamina cantantium”] (ch. 8). The intention is to weaken Christina’s resolve, make her feel more inclined to accept Burthred as a husband. As a defence, Christina fixes her mind on the Virgin Mary, reciting the “Hail Mary” each time she passes by a door looking out onto St. Mary’s monastery, thus blocking out the effects of the seductive music, much as Cecilia had countered the music being played at her wedding by repeating a prayer to God in her heart. As we saw in an earlier discussion of this scene, Christina pretends to sip wine with each guest, but really waits until she can drink some water. Although the author does not specify that it was the same night that Burthred visited Christina’s bedroom, the description of that episode follows directly after this banquet scene. Moreover, symbolism from the story of Cecilia is picked up and applied to Christina. Later in the story, a Jewish woman, brought in by Beatrix to try a spell on Christina, notices that the young woman is accompanied everywhere by “two persons. . . dressed in white” [“duas Candidas personas], who are there, like Cecilia’s angels, “to protect her from assaults at all points” [“ab omnibus impugnationibus hinc inde defendunt”] (ch.23). The symbolism of the crowns given by the angels is especially well-integrated into her story by Christina’s biographer. Christina associates the crowns with both chastity and martyrdom. She asks Burthred to take a vow of chastity with her, live together in a chaste marriage for a time, and then enter a monastery. Their chaste marriage and monastic profession will ensure their equality with the saints in heaven.

Although Burthred declines at this point, the symbol of the crown does not

disappear from the story; it is worked in to demonstrate both Christina's integrity and also her spousal relationship with Christ. Later, for example, when Christina is already established at the hermitage, she encounters doubt as she contemplates making her monastic profession at St. Albans. She is troubled because she has had such a hard battle against her sexual urges, and she wonders if her will at any point was weak: "But inwardly she was much troubled, not knowing what she should do, nor what she should say, when the bishop inquired during the ceremony of consecration about her virginity" ["Sed intra semetipsam multum estuabat. ignorans quid sibi faciendum. quid dicendum foret. quando sacraturus eam episcopus de virginitate sua requireret"] (ch. 51). Early one morning, some angels bring a crown from heaven and crown her, confirming "from the heavenly crown that Christ had preserved her chaste in mind and body" ["per celestem coronam quod Christus eam mente et corpore virginem usque servaverat"] (ch. 52).<sup>112</sup> Soon after, she sees a vision of a man wearing an elaborate crown and approving of the singing of the monks in the church at St. Albans Abbey. Anonymous identifies this man as Christ and later also with the Pilgrim who visits Markyate. Christina's crown, with its "two white fillets, like those of a bishop's mitre" ["albe due tanquam vitte instar episcopalis mitre"] (ch. 52), is not unlike that of the Pilgrim in its divine craftsmanship; however Christ's crown is more ornate and is topped with an identifying cross. As Anonymous tells us, "He who appeared that night in such a guise showed Himself in some sort of way as He will be seen in glory" ["enim in nocte cum tanto scemate apparuit. qualis videndus est in gloria

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<sup>112</sup>Aelred of Rievaulx, in his *De Institutione Inclusarum*, advises the recluse that temptation is part of the life she has chosen: "Ipse te iam elegit in sponsam, sed non coronabit nisi probatam. Et dicit Scriptura: Qui non est tentatus, non est probatus" ["He has already chosen you as spouse, but he will not crown you without testing. As Scripture says, "Whoever is not tempted is not proved"] (ch. 14) (translation mine). For a discussion of apparitions as a form of "proving," see chapter three.

quoquo modo innotuit”] (ch. 81). We are aware that Christina’s crown both confirms her virginity and sets her apart as Christ’s bride. Moreover, in Christina’s vision the Pilgrim appears in the church of St. Albans, suggesting his approval of the monastery in which Christina has chosen to make her profession.

While Christina is shown looking to the story of Cecilia as desirable model, the story of her early battles triggered a different association for Abbot Geoffrey. The evidence for this example comes from sources quite outside the events described in the *Life*. The *St. Albans Psalter*, which is believed to have been made, or at least adapted for Christina’s use, contains some extra features. One of these is an illustrated Anglo-Norman version of the story of St. Alexis. Alexis was a popular saint in the twelfth century, and had a strong cult at Bec. St. Albans monastery for a time honoured him with his own chapel, consecrated by Bishop Ranulf Flambard sometime between 1115 and 1119. Still, it is not Anonymous who uses the Alexis theme, as one might have expected, but Abbot Geoffrey, the patron who, it is believed, commissioned the Psalter with Christina in mind. Otto Pächt was, I believe, the first to suggest a specific connection between Christina and the Alexis poem in the Psalter in his chapter on the poem (135-144), although he compresses the events in the *Life* somewhat in order to make the connection clear. Talbot also stresses the parallels in his introduction to the *Life* (26-27). Since then, the Alexis/Christina parallel has become accepted as given, even though, if we look closely at the two stories, it is hard to see a very clear resemblance past the “escape” episode. In fact, the limitation has been commented on by Pächt, and may actually strengthen, rather than weaken the association. According to Pächt, “the miniature placed in front of the “chanson” of Alexis in the St. Albans Psalter is unique in that it represents the beginning of

the Saint's wanderings and not the end" as was more usual (139). The scenes chosen for illustration do have parallels with Christina's story, whereas in the latter part of the story there is no analogy to be made. The illustration shows Alexis explaining his decision to his bride and then leaving to pursue a religious life. In a similar way, Christina explains her purpose to Burthred, using the exemplum of Cecilia, but must still escape from him and from her family, a flight that is symbolically underlined in the vision Christina has of the staircase (ch. 24-25). One must collapse these events in Christina's story to bring them into line with the Alexis poem; there are no further parallels between them. Moreover it must be acknowledged that the Alexis *chanson*, as a masculine tale, does not really capture Christina's experience. Alexis is able to wait until he is alone with his bride and takes the initiative. She has no real recourse except to accept his decision, although she mourns for him when he is gone. On the other hand, Christina cannot afford to go through with a wedding night. If she can pre-empt the event, good, but it would have been unwise to allow events to overtake her.<sup>113</sup> It is, finally, the iconography of the Psalter which produces the parallel with Alexis. Whose view are we seeing in this poem? The inclusion of the illustrated Alexis in the Psalter "could represent the views of the commissioner of the manuscript, who may also have dictated some details of its iconography", that is, Abbot Geoffrey (Thomson 42). However, even if we accept this evidence that Geoffrey (whom we assume had some influence over Anonymous) found the story of Alexis suggestive of Christina's experience, the saint is never mentioned in the *Life*.

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<sup>113</sup> See Dyan Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage*, page 65 for a discussion of the stories of Cecilia and Alexis as female and male stories, respectively. "The extreme popularity of the Cecilia story is a tacit recognition of a woman's particular vulnerability in the marriage game."

### The Form of the First Part of the Life

We come to Anonymous and his particular approach to the events of Christina's life. Anonymous would have participated daily in readings of scriptures and of other holy writings which had over time become part of the liturgical canon. Although during the twelfth century and later, some monastic groups worked to pare down the liturgy, allowing more time for physical labour and later for preaching, the Benedictines maintained the heritage that, for them, was sanctified by its place in sacred time. Each year brought the same feast days, the same round of liturgy, the same stories and Psalms. This rich textual heritage was available to all in the community, from the youngest novice to the eldest monk, to both Anonymous and his audience.<sup>114</sup>

The stories of the saints were an integral part of monastic life. They were considered appropriate, of course, for *lectio divina* and were also included in readings considered suitable for the refectory. But it was in the liturgy that hagiography was most influential, not only as text, but also as inspiration for music. Saints' anniversaries are stable as to date. The same story would be read each year on the same day, accompanied by psalms, which could be chosen to complement the particular lesson being read (Jungmann, I: 434). These fixed feasts emphasized the concept of sacred time, and the power of the saint was felt intensely each year. On a typical saint's anniversary, especially

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<sup>114</sup> Details of the substance and place of the liturgy in medieval life can be found in the following: Margot Fassler and Rebecca Baltzer, ed., *The Divine Office in the Latin Middle Ages*; Thomas J. Heffernan and E. Ann Matter, ed., *The Liturgy of the Medieval Church*; Joseph A. Jungmann, *The Mass of the Roman Rite: its Origins and Development* and J.B.L. Tolhurst's introduction to *The Monastic Breviary of Hyde Abbey, Winchester*. M. Teresa Tavormina explores the use of hagiographical details in the liturgy for the consecration of nuns in her article, "Of Maidenhead and Maternity: Liturgical Hagiography and the Medieval Ideal of Virginity." For a discussion of how the legend of St. Alexis may have featured in the liturgy at St. Albans Abbey, see Rachel Bullington, *The Alexis in the Saint Albans Psalter: a Look into the Heart of the Matter*.

that of a highly regarded saint, commemoration would begin the previous evening at Vespers, with a brief memorial and prayer. Throughout the feast day itself, commemoration would be made at services, including mass, and ending with Vespers of the day itself. The office of Matins, the first office of the monastic day, however, was the service at which the saint's story would be read out. In time, these stories were often carefully constructed to fit the office. Heffernan feels that it is in the Divine Office, and especially Matins, that the form of much hagiography was influenced since, "from the fifth century onward, the primary motivating force behind the composition of the majority of hagiographic texts was the liturgy" (*Liturgy* 78). Margot Fassler and Rebecca Baltzer concur: "Christian communities knew the saints primarily through the Office, for it was there, even more than in the Mass, that liturgical materials were particularized and individual *vitae* shaped for communal celebration" (ix).

Although some saints' days were universally celebrated as major feasts, the ranking of others varied according to location. Examples of the former are saints Agnes, Vincent, Laurence and Martin (Tolhurst I:147). Furthermore, a monastery might have a particular reason to raise the grade of a feast. For example, Abbot Geoffrey had a particular reverence for St. Catherine of Alexandria and likely thought of her as being responsible for his original conversion to monasticism. The story as told in the *Gesta* is that Abbot Richard asked Geoffrey Gorham, then a lay scholar, to come from France to take charge of the school at St. Albans. As Geoffrey was delayed, another took the school and so when Geoffrey arrived, he went instead to Dunstable, still expecting eventually, the St. Albans post. While at Dunstable, he seems to have kept up an association with St. Albans, and was able to borrow some copes from the sacristan to

costume a miracle play of St. Catherine which he produced at Dunstable. This is a valuable reference to an early production of a miracle play, although as Rachel Bullington has noted, “the use of liturgical vestments for a play must have been so innovative as to be startling, if not shocking” (100, n.7). The next night, Geoffrey’s house caught fire and, along with his own books, the St. Albans copes were destroyed. Geoffrey was naturally greatly troubled by the disaster. To make some sort of amends, he offered himself “in holocaustum Deo” at St. Albans Abbey, and later, when elected abbot, caused many precious copes to be made (*Gesta Abbatum* 73). Since Geoffrey was a man of substance, he could, of course, have replaced the copes without becoming a monk. This revealing step is an indication of how significant he found the circumstances of the fire, and how strongly he felt the involvement of the saint.<sup>115</sup> He clearly attributed his conversion from the world to St. Catherine, and as Abbot, he instituted that the feast of St. Catherine be celebrated “in cappis” (*Gesta* 93), making it a major festival at the Abbey. The details of Catherine’s life would have been read at matins and references to her would have been made at other points during the Divine Office on her day.

The office of Matins, when it was a major, “twelve-lesson” feast, was organized into three nocturns, each of which, besides psalms, anthems and prayers, contained four lessons from the saint’s story which, read in this way, would not only be substantially covered, but because of the liturgical formula of reading and response, also meditated upon. In structure this kind of reading, like other monastic reading, presents the story in small

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<sup>115</sup> Anonymous’ treatment of Geoffrey confirms this rather impulsive moral sense. When a deceased monk appears to Geoffrey, angrily warning him away from an error he is about to make and having him beaten, Geoffrey immediately gives up his plan and vows to follow the instructions of Christina, who has also given him the warning.

portions. Responses and antiphons pick out key elements of the reading for reflection and are sometimes repeated in various parts of the Office. On the particular saint's feast day, the entire liturgical round would in various ways call the saint to remembrance, the foundation of memory having been provided at the opening Office of the day. The monks' habit of meditating on sacred writing would have been applied to these stories so that they too became available to the "sanctified imagination," and a writer such as Christina's biographer would be greatly influenced by them.

It is in the kalendar of the monastery that we find the local hierarchy of feasts. The notation, *principale*, denotes a major feast of the universal Church, of the order of the Nativity of Christ or the founding saint of a monastery, for example. Other saints who are particularly venerated may be designated as being celebrated *in cappis* (in copes) or *in albis* (in albs), the former being the higher grade. The number of lessons read in the service from the saint's story is another indication of the prestige of the saint. A saint for whose feast twelve lessons were prescribed is a more significant patron than one honoured with three lessons. Besides Catherine, celebrated *in cappis*, the St. Albans kalendar also shows that St. Faith was celebrated *in albis*, and lists as twelve-lesson feasts those of saints Agnes (as well as her octave with three lessons), Agatha, Margaret, Cecilia and Lucy, all of these saints virgin-martyrs.<sup>116</sup> In addition, as Tavormina has shown, portions of the passions of

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<sup>116</sup> For St. Albans kalendars of this period, see *English Benedictine Kalendars after A.D. 1100*, ed. Francis Wormald. In her article, "Saints' Lives and the Female Reader," Jocelyn Wogan-Browne uses Christina's story as historical context to show that the extreme violence portrayed in vernacular virgin-martyr stories might not have seemed so extreme to an audience in that period. She also finds that "hagiographic convention is precisely what can be used to render a late twelfth-century account of a young woman's rejection of marriage" (319). However, she uses a later date for the *Life* than I do ("shortly before 1166" (316)), bringing it closer to the lives she discusses, which are of the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. She makes comparisons forward from Christina's story to these legends, as well as to hagiographic convention generally. The view I take in this study is rather that Anonymous was immersed

saints Agnes and Agatha were read during the consecration service for nuns from the tenth century onward (384). Anonymous may have attended Christina's consecration, if he was already a monk of the Abbey c. 1131, since she was consecrated in the Abbey church by Bishop Alexander of Lincoln. If he already knew something of her history at the time he could not have failed to make some connections, laying what he knew of her experience beside elements of sacred stories he held in memory.

Anonymous had an abundance of detail and authorities; if the subject of his biography was to be made part of the "life" of the saints, in Gregory of Tours' sense, what was needed was a historical foundation, which he found in form. In the virgin-martyr stories, there are two paths shown, two narratives. It is clear to the Christian audience, for whom the story is written, that one narrative is good and the other evil, since each narrative is assimilated to a moral stance: Christian versus pagan. In Christina's case this is complicated by the fact that she lives in a Christian society. No one is asking her to sacrifice to idols. Her father, Autti, says, "Let her marry in the Lord" ["in Domino nubens"]: this marriage would provide a Christian narrative as well, as Fredebert affirms (ch. 15).<sup>117</sup> In Christina's story, however, marrying becomes the equivalent to sacrificing to idols, although only in strictly narrative terms. Actually, using Augustinian teaching, Anonymous shows that each way of being has its value, but the monastic view would be that virginity is to be preferred, and Christina's private vow takes on the narrative

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in conservative monastic and liturgical models of hagiography, which shaped how he received and used information about Christina's experiences. Although both monastic models and vernacular legends called on hagiographic conventions, broadly speaking, for my purposes, I prefer to look to models Anonymous actually knew.

<sup>117</sup> This aspect of Christina's dilemma interested the biographer enough that he makes the marriage/virginity contrast the focus of the "trial" scene, and gives it considerable space. The episode involving the hearing before Fredebert and his canons is discussed in more detail in chapter three.

equivalency of the virgin-martyr's secret Christianity. Perhaps the detailed presentation of Fredebert's sermon in favour of marriage is a safeguard against possible charges that Anonymous is preaching against marriage, inciting to disobedience. Yet it really is the prior, private vow that is troublesome, precisely because it is private and personal, the expression of an individual conversion – not something to be encouraged in a society where families still determined the careers of their children, especially female children. As such it is an apt narrative equivalent to the secret Christianity of the early virgin-martyrs.

If we imagine the two stories: the “typical” virgin-martyr story, and Christina's early life, as running parallel, we get a sense of how Anonymous imagined his subject. Like the virgin-martyr, Christina is one of the nobility; moreover, she is both beautiful and prudent. One of the responses in the Office for St. Catherine, begins, “Nobilis et pulchra prudenta katerina puella.” The virgin-martyr is seen by a pagan ruler (or sometimes his son, or another high-ranking official) and because she is *seen*, this powerful male character becomes lustful and desires either to marry the future saint or at least have her as a mistress. For example, the sight of Agatha fills the consul with lust: “as a result of seeing the beautiful girl with his eyes he was moved to lust” [“ad aspectum uirginis pulcherrime oculorum suorum concupiscenciam commouebat”] (*Breviary*, fol 214). In Christina's case, Ranulf Flambard takes this initial role. He is a high-ranking but worldly (as a narrative equivalent to pagan) clerical official, and it is through his contemplation of her beauty that the Devil attacks: “The bishop gazed intently at [Autti's] beautiful daughter, and immediately Satan put it into his heart to desire her” [“episcopus elegantem puellam intencius consideraret. continuo misit in cor eius inceptor

libidinis Satanas ut eam male concupisceret”] (*Life* ch. 5). The virgin of course, in each case rejects her suitor. In the virgin-martyr tale, the idea of marriage is quickly sidelined when it is discovered that all along, this beautiful and desirable girl has secretly been an outlaw, a Christian. Sometimes the saint designates herself as a “bride of Christ,” causing confusion among the pagans. For Christina’s story, the original attempted seduction by Flambard, although credited by the author as the beginning of Christina’s family troubles, is also set aside as the real issue comes forward: her refusal to marry Burthred according to custom because of a secret prior vow of virginity. As mentioned above, the vow becomes the narrative equivalent of the pagan virgin’s conversion to Christianity. Moreover the two characters Flambard and Burthred are collapsed into one in narrative terms, Flambard’s original lust giving way to a judicial issue: whether Christina is legally capable of making and maintaining a vow contrary to her family’s will.<sup>118</sup>

In the saint’s story, flattery and promises give way to torture and incarceration in an attempt to break the virgin’s will. Attempts are made to change Christina’s will as well. Her parents also begin with gifts and flattery, even bringing in one of Christina’s close childhood friends, Helisen, to try to convince her to marry. When these stratagems fail, they, like the pagan judge in the earlier story, resort to physical and mental punishments, under the misapprehension that these will bring her will into line with theirs. Christina is kept under house arrest for a year, and prevented from visiting her mentor Sueno or even attending her usual place of worship.

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<sup>118</sup> Burthred is distinguished from the pagan lover by being capable of reform, as he later demonstrates.

In the saint's story, the virgin is finally brought from her dungeon to be tried. Another attempt is made to persuade her to sacrifice to idols. This trial is sometimes quite extended. In St. Catherine's case, for example, she debates with fifty pagan philosophers and succeeds in defeating their arguments, although this does not preserve her from further torment (*Breviary*, fol. 389). Miracles and visions often attend the virgin's resolution. Frequently pagans are converted to Christianity, resulting in their summary execution. In the biography, Christina is brought before Fredebert, prior of the canons of St. Mary's, Huntingdon, in the hope that he will be able to change her mind. The author's placement of this episode after his description of the persuasive techniques used by Christina's family, and her virtual house arrest, seems to me another indication of deliberate analogy with the virgin-martyr form. Fredebert's position is Christian, and he ultimately comes to sympathize with Christina. At the beginning, however, he attempts on the family's behalf, to convince Christina to accept her marriage. The arguments he uses to persuade her are ultimately deflected by Christina's answers, which insist on the validity of her status as a bride of Christ, a status that virgin-martyrs often claim. St. Catherine, for example, says, "Christ chose me as his spouse. To Christ I joined myself as spouse with an inseparable covenant" ["Christus me sibi sponsam adoptavit. ego me christo sponsam indissociabili federe coaptaui"] (fol. 390). In a final effort to regain control of the situation, the pagan judge in the saint's story condemns the virgin to death, a scene sometimes attended by miracles, and her soul flies to God, often being seen in the form of a dove ascending (for example, in the case of Margaret of Antioch, *Breviary*, fol. 298). In Christina's case, Bishop Bloet is given the role parallel to that of the pagan judge. At first he judges in her favour, but the final judgement, in analogy with the

saint's story, goes against Christina: she is to marry Burthred, which would be, as mentioned earlier, the narrative equivalent of both sacrificing to idols and of death, since it would, Christina believes, mean her damnation. It is after this judgement that the physical abuse of Christina escalates, and during this distressing time, Christina receives a comforting vision.<sup>119</sup> When Sueno reports this vision to Fredebert, who has been somewhat sympathetic before, the prior converts completely to Christina's side, saying to Autti, "Take my advice and do not resist the judgement of God. Do not cause Christina any more pain, but respect her as the spouse of Christ" ["Audi consilium meum. et ne relucteris contra divinum iudicium. Noli Christinam amplius angere. sed tanquam sponsam Christi venerare"] (*Life*, ch. 26). The advice is rejected.

The execution faced by the saint is, in Christina's case, transmuted into flight to Alfwen's cell, where she dies to the world, and begins a life entirely devoted to God, an event symbolized when she exchanges worldly attire for the religious habit. "She who had been accustomed to wearing silk dresses and luxurious furs in her father's house was now covered with a rough garment" ["[asperam indueba]tur tunicam que sericis ves[timentis et] delicatis variarum pelliciarum [delic]iis in patris domo consu[everat u]ti"]. The room in which she hides is dark and "hardly large enough . . . to house her" ["illi pre angustia sufficientem detrusa"], a tomb-like space (ch. 34). This metaphor of death continues when Christina is later hidden in a tiny cell at Roger's hermitage. It is a

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<sup>119</sup> The extreme violence in the *Life* has been dealt with on different levels by Jocelyn Wogan-Browne and Robert Stanton. Wogan-Browne, talking of later vernacular virgin-martyr stories, finds that the historical portrait of family response to rejection of parental authority described in the *Life* demonstrates that the audience for the later saints' lives would not have found the violence in these stories too far-fetched. Stanton sees the *Life* as a commentary on the political reality of the time. The violence used by Christina's family in response to her rebellion reflects "the larger social violence necessary to uphold the aristocracy in twelfth-century England" (243).

vision of Christ, who gives her a golden cross, which signals her liberation from this tomb, and the relinquishing by Burthred of all worldly claims on her. She is finally free of the world. As the virgin-martyr was content (so far as we know) to ascend to her heavenly bridegroom, there to intercede on behalf of those left behind, so Christina, now free to assume a heavenly life, still has much to accomplish.

Form thus holds particular meaning in the case of Christina's *Life*. The parallels discussed above between her story and those of the virgin-martyrs are striking. It is my belief that long meditation on the early events of her life coupled with the monastic discipline of meditation on saints lives, especially the virgin-martyr stories, led Anonymous to cast the first part of her biography in this hagiographic form. To make this assertion, of course, is to say that the author knew of his subject long before he began to write. Abbot Geoffrey first came to know Christina around 1124. It is possible, and I think likely, that Anonymous was already a monk at St. Albans at this time. Christina was not consecrated as a nun until around 1131, so that Anonymous had several years to meditate on what had happened in Christina's life, add to his information, and begin to make connections between Christina's early life and the virgin martyrs' stories with which he was so familiar.

The first part of Christina's biography is thus quite different from the second part, which is much more episodic. The episodic nature of the second half may be an indication that this material had not had the long meditation that the first half had. This is perhaps borne out in the remarks made in the second half that refer to Christina as still alive. The events related here are closer in time to the author and his subject, are perhaps being noted down in some cases very shortly after their occurrence. If this were the case,

when Anonymous was ordered to stop writing, he may only have had his notes and some finished sections for the second part, whereas the first part had already received considerable polishing. It is my view that in the second part of Christina's story, Anonymous intended to develop the spiritual friendship between Christina and Abbot Geoffrey, as an *exemplum* of an ideal reaching back to apostolic and even Gospel times.

I return to this idea in my conclusion. Next, however, I would like to consider some specific examples of the skill Anonymous shows with regard to rhetoric.

#### Anonymous' Use of Rhetoric in the Life

We have seen how in writing the *Life*, Anonymous used scriptural intertextuality and form to create meaning. Intertextuality conferred authority on the narrative, and form, as well as having the effect of inclining the mind to receive the author's message, actually provided meaning by bringing to mind the examples of the virgin-martyrs. However, he had other tools at hand to ensure that the moral teaching of his story would be clear. Both in his use of language and his methods of amplification, Anonymous shows skill in the use of rhetorical convention.<sup>120</sup> In the following pages, I will discuss these conventions as they apply to the author's use of language. The next chapter deals with his methods of amplification.

While it is true that some of the language in the *Life* reads as unpolished, in the following examples, I suggest, we see proof that this was more likely due to lack of

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<sup>120</sup> For the information on rhetoric in the following pages, unless otherwise noted, I am indebted to R.A.Browne's introduction to his anthology, *British Latin*, pp. l-lxi.

revision than to lack of rhetorical skill.<sup>121</sup> In considering the author's use of language in the *Life*, it is necessary to recall that in the normal way of things, Anonymous would have expected his biography to be read aloud, and I believe that there is much in the style of the biography which supports this belief. It is not possible to be sure of the specific setting he envisioned. Perhaps, as Talbot has suggested, it was intended from the first for the inhabitants of Markyate (3-4), and perhaps the writer was envisioning a time after Christina's death, when the nuns would appreciate an account of their first prioress. And indeed, this may have been the book's fate, for it was held at Markyate at least from the thirteenth century.<sup>122</sup> In any case, whether Anonymous thought his book would be further copied or not, it is clear that he was a monk writing for a monastic audience, whether male or female. So, in our overview of the author's use of language we should always give special attention to the sound of the words as they are read aloud.

Medieval prose was made up of sentences ("periods") of short and long clauses ("commata" and "cola" respectively; singular: "comma," "colon"). Increasingly in the twelfth century, a sentence was followed by a "punctus" (our period) and the next sentence begun with a capital letter (Parkes, *Pause and Effect* 42). Punctuation was a guide to the reader about suitable places to pause and where to signify the conclusion of a sentence with a full stop.<sup>123</sup> Punctuation followed the author's sentence structure,

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<sup>121</sup>While some of the roughness of style may be due to a copyist's deletions, I believe my main argument here is supported when we examine what we have in the Cotton Tiberius MS, as the rhetorical examples given in the following pages demonstrate.

<sup>122</sup> See discussion in the Introduction concerning the dating of the text.

<sup>123</sup> For more detail on medieval punctuation, see Marjorie Chibnall's introduction to *The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis*, I, pp. 109-110, and R.W. Southern's introduction to Eadmer's *Life of St. Anselm*, pp. xxv-xxxiv. The historical development of punctuation is traced by M.B. Parkes in *Pause and Effect: an Introduction to the History of Punctuation in the West*.

clarifying the grammatical divisions, and the effect of many rhetorical techniques depends upon sentence division. In the case of the Cotton Tiberius manuscript, it is probable that the punctuation has been revised to fourteenth-century standards by the copier.<sup>124</sup> That the colon (:), for example, would have appeared in the twelfth-century original is unlikely (Parkes, *Pause and Effect* 48-49, 304). The adjustment of punctuation to current standards was normal. However, whatever symbols were used, the punctuation would have followed the prose itself, and it is not likely that a change in punctuation would result in significant changes in the text.

In his introduction, Browne alludes to three general categories of stylistic effect that proved useful to medieval Latin writers: symmetry of structure, antithesis, and play on words (including figures of sound, such as alliteration, assonance and consonance). As he notes, however, these effects are most often used in combination (li). Keeping that proviso in mind it may be best to proceed briefly with examples from the *Life* of each device in order.

Structural symmetry, that is, the use of parallel clauses “has the advantage of being natural, tidy and easily comprehensible” (Browne lii). Moreover, as Latin is inflexional, rhyme is often an element of this form of expression. Consider the following two examples:

Hoc illa cum magno tedio audivit. et cum indignacione subintulit.

(ch. 3)

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<sup>124</sup>In Talbot’s edition, “the spelling and punctuation of the manuscript have been preserved” (viii).

Attemptatur regis clemencia nec ostenditur. ecclesiastica proponitur censura. Sed  
contempnitur.

(ch. 73)

Note in the first case the balance of the two parts of the sentence and how the medial stop serves to emphasize both the symmetry of the sentence and the inflexional rhyme at the end of each colon.<sup>125</sup> In the second example, the brief phrase “se contempnitur” both sums up the king’s intransigence and, being followed by a punctus, draws attention to the rhyme with “ostenditur.” Its brevity and finality of expression may be seen as a fitting lead-in to the author’s weary, “Quid plura?” which follows. As Browne notes, “the occurrence of inflexional rhymes at the colon-endings is not *in itself* a sign of the deliberate use of the figures of sound” (lii). However, in conjunction with symmetry, it suggests a knowing use of rhyme. Rhyming, rhythmic prose was often used by monastic writers. Orderic Vitalis used it extensively (Chibnall I, 107-109; II, xix-xx). Chibnall cites the following example from Book 2 of *The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis*.

Omnes enim isti fratres fuerunt strenui et dapsiles, in militia callidi et agiles.  
hostibus terribiles, sociisque blandi et affabiles. Diuersis eurentibus creuerunt. et  
nichilominus ut se habet humana conditio deciderunt. (24)

Anonymous does not use rhyme throughout; it may be that he uses it only as occasional ornament, to emphasize or enhance meaning. Whether he would have added more rhyming prose in further revision is an open question.

The effect of sentence division is even more marked in the next example, where

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<sup>125</sup> A medial stop (looking like our period) marked the end of each colon. Only if followed by a capital letter did the punctus signify the end of the sentence.

short clauses are listed symmetrically.

Denique vir ille famulam Christi postea frequentare. exhortaciones audire. monita  
suscipere. de incertis consulere. prohibita refugere. increaciones sustinere.

(ch. 57)

Again, there is rhyme at colon endings, especially after “audire,” although it is the consonance of the “re” at colon endings that is the consistent effect.<sup>126</sup> In the following example, symmetry and rhyme are used, but the object of both clauses is deferred to the end of the sentence. The medial stop after “exprimebat” would be a clue to the reader of the importance of “extollebat,” the end-rhyme emphasizing this. The deferment of “virginity” has the effect of giving it importance in the articulation of the sentence, corresponding to its significance in meaning.

Modo difficultatem exprimebat. modo gloriam extollebat virginitatis.

(ch.3)

Finally, the next excerpt shows a more complex symmetry in the first two cola, using internal rhyme as well as antithesis.

Et quoniam *in agendis* seculi admodum *erat industrius*. nec *in regendis* animabus  
*minus sollicitus*. multa sibi sepius ex hiis ingruebant que quietem quam  
summopere querebat turbare videbantur.

(ch.57)

The worldly activity of the abbot is contrasted with his work in saving souls, and this meaning is reinforced by the symmetry of the sentence and the rhymes marked.

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<sup>126</sup> Although Talbot’s translation retains the phrasing, it necessarily ignores the rhymes, which are less available in English.

In the next example, antithesis balances opposite sentiments in close proximity in the sentence so that the contrast may be clearly appreciated.

Nam et *ipsa derelinquens seculum* sese penitus dedit sponsam Christo domino,  
non fraudando a desiderio suo. et *illi postmodum a seculo derelicti*

(ch.20)

Here the author uses the device of *polyptoton*, “the repetition in close proximity of words that have the same roots” (Holman 345). The repetition of forms of “derelinquo seculum” serves to underline the antithesis. Antithesis is an effect that is “closely linked with symmetry of structure” (Browne lii) as we have seen above and as the following example shows. The author here emphasizes the antithesis by the repetition of “your” in his address to God (“virgo tua,” “abbas tuus”).

Abhinc enim virgo tua per abbatem *<ab> exteriorum attenuacione*: abbas iam  
tuus per virginem *ab interiorum aggravacione* levatur.

(ch. 57)

The antithetical clauses in this case are quite even in length. We note the opposition of “exteriorum attenuacione” with “interiorum aggravacione,” where contrasting meaning is emphasized by rhyme. The verb, “levatur” governs both clauses and is deferred to the end of the sentence. In the following instance, repetition of a key phrase, along with symmetry and internal rhyme helps to emphasize the antithesis.

Essetque sicut *Christi bonus odor* bonis in vitam. ita *Christi bonus odor* malis in  
mortem.

(ch. 76)

In this final example of antithesis, it is the unevenness of the clauses that gives emphasis

to the meaning. The unadorned simplicity of the final colon is most effective.

Sed dico quia multe virgines <pereunt> sicut vos dictis et verum est: utique multo  
magis pereunt coniugate

(ch. 16)

Although Anonymous makes use of wordplay, most instances are in conjunction with symmetry and involve the repetition of sounds (syllables and single letters) mainly at the ends of words, but sometimes at the beginnings and within words. We have already noted some instances of polyptoton. Consider the alliteration in the following example:

*de preteritis vir prudens presencia confirmans*

(ch.63)

and the combination of alliteration with polyptoton in these instances:

*Pro pudor. impudicus episcopus*

(ch.5)

*difficultatem servande. gloriam servate*

(ch.3)

Browne notes that generally in prose, these “figures of sound . . . are most effective when they are used to reinforce the figures of sense” (lii), as the examples above demonstrate. Often several devices are worked in together. (The following example expands on a phrase cited above.)

*Modo difficultatem exprimebat. modo gloriam extollebat virginitatis. difficultatem servande. gloriam servate.*

(ch. 3)

Here, in addition to repetitions of sound and rhyme, “gloriam” is repeated in connection with both virginity and one’s ability to preserve it. The forms of *servare* point to the antithesis “difficultatem/gloriam.” In the following two examples, polyptoton is used to enhance the intensity of the statements.

Iam siquidem *iniustum* adimens questum. *iuste* possessa *iustis* expendebat  
donariis

(ch.65)

Quocirca res quedam *mirabilis*. et *mirabilibus mirabilior* accidit.

(ch. 42)

Again, it is impossible to know how thoroughgoing Anonymous would have been with these figures, given more time for revision.

The foregoing discussion is not meant to be an exhaustive stylistic study of the *Life*, but by highlighting some of the techniques used by Anonymous, I hope to demonstrate further that the book is not entirely unrevised and also to give some particular sense of the author’s stylistic predilections. Anonymous demonstrates considerable skill in the use of sound to keep the interest of his audience and to reinforce sense with memorable diction and rhythm. In different circumstances, his ability shows that he might have been a writer of note, and of course it is to be hoped that Fortune may yet choose to reveal more of his work.

### Rhetoric in the Service of Truth-Value

Nancy Partner has characterized the *Life* as an “antemortem biography with hagiographic aspirations” (867). As discussed previously, an individual hagiographic

work partook of a tradition in which God's immanence was manifest through his saints. The truth of the saint's life existed in its ability to edify: to build up the reader through instruction and example, an ability that was enhanced by the repetition of patterns and topoi, since by repetition, God's power is replicated as grace in the community. The truth of the story is established by its replication of grace. Moreover, it is only by recognizable patterns that the individual is marked out as holy and thus worthy of reverence as a locus of God's presence. As a hagiographical work, therefore, the *Life's* claim to truth, in this sense of ideological conformity, was not a minor consideration, and was made more complicated by the fact that it was being written of a contemporary. As important as the story's participation in hagiographic tradition was, however, in many ways the acceptance of a work's authenticity depended to some extent on the author's relationship with his audience. That relationship grew out of the writer's knowledge of his audience's expectations and his ability to satisfy those expectations.

Anonymous works to establish his book as legitimate *historia* in several ways. As we have seen, scriptural and hagiographical intertextuality provided authoritative parallels and commentary for Christina's experiences. Further, the form of the first part of the story provided a well-known structure, one that came already with associations to sacred stories, none of which would be lost on a monastic audience. The spiritual truth of Christina's biography is thus firmly established. But the author seeks a closer association with his reader/auditor. Partly he forges this link by insinuating himself as a character. We are aware from very early on of the presence of this author. Speaking of the events surrounding the birth of Christina, he describes an incident which Christina's mother, Beatrix, considered to be a sign of God. A dove, "whiter than snow," flies to the open

window where Beatrix sits and stays with her. Anonymous continues, “Furthermore, as she told me herself, the dove stayed quietly with her for seven whole days” [“Porro columba cum pregnante muliere sicut ipsa michi retulit. septem continuos dies in mansuetudine egit”] (ch.1). He thus inserts himself into the narrative from the outset, and throughout the story similarly makes his presence felt, although he is never obtrusive, never upstages the main characters of his story. Indeed, it may come as a surprise that there are nearly forty interjections by the author throughout the story. Sometimes he simply addresses the reader, calling attention to the qualities of his subject or asking a rhetorical question. For example, he emphasizes Christina’s prudence and fortitude (“prudencia” and “fortitudo”), praising what he sees, in a typical monastic way, as primary monastic virtues. “Hear then, how prudently she acted” [“Audi ergo quam prudenter egit”], he says, as he is about to describe her clever deception of Flambard (ch. 6). Then later, recounting the suffering she experienced while waiting for an opportunity of escape, he notes, “in this one can see how great was her prudence and fortitude” [“in quo libet intueri quanta fuerit in virgine prudencia sive fortitudo”] (ch. 27). The cumulative effect of these interjections is to create the author as a character who speaks directly to the reader, and even more effectively, to the auditor.

Questions, even if rhetorical, would have the effect of stimulating some response in the mind of the reader/auditor, thus creating a bond with the author. There are many examples of these. “What, I ask you, were her feelings at that moment?” [“[Quid] queso. quid animi tunc illi fuisse putes?”] (ch. 11) “What think you then was the brightness of her countenance which outshone all the rest?” [“Quantum igitur credas extitit ipsius facies clara que longe choruscabat super isata omnia?”] (ch. 42) “Would you like to know

how manfully she behaved in so imminent a danger?" ["Vis scire quam viriliter ipsa se continuerit in tam grandi periculo?"] (ch. 44) In these we see that he combines a direct address to the reader with the question, a strategy which would have been most effective when the story was read aloud. In other cases the question is indirect, but still calls on a response at least in the reader's mind. "What were they to do?" ["Illi quid facerent?"] (ch. 43) or "What was he to do?" ["Quid ageret?"], followed by explanations of alternative courses of action, are of this sort. At one point the author apostrophizes the Devil: "But amidst all this, o Satan, were your darts blunted?" ["Sed numquid inter hec tua Zabule tela iacula contunduntur?"] (ch. 76), and at another, we hear him speculating on the miraculous disappearance of the Pilgrim from Markyate: "Who else could we say he was, except an angel or the Lord Jesus?" ["Quem illum nisi Dominum Ihesum aut eius decemus angelum?"] (ch. 81). These questions, then, have the effect of engaging the reader in the narrative. The relationship carefully developed between the writer and the audience encouraged trust and a willingness to accept, along with spiritual truth, the more mundane facts which made up the story.

Throughout, the author is keen to emphasize the authenticity of his story by associating himself with the main characters. As mentioned above, he specifically says that Beatrix told him the story of the dove (ch. 1). Later he claims to have seen Helisen consecrated as a nun in an attempt to atone for her part in Christina's tribulations (ch. 7). He at one point speaks of overhearing something Christina says (ch. 31), at another, that she told him something directly (ch. 40). He even speaks of being at dinner in her company (ch. 83). He writes with great authority for example, about the trait of stubbornness in Christina's family and how it influences their motives. In a familiar,

conversational way, he gives us his opinion:

How astonishing is man's shamelessness, to despise the power of God and to rebel against it! But there were two reasons for this, which it may be worth while to give here. For when they are understood, there can be no hesitation in believing that parents can behave in this way against their own flesh and blood.

One reason, therefore, was this family's characteristic of pursuing to the bitter end anything it had begun, whether it was good or bad, except where success was impossible. . . . Another reason was [here the author describes the qualities that make Christina precious to her family]. So keen were they on these advantages that they begrudged her a life of virginity.

[O miranda impudencia hominum qui potest[atem Dei contemnent] insurgere potuerunt in idipsum. Et due quidem maxime extiterunt huius rei causae quas his libet et non ab re forsitan interserere. Quia dum quis eas cognoverit, parentes adversus sanguinem suum tales esse posse non dubitabit.

Igitur una causarum fuit quod haec parentela pro natura habuit nondesistere ceptis seu bona fuissent seu mala donec consummavit ipsa . . . . Altera fuit causa hec . . . .

[here the author describes the qualities that make Christina precious to her family] (ch. 20). Et hos fructus intendentes vitam ei celibem inviderunt.] (ch. 20).

Although, as we have seen, he names many well-known people who come into Christina's life in one way or another, on two occasions he says that he has been told to suppress a name. In one case a monk, perhaps out of humility, wished to be nameless. The other case was the unchaste priest, described above, whose name was likely suppressed out of charity, since he had, after all, repented. The effect of telling us that he

is suppressing names is, of course, that we believe that he could name names if he were allowed to do so. The truth-value of his statements is thus enhanced by his personal connections with the people about whom he writes.

These authorial interjections are part of an overall strategy for drawing his audience in, providing circumstantial, local information, while associating himself with named characters, thus enhancing the perceived truth of his story. The need for such enhancement is directly related to the “antemortem” nature of the work, remarked on by Partner. Both Geoffrey and Christina are still alive as Anonymous is composing the biography, and the author must contend, moreover, with rumours of scandal that circle around the friendship of his main protagonists. Establishing the holiness of Christina and the spiritual nature of her friendship with Geoffrey depends a great deal on facing rumour down and replacing it with irrefutable evidence of her saintliness. The rhetorical pose he chooses - in the background, but definitely present as a character – is thus meant to gain the audience’s belief in the credibility of his story.

In this chapter, I have tried to develop a monastic milieu for the writer Anonymous, using the experiences of contemporary writers to explain various aspects of twelfth-century authorship. Evidence of the text seems to indicate that Anonymous had, because of Geoffrey’s support, considerable freedom to pursue his project, although, as we have seen, the author’s role was not easily assumed, nor could it be taken for granted. Support from one’s superior could be easily revoked by his successor. This seems to have been the situation for Anonymous. His case was without doubt exacerbated by the threat of scandal, which hovered insistently over the spiritual friendship between Abbot Geoffrey and Christina. We have also explored how the monastic life and attendant

liturgical forms contributed to the author's narrative strategy. Finally, we have outlined some of the author's rhetorical techniques. In the next chapter, we will explore the author's use of *amplificatio*, specifically his use of dramatic writing and of the visionary experiences of his subject.

## CHAPTER 3: AUTHORIAL STRATEGIES II: *AMPLIFICATIO*

### A. DRAMATIC WRITING

In composing his biography of Christina's life, Anonymous not only selected and ordered the events according to moral purposes – those of hagiography – but also picked out particular episodes for amplification in its rhetorical sense. These episodes are selected from both events in his subject's life and descriptions of her visionary experiences. The amplified incidents serve the author's narrative purposes, especially to explain or emphasize the moral significance of events, and to reveal character. Specifically, in keeping with hagiographical purposes, they demonstrate Christina's holiness as well as her fortitude and resourcefulness. This chapter is concerned with the use Anonymous makes of *amplificatio*, and particularly with his use of dramatic writing and his depiction of visionary experience.

Anonymous makes effective use of dramatic writing. There was in the twelfth century a growing audience for this kind of writing. We may recall how Geoffrey Gorham, while still a secular scholar, produced a miracle play of St. Katherine using ecclesiastical costume borrowed from St. Albans Abbey.<sup>127</sup> According to David Farmer, Geoffrey's production (c. 1110) is "the earliest recorded example [in England] of a miracle play" (*Saints* 77).<sup>128</sup> The theatrical sense, however, was already well-established in churches. As Joseph Jungmann has shown in his study of the Roman mass in this

<sup>127</sup> When Geoffrey's house burned down, destroying the borrowed vestments, Geoffrey offered himself as a monk at the Abbey (*Gesta Abbatum* 73).

<sup>128</sup> The implications of Geoffrey's choice of St. Katherine were discussed many years ago by Catherine B.C. Thomas in "The Miracle Play at Dunstable," an article which deserves reassessment in light of more recent research. Her view, arrived at before Talbot's edition of Christina's *Life* was published, that Geoffrey was making a bid for royal favour, is certainly supported by the biography's portrayal of Geoffrey's ambition prior to his conversion by Christina.

period, “the mass is looked upon as a holy drama, a play performed before the eyes of the participants” (I: 107), entailing action, costume and dialogue.<sup>129</sup> Hardison concurs: “Just as the Mass is a sacred drama encompassing all history and embodying in its structure the central pattern of Christian life on which all Christian drama must draw, the celebration of the Mass contains all elements necessary to secular performances” (79), that is, costume, props and dialogue. Dialogue in particular was doubtless suggested by the liturgy, which uses a form of dramatic dialogue in its responses and antiphons. Liturgical plays began as amplifications of particular segments of the mass (Hardison 178) which suggested to artists the possibility of independent dramatic representation of Biblical stories (226).<sup>130</sup> Spectacle was particularly dominant in the drama of the mass. The vestments with their symbolism, the utensils and crosses all lent themselves to dramatic effect. Moreover, on certain feast days, processions in splendid vestments added to the grandeur of the service. To layfolk, for whom such display would be a welcome form of entertainment, the mass and associated processions were indeed theatre, albeit pious theatre. A major abbey such as St. Albans would provide regular episodes of pageantry for the monastics and for visiting layfolk. Like other abbeys, the feast of its particular saint, the protomartyr of England, would be an especially grand occasion indeed. As mentioned earlier, Abbot Geoffrey had many precious copes made, which would have

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<sup>129</sup> The scholarship on the dramatic aspects of the liturgy and its influence on later forms of drama is substantial. Useful works include O.B. Hardison, *Christian Rite and Christian Drama in the Middle Ages*; Alexandra F. Johnston, “What if No Texts Survived? External Evidence for Early English Drama”; Lynette R. Muir, *Biblical Drama of the Middle Ages*; Dunbar H. Ogden, *The Staging of Drama in the Medieval Church*, and Karl Young, *Drama of the Medieval Church*. Rachel Bullington has done specific work on how the *Chanson d’Alexis* may have been used liturgically at St. Albans in her *The Alexis in the St. Albans Psalter*.

<sup>130</sup> The *miraculum*, or saint’s play, on the other hand, more likely developed independently of the Office, from the *vita* itself (Young II, 310).

been used for particularly high feast days (*Gesta Abbatum* 73, 93). We also read in the *Life* of processions at Markyate priory, in which all took part, even visiting pilgrims (ch. 81). As the *Life* shows, however, lay people visited the shrine on other, more personal, missions, as did Beatrix and Autti, who took Christina there on her birthday (ch. 4).

It would be natural then, for an author of this period to use dramatic writing when writing a biography, with action and dialogue complementing one another, each predominating from time to time. A dramatic episode depending mainly on action has been analyzed by Nancy Partner in her article, "Medieval Histories and Modern Realism: Yet Another Origin of the Novel." After being dissuaded from assaulting Christina by her recitation of the story of St. Cecilia on his first visit to her room, Burthred is encouraged to try again, with friends at hand to help should it be necessary. When Burthred enters the bedroom, however, Christina is aware of him and hides by hanging from a spike behind a tapestry until the intruders give up and leave. Partner notes the author's need to confirm Christina's sincerity with regard to her vow, since her betrothal, although enforced by her family has, of course, put her firmness of purpose under scrutiny. She points to the description of the room, the actions of the intruders and the author's portrayal of Christina's fearful thoughts as the means by which the plausibility of the story is enhanced (867-868). The incident could have been told very concisely, with Christina's escape noted and credited to God. Its amplification, however, lends it more truth-value and moreover emphasizes Christina's power in prayer, for it is her prayer that immediately results in her seekers' confusion.

One of the most dramatic episodes in the story is that describing the morning of Christina's escape to Flamstead. The scene is prepared in advance. Having scouted

various locations for Christina's concealment, Eadwin sends his servant, Loric, who is finally, by means of bribery, allowed a meeting with Christina. A day and time for the escape are fixed, a secret signal for quick identification is agreed upon and Loric leaves to organize horses for the flight. On the arranged day, we read of anticipation and near discovery on two occasions before Loric arrives. Although this episode is primarily action-based, dialogue is used to effect, for example, when the reeve intercepts Christina.

And with her eyes fixed all the time on the meadow beyond the river, fearing the return of her parents at any minute, she went out again to the church of Blessed Mary. On her way she met the reeve of the town accompanied by some citizens. And he took her by the mantle and entreated her to tell him whether she intended to run away. And she smiled and said: 'Yes.' 'When?' said he. 'Today,' she replied. So when he let her go, she entered the church.

[Et iugiter habens oculos ultra amnem frustra. iamiamque parentum formidans reditum. iterum perrexit ad prefatum beatissime Marie templum. Cui venit obviam in itinere prepositus civitatis non[nullis] comitantibus civibus. Ettenens eam per pallium: adiuravit ut sibi diceret an fugere voluisset. Surrisit et ait. volo. Et ille quando inquit? Respondit. hodie. Sicque dimissa: ingreditur in templum.]

(ch. 32)

At this point Christina, it seems, does not look like a runaway. She makes a joke of the possibility when the reeve questions her. When he lets her go she enters the Church, putting a final stop to any suspicion on the reeve's part.

Later Matilda, curious about her sister's sudden departure from the house, follows her. Christina has by this time dressed herself in male clothing under a long cloak, both

as a disguise for the trip and to make a rapid departure easier.

Christina, noticing this, pretended that she was going to the church of Our Blessed Lady. But, as she walked, one of the sleeves of the man's garment which she was hiding beneath her cloak slipped to the ground whether through carelessness or by design I do not know. And when Matilda saw it, she said, "What is this, Theodora, that you are trailing on the ground?" But she replied with an innocent look: "Sister dear, take it with you when you go back to the house for it is getting in my way." And she handed over to her a veil and her father's keys, adding: "And these too, sweetheart, so that if our father returns in the meantime and wishes to take something from the chest, he will not get angry because the keys are missing." And when she had allayed Matilda's suspicions with these words, she sallied forth as if she were going towards the monastery, and then turned her steps towards the meadow.

[Animadvertens hoc [Christi]na: finxit se velle templum beate Ma[rie] semper virginis adire. Et dum iret [ecce una] de manicis fustanii quod oc[cul]te sub cappa gerebat cecidit in terram [sive] incuria gestantis sive industria nes[cio]. Qua visa Matildis: ait. Quid est [hoc] Theodora unde verris terram? At il[la] blande dixit ad eam. Cara michi [so]ror accipe. refrediensque deferto do[mum] quoniam impedit me. Et baiulavit illi bombicinum clavesque patris: dicens. Et has pariter dulcis michi anima. ne si pater noster interim venerit. et in qualibet [ar]charum suarum videre quippiam affecta[ve]rit non inveniens claves ad man[um] moleste ferat. Istis Matildi persua[sis] paululum processit et quasi vellet ire monasterium et mox ad pratum vertit gradum.] (ch. 33)

Again Christina uses the ruse of pretending that she is only on her way to Church. Although in the reeve's case, she really did have an errand there, in Matilda's case it is only a cover for her real intentions. The author's apparent uncertainty about whether the sleeve is dropped on purpose ("incuria gestantis sive industria nes[cio]") creates space for speculation on the part of the reader. Is Christina really trying to trick Matilda, or is she simply recovering well from a careless move? Similarly, is Christina tempting Matilda, offering her the keys, symbols, as noted previously, of an important position in the family? Even if Matilda does continue to suspect that Christina is trying to escape, might she not see herself as benefitting from her sister's flight? Moreover, Christina's speech is loaded with verbal carresses for Matilda, whose suspicions seem to be overcome by Christina's persuasive words and actions. As in her encounter with the reeve, evasive tactics, both verbal and physical, are used to allay suspicion. The description of these tactics, besides contributing to realism in the narrative, contribute to our understanding of the character of Christina. They also add to the story's liveliness, and even provide a touch of humour, as Christina outwits the sherrif and her sister.

Finally she arrives in the meadow, where Loric waits with the horses. At that moment, when she must mount and flee, the author tells us, "she paused, covered with embarrassment" ["rubore perfusa substi<it>"]. "Why delay, fugitive?" he interjects, giving lively voice to her thoughts. "Why do you respect your feminine sex? Put on manly courage and mount the horse like a man" ["Quid fugitiva m[ora]ris?" "Quid sexum feminei veneris? [Vi]rilem animum indue. et more viri [in] equum ascende"]. At this, continues the author, "she put aside her fears and, jumping on the horse as if she were a youth and setting spurs to his flanks, she said to the servant: 'Follow me at a distance: for

I fear that if you ride with me and we are caught, *you will die*” [“ab[iecta pusil]lanimitate: viriliter super equum [saliens] atque calcaribus eius latera [pungens] famulo dixit. Sequere me a [tergo. timeo] ne si mecum equitaveris: de[prehensis] nobis tu moriaris”] (ch. 34). Using the word “viriliter” [“manfully”] of Christina’s action of mounting points both to the potential embarrassment of her situation should she be discovered dressed as a man, and to her courage in overcoming what would seem to the monk and his audience the normal fearfulness of women.<sup>131</sup> The resourcefulness of her male disguise and her active control of the situation are in keeping with the character of Christina we have seen to this point, but greatly out of keeping with the more usual passivity ascribed to heroines of romance. Loric, the one male available to her in this scene as a rescuer, is firmly kept in his servant’s role and told to make a run for it if they are intercepted. There are to be no human male heroics on her behalf. She is shown taking responsibility for her escape, and Anonymous here describes her physical and spiritual courage in terms usually associated with male virtue, but which are also associated with the courageous actions of female saints of the early Church. All of this episode, from the secret meeting through to the dramatic escape on horseback with the attendant fear of pursuit only really moves the story forward to the extent that she secretly escapes to Flamstead while her parents are away from home. As Anonymous tells it, however, it is a brilliantly realized tale of escape, and a very satisfying climax to

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<sup>131</sup> Anonymous himself early in the *Life* includes Christina among fearful women: “Christina considerabat eorum clandestina conventicula. et nescio quid suspicata: sicut est feminea consuetudo metuebat omnia” (ch. 21). He also later describes in a rather comic fashion the after all natural fearful reaction of women who are confronted with a headless demon but shows Christina overcoming both her own fear and its source (ch.78). Describing her trials with the unchaste cleric, the author is at pains to suggest how much more like a man Christina is than a woman (ch. 43-44). This may be, in part, an effort to counterbalance the rather disruptive descriptions of her very feminine biological urges.

the long family drama which has unfolded to this point. Moreover, it is grounded in the everyday setting of the community: Christina's house, her aunt's house, the church, the streets of Huntingdon and the nearby river and meadow. Like the bedroom scene analyzed by Nancy Partner, the escape episode uses a realistic setting, brought to life with unusual circumstances with an emphasis on action and, in this case, the effective use of dialogue, as well as interior monologue. The author's strategy, using dramatic writing to amplify the fact of Christina's escape, allows him to emphasize Christina's courage and resourcefulness.<sup>132</sup>

While dramatic episodes involving action ground the narrative in human activity – so that our interest is primarily held by the plot – dramatic dialogue has the effect of slowing the narrative down: action slows or even ceases altogether while characters speak. Although action dominates many of the dramatic episodes in Christina's story, dramatic writing, if we think in terms of drama as theatre, can be very well-developed as pure, or nearly pure, dialogue, and Anonymous gives us a very effective set-piece in his description of the hearing Autti seeks with the canons of St. Marys, Huntingdon. As Chibnall explains in her introduction to Orderic Vitalis' *Ecclesiastical History*, dramatic dialogue, in Orderic's case, "served to express conflicting viewpoints and analyse motives" (I 79). The use of dialogue creates drama in the sense of the theatrical moment:

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<sup>132</sup> Although I agree with Stephen Jaeger that this episode is evidence of "a writer with a keen sense of romance, of drama, and of narrative staging," I cannot agree with the conclusion he draws, that it is "completely superfluous," and that it "adds nothing to the story of Christina's sanctity, miracles, visions, or of her close relations with Christ" (177). Setting aside his assumption that these are the only proper motivations for writing, it seems to me, on the contrary, that the amplification of this sequence of events is a deliberate strategy on the part of Anonymous, and that Christina's character, which is further developed in this episode, is an important aspect of her sanctity. Escaping, literally, to her lover Christ, is later paralleled in her frequent escapes to her refuge of prayer.

characters interacting with one another and commenting on the action, and this is particularly the case when characters interact before an audience within the account, as is the situation in this episode. Dialogue is a major tool of historians, such as Orderic Vitalis and William of Malmesbury, and Anonymous, in writing Christina's *historia*, uses it to great effect.

The amount of space given to this episode is a clear indication of the author's interest both in the questions raised by the early events of Christina's life and also, as we will see, in contemporary discussions on issues such as marriage, virginity and personal responsibility to God. By contrast, the later meetings with Bishop Bloet are reported briefly and for the most part indirectly, with only a few direct speeches. We will analyze the hearing before the canons in some detail below. First, however, it is intriguing to consider why Anonymous chose not to expand to any extent on the meeting which persuaded Robert Bloet to change his first favourable ruling on Christina's case, a meeting which could have provided a contrasting dramatic situation to the meeting before Fredebert and his canons. While it is quite possible that there was a description of this meeting in the original twelfth-century narrative which has not survived into the fourteenth-century MS, there are valid authorial reasons that might be put forward for dealing with the secret meeting in just the way it appears in the Cotton Tiberius MS. Keeping this particular meeting behind the scenes, in fact, adds to the dramatic effect of the contingent events, and Anonymous does devote considerable space to their description. We see the two parties at work: Christina suspects that her father will try to work around the Bishop's decision and attempts to forestall him by having the decision ratified by Burthred. Meanwhile, Autti is being told of Bishop Robert's susceptibility to

bribery by Robert the dean of Huntingdon. Burthred first releases Christina, an act which infuriates her parents, and is then with difficulty persuaded to join the party going to Bishop Robert with Autti's bribe in hand. One narrative effect of all of this busyness is to set up a situation of dramatic irony. Christina and her helpers are unaware of the bribe, as the author tells us, and so go to the next meeting with the Bishop expecting to hear the first decision officially confirmed. Instead, as the reader already knows, Robert has accepted Autti's position and his money. The dramatic dialogue that climaxes this part of the story is all the more effective for its brevity:

Whilst Burthred *misrepresented her*, the bishop said: "Take counsel, Christina."

And she, not being aware that he had been bribed, and putting her reliance on his earlier judgement, replied: "Whose counsel can be better for me than God's and yours, most holy father?" "That's the right answer," said the bishop, and handed her over to *her false accuser*.

[Quam dum calumniaretur Burhredus: ait episcopus. Consule tibi Christina. Que corruptum ignorans et eiusdem priori iudicio freta: respondit. Cuius consilium salubrius michi quam Dei et tuum sanctissime pater? Recte respondisti. Et traditi eam calumniatori.] (ch.22).

Note that Anonymous does not deign to record Burthred's arguments: he is a false accuser ("callumniator"). What he says has nothing to do with what is really going on. The Bishop does not seem to even pay attention to what the young man is saying. While Burthred speaks, the Bishop converses with Christina, tricking her into a form of

acquiescence. Her reliance on the “holy father’s” integrity has been misplaced.<sup>133</sup>

Another reason for the author’s brief treatment of the meeting of Autti’s friends with Bishop Robert is perhaps in order to reinforce his negative assessment of the bishop. As I argue in chapter one, Robert Bloet is a representative, in the author’s view, of clerics who lack genuine vocation. In a position which required the incumbent to balance secular and ecclesiastical authority, Robert acted primarily as a baron and a worldly man. In this case, having heard the counter appeal of Autti’s party, and perhaps being made aware of Flambard’s support of the marriage, Robert closes ranks with the noble patriarchy against Christina. That it is a secret meeting adds to the sense we have of the author’s suspicions of corruption among the higher ecclesiastical ranks. (See chapter one.) The bribe is, perhaps, a damning “extra”: it is not really needed, but adds greatly to Robert’s wickedness. Even as a baron he is a wicked judge. The picture painted of Robert’s character is not, I think, unconnected with the long fight of St. Albans abbey for its exemption from the Bishops of Lincoln. It may have been too tempting for our author to show Robert Bloet in an altogether negative light, as unworthy to have authority over his own abbot.

Finally, by relegating this meeting to a back room, Anonymous ensures that the focus remains on Christina. It is the original hearing that provides the evidence of her integrity, and especially of the validity of her vow of virginity. The fully recorded hearing, in fact, is given as evidence, testimony. Even Bishop Robert, considering the theological evidence, found in Christina’s favour. The secret meeting, on the contrary,

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<sup>133</sup>Could it be that had Anonymous felt that he had sufficient information to detail the episode during which Christina agreed to her marriage to Burthred, he might have recorded a trick such as this?

has no validity because it is tainted by bribery. None of its arguments are recorded. In fact, we are specifically told that when Autti's party secretly met with the Bishop, they convinced him "by saying little [pauca loquendo] but by giving him large bribes [multam largiendo pecuniam]" (ch. 21). This decision, unlike the first ruling, takes no account of theological argument; it is a business and political matter. The secret meeting between Autti's party and Bishop Robert, then, is kept "off-stage" in the drama. It lends a sense of intrigue to the events surrounding it, it confirms and reinforces the already unfavourable monastic (and especially St. Albans) view of Bishop Robert, and it keeps the reader's focus on the validity of Christina's position. The influence of the clandestine meeting continues to be important in the story, and the Bishop remains a threat to Christina and also to her supporters until his death.<sup>134</sup>

We come now to the hearing Autti seeks with the canons of St. Mary's. By casting the meeting with the canons in the form of an elaborate dramatic dialogue, Anonymous is able to present various views without at any time subscribing to any but one. Hagiographic convention, after all, alerts his audience to the "correct" view of the case. Moreover, this particular form contributes to the parallels Anonymous seeks to draw between Christina's experiences and those of the early virgin martyrs. This episode

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<sup>134</sup> Anonymous makes a point of remarking on Bishop Robert's death: "after suffering long punishment his life was cut short by a sudden death, and by his example he deterred others from persecuting the virgins of Christ" ["qui diut[ur]nam perpressus ultionem subitanea morte vitam finivit. et alios a persequendo Christi virgines exemplo suo deterruit"] (ch. 45). We know from Henry of Huntingdon that toward the end of his career, Robert found himself outside the king's favour, and as a result, suffered financially. His death, as Anonymous says, and Henry confirms, was sudden, and as he was unable to speak at the end, he may have died unshriven. "At a hunting party at Woodstock . . . he was paralysed by a stroke. Still alive, but speechless, he was carried into his lodgings and shortly afterwards, while the king was with him, he died" ["Apud Wdestoc, ubi rex conuentum hominum et ferarum statuerat . . . percussus est apoplexia. Viuus tamen, sed elinguis, in hospicium suum deportatus, presente rege mox exspirauit"] (*Historia Anglorum* 588). See also Barlow, *English Church*, p. 71.

also, however, demonstrates the keen interest Anonymous shows in contemporary Church views on marriage. Before investigating the hearing, it will therefore be useful to mention briefly some of the issues surrounding marriage at this time.<sup>135</sup>

Concerning marriage customs of the time of Christina's biography, two kinds of authority can be distinguished: one concerns the customary rights of the family within the community. Customs varied throughout Christendom. In England, after the Conquest, "one of the aims professed by William I was to allow the different peoples under his rule to keep their own customs as far as possible," in order to demonstrate the continuity of his reign with Edward's (Chibnall, *Anglo-Norman England* 168).<sup>136</sup> Molin and Mutembe have thoroughly analyzed manuscripts containing marriage forms from medieval France, but also from Norman areas, including eleventh-century Anglo-Norman England. Marriage rituals by tradition were performed at home, and the priest would involve himself at various points in the ceremony to bless the couple (29-30).

Another kind of authority rested with the Church, which increasingly sought to codify and universalize its laws and saw marriage as an area over which it should have

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<sup>135</sup> Legal and literary studies of marriage in this period include Christopher N.L. Brooke, *The Medieval Idea of Marriage*; James A. Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe*; *Sex, Law and Marriage in the Middle Ages*; Neil Cartlidge, *Medieval Marriage: Literary Approaches, 1100-1300*; Georges Duby, *Medieval Marriage*; Marc Glasser, "Marriage in Medieval Hagiography"; George Elliott Howard, *A History of Matrimonial Institutions*, v. 1; Jean Leclercq, *Monks on Marriage: a Twelfth-Century View*; Jean-Baptiste Molin and Protais Mutembe, *Le Rituel du Mariage en France*; John T. Noonan, "Power to Choose"; K. Ritzer, *Le Mariage dans les Églises Chrétiennes* and Michael M. Sheehan, "Choice of Marriage Partner in the Middle Ages: Development and Mode of Application of a Theory of Marriage." Works dealing with the circumstances of Christina's marriage are Thomas Head, "The Marriages of Christina of Markyate"; Paulette L'Hermite-Leclercq, "Enfance et Mariage d'une Jeune Anglaise au Debut du XIIe Siecle: Christina de Markyate" and Robert Stanton, "Marriage, Socialization, and Domestic Violence in the *Life of Christina of Markyate*."

<sup>136</sup> This extended to law, so that Normans and English might face different laws for similar crimes. For example, after the rebellion of 1075, Earl Waltheof was executed, according to Anglo-Saxon law, while the Norman rebels were disinherited, according to Norman law. See Chibnall's discussion in *Anglo-Norman England*, p. 36. Even in coronation charters of Henry I and of Stephen, the laws of King Edward are referred to and confirmed (*English Historical Documents* 400-402).

jurisdiction. Molin and Mutembe find that the manuscripts indicate that while families increasingly sought the priest's involvement in their marriage ceremonies, the Church increasingly sought to involve itself in validating and controlling marriage (30-31). In England Lanfranc, Archbishop of Canterbury, made the priest's role in marriage obligatory in 1076. Although Barlow finds that this legal requirement was "a clear interference with Germanic marriage custom" (*English Church* 127), Molin and Mutembe remind us that from earliest Christian time families had regularly involved the local priest in the marriages of their children (28). The effect of Lanfranc's requirement was to encourage families to make the priest's role more public. Thus we see the two authorities merging. The primary concerns of the Church were to do with consanguinity and with free consent of the principals: are these individuals free to marry one another, and do they give their free consent to the marriage? The concern over consanguinity was in order to avoid future requests for annulment. Free consent had to do with the sacramentality of marriage (31).<sup>137</sup> The Church preferred to see the couple blessed in Church, in the presence of the community, rather than at home, where witnesses were interested parties: family members and friends. Furthermore, the Church preferred the legal aspects of the union to be dealt with prior to the giving of the bride, prior to the blessing, and prior to the marriage mass (31). Molin and Mutembe find that, at the beginning of the twelfth century, these various requirements had the effect, in England, of moving to the church door many of the rituals previously performed in the home: "Il s'agit de la transposition devant la porte de l'église, juste avant la messe, d'usages

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<sup>137</sup> Marriage was more often being termed a sacrament. See discussion below, pp. 172-174.

pratiques jusque-là à la maison” (31-32). This would increase the rite’s publicity and decrease the likelihood of later application for annulment. (This is probably what what Autti was hoping for.) The community was thus called on as witness to the marriage. The priest’s role thus complemented local custom in its public aspect: the marriage would be part of public liturgy and, as Neil Cartlidge has said, “the more impressive the marital ceremony could be made to seem, then the greater emphasis upon the finality of the union” (13). Before the priest at the door of the Church and in full view of family and community members, the couple would exchange statements of consent and tokens of gifts. The congregated witnesses would then move with the couple into the Church itself, where the Mass would proceed.<sup>138</sup> What we see occurring in the *Life* is a local coordination of these two authorities, family custom and Church regulation, along the lines that Lanfranc had perhaps envisioned. The first agreement is between the groom and Christina’s parents. Either at this point or at some subsequent time, Autti promised that Christina would be his main heir. Later the family seeks the priest’s blessing. It is at this still novel ceremony that Christina is either coerced or tricked into assenting, “in word” [“lingua”], to her betrothal to Burthred (ch. 7).<sup>139</sup> Christina’s public acceptance of her betrothal to Burthred has caused much speculation. What possible trick could her parents have used that would lead her to accept something so distinctly opposed to her vow of virginity? Dyan Elliott, working in a later period, has hit on a possible answer

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<sup>138</sup> For a discussion of English evidence for the rite performed at the Church door in this period, see Brooke, *Medieval Idea of Marriage*, pp. 248-257; Molin and Mutembe, pages 29-32, 34-37 and Ritzer, pages 385-397.

<sup>139</sup> Although Lanfranc had made the blessing of a priest compulsory in 1076, the church door rite would still have been an “extra” bit of ceremonial in this period, around 1115, one that Autti and Beatrix probably thought they could use to their advantage.

that can, I believe, be applied to Christina's situation. She cites the example of Dauphine of Provence (born c.1284), who was mendaciously told by a friar introduced by her guardians that she would be able to repudiate her marriage after five years if she so wished. Moreover, he "suggested to her that God, who does not deceive, had foreseen that she would convert her spouse to chastity in the manner of St. Cecilia" (218, 284, no.71). Apparently the king, Charles II of Sicily, had some interest in Dauphine's marriage as well, and confirmed the five year limit. By these tricks, she was betrothed at the age of twelve (283-284). Although the conversion was not as miraculously speedy as was the case for Cecilia, Dauphine did eventually manage to convert her husband to a chaste marriage (286). It seems to me that Beatrix, aware of her daughter's preferences in saints' stories, could have used a similar trick, focussing on Burthred's demonstrated weaknesses and indicating perhaps that it would be easy for Christina to convert Burthred, thus saving the family from embarrassment and still fulfilling her own vow. The text supports this to the extent that shortly after the betrothal, Christina does attempt, although unsuccessfully, to get Burthred to agree to a celibate life. Her persuasive argument includes the idea that they can secretly maintain a chaste marriage for a few years in order to satisfy his family and friends (ch. 10).<sup>140</sup> Later too, when Ralph, Archbishop of Canterbury hears the story from Eadwin, he refers to the tactics of Beatrix, saying that she seduced Christina into agreeing to the betrothal by her words: "*cuius astu virgo de qua loquimur seducta est ad coniugium*" (ch.30). It is significant, I think, that

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<sup>140</sup> As Elliott points out, "the women who allegedly pursued a program of wedding-night proselytism for chastity were invariably the ones who were successful" (218). She exempts Christina, who was not successful in converting Burthred, although she did succeed in guarding her chastity. Her main point holds, however: writers were not likely to record instances of those who were tricked into consenting and then coerced into marriage and motherhood.

the archbishop feels so strongly about these tactics that he says he would impose the penance for manslaughter on Beatrix, should she ever come to him in confession. It is quite possible, although we can never be sure, that Beatrix used false assurances such as we read of in the later case of Dauphine.

Following the betrothal, both Burthred and Christina's parents are anxious to further publicize the marriage. Burthred begins to build a new house for his bride, nearby her parents' house (ch. 8).<sup>141</sup> Her parents take the precaution of keeping Christina from her usual religious friends, and make arrangements for the celebrations, even if they cannot interest their daughter in them. They take her under close supervision to public events, to present her as their betrothed daughter. Even when the family attends church, Christina is carefully watched, and is unable to communicate with her friends. The family's public portrayal of the betrothal is very effective in the community, so effective that even Christina's close friend and mentor, the canon Sueno, is for a time convinced that she has decided after all to marry.<sup>142</sup> Nevertheless, by the time Autti consults the canons of St. Mary's, the townspeople are well aware of Christina's rebellion and, we may think, are waiting on the outcome with a mixture of curiosity and anxiety.

This biography was being composed during the 1140s, that is, about twenty-five years after the events recorded in the early part of the *Life*. Around the same time, Gratian produced the volume known as the *Decretum*, (*Concordantia Discordantium*

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<sup>141</sup> This may be a reference to the Anglo-Saxon custom of *morgengifu*, the gift that the groom would make to his bride once the marriage was formally solemnized. See Christine Fell, *Women in Anglo-Saxon England*, 56-57, and Helen M. Jewell, *Women in Medieval England*, 27-28.

<sup>142</sup> One is reminded of Oda de Bonne Esperance, whose family proceeded with all of the wedding arrangements in spite of her obvious disinclination. The family's confident coercion, however, in that case back-fired at the ceremony itself.

*Canonum*) a collection of papal and council decrees, along with commentary on them. His aim was to bring concord to conflicting canons, and the position he took on marriage was to have a significant effect on custom throughout Western Europe. In his article, "Power to Choose," John Noonan demonstrates that Gratian's position on marriage and the precedents he uses to support this position were intended to bring marriage securely under the jurisdiction of the Church, and free it of secular control (427). In brief, Gratian held that, "no woman should be coupled to anyone except by her free will" (qtd. in Noonan 422). He also confirmed four limits on free choice of a spouse: (1) believers must not marry infidels; (2) a prior vow of chastity was an impediment; (3) the persons must be of seven years or more; (4) the persons must not be within seven degrees of relation.

Now, the story of Christina's family difficulties takes place between about 1115 and 1118, and therefore as mentioned above, well before Gratian's *Decretals* were written. Although it is impossible to know when Anonymous first recorded his notes for this period, I believe that the text of the hearing before the canons benefited considerably from hindsight, and that some of the revisions were in light of much later developments of ecclesiastical thought on marriage; the narrative is, in effect, an exemplum of issues that would quite soon, at least in theory, if not immediately in practice, be tackled by the Church in canon law. Some specific issues raised by the author in the biography are: first, the authority of family to negotiate on behalf of a child and give a child in marriage against her will, and whether consent given under duress was binding; and second, whether a prior private vow made by a child had any validity and especially if it had precedence over an agreement made by the family.

The opening speech of the hearing is given to Autti, the representative here of secular authority in the matter of marriage. Anonymous describes Autti's voice as "tearful. [lacrimabili]."

I know, my fathers, I know, and I admit to my daughter, that I and her mother have forced her against her will into this marriage and that against her better judgement she has received this sacrament. Yet, no matter how she was led into it, if she resists our authority and rejects it, we shall be the laughing-stock of our neighbours, a mockery and derision to those who are round about. Wherefore, I beseech you, plead with her to have pity on us: let her marry in the Lord and take away our reproach. Why must she depart from tradition? Why should she bring this dishonour on her father? Her life of poverty will bring the whole of the nobility into disrepute. Let her do now what we wish and she can have all that we possess.

[Scio domini mei scio. et testimonium huic filie mee perhibeo quod ego et mater sua com[pule]ramus invitam ad coniugium et contra voluntatem suam suscepit hoc sacramentum. Verumtamen qualitercumque ad hoc [ded]ucta sit. si nostra auctoritate contemta illud respuerit facti sumus obprobrium vicinis nostris. abonminacio et illusio hiis qui in circuitu nostro sunt. Quocirca vos obsecro rogate [eam] ut misereatur nostri et in Domino nubens [aver]tat a nobis notam imminentis ob[pro]brii. Ut quid degeneret? Ut quid parentes dishonoret? Mendicitas illius universe nobilitati erit notabile dedecus. Fiat modo quod nos volumus. omnia erius erunt.] (ch. 15)

Note the repetition of the opening of Autti's speech, "I know, my fathers, I know" ["scio domini mei scio"] spoken in a broken voice as a harrassed father. Clearly Autti seeks

sympathy for his plight. Anonymous economically portrays him as a pathetic, spiritually blinded character, without distracting our attention from the issues raised by the family dispute. Autti here is depicted as humble and sad, an ironic turnaround from his earlier rage. I am reminded of Perpetua's father, who is actually beaten during the court scene when he attempts tearfully to persuade Perpetua to recant. He also has previously erupted in rage at his daughter's intransigence.<sup>143</sup> However, in Autti's case, we are also aware of a satirical undertone, and certainly Fredebert is not fooled by Autti's tears: he knows exactly what kind of worldly considerations are at stake. Autti admits to Christina and to the canons that her consent to marry was gained under compulsion, and is clearly contrary to Christina's will. He believes, however, that since consent has been given and the arrangement with Burthred has been made publicly, she should abide by her parents' decision. Partly, he is shocked that his daughter, whom he has raised so carefully, and for whom he has such high hopes, would rebel so openly, throwing her life away, so it would seem to him, because of a childish vow. If she succeeded in scotching the marriage she would disgrace her family and probably cause them financial suffering, for Burthred would have to be compensated for the broken contract. On the other hand, Autti is plainly worried about having used coercion to bring about the betrothal. His acknowledgement of compulsion reveals an awareness of a preference for free consent. Christina, too, seems to be aware of free consent as an ideal. It may be that the biographer, writing when Gratian's ideas are becoming known, at least among clergy, retrospectively imposes this discomfort with compulsion on Christina's father. On the

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<sup>143</sup> See Musurillo, "Passio Sanctorum Perpetuae et Felicitatis," ch. 3 and 6.

other hand, since Anglo-Saxon laws included a law indicating that women should not be forced into an unwanted marriage (Jewell 28), Autti's unease probably shows that the idea of free consent was not entirely original with the canonists. His insistence on the *fact* of consent (however gained) is perhaps an attempt to place the matter in a different light, one that focussed on the legality of the betrothal and de-emphasized how that betrothal was achieved.<sup>144</sup> He is more concerned about what the community will think of him if she resists the marriage now. He avoids referring directly to a vow of virginity, although he does refer to her proposed "life of poverty," which he immediately contrasts with the wealth he is willing to give if she obeys her parents' wishes: "Her life of poverty will bring the whole of the nobility into disrepute. Let her do now what we wish and she can have all that we possess" ["Mendicitas illius universe nobilitati erit notabile dedecus. Fiat modo quod nos volumus. omnia eius erunt"] (ch. 15).<sup>145</sup> That Autti concludes his statement by complaining of Christina's rejection of her place in secular society shows how far he is from worrying about her marriage as a "sacrament," even though he was careful to use that word at the beginning of his speech. Having made his statement, Autti leaves the assembly, leaving Christina with the canons, in a scene

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<sup>144</sup> Christina's verbal consent was achieved through trickery and was clearly contrary to her unwavering intention. The idea of personal responsibility, and thus of intention, was under discussion around the time that Anonymous was writing and may have influenced his emphases here. Abelard's *Ethics*, in which Abelard emphasized intention as the factor determining sin, was written sometime between 1125-38 (*Dictionary of Philosophy and Religion* 1) and may have been circulating among his disciples around 1139 (Luscombe xxx). It does seem that Anonymous had an interest in this idea, which also informs his treatment of Christina's conscience. However, whether he somehow obtained access to Abelard's work, or heard of his theory at second hand cannot be demonstrated. St. Albans certainly had a large, working scriptorium and, as Rodney Thomson has pointed out, in the twelfth century "the monasteries remained the principal vehicles for the preservation and dissemination of learning, whether new or old, scholastic or not" (1). For a discussion of Abelard's theory of intention, see D.E. Luscombe's introduction to *Peter Abelard's Ethics*, pp. xxx-xxxvii.

<sup>145</sup> See n. 119.

reminiscent both of St. Catherine with the philosophers and also of the young Christ with the elders.

Fredebert now makes his opening remarks, based on particular aspects of Autti's speech. Autti's worldly concerns are tacitly set aside. The issue is not Autti's standing in the community, but the legality of the marriage. As Autti probably hoped, it is the sacramentality of the marriage that captures Fredebert's interest. In his opening comments Fredebert, the prior, focuses on the idea that the marriage is already accomplished; he does not even mention how her consent was gained. "We know that you have been betrothed according to ecclesiastical custom. We know that the sacrament of marriage, which has been sanctioned by divine law, cannot be dissolved, because what God has joined together, no man should put asunder" ["Nos scimus te fuisse dsponsatum ecclesiastico more. Nos scimus sacramentum coniugi divina sancitum institutione non posse solvi. quia quos Deus coniunxit homo non separet"] (ch. 15). Note here that Fredebert has indeed picked up on the word "sacramentum," and insists that the marriage, performed according to "ecclesiastical custom," is binding. The parallelism in his speech ("Nos scimus . . . Nos scimus") emphasizes the legal importance of what has been done: what *we know*, says Fredebert to Christina, is that you have been betrothed legally, by a priest, and that you have thus received a sacrament of the Church. Fredebert's insistence on the legality and indissolubility of the marriage is in keeping with contemporary endeavours of the Church to bring marriage firmly under ecclesiastical control. This case would be seen by him as important in this regard, a test case of the still novel canons. He speaks of the command to children to obey their parents. The views of Fredebert are also in line with Augustinian values. As a final argument, he tells Christina that "while

many virgins perish, many mothers of families are saved as we know” (ch. 15). It is probable that Fredebert is under the impression that Christina has decided on virginity only since her parents’ choice was made known to her; in other words, he thinks that she is trying to evade marriage to Burthred, rather than marriage in general. (One has the impression that Fredebert would have had no difficulty in enforcing a legal marriage on a reluctant bride, even if coercion had been a factor.) Fredebert here derives his counsel from Augustine’s *De Bono Coniugali*, where the author says “the good of obedience is more important than the good of continence, for whereas marriage is nowhere condemned on the authority of our scriptures, disobedience is nowhere condoned” [“Maius . . . bonum est oboedientiae quam continentiae. Nam conubium nusquam nostrarum scripturaum auctoritate damnatur, inoboedientia uero nusquam absoluitur”] (ch. 29), so that an obedient, faithful wife is to be preferred to a disobedient virgin.<sup>146</sup> “Now it is better to possess nothing but goods, even lesser ones, than to possess a great good combined with a great evil” [“Melius est autem habere omnia bona uel minora quam magnum bonum cum magno malo”] (ch. 29), says Augustine. Fredebert feels he can apply this teaching to Christina’s case because a public betrothal has taken place, and is legally binding, and because she is in a state of flagrant disobedience to her parents. He acknowledges her desire to remain a virgin, but *he also*, fails to take her desire seriously at this point, because he does not know yet about the private vow. A situation of dramatic irony is thus set up, which will have its effect in Christina’s speech.

Christina in her answer, takes what she can from her father’s witness; she points

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<sup>146</sup> For both Augustinian texts quoted here see Augustine, *De Bono Coniugali*; *De Sancta Uirginitate*, edited and translated by P.G. Walsh.

out that her father has admitted that her consent was not freely given. As we already know, however, this is not her main argument. The biographer has carefully constructed this dialogue to bring our attention finally to *one* point: the vow. All other arguments are left behind. Christina supplies the issue that has been skirted until this moment: that her vow of virginity was, in fact, made well before the betrothal. “Know that from my infancy I have chosen chastity and have vowed to Christ that I would remain a virgin: this I did before witnesses, but even if they were not present God would be witness to my conscience continuously. This I showed by my actions as far as I was allowed” [“Quantocius scitote quod elegerim ab infancia castitatem et voverim Christo me permansuram virginem. et feci coram testibus qui etsi deessent: adesset tamen consciencie mee testis michi Deus. . . . Quare diu hoc quantum licuit operibus ostendi”] (ch. 16). She asks Fredebert to judge what a wicked thing her parents are ordering her to do: to break her vow to Christ. She quotes scripture in her defense, citing in particular Matthew 19:29: “Every one who leaves house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or possessions for My name’s sake shall receive a hundredfold and possess eternal life” [“Omnis qui reliquerit domum vel fratres, aut sorores. aut patrem aut matrem. aut uxorem aut filios aut agros. propter nomen meum centuplum accipiet. et vitam eternam possidebit”] (ch. 16). She also replies specifically to Fredebertus’ use of *De Bono Coniugali* by referring to Augustine’s *De Sancta Virginitate*, stating, “Nor do I think that virgins only will be saved. But I say as you do,<sup>147</sup> and it is true, that if many virgins perish, so rather do married women. And if many mothers of families are saved,

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<sup>147</sup>Perhaps, “as you Augustinians do.”

which you likewise say, and it is true, certainly virgins are saved more easily” [“Nec tamen puto solas virgines salvari. Sed dico quia multe virgines <pereunt> sicut vos dicitis et verum est: utique multo magis pereunt coniugate. Et si multe matres familias salvantur. quod vos dicitis similiter et verum est. utique multo facilius salvantur virgines”] (ch. 16). This reply reflects Augustine’s teaching in *De Sancta Virginitate*, where he maintains that although marriage is good, virginity is better, because the virgin can more easily spend her time on the things of God, not being distracted, as the married woman is, by concerns for her husband and household. He quotes the apostle Paul: “she who is unmarried is concerned for the things of the Lord, that she may be holy in both body and spirit. But the married woman is concerned for the things of the world, how to please her husband” [“innupta est sollicita est quae sunt domini, ut sit sancta et corpore et spiritu; quae autem nupta est sollicita est quae sunt mundi, quomodo placet uiro”] (ch. 22).<sup>148</sup> From this exchange we see that Christina sees her vow in a positive light; she gives up earthly matrimony and maternity not to escape specifically from Burthred (who in any case was not on the scene when her vow was made), but for the love of Christ; her spirit leads her flesh. It is clear that Christina sees her vow in sacramental terms, even if she is not entirely convinced that her marriage to Burthred is sacramental.<sup>149</sup>

The basis of considering marriage as a sacrament in this period (that is, at the time of the hearing) was its symbolism of the relationship between Christ and the Church. “Christ and the Church form one body and are united by an indissoluble bond. The union

<sup>148</sup> Augustine derives his teaching and quotes from from I Corinthians 7:32-34.

<sup>149</sup> The theology around the sacramentality of marriage had not been entirely worked out at the time of the hearing, nor even by the time Anonymous was writing. For a detailed analysis of the process by which marriage became one of the seven sacraments of the Church, see Seamus P. Heaney, *The Development of the Sacramentality of Marriage from Anselm of Laon to Thomas Aquinas*.

of a man and woman is a sacrament, a sign of this sacred union when they too form one flesh” (Heaney 6). Note that the basis of sacramentality is the physical union of the consenting couple, as a signification of the union between Christ and the Church. Few writers in this period, or for some time afterward, considered the element of grace in the sacrament, even when they included marriage amongst the sacraments (13). The energy expended by Christina’s parents in trying to enforce the consummation of her marriage reflects this early view, that is, the consummation as a sign of the sacrament, even if statements by both Autti and Fredebert insist on the public betrothal as binding on her. (Heaney points to Gratian’s distinction between *matrimonium initiatum* and *matrimonium ratum* (12).) Fredebert is attempting to make sure that ecclesiastical rules are not being flouted. Autti is more likely grasping at any authority that will bring his daughter to obedience. The hearing is thus interesting in light of later developments, which insisted on the mutual consent of the couple as binding. Certainly Lanfranc’s edict shows his thoughts leaning this way, even if his main purpose was to bring marriage under Church authority.

Still, grace *is* usually associated with the sacraments. If we consider for a moment the specific actions Christina took when making her vow, we will, I think, understand more clearly her rather ironic remark about the “sacrament” of her marriage. She makes her vow a part of the liturgy, offering a penny to the priest as she prays her vow directly to Christ (ch. 4).<sup>150</sup> This contrasts sharply with her unwilling betrothal to Burthred, which was effected only through coercion. Her primary motive, which may become obscured in later

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<sup>150</sup> See Thomas Head’s perceptive discussion of Christina’s vow in “The Marriages of Christina of Markyate.” The identification of her vow of virginity with marriage to Christ is confirmed by her ritual acts: “the indication of the vow at the church door, the payment of the symbolic dowry, the obtaining of a priestly blessing” (81).

events, is not simply to escape a marriage, but to remain faithful to her marriage to Christ. This marriage, and the vow associated with it are clearly sacramental in Christina's view, having been made "through the inspiration of his grace" [*sua preveniente gracia*] (ch.17). The element of grace is completely missing from her union with Burthred; moreover, even setting aside the requirement of grace in this sacrament (as many in this period did) as a symbol of the union of Christ with his Church, it is very nearly blasphemous. The idea of marriage as a sacrament is clearly interesting to Anonymous, and here again, we may be seeing the influence of hindsight on his writing. He is aware of the discussions over the sacramentality of marriage, but his focus is rather on the sacramentality of Christina's vow, and its efficacy for her. What we miss in his handling of this situation is any clear idea about whether he felt grace to be a normal attribute of marriages that did involve willing consent. His focus is completely on Christina's vow, and he privileges that vow of chastity over any marriage vow Christina subsequently made.

The effect of Christina's revelation here is impressive. Fredebert is astounded ["*obstupescens*"] at Christina's reply. This new information changes things. In the final exchanges with Christina, he attempts to clarify and confirm what she has said.<sup>151</sup>

Fredebert: How do you prove to me that you are doing this for the love of Christ? Perhaps you are rejecting marriage with Burthred in order to enter a more wealthy one?

Christina: A more wealthy one, certainly, for who is richer than Christ?

Fredebert: I am not joking. I am treating with you seriously. And if you wish us to

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<sup>151</sup> In the following passage all connecting words have been omitted, leaving only the dialogue itself.

believe you, take an oath in our presence that, were you betrothed to him as you have been to Burthred, you would not marry even the king's son.

Christina: I will not merely take an oath, but I am prepared to prove it, by carrying red-hot iron in these my bare hands. For, as I have frequently declared, I must fulfil the vow which through the inspiration of His grace I made to the only Son of the Eternal King, and with the help of this same grace I mean to fulfil it. And I trust to God that the time is not far off when it will become clear that I have no other in view but Christ.

[Fredebertus: Quomodo probabis michi quod hec facis propter amorem Christi? quia forsitan spretis Burhredi nupciis: diciores affectas.

Christina: Vere diciores. quis namque Christo diciores?

Fredebertus: Non iocor. sed serio tecum ago. Et si vis ut credamus tibi. satisfac nobis iureiurando. quia non nuberes nec regis filio. etsi desponsata illi fuisses quemadmodum desponsata fuisti Burhredo.

Christina: Non modo iureiurando sed etiam calidum candensque ferrum hiis nudis portando manibus parata sum probare. Votum etenim quod ut sepe dixi vovi eterni regis unico filio sua preveniente gracia ipsi omnimodo reddere me oportet et reddam. eadem gracia cooperante. Et confido in Domino quoniam adhuc tempus erit. quando me non aliud quam Christum habuisse in causam clarebit.] (ch. 17).

Mary Carruthers, in *The Book of Memory*, points out that in most medieval narrative literature we find “a recollecting subject, a remembered text, and a remembering audience” (182). This rhetorical relationship – subject, remembered text, remembering audience – is what gives the narrative its moral significance. In the case before us,

Christina's reference to a wealthier husband, which Fredebert thinks is a joke (and we have to wonder here if Christina was smiling), would immediately bring to the audience's mind several references in hagiography to the saint's status as *sponsa Christi*, but it would most likely bring to the monastic mind of its audience the story of St. Agnes, a major saint in most kalendars, whose story also provided significant material for the liturgy concerning the consecration of nuns (Tavormina 385). The link between the speaker and the audience, that is, between Christina and the canons (and the reader), is a common memory. A mere tag would bring this memory to mind. Fredebert asks Christina if she is merely looking for a wealthier husband. Christina says, "a more wealthy one, certainly, for who is richer than Christ?" This brief statement summarizes the statement Agnes makes to her pagan suitor concerning the gifts of the lover who has anticipated him, that is, Christ: "He has encircled my right hand and my neck with precious jewels. He has put priceless pearls on my ears and surrounded me with vibrant and sparkling gems" ["Dexteram meam et collum meum cinxit lapidibus preciosis. tradidit auribus meis inestimabiles margaritas. et circumdedit me uernantibus atque choruscantibus gemmis"] (fol. 199). By pointing rhetorically to the speech of St. Agnes, Christina "represents" herself as *sponsa Christi* (in the sense described by Carruthers, *The Book of Memory* 180-183). Fredebert takes offence at what he calls Christina's "joke," because if she takes for herself the role of the virgin-martyr, he is cast as the tyrant, the pitiful young suitor's father. Everyone in Christina's audience at St. Mary's Priory and later, in the monastic audience for which the story is written, would

understand the “casting.”<sup>152</sup> Fredebert feels that this is an unfair assessment of what is going on. The prior by this time is becoming convinced of Christina’s position. He suggests that Christina take a solemn oath. We do not know that Fredebert ever administered the oath – it would have made things even more complicated. He perhaps had a faint hope that Christina would back down, faced with the binding legality of an oath taken before the canons as witnesses. Christina, however, takes the idea further: she will face trial by ordeal to prove the validity of her vow. As noted above, Christina insists on the sacramentality of her vow. It was made “through the inspiration of His grace,” unlike the graceless “sacrament” that her parents have orchestrated with Burthred and the local priest. Moreover, as she stated earlier in the dialogue, she has demonstrated her vocation by her actions as consistently as she was able, as an outward sign of her vow, of which she was continuously aware in her conscience. The idea of her vow as a true sacrament is thus reinforced throughout, displacing the previous discussion of the “sacrament” of marriage. By this point we may assume that the prior is convinced, particularly in light of his later remarks to Autti, but if he was not about to be the one to order her to break a prior vow of virginity, he also did not want to be the one to command Autti to back down. Luckily, his bishop was due for a visitation. Fredebert suggests to Autti that the matter be put before the bishop and Autti agrees.

In this dialogue, the problem of Christina’s marriage reflects a great deal of

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<sup>152</sup> Modern readers have often taken this view of Fredebert’s role. He has come in for much criticism and is often categorized along with other unhelpful clergy in the story, as a male authority figure who does not understand Christina and tries to derail her religious vocation. Like Fredebert himself, I believe that this is an unfair assessment of what is happening in this scene. Fredebert tries to do what he can by way of moral authority, advising Autti to respect his daughter’s vow; however, the prior had no political authority. The best he could do for Christina was to seek the authority of the bishop, whose decision would carry weight.

uncertainty in many quarters around the issues associated with marriage. Anonymous uses dramatic dialogue with the advantages of hindsight to explore these issues. One of these, free consent, as we saw, was not an issue that seemed compelling to most churchmen who dealt with Christina's case. If ideas of free consent were in the air, they do not seem to have held the same implications for these people as they did later. (Even later, when such arguments did have weight, coercion was extremely difficult to prove.) The clergy here assumed that parents should arrange their children's marriages and expect to be obeyed. Ironically, as we have seen, it was Autti who was worried by it, as his statement to Fredebert shows, and we may think that the Anglo-Saxon ideal of free consent, even if it was often set aside, shows in twelfth-century England a readiness for ideas of consent later developed in canon law. Of course, the biographer himself writes disapprovingly and at length about the family's use of compulsion, though perhaps more to show how valiantly Christina resists, and thus to emphasize the parallels between her story and those of the early virgin martyrs, like Agnes, whose story Christina's speech evokes. His emphasis may also reflect that the idea of consent was becoming interesting to clerics at the time of writing (that is, after 1140). It was the vow that really interested him, however.<sup>153</sup>

The issue of the prior vow of chastity, especially an informal vow made by a child, was a much trickier question, and did worry the clergy in the story. Christina is

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<sup>153</sup> A contemporary story where consent is brought to the fore as a major issue is that of Oda of Bonne Esperance (d. 1159). In Oda's case, her refusal is made at the wedding ceremony itself, which has been arranged in spite of her obvious reluctance. Her story is told by Philip of Harvengt, *Vita B. Odae Virginis*, P.L. 203, 1359-74. For a summary of the story, see Jean Leclercq, *Monks on Marriage: a Twelfth-Century View*. Her wedding is discussed by Molin and Mutembe, *Le Rituel du Mariage en France*, pp. 65-66, and the significance of Philip's account to the development of marriage liturgy is commented on by Ritzer, *Le Mariage*, p.393, n.621.

sure that a prior vow is an impediment to marriage. We may note that she says that the vow was made before witnesses, but that her main witness is God. A problem for everyone involved is that the vow was not made formally; even though Christina's mentor, Sueno, confirmed the vow, it remains a private vow made by a young girl, and there is a question about whether Christina was legally capable of making such a vow. Legally, a woman could not make a vow without permission of her father, or if married, of her husband.<sup>154</sup> The churchmen's immediate and fundamental response in Christina's story, however, was to uphold the vow. That anyone could make a vow to God and after deny it went against their religious instincts. Fredebert becomes concerned when Christina reveals that her vow of virginity was made long before her parents thought of marriage, or at least of this particular marriage. It is very likely that, although he is not willing to make the judgement himself, he fully expects the bishop to uphold Christina's position. Bishop Robert's first reaction, when he is later consulted, is in line with this view. We see in his shifting judgement an indication of how this religious view was capable of being subverted by family, that is, by worldly considerations. More pious churchmen, at various levels, are shown taking the vow, although of a young girl, very seriously, even if they found it difficult for political reasons to be very helpful to her. Another aspect of the situation that will have influenced Fredebert to some extent, causing him to first hesitate, and then refer the case to the Bishop, was the disinclination of churchmen at the time to hinder a sincere person from pursuing a stricter life as a

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<sup>154</sup> Dealing with a later period, Dyan Elliott reminds us that childhood vows of chastity created "something of a spiritual mare's nest" for canonists (219). Although considered binding by the subject and often by her religious associates, these vows were technically invalid. It is also well to remember that "the only childhood vows we ever hear of are voiced by the women who succeeded in guarding their virginity until death" (219). Christina's story is an early example of interest in this problem.

means to salvation (Constable, *Reformation* 51-52). Although this was generally of concern to monastics, the principle here is similar. Christina, for the salvation of her soul, could not break her vow, must in fact, pursue a celibate life. To hinder a clear vocation which, even if undertaken as a child, had not cooled with time, would seem to many clergy at least inadvisable, if not culpable.

The writer's amplification of the hearing, written some years after the fact, allows Anonymous to explore some of the issues that, after 1140, were becoming increasingly interesting to clergy. He is able to touch on the idea of consent in a way that reveals a cultural receptiveness to that idea. He portrays the family's arguments as worldly, and we see that Fredebert ignores those arguments. Finally he explores the issue of a dependent individual's right to make a religious vow and keep it. This is in keeping with his reformist perspective on individual responsibility for one's salvation, and may also, as noted above, indicate some familiarity on the part of Anonymous with Abelard's theory of intention. At the same time, by using dramatic dialogue to record the episode, he is able to emphasize further the rupture in Christina's family and shed some outside light on the situation. Finally, his portrayal of the hearing in several respects resembles a trial, with Fredebert as judge, the canons as jury, and Autti and Christina pleading their cases. Anonymous thus draws another parallel with the early virgin-martyr form.

The author's use of dramatic writing, both his description of action and his use of dialogue, allows him to expand on issues that are of interest to him. Having had time to reflect on the events of Christina's life, he is in a position, some years later, to put those experiences into context and to emphasize their moral significance. Moreover, as we have seen through several examples, he also thus further develops the character of his

subject. Her intelligence and wit, for example, shine through in both the hearing before Fredebert and also on the morning of her escape when she eludes those who could stop her. In the next section we will see how he uses the visionary experiences of various characters in his story for similar purposes, while at the same time, confirming Christina's place as a holy visionary of his own time.

## B. VISIONARY EXPERIENCE

As suggested at the beginning of this chapter, the dreams and visions that Anonymous records are a particular form of *amplificatio*. One of the most striking features of the *Life* is the extensive record of visions and dreams, both those of Christina herself, and those of other characters in her story.<sup>155</sup> As will become apparent in this section, although the dreams and visions are not concerned with the afterlife, as many twelfth-century visions were, their use in the *Life* is, in spite of its contemporary obscurity, a powerful testimony to the influence of visionary experience at all levels of society in this period.<sup>156</sup> Nor are these visions usually sent as messages for Christina to give to others, but have to do with Christina's inner life and thus, because of the intensely personal nature of the biography, are part of the very fabric of the narrative. In fact, the story is structured so that most of the visions reflect on and resolve the personal and spiritual difficulties that Christina experiences in her quest for a life devoted to God. They are also revealing about the beliefs of Anonymous with regard to visionary

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<sup>155</sup> See Appendix 2, "Finding Aid for Visions in the *Life*."

<sup>156</sup> For example, Christina's younger contemporary, Elisabeth of Schönau, often saw visions of souls in the afterlife who, in order to achieve heaven, needed the prayers of Elisabeth's convent. (See *Visions*, Bk.II, trans. Thalia Pandiri, in Elizabeth Petroff's *Medieval Women's Visionary Literature*.)

experience.

Although the *Life* records many dreams and visions, it is probable that these form a selection of those of which the author was aware. Anonymous would have had to choose and place his accounts of visions according to his hagiographic and narrative purposes, just as he did the events of his subject's life. If we consider the space and detail lavished on Christina's visionary experience, we begin to understand, I think, some of the author's priorities. As narrative events, the visions in the biography perform several functions. They contribute further to drama, both as narrative passages and by precipitating action; they provide psychological insight into characters' minds, revealing concerns and providing resolution; and they explain events or actions. As well, in the nature of dreams, they are symbolic and thus enrich the narrative and link it to the literary culture of the time. Western medieval theories of dreams and visions have cultural roots, not surprisingly, in both Biblical and pagan ideas, so that a consideration of a twelfth-century monk's literary use of dreams and visions necessitates here a brief review of the sources and ideas that may have influenced him.

Dreams were central to Greek and Roman belief systems.<sup>157</sup> The primary concern of pagans with regard to dreams seems to have been to interpret them correctly. A dream could not with safety be ignored. It was important to discover, or have someone discover for you, whether the dream was true or a deceit. The metaphor which came to represent

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<sup>157</sup> For the nature and experience of dreams in Greek and Roman culture, see Raymond Bloch, *La Divination dans L'Antiquite*; E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* and Jacques Le Goff, *The Medieval Imagination*, which continues the discussion into the Middle Ages. For the Early Church, see E.R. Dodds, *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety*; Martine Dulaey, *Le Reve dans la vie et la pensee de saint Augustin*; Frank Tobin, "Medieval Thought on Visions" and J.H. Waszink, "The Classification of Dreams" (in his edition of Tertullian's *De Anima*).

this distinction was itself derived from Homer's *Odyssey*, where Penelope explains why she does not trust a favourable interpretation of a puzzling dream she has had. "Dreams are beyond our unravelling – who can be sure what tale they tell? . . . Two gates there are that give passage to fleeting dreams; one is made of horn, one of ivory. The dreams that pass through sawn ivory are deceitful, bearing a message that will not be fulfilled; those that come out through polished horn have truth behind them, to be accomplished for men who see them" (*Odyssey* XIX, 560-). Aeneas sees these same gates while visiting the Underworld with the Sibyl: "Two gates of Sleep there are, whereof the one is said to be of horn, and thereby an easy outlet is given to true shades; the other gleaming with the sheen of polished ivory, but false are the dreams sent by the spirits to the world above" (*Aeniad* 6, 893-898). These gates seem very purposeful: the dreams are *sent* through them with their potential effect already ascertained. The concern over whether a dream would come true or not thus brought with it a logical desire to know whence it came. Since, by the metaphor of the two gates, dreams were thought to originate in Hades, the abode of the dead, it is not surprising that many dreams, including that most famous dream of Scipio, feature a character from the afterlife: a deceased family member, a famous stranger, or even a god. The difficulty was that daemons (spirits of the air neutral in intent during Classical times) were capable of sending false dreams as well as true ones, so that recognizing a deceased uncle in one's dream was no guarantee of the reliability of his message. This difficulty was complicated further when a dream was, or seemed to be, ambiguous.

This concern over the veracity of dreams (and its metaphor) is one of the most influential aspects passed from pagan culture to Western tradition. The Church had a

very complex task in assimilating what it found in the pagan record and in reconciling it, not only with scripture, but with its own accumulated literature of the Christian era, some of which, especially early Christian writings, almost immediately posed problems for those trying to bring some form to Christian doctrine.<sup>158</sup> What comes through with Pagan literary theory, then, is an ambivalence about the reliability of dreams, and writers of the Middle Ages assimilated this ambivalence, but in a form that already begins to solve the problem. Macrobius' fourth-century *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio* provided a schema to assist in the discernment of dreams. Macrobius' theory provided a way to classify and place these phenomena, a guide to reliability, or so he promised. He used physiology and psychology to do this.

To cite Macrobius in the Middle Ages, especially in the twelfth century, was to call on Classical learning. "The dream theory set forth by Macrobius in his *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio* became the key to a renaissance in the study of dreams in the twelfth century (Le Goff 201). Macrobius takes the opportunity, in discussing Scipio's dream, of summarizing the traditional Neo-Platonist classification of dreams. This classification proved highly influential in the twelfth century.<sup>159</sup> Macrobius also repeats the Virgilian imagery regarding the veracity of prophetic dreams: that they come through the "twin portals" of ivory or horn. He explains the imagery in a way that suggests that it

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<sup>158</sup> For example, many of the early martyr stories, such as *Perpetua and Felicitas; Marian and James, and Montanus and Lucius*, contained records of visionary experiences. These texts are edited and translated in Herbert Musurillo's *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*.

<sup>159</sup> William Harris Stahl, in his introduction to Macrobius' *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*, discusses the work of late Latin encyclopedists such as Macrobius, and their influence in the Middle Ages, when writers used their summaries of classical works as authorities. To give one example, John of Salisbury, although citing other sources as well, uses the scheme of Macrobius for defining the kinds of dreams. See his *Policraticus*, Book II, ch. 15.

is *the dreamer* who is able to distinguish horn dreams and understand their meaning (IV, 17). We may say then that Macrobius transmitted, along with a way of thinking about dreams, an idea of the soul's own ability to perceive truth in dreams.

The classification of dreams which Macrobius recorded involves five types of dreams. Of these, the nightmare, "insomnium" and the apparition, "visum" had no significance with regard to the future, upsetting as they may be. According to Macrobius, nightmares are a result of anxiety or physical stress. Apparitions occur in that period between wakefulness and sleep. Macrobius says that apparitions may be delightful as well as disturbing, but have no meaning. Since Macrobius' aim is to discuss the elucidation of prophetic dreams, nightmare and apparition do not hold his attention.<sup>160</sup> The other three give "the powers of divination" (III, 8).

Oracular dreams are dreams "in which a parent, or a pious or revered man, or a priest, or even a god clearly reveals what will or will not transpire and what action to take or avoid" (III, 8). Prophetic visions are dreams that prove to come true, while enigmatic dreams are vague and require interpretation (III, 9-10). The difference between a prophetic and enigmatic dream seems to lie in the sense the dreamer has of clarity or ambiguity.<sup>161</sup> Usually, however, until the outcome of the dream is understood, the

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<sup>160</sup> In the Middle Ages, however, nightmares and apparitions were numbered among the weapons available to the Enemy, and theological assertions were made about their purpose. Just to confuse the issue, it is also interesting that what might be considered a nightmare (a frightening dream) could actually come from God, as a punishment or warning. It finally comes down to whence the experience comes. There are many incidents of apparition in Christina's biography. None of them prove to be completely meaningless. (See below, pp. 193-196.)

<sup>161</sup>As we will see, Christina generally interprets her dreams very confidently for herself.

prophetic vision remains enigmatic.<sup>162</sup> Alternatively, the enigmatic dream may resist interpretation, although throughout the Middle Ages, much thought was given to codes which would make interpretation possible.

A major influence on dream theory in the Middle Ages was, of course, Biblical. Considering the frequency of occurrence and importance attached to dreams in the Middle Ages (and especially, it would seem, among monastics) it is perhaps surprising to find that the actual number of biblical dreams is quite low.<sup>163</sup> Dreams, though used by God in the Old Testament, were not privileged over simple faithfulness to God and obedience to the law as delivered by Moses. It was most important that one should not heed any “vision” which tempts one to stray toward another god:

If there arise in the midst of thee a prophet or one that saith he hath dreamed a dream, and he foretell a sign and a wonder, and that come to pass as he spoke, and he say to thee: Let us go and follow strange gods, which thou knowest not, and let us serve them: Thou shalt not hear the words of that prophet or dreamer: for the Lord your God trieth you, that it may appear whether you love him with all your heart, and with all your soul, or no.

[Si surrexerit in medio tui prophetes aut qui somnium vidisse se dicat et praedixerit signum atque portentum et evenerit quod locutus est et dixerit tibi eamus et sequamur deos alienos quos ignoras et serviamus eis non audies verba

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<sup>162</sup> Even the example Macrobius gives of a prophetic dream must remain enigmatic until its fulfillment: “A man dreams the return of a friend who has been staying in a foreign land, thoughts of whom never enter his mind.” That is, until his dream, he has not thought of his friend. He goes out and meets this friend, at which point, he recognizes the dream as prophetic (III, 9).

<sup>163</sup> For the Old Testament, Le Goff cites E.L. Ehrlich as counting thirty-five dreams and Martine Dulaey forty-five. He himself counts forty-three. For the New Testament, Le Goff counts nine dreams and visions (*Medieval Imagination* 193-194).

prophetae illius aut somniatoris quia temptat vos Dominus Deus vester ut palam fiat utrum diligatis eum an non in tota corde et in tota anima vestra.]

(Deuteronomy 13: 1-3)

This ambiguous attitude toward dreams and visions - they could be revealing the will of God or they might be leading people astray – seems never to have been entirely resolved. In some stories, such as those told of Joseph, it is taken for granted that dreams are from God, in others, dreams are vigorously condemned.

The New Testament contains significantly fewer dreams, although dreams and visions are perhaps given more importance at the outset of the Christian movement when Peter reminds the faithful of the words of Joel:

And it shall come to pass, in the last days, (saith the Lord) I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.

[et erit in novissimis diebus dicit Dominus effundam de Spiritu meo super omnem carnem et prophetabunt filii vestri et filiae vestrae et iuvenes vestri visiones videbunt et seniores vestri somnia somniabunt.]

(Acts 2:17, Peter quoting from Joel 2: 28)

The worry that dreams and visions might lead the unwary astray, which, as noted above, was often evident in the Old Testament, is not so noticeable in the New Testament. Perhaps the tone set by the apostles, and especially by Peter, at Pentecost, created a more receptive attitude toward the miraculous in general. Certainly Paul believed in the existence of a variety of spiritual gifts, as his letter to the Corinthians often shows. In I Corinthians, 12:8-10, he gives a list of such gifts:

To one indeed, by the Spirit, is given the word of wisdom: and to another, the word of knowledge, according to the same Spirit. To another, faith in the same Spirit: to another, the grace of healing in one Spirit: to another the working of miracles: to another, prophecy: to another, the discerning of spirits: to another, diverse kinds of tongues: to another, interpretation of speeches. But all these things one and the same Spirit worketh, dividing to every one according as he will.

[alii quidem per Spiritum datur sermo sapientiae alii autem sermo scientiae secundum eundem Spiritum alteri fides in eodem Spiritu alii operatio virtutum alii prophetatio alii discretio spirituum alii genera linguarum alii interpretatio sermonum haec autem omnia operatur unus atque idem Spiritus dividens singulis prout vult.]

The Church's views would harden later, but during the early period of persecution and development of Christianity, dreams and visions provided demonstrations of God's approval of Christian converts, and especially of martyrs. They formed part of the nascent Church's story of triumph. These stories of martyrdom were read in the early Church, and were still available, if in different forms, in the twelfth century and beyond. In spite of the Church's attempts to rein in attitudes toward dreaming, dreams remained the single, private experience that could not be dictated by another. One cannot will one's dreams, after all. It is true, however, that the dreams that are recorded, the ones that are received with reverence by the Church, are those that come to special people, to demonstrably holy persons. The dreamer's *conversatio morum* became the key to the validity of his or her dreams and visions. In the early Church, the imminent martyrdom of the dreamer gave special status to

his or her dreams.<sup>164</sup>

In his book *The Medieval Imagination*, Le Goff outlines the reasons for the growing distrust of dreams that became apparent from the fourth century onward (212-214). The main problems were the vulnerability of the sleeping Christian to sin and also the close association of dreams with heretical groups. Among the Church Fathers we thus find this element of distrust, coupled with a very human desire to understand and categorize these phenomena. Augustine, for example, although voicing his scepticism about dreams generally, had to acknowledge his belief in scriptural accounts, and moreover, had a great respect for his mother's experiences, whose dream about his own conversion had proved prophetic. In *De Genesi ad Litteram*, Augustine gives more detailed analysis to vision, which he categorizes according to degree of spirituality (Book XII, ch. 6-12). *Visio corporalis* refers to direct bodily sight, *visio spiritualis* refers to the sight of images of things (as often occurs in dreams, but can also be waking), and *visio intellectualis* referring to a vision, often in ecstasy, which is unmediated by images and leads to understanding. This last form of vision is the most valuable, and it is the experience most sought after from the twelfth century onward. Gregory the Great (540-604) and Isidore of Seville (c.560-635), who theorized about dreams in the period after Augustine, were also "both instrumental in transmitting the encyclopedic culture of late antiquity to the Middle Ages (Le Goff 223).

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<sup>164</sup> For example, Perpetua, in prison and facing death as an avowed Christian, is asked to seek a dream. See Musurillo, *Passio Sanctorum Perpetuae et Felicitatis*, ch.4. In his introduction to this *passio*, the narrator who compiled the story quotes the passage in Acts, and speaks of the visions given to martyrs as proof of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in his own time (ch. 1). In the later Church, the verification of holiness became increasingly complicated. An excellent description of the attempts of the Church to control and somehow codify legitimate spiritual experiences while censoring questionable activity is Rosalyn Voaden's *God's Words, Women's Voices*. Briefly, the guiding principles were "the virtue of the recipient, the circumstances of the apparition, the orthodoxy of the revelation, and the 'fruits' of the experience – that is, striving after goodness or succumbing to temptation" (48).

The works of these authors then, although in many instances warning about the deceptiveness of visionary experience, also ensured that the topic was available to the monastic audience, where increasingly such experiences occurred. With this necessarily brief outline of the cultural heritage regarding dreams and visions, we turn again to the *Life*.

As dramatic writing is used by Anonymous as a form of *amplificatio* to present the views of his characters, as well as to indicate to his audience the moral significance of incidents in his story, so visions have a narrative purpose. The original source for the accounts of Christina's dreams and visions, we assume, is herself, but it is Anonymous who calls to mind the particular dreams and places them in his story. How much he improved upon these accounts in order to reinforce their moral significance must remain an open question. It is evident, however, that they are put on an equal footing with events of Christina's life and are arranged, as are events, to best narrative effect or authorial purpose. At the same time they reveal some of the beliefs about visionary experience held by Anonymous, and these beliefs in turn reflect twelfth-century monastic perceptions.

Visionary experience is used to precipitate action in the *Life* when it occurs at critical points in the narrative. For example, Christina has an oracular vision of Alvered, deceased St. Albans monk, who tells her to warn Abbot Geoffrey from a course of action which would be detrimental to the Abbey (ch. 56). The effect of this vision in narrative terms is twofold. First, because Geoffrey refuses to take warning, he is punished and thus converted from his worldly ways. His financial support of Markyate is seen to stem from his conversion, for which he gives credit to Christina. In the overall story, however, the incident also reintroduces the connection of Christina with St. Albans Abbey, a

connection which the author continues to emphasize throughout the second part of the book. It is ironic also that Geoffrey, on first hearing Christina's warning, tells her not to trust in dreams. His caution is in keeping with Church convention; however at this point in the story he is still a worldly prelate. Anonymous here makes a clear distinction between those who are worthy to receive and understand visions and those who are blind to the spiritual value of visions. It is only with his conversion from worldliness that Geoffrey comes to believe in Christina's visionary powers. It is interesting in this regard that Christina is also shown to mistrust the dream of the woman of Canterbury, and tells her "that perhaps she had been deluded by a dream" ["forte somnis delusam fuisse"] (ch. 4). Christina is only with difficulty persuaded to accept the message of the dream as being from God. In this case, the author seems to be emphasizing Christina's humility.

Auditory and physical manifestations are significant spurs to action on the morning Christina escapes from home. As she sits with her mother's servants, having almost given up on her plan since Loric, who is in charge of bringing horses, has not come, "suddenly something inside her, like a small bird full of life and joy, struck her inward parts with its fluttering. And she felt it flying upwards towards her throat and forming these words: "Theodora, arise. Why are you so slow? Behold, Loric is here" ["ecce subito quiddam in se quasi avicula viva et exultans. omnia interiora eius suo plausu concussit. que senciebatur usque ad guttur illius volitare. et huismodo verba formare. Teodora. surge. Quid pigraris? Ecce Loricus adest"] (ch. 33). Christina

immediately obeys the voice and leaves.<sup>165</sup> Several of the visions are of this sort. They act as narrative events, precipitating action, while at the same time contributing to the psychological realism of the story, in this case vividly representing Christina's anxiety as she waits for rescue.

Visions are also a sign of validation in the *Life*. Simon of Bermondsey, for example, receives a vision of Christina, who assures him that she is a virgin (ch. 77). This anecdote follows a long passage describing the rumours that were circulating about Geoffrey and Christina. As Holdsworth has pointed out, Christina herself needed and received reassurance from visions, "and others also needed to have her seriousness authenticated in the same way" ("Christina" 199). To our modern perception, perhaps the most ironic method of validation, however, comes in the form of apparition. Christina is often plagued by the sight of strange creatures.<sup>166</sup> The demonic bestiary includes miraculously appearing toads, a large bear and a headless body, among other more vaguely described spirits. In classical dream theory, of course, apparitions of this sort, though frightening, have no value one way or another. They came to have a sort of value, however, in the Christian scheme of things. Guibert de Nogent, to cite an example, in his memoirs, says, "Judging from the many things I have heard, I am convinced that demons are more vehement in attacking recent converts or those who continually aspire to this holy way of life" ["Auditarum rerum conjecturis experior adversus nuper conversos, seu eos qui ad hoc propositum semper aspirant, vehementius

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<sup>165</sup> The "little bird" sensation is one that Christina apparently had throughout her life. Later the author lists it as one of the signs she would receive when a prayer was answered [ch. 75], as it was on the morning she left Huntingdon.

<sup>166</sup> In this, Christina is part of a long tradition of those tempted by the Devil, which includes even Jesus Himself (Luke 4:1-13).

daemones acerbari”] (Labande 118; Trans. Archambault 52). Having described an example of this, Guibert continues, “it is entirely believable that the hearts of devils are seriously stung by the sudden stirrings of our good intentions” [“procul dubio plenum fidei est hostes humani generis acerbissima invidentia de eorum, qui mutantur in melius, ereptione tristari”] (Labande 120; Archambault 53). He draws a parallel with the joy Heaven experiences when a sinner repents.

Anonymous, in common with other writers of the period, uses this idea - of the Devil being stung to fury by good works - throughout the *Life* as a form of validation for Christina. The Devil harrasses Christina at any point she makes a special effort toward holiness or fulfilling her vow. His attacks are described as part of an overall strategy to break Christina’s faith. While Christina is staying at Alfwen’s cell, for example, “her concealment and her peaceful existence irritated the devil: her reading and singing of the psalms by day and night were a torment to him” [“latebre sue vita[que] tranquilla diabolum exacerbabant. [lec]ciones ac psalmodia die noctuque [cru]ciabant”] (ch. 37). Demon-toads appear, sitting on the psalter which is open on her lap. Later, when she stays with the unchaste priest, she is (at least outwardly) resolute in her rejection of his advances, and continues her regimen of prayer. The priest appears one day as a large bear and tries to keep her from entering the monastery to pray (ch. 44). The toads and the bear provide vivid reflections of her inner state at these times. At Alfwen’s cell, she is terrified of being found by her family. The toads externalize this fear, portraying it accurately as a potential distraction from her religious exercises. Facing down the demon-toads by persevering in her prayers and singing is a way of demonstrating her resolution and her success in conquering her fear. In the case of the bear, we are given a

sense of how physical the danger of the cleric's lust appears to Christina. The already considerable pressure of his desire is intensified by the rebellion of her own body. God's power in this case saves her, as the earth swallows the bear-apparition. In both instances, the apparition serves to objectify the fear that Christina is experiencing. At the same time, Christina's perseverance and fortitude are highlighted.

It is, however, when Christina has had a particular moment of grace, or has undertaken an extra devotion, that the Devil is said to retaliate most fiercely. Directly after the vision in which Christina is crowned by angels, confirming her chastity, Anonymous tells us: "Disturbed by these events, the demon launched out into new warfare" ["Commotus ex hiis demon et in nova bella prorumpens"], sending apparitions that disturbed her rest (ch. 53). He attempts unsuccessfully to overcome her piety by insinuating blasphemous ideas: "He came by stealth and put evil thoughts into her mind. He suggested horrible ideas about Christ, detestable notions about His Mother. But she would not listen" ["Venit [fraude ut mal]icie sue macula virginis animum [ob]velaret. Horrenda de Christo. de ipsius sancta genetrice detestanda suggerebat nec [audi]ebatur"] (ch. 53).<sup>167</sup> Finally, the author describes how Christina undertakes the special offering of a wax candle each week. This results in an apparition seen by all of the nuns, since they have all agreed to the offering. The Devil in this case appears as a headless body which terrifies the nuns and invades the church. Christina must go in after and throw him out, an action that almost completely saps her strength, and causes her to wonder whether

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<sup>167</sup>Her concern about having blasphemous thoughts of Jesus and the Virgin is not unlike the difficulty experienced by her near contemporary Hugh of Grenoble, described by Alexander Murray in "The Temptation of St. Hugh of Grenoble."

God has abandoned her.<sup>168</sup> This seems to mark the end of her apparitions, however, and she receives the assurance in prayer that they will be suppressed (ch. 78). Apparitions demonstrate that Christina is holy, otherwise the Devil would not be bothered by her. Her virtue infuriates him. As well, however, Anonymous uses these apparitions to externalize Christina's inner struggles and confusions. The description of the devil's actions as "warfare" (*bella*) intensifies the narration (ch. 53). We see these struggles as vivid physical battles, which Christina wins through God's help.

Visions thus provide clues as to the psychological state of characters. As R. W. Southern has said, "the taste for psychological elaboration became very widespread in the course of the twelfth century" (*St. Anselm* 335). Writing just before mid-century, Anonymous shows himself intrigued by his characters' inner lives. Especially he dwells on the mental states of his subject Christina, of course, but as we have already seen, for example, he also discusses the motives of Autti's family. In most cases, the psychological value of visions is in their resolution of problems and in their encouragement. In a vision already commented on, Christina is crowned by angels. This follows a period during which Christina is tormented by the idea that she may not have been pure in mind as well as body. Her coming consecration ceremony causes her to do some soul-searching. She is encouraged by the vision. The crown symbolizes her purity and her readiness for consecration. The vision we are about to examine in some detail is a major narrative event of the first part of the story. The "staircase vision" is significant not only as a resolution to Christina's psychological state but also, as will become

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<sup>168</sup> It is of particular interest that the apparitions seem to be linked somehow to Christina's physical health. After seeing the unchaste priest as a large bear, for example, she is ill for two weeks or more (ch. 45).

apparent, in narrative terms, for the episodes of the dream as narrated function symbolically in the story, either as “commentary” on events or characters in the narrative, or as a prefiguration of events.<sup>169</sup> Moreover, the dream acts as a catalyst to action.

To consider the staircase vision as a narrative event, we should first think of its context in the overall story. At the time of the vision, Christina is in a state of war with her family and their social milieu. Having made a vow of virginity as a young girl, she has spurned a marriage arranged by her parents, and is in defiance of the Bishop’s orders to comply with their wishes. After once attempting to leave home, she is being held under close supervision, is denied access to religious friends, and is subject to beatings and humiliation. It must have seemed an impossible quandary. It is “amidst all these trials” that she sleeps and receives the vision.

The vision’s stated function in the story is as a consolation for Christina. We should note the words with which it is introduced: “Amidst all these trials Christ, wishing to comfort His spouse, gave her consolation through His holy Mother” [“Inter has angustias volens Christus suam fidelem sponsam confortare. per suam virginem matrem confortavit eam sic”] (ch. 24). Anonymous here reaffirms Christina’s position as spouse of Christ and also reinforces her relationship with the Virgin. The vision provides a pivotal experience for Christina. She has been through the bitter disappointment of Bishop Robert’s hearing, and her determination to maintain her virginity has infuriated her relatives, and especially her mother, so that she has suffered extreme physical and mental abuse. During her dream (it occurs while she is sleeping, although the author

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<sup>169</sup> “Staircase vision” is a convenient tag for this dream, the climax of which concerns Christina’s ascent to an upper room by means of a difficult set of stairs [“gradus arduus”] (*Life*, chs. 24-25).

calls it a vision) she weeps, as she converses with a sympathetic Queen of Heaven. Sympathy has been in short supply in her life. We may compare here the visionary experience of St. Perpetua, who saw in her dream a sympathetic shepherd, who gave her some cheese to eat, and also a judge, who gave her the victor's prize (*Passio Sanctarum Perpetuae et Felicitatis*," chs. 4 and 10). These dreams are of psychological value since they show the mind's attempt to find comfort in substitute parental figures, as Christina does. On awaking, she finds her pillow wet with the tears she has shed in her dream. By a kind of naïve logic, she concludes that since those dreamed tears have entered reality – the evidence is the wet pillow – then “the rest of the events” are not ambiguous [“non ambigeret”]: they can only mean her deliverance. Although she afterwards tells her vision to Sueno, she does not seek his interpretation, being convinced of the promise of freedom, and begins to live joyfully where before she had been depressed. No mention is made of the reaction of her family to this change in her demeanour; however the text shows that close watch was continued. In a sort of chain reaction, Sueno relates the vision to his prior, Fredebert, who has all along shown extreme discomfort about Christina's case. The vision confirms him in the view that Christina's vow of virginity should be taken seriously, and he says as much to Christina's father, who ignores the warning. Christina's vision simply reinforces Autti's obduracy. As a narrative event, then, the vision provides a turning point for Christina and her main supporter Sueno. It gives them hope and inspires them to redouble their efforts to secure Christina's freedom. Word spreads among her supporters and things begin to move very quickly thereafter. The vision is thus an integral part of the action, and its timing, at a point at which Christina's future is very much still undetermined, gives it maximum dramatic effect.

Dreams also, of course, provide psychological realism in a story, and give us an emotional view of the inner life of a character. The staircase vision was consoling to Christina; it transformed her immediate outlook: “the immense joy which filled her at the thought of her freedom was displayed for all to see in the cheerfulness of her countenance” (ch. 25). We might wish to consider what issues the vision resolved for Christina at this point. Primarily, of course, she wants to see some way out of her entanglement with Burthred, and a confirmation that she has been in the right to maintain her vow. It shows a striking sense of dramatic timing on the author’s part, I believe, that until this vision, Christina has acted primarily on faith. There has been one prophetic dream, but it dealt with a specific incident, her escape one night from Burthred’s attempts on her virginity. This vision marks the real beginning of her visionary experience of Mary and Christ. In addition, Christina would wish to be consoled by a female authority figure, since her own mother has been so very cruel. Finally, it would be comforting to have her relation with the established Church put back on a more trusting basis, after her experiences with her uncle, the Bishop of Durham, who tried to seduce her, and the Bishop of Lincoln, who proved to be easily corrupted by bribery. All of these elements are in the vision: Burthred is dealt with, her choice confirmed by no less authority than Christ’s mother herself, who takes on responsibility for Christina, providing a heavenly family to replace her earthly family. As well, in the priest who appears in the first scene, she sees the benevolent face of the Church she remembered from the early days of her fervour. That the vision has been a consolation is evident in Christina’s reaction to it on awaking. “From that moment,” says Anonymous, “you could see she was completely changed” (ch. 25). She believes in Mary’s promise of deliverance. These issues, which

all have to do with Christina's future, are resolved through symbolic imagery. The vision is, moreover, carefully narrated as a prefiguration of later events in the story. It falls into five segments, each of which deals with one "stage" of Christina's later progress.

### I. The Church

One night whilst she was sleeping, it seemed to her that she was brought with some other women into a most beautiful church. At the altar stood a man clothed in priestly vestements, as if ready to celebrate Mass. Looking over his shoulder, he beckoned to Christina to come to him. And when she approached with trembling, he held out to her a branch of most beautiful leaves and flowers saying: 'Receive this, my dear, and offer it to the lady.' At the same time he pointed out to her a lady like an empress sitting on a dais not far from the altar.

[Nocte quadam cum dormiret: videbatur sibi quod in quoddam pulcherimum templum cum aliis mulieribus introducta fuisset. Et ecce stabat ad altare quidam inductus vestimentis sacerdotalibus quasi ad solemnia missarum celebranda paratus. Qui respiciens: innuit Christine quatinus ad se veniret. Et accedenti cum tremore: porrigebat ramum frondium speciosarum et florum inestimabilium. dicens. Accipe cara. Et offer ille domine. Pariterque monstrabat ei quendam similem imperatrici non longe ab altari sedentem in tribunali.]

The beautiful church and benevolent priest represent the ideal Church, and are envisioned as a contrast to the reality that Christina has lately experienced in the persons of Bishops Ranulf Flambard and Robert Bloet. Christina's early interaction with the Church had been peaceful, nurturing and supportive of her religious inclinations, and she wishes to

maintain this vision of the Church. It is, after all, under the influence of the Church that she has made her vow of virginity. The priest in her vision beckons to her, confirming that she is called, selected from among the “other women” who accompany her. This echoes the circumstances of her original vow of virginity, when she approached the altar with a silent prayer and an offering, setting herself apart from family and other associates (ch. 4).

The priest, as a representative of God, gives Christina a “branch of most beautiful leaves and flowers” [“ramum frondium speciosarum et florum inestimabilium”]. This branch is at once a mark of Divine favour and a burden. Although the type of flowering branch seen in the vision is not named, it is associated both with Christina’s virgin state and with the Virgin Mary. There is some tradition around the flowering branch which we should consider in this context.

The symbolism of the flowering branch has its source in the Old Testament story of Aaron’s rod. In Numbers 17:1-8, we read that each of the leaders of the twelve tribes of Israel brings a rod (*virga*) to the tabernacle, where they are kept overnight. In the morning, it appears that “the rod of Aaron for the house of Levi, was budded: and that the buds swelling it had bloomed blossoms, which spreading the leaves, were formed into almonds,” signifying that his tribe has been chosen by God as His priests. This miracle was, then, a sign of responsibility as well as a mark of Divine favour. Thus the flowering almond branch came to symbolize God’s favour or preference. Both of these suggestions, Divine choice and responsibility, will be applied later to the Virgin Mary, who is chosen to bear God’s Son and is thus “blessed” among women. The story of Aaron’s rod also demonstrates the power of God over nature in the creation of a sign of

favour . God's power over nature is given another meaning in the *Shepherd of Hermas*.<sup>170</sup> Moreover, in *Shepherd*, the miraculous is toned down somewhat for reasons described below.

The Eighth Parable in the *Shepherd of Hermas* has correspondences with the story of Aaron's rod. As the Israelites are the chosen people of God, so, in *Shepherd*, are those gathered under the "great willow tree," who receive rods cut from the tree, "all who were called by the name of the Lord" (48). The rods here, as well as in Numbers, are scrutinized as signs, and the fate of their holders rests on the sort of sign they give. However, there are significant differences which reflect the different purposes of the two stories. For example, in *Shepherd* the rods are given to all, rather than to the leaders of tribes or groups as in Numbers. Furthermore, the rods are not left overnight in the tabernacle or temple as they are in Numbers, but are demanded back immediately. The emphasis, then, is on God's work of salvation. Those receiving the rods are "called by the name of the Lord" already. The rods represent their potential. The Shepherd is "very glad of" those whose rods are green, bud and bear fruit. These receive immediate reward. He does not despair though, even of the driest of the sticks, which he diligently plants and waters, lest he be "found negligent." He tells Hermas, "The willow is of a lively sort; if therefore the rods be planted and receive a little moisture, many of them shall live." He also says that, "He who created this tree willeth that all who received branches from it should live" (52-53). This is the story of salvation, free to all if not accepted by everyone. The willow is likely to sprout when put in water. This liveliness is meant to

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<sup>170</sup> *The Shepherd of Hermas* is a Greek work of the first or early second century (Holmes 330-331).

illustrate how natural it should be for those called by God to respond, live and bear fruit. Thus in *The Shepherd of Hermas*, the Old Testament story has been worked into a story of the New Dispensation, a story of grace.

It is the older story of Divine favour demonstrated by miracle that was re-worked in the Middle Ages as a story of the selection of Joseph as Mary's husband. This reworking stays closer to the Old Testament story. Each of Mary's suitors delivered a rod to the High Priest at the temple. Joseph's "rod flowered and a dove appeared over his head" (Ross 264)<sup>171</sup>. The flowering almond branch, identifying Joseph as the husband chosen by God for Mary easily became associated with the Virgin herself and with her most striking attribute: her virginal maternity (Schiller I:15). The miraculous production of fruit on an unfertilized stick came to signify the Virgin birth. Flowering branches or rods thus became an important Marian symbol.<sup>172</sup> For the priest to give the branch to Christina is already a mark of favour and the context suggests that Mary's symbol of purity is being applied to Christina. She is instructed to offer it to the lady who sits on the nearby dais. Christina does this as an act of homage.

## II. An Empress Enthroned

Curtsying to [the lady] she held out the branch which she had received. And the lady, taking the branch from Christina's hand, gave back to her a twig and said,

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<sup>171</sup>The story is told in the Apocryphal *Book of James* and the *Gospel According to Pseudo-Matthew*. See M.R. James, *The Apocryphal New Testament*.

<sup>172</sup>In a later example, one of Hildegard of Bingen's Antiphons to the Virgin Mary begins, "O viridissima virga, ave" (Newman 126). Mary Clayton discusses late Anglo-Saxon manuscripts containing images of Mary with flowering branches (pp. 170-172). Christina, judging by this vision, seems to have been familiar with such imagery.

‘Take care of it for me’; and then added as a question: ‘How is it with you,’ She said: ‘Ill, my lady: they all hold me up to ridicule and straiten me from all sides. Among those that suffer there is none like me. Hence I cannot stop crying and sobbing from morning till night.’ ‘Fear not’, she said. ‘Go now, since I will deliver you from their hands and bring you to the brightness of day.’

[Cui genu flexo. Acceptum ramum offerebat. Suscipiens autem illa domina de manu Christine ramum: de ipso sumens redonabat offerenti ramusculum. Et dicebat. Custodi michi hoc diligenter. Adiciensque interrogat eam: Quomodo tecum est? Aiebat: male domina: omnes subsannant me: et coangustant undique. Non est si,ilis mei in sorte dolencium. Unde nec die nec nocte a flectu et singultu meo temperare possum. Ne timeas inquit. Vade modo quoniam ego de manibus eorum eripiam te: et educam clara luce diei.]

To the side of the altar, on a dais or platform, sits “a *certain* lady like an empress” [“quondam similem imperatrici”]. We expect and see Mary in this lady, having been prepared by the vision’s introduction. Moreover, we have seen instances of Christina’s devotion to Mary, in her actions at the Gild banquet and in her preference for worshipping at the monastery dedicated to Mary. The twelfth century saw a great surge of affection and devotion to Mary. Older stories of Mary’s help were collected in this time, and contemporary examples were added.<sup>173</sup> The stories of Mary’s aid to Christina, especially in the first part of the narrative, fall into this mould: devotion to Mary

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<sup>173</sup> For a thorough discussion of the miracle collections in England, see R.W. Southern, “The English Origins of the ‘Miracles of the Virgin’.” For the cult of the Virgin, see Mary Clayton, *The Cult of the Virgin Mary in Anglo-Saxon England*; Rachel Fulton, *From Judgment to Passion: Devotion to Christ and the Virgin Mary, 800-1200* and Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*.

rewarded by Mary's assistance. Devotion to the Virgin is clearly one of the author's values and the *Life* is very much of its time in this respect. In the *Life* the imagery surrounding Mary is consistently regal, both with regard to appearance and authority. Here she appears "like an Empress" and promises, in effect, to overrule the Bishop's decision and familial authority to enable Christina to fulfill her vow to Christ. The language in later visions reinforces this regal impression. In a later vision, Mary says to Christina, emphasizing Her influence with Her Son, "I am the greatest of women. Do you wish to know how great? As I stand here it is quite easy for me to touch the highest point of heaven" ["Ego sum maxima feminarum. Vis scire quanta? Hic michi stanti facile est manu contingere culmen celi"] (ch. 26). In this vision she is called "queen of heaven" ["reginam celi"], as she is in the vision during which she gives Markyate to Christina (ch. 42-43). Later again, when she visits Christina's sickbed, the sister who was able to see her describes her as "a woman of great authority, with a shining countenance, whose head was veiled in a snow-white coif, adorned across the breadth of it with gold embroidery and fringed on each end with gold" ["magne auctoritatis matronam adesse splendidissimo vultu. velatam caput niveo amictu: distincto per latum aureis intexturis. necnonaureas habente fimbrias in utroque capite"] (ch. 49). However, notwithstanding her demonstrated regal authority, throughout Mary is seen acting only on direction from Christ, which is in keeping with Church doctrine on her position in the hierarchy of Heaven.<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> See *The Blessed Virgin Mary as Mediatrix*, by Mary Vincentine Gripkey. In this work, Gripkey surveys stories of the Virgin, concluding that "Mary's role of Mediatrix is founded upon her exalted dignity as Mother of God wherein she is said to surpass the saints and to obtain favors which might be denied them. Her mediation assumes a theocentric aspect since it is specifically stated that God performs the miracles

Christina offers the flowering branch, her virginity, to Mary, which she has already vowed to Christ. There is no contradiction here. Miracle stories of the Virgin often show her protecting the virginity or chastity of women. Another metaphor is being worked out in this case, however. Mary accepts the branch - that is she accepts ultimate responsibility toward Christina – but gives back a small branch, a twig, and instructs her protegee to look after it. The imagery in the gestures here is feudal, and in fact, Mary has become Christina’s protectress, her “Lady,” a term used frequently in the story.<sup>175</sup> As Marina Warner has shown, “it was during the twelfth century that the Virgin was first given her feudal title, Notre Dame, Our Lady” (153), although she was previously referred to as “lady” by Jerome and others. Here Anonymous gives the title its feudal connotations. The branch seems to symbolize the burden of maintaining virginity. By taking responsibility for Christina, Mary assures her future, and we see later in the story how the Virgin acts in defence of Christina’s virtue. For example, Mary will soon visit Burthred at night, terrifying him and causing him to relinquish his claim to Christina. Yet Christina also has responsibility, as represented by her “twig.” Christina takes on a part of Mary’s purity and must look after it.

### III. Christina Evades Burthred

So she withdrew, full of joy as it seemed to her, carrying in her right hand the little

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because of her prayers or in her honor, and that the divine power uses her as an instrument or acts through her” (220). In all of the episodes which involve Mary, Anonymous shows her as powerful through her Son.  
<sup>175</sup> G.C Coulton has remarked that “the medieval Church – as distinguished from earlier and later forms of Christianity – was essentially feudal in practice” (141). Marina Warner has also noted the “special relation between the court of heaven and the court on earth” (111), which had the effect of “projecting the hierarchy of the world onto heaven” (104).

branch of blossoms. And where she had to go down, there lay Burthred prostrate on the ground swathed in a black cape with his face turned downwards. And as soon as he saw her passing by he stretched out his hand to seize her and hold her fast. But she, gathering her garments about her and clasping them close to her side, for they were white and flowing, passed him untouched. And as she escaped from him, he followed her with staring eyes, groaning horribly, and struck his head with repeated blows on the pavement to show his rage.

[Recedebat igitur ut sibi videbatur leta. Portans florentem ramusculum in dextera. Et ecce qua illi descendendum erat. Burthredus iacebat prostratus super pavementum. Versus faciem ad terram. Et atra circumamictus cappa. Qui cum videret transeuntem: extendebat manus in illam ut apprehenderet atque teneret. Illa vero colligens et stringens ad se vestimenta sua que habebat candidissima et subtus ampla: pertransibat intacta. Quam sic evadentem torvis persecutus oculis horribiliter ingemescebat et proprium caput pavimento repetitis ictibus hostiliter infligebat.]

This point in the dream corresponds to Christina's immediate circumstances when she wakes; the rest of the dream is prophetic. Her mood within the vision changes (as it will when she awakes), for she has left at least part of her burden with Mary, and carries away only a "little branch of blossoms" ["florentem ramusculum"]. That it is in her right hand signifies her rectitude, the rightness of her stance. As she descends from the dais, she sees Burthred sprawled face down, swathed in a black cape. ["Burhredus iacebat prostratur . . . versus faciem ad terram. et atra circumamictus cappa"]. She makes her way by in her flowing white robes, which symbolize her virginity, as Burthred's black

cape signifies his sinfulness in pursuing his lust. The white robes show that she is determined to renounce her worldly life and begin her life as a bride of Christ, that is, take on the martyrdom of virginity. That Christina also carries a flowering branch echoes, I believe, the early martyrs' palm branches. The stark contrast with Burthred's black cape focusses our attention on the major conflict at this point in the story. Christina's immediate troubles stem from her relationship to Burthred and her unwilling betrothal to him. In her vision, she gathers her garments closely to herself and goes by Burthred. He is unable to touch her or to follow her except with his eyes. Inarticulate, he bangs his head in rage on the pavement.

Burthred has been seen as a parallel to the dragon that sometimes lurks at the foot of the ladder, for example in Saint Perpetua's vision or in Herrad of Hohenbourg's illustration of the Christian's progress to Heaven.<sup>176</sup> Certainly his rage at her escape, the futile banging of his head on the pavement, seems not really human. He becomes in the vision, I think, a caricature of his desire, cloaked in ignorance, as is symbolized by his black cape. However, I think it a mistake to see Burthred as Satan, although he does represent a worldly entanglement. Unlike Satan, Burthred proves to be able to repent and reform. In any case, Christina is well beyond Burthred when she comes to the staircase. She hesitates, not because of Burthred, but because of the difficulty of ascent ("propter ascensus difficultatem"). The vision, had it stopped here, would have been encouraging: Christina will bypass an entanglement with Burthred. He will not touch her and she will safely keep her virginity (her "flowing white robes"). It would have been ambiguous,

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<sup>176</sup>For Perpetua's ladder, see below, pp. 209-210; for Herrad's ladder, see below, p.210.

however, with regard to her success in her vocation.

#### IV. A Difficult Ascent

Meanwhile, the maiden looked closely in front of her, and saw an upper chamber, lofty and quiet, which could be reached only by a series of steps, steep and difficult for anyone wishing to climb. Christina had a great desire to climb up, but as she hesitated on account of its difficulty, the queen whom she had seen just a short time before helped her, and so she mounted to the upper chamber.

[Interea virgo prope prospiciebat et videbat quasi solarium unum altum et quietu. Ad quod ascendere volenti: per interpositos gradus arduus et gravis patebat ascensus. Huc eciam Christine habenti magnam ascendendi voluntatem. Sed hesitanti propter ascensus difficultatem: subito regina quam paulo ante viderat ministrabatur adiutorium et sic ascendeat in solarium.]

Steps, stair, ladder: these are all images in Christian literature of the difficult struggle the individual faces to achieve perfection.<sup>177</sup> The Old Testament provided the basic imagery in Jacob's ladder, a connection between earth and heaven, a way of intercourse between the human and divine (Genesis 28:12). The story of Jacob's ladder, however, also involves testing, for immediately following his vision of the ladder, Jacob must begin fourteen years of labour for his uncle Laban. The approval of God does not come without long struggle. In Christian usage, from early times, the ladder took on both

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<sup>177</sup>A good survey of ladder imagery in the Christian tradition is provided in the entry, "Echelle Spirituelle," in the *Dictionnaire de Spiritualite*, tome IV, columns 62-86. Also see John Climacus, *Ladder of Divine Ascent*, ed. Colm Luibheid and Norman Russell; J.R. Martin, *The Illustration of the Heavenly Ladder of John Climacus*, and Herrad of Hohenbourg, *Hortus Deliciarum*, 2 volumes, ed. Rosalie Green, et al.

nuances. These meanings remained with the image as time went on, nor are they truly separable, since the ascent to God exists in a series of tests. The earliest use of ladder imagery in Christian literature is that in Perpetua's dream. Her ladder has its antecedents in pagan literature (as do other of her dream images).<sup>178</sup> However, in the context of her situation, the ladder is given particular Christian meaning. She had specifically asked God to reveal whether she and her companions faced martyrdom or not. The vision, as an answer, symbolized for her that she would die a martyr, and that it would be a difficult death, as signified by the sharp weapons hanging on either side of the ladder, but it also symbolized the comfort of triumph and the achievement of the elect. For, at the top of the ladder, having "escaped" the dangerous weapons (fear, cowardice) she stands among the elect and receives nourishment from the kindly shepherd. Perpetua awoke encouraged, still tasting the sweetness of the cheese she had been given in the garden at the top of the ladder. Perpetua's ladder was remembered in Augustine's sermons for the feast day of Perpetua and Felicity.<sup>179</sup> Ladder and dragon both occur in catacomb wall paintings (*Dictionnaire de Spiritualite*, IV: 62) The symbolism established itself so well probably because the idea is intuitive. Indeed, it is only "one of the many images of ascension of the soul to God by degrees" (IV: 62).

This double meaning was early on applied to the ascetic life. Several early Christian writers speak of developing the spiritual life in degrees. Jerome, for example, made Jacob's ladder into a ladder of virtues, to be ascended with the assistance of God

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<sup>178</sup>Peter Dronke has discussed the Christian and pagan aspects of Perpetua's ladder and their literary sources in his *Women Writers of the Middle Ages*, pp. 6-9.

<sup>179</sup> Augustine's sermons on Perpetua and Felicity have been usefully gathered together by Cornelius Van Beek in the section "Testimonia," pp. 149-156 in his book *Passio Sanctarium Perpetuae et Felicitatis*. Her ladder occurs in sermons I and IV.

(*Dictionnaire IV*). Benedict, in Chapter seven of his rule, described the progress of the monks in an upward sequence of virtues; he specifically called on the image of Jacob's ladder in describing the steps of humility which lead to union with God. Benedict's rule, then, assured the image's establishment in monastic culture.<sup>180</sup> Evidence of the image in Western monastic culture can be seen in a twelfth-century miniature in the *Hortus Deliciarum* by Herrad of Hohenbourg which shows a ladder between earth and heaven with several individuals trying to ascend. Most of the characters fall: devils shoot at them with bows and they yield to their sins. One soul only, guarded by an angel, reaches the top and receives a crown. The illustration is very close thematically to eastern representations of the *Ladder of Divine Ascent*, but I think also reflects meditation on Benedict's rule.<sup>181</sup>

The monastic life presented daily trials and dangers, and the rungs of the ladder provided a clear analogy of this. The idea of martyrdom, however, also persisted. Perpetua's ladder was a symbol of her coming martyrdom. The ladder is included among the instruments associated with Christ's crucifixion (Schiller, II: 83). The ideal of martyrdom never left the Church; however, with Constantine's conversion, it was sublimated into the ascetic life. Renouncing the world was the first rung of the ladder for the monastic, and meant abjuring worldly entanglements, including marriage. Virginity

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<sup>180</sup>The first person to develop this imagery systematically was an ascetic usually known as John Climacus, who devoted his *Ladder of Divine Ascent* to outlining the steps monks need to take to make progress toward their goal: spiritual union with God. At step or rung nine, John makes his only specific reference to Jacob's ladder, but the general idea is clear enough without the Old Testament analogy. Although the book was written in the East and was well known and illustrated there, the ideas themselves also permeated the Western Church, likely developing out of the Fathers and Benedict, and perhaps, when the Crusades began, through returning pilgrims.

<sup>181</sup>*Hortus Deliciarum*, v.2. The illustration of the ladder of virtues and vices occurs opposite p.352, with inscriptions, and as plate 158.

was also a form of martyrdom in a real sense, since it removed one from the family economy. Although a dowry would likely be paid to the house entered, one's individual line ended; in fact, a monastic was considered dead to the world. In a culture that valued kin highly, this was indeed a sacrifice.<sup>182</sup> Monastic culture maintained this idea of martyrdom along with the imagery of gradual ascent to union with God. In the *Gesta Abbatum*, for example, Geoffrey is said to offer himself "in holocaustum Deo" or sacrifice to God on first becoming a monk at St. Albans (73).

Christina's vision incorporates this double-meaning. The steps in her dream are steep and difficult ["gradus arduus"]. In her life she is about to begin the long arduous ascent to union with God. As often happens in dreams, time is compressed here. Suddenly, the Queen is with her and helps her ascend. In some sources, Mary herself is the ladder between the human and the Divine, symbolic of her role as mediator (for example, in the *Hortus Deliciarum*, II: 354). Perhaps symbolism of this sort is intended here. In Christina's case, Mary will not only protect her from an entanglement with Burthred but will help her also on that arduous climb to religious perfection.

#### V. A Peaceful Place

And as she sat there enjoying the beauty of the place, behold, the aforesaid queen came and laid her head in her lap as if she wished to rest, with her face turned away. This turning away of her face was a source of disquiet to Christina, and not daring to speak, she said inwardly: 'O, if only I were allowed to gaze upon your

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<sup>182</sup> Recall that in Christina's case, the major objection of her family to her vow of virginity was that she would have no children to carry on her qualities (ch. 20).

face.’ Straightway the empress turned her face towards her and said to her with winning kindness: ‘You may look now; and afterwards when I shall bring both you and Judith also into my chamber, you can gaze to your full content.’ After this vision she awoke and found her pillow wet with tears, so that she was convinced that as the tears she dreamed she had shed were real, so were the rest of the things she had dreamed.

[Cumque resideret ibidem delectata loco. Ecce predicta regina veniebat. Et instar quiescere volentis. Caput suum reclinabat in gremio sedentis: sed aversa facie. Cuius adversionis Christianam non mediocriter tedeat et non ausa loqui: tantam in corde suo dicebat. O si licuisset michi vultum tuum contemplari. Et continuo convertit vultum suum imperatrix illa dixitque blanda affabilitate. Et licet et contemplare contemplativa postmodum ad sacietatem: quando introduxero te in thalamum meum. Te et Judith una tecum. Post hec visa evi<gi>lavit et cervical suum multis lacrimis maduisse reperit, ut sicut verum flere fuit quod sompniasse putabat. Ita de reliquorum eventu non ambigeret. Que per idem somnium viderat.]

The “upper chamber, lofty and quiet” [“solarium unum altum et quietum”] seems to represent the contemplative life, the place of prayer, and therefore a place of enjoyment and comfort for the soul. The top four rungs of John Climacus’ ladder are stillness, prayer, dispassion and love, which bring the soul into union with God (Steps 27-30). The room also is a symbolic representation of Christina’s future enclosure, for what she really desires is monastic claustration. It is a quiet place, a place where Christina will learn contemplation and develop fully her relationship with God. Mary is here too, and in a moment of intimacy, lies down with her head in Christina’s lap, but facing away [“caput

suum reclinabat in gremio sedentis: sed aversa facie”]. Even at this level of spirituality (represented by the upper room) “disquiet” comes to Christina. Why does Mary turn her face away? Christina feels uneasy, and perhaps this uneasiness is meant to foreshadow the crisis of conscience she will have prior to her consecration as a nun. Immediately, perceiving Christina’s disquiet, Mary turns toward her, granting grace, and a promise of future bliss: “afterwards, when I shall bring both you and Judith also into my chamber, you can gaze to your full content.” These words end the vision.

Judith, the apocryphal heroine of Israel who assassinated Holofernes, leader of the Assyrian army, was well known in the Middle Ages. The story of Judith is found in many twelfth and thirteenth-century Bibles. In Christian typology, Judith was considered to be a type of the Virgin Mary, for like Mary, “in decapitating Holofernes, Judith trod on the head of the serpent Satan” (Stocker 11). She provides an example of virtue overcoming vice, since she killed Holofernes without being defiled by him. Although Christina does not assassinate an army leader, she has overcome great danger to her spiritual self in avoiding Burthred’s advances, cutting off someone who wished to be her “head,” a position she had reserved for Christ only. The association with Judith thus reinforces the symbolism of the third scene of the vision, where Christina safely passes by Burthred, who bangs his head on the pavement in frustration. It seems, therefore, very appropriate that Christina would be promised a meeting with her model. This association relating Judith, Mary and Christina is very suggestive, especially in light of a later vision Christina has during which she plays a maternal role toward Christ (ch. 45).<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>183</sup> Alcuin Blamires, discussing this passage notes that “the biographer does not orchestrate this analogy as

The “staircase vision” has several narrative functions in the *Life*. If we survey the five episodes of the vision, we see that as a whole it is symbolic of the biography itself. Its placement in this respect is important, since it prefigures symbolically what will happen later in the biography, and provides a moral view both of those, and of preceding events. It acts then, as a kind of guide as to how the *Life* should be read, demonstrating at the same time, I believe, a clear authorial plan for the first part of the narrative. On a more intimate level, it gives us insight into Christina’s psychological state at the time of the vision. Her vision shows her to be concerned about her situation. Although she is firm about her commitment to a celibate life, she is unable to see her way past her entanglement with Burthred. It requires heavenly empowerment for her to walk by Burthred unscathed. Nor is she confident that she can aspire to religious perfection, as her hesitation at the foot of the staircase shows. All of these issues, as we have seen, are resolved in this vision. Mary takes on responsibility for her, as her Lady, and promises her aid. Finally, Christina feels able on awaking to interpret the dream as a sign that she will be delivered from her difficulties. The dream is not enigmatic; the dreamer is able to explain its significance herself. Moreover, both Christ and Mary have been introduced as active supporters of Christina’s vocation. Most importantly perhaps, Sueno and Fredebert both accept the vision as a sign, and it has the effect, in the narrative, of setting events in motion, or at least of explaining why, very soon, local hermits are arranging Christina’s escape.

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he orchestrates others,” for example, the reference to Joseph in chapter 22, where the author specifically links Christina’s action with that of Joseph. Blamires thinks that perhaps here we have an “authentic glimpse” into Christina’s mind (178), the memory of an image without allegorical interpretation.

## CONCLUSION: A CONSIDERATION OF THE AUTHOR'S PURPOSES

A story is never merely a story, especially in a twelfth-century monastery, and especially if that story is the biography of someone regarded as holy. Hagiography, that form particular to the monastery, was no exception. As Heffernan reminds us, “The primary social function of sacred biography, understood in the broadest of terms, is to teach (*docere*) the truth of the faith through the principle of individual example” (*Sacred Biography* 19). Thus the first overall purpose of any biography written with a monastic audience in mind, as this story clearly was, would be to edify, that is, build up the faith of its readers or hearers by providing worthy examples. With the biography in its present state, we might wonder whether this would be a consistent result. As I have maintained throughout this study, the story as we have it is unevenly revised;<sup>184</sup> however, the moral direction of even the most erotically-charged episode (such as, for example, Christina’s encounter with the unchaste priest) is correct from a Christian standpoint, if the details are sometimes over-lavish and could cater unwittingly to less pious thoughts. Bearing these things in mind, we might consider what specific purpose or purposes Anonymous might have had in mind when he composed Christina’s biography, and of course, that is complicated by the fact that he must at least have had permission to begin the work, and might also have had specific directions about it. Whatever his own ideas about his composition, the original direction, as discussed earlier, is likely to have come from Abbot Geoffrey. There is the possibility, of course, that Anonymous, having received his

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<sup>184</sup>It must be noted, of course, that some passages which appear to us unrevised could be the result of a copyist’s editorial efforts. Often in this narrative, however, we have a bit too much in the way of detail: to some extent, it is what has been left in which gives the impression of a draft rather than a polished work.

original instructions from the abbot, proceeded to create his own project. As we have seen in a previous chapter, writers did sometimes bend rules and instructions in order to create some space for their own writing.<sup>185</sup> Whether Anonymous was acting to a certain extent on his own must remain an open question.

Then, as now, the timing of a piece of writing was crucial. Abbot Geoffrey's sudden death in 1146 seems to have put a stop to the work and it may be that the abbot never actually laid eyes on the *Life*. His successors either forbade its continuance or withdrew support, which in the monastic setting, may have amounted to the same thing.<sup>186</sup> What was the nature of the instruction given? Abbot Geoffrey, after his (second) dramatic conversion in which Christina was instrumental, was convinced of her spiritual powers. As he continued to cultivate her friendship and feel reformation in himself, her holiness may have seemed to him remarkable and worthy of record. That may, indeed, have been all. It may be that he had in mind a book for the Abbey library about the pious local recluse whose life had meant so much to him and to other monks of the house. Another possibility, and perhaps after all the best suggestion, is that Geoffrey, having built up Christina's hermitage and encouraged its establishment as a priory, felt that a memorial of its first prioress should be written and kept for the nuns at Markyate. Talbot thought this a likely reason for the work ("Introduction" 3-4). The work is obviously meant for a monastic audience, but may have been intended only as a memorial. By no means were all memorials of holy monastics intended to become

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<sup>185</sup> We may recall how Guibert de Nogent and Eadmer both parted from strict obedience in order to pursue their own projects.

<sup>186</sup> There is the possibility, as one of the *Life's* first readers, Roscarrock, suggested, that the writer died suddenly or went away, but I think it is unlikely that Anonymous would have left this work unfinished voluntarily. For Roscarrock, see Talbot's Introduction to the *Life*, p.3 and Koopmans, 666-668.

documents in canonization proceedings. Simply the human propensity to record the matters that are important to them would explain these remembrances.

Given, however, what we know of Geoffrey's personality - his flamboyance, forcefulness and emotional response to experience - it is quite possible that he was convinced that he was associating with a saint, a human link to the Divine. Abbot Geoffrey was convinced of Christina's holiness as were many others, both at Saint Albans and elsewhere. In this case the biography may have been undertaken with the idea, even if only half-formed, that it would be a first step in the process of canonization.<sup>187</sup> This may not even have been openly under discussion while the writing was going on. The benefits of such an association could have been significant if it happened that St. Albans had cultivated a relationship with a saint who was later approved by the Church through canonization.

Anonymous certainly emphasizes Christina's connection with St. Albans Abbey, not just with its Abbot. It is worth reviewing the association here. Quite aside from the fact that she eventually took her vows at St. Albans, some of the monks were well-known to her before she met Geoffrey. Discussing Christina's preference for St. Albans Abbey

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<sup>187</sup> Local development of saints' cults was still a possibility at this time. Indeed, "before the late-eleventh-century consolidation of canonization by the Vatican (especially under the jurisdiction of Alexander III, 1159-81), virtually all the worship of saints began as local cults" (Heffernan 22). The process of canonization, however, was increasingly being removed from local authorities and taken on by the papal court from the time of Alexander III. Its requirements and processes became more fixed and, consequently, many holy persons who, under local authorities would have been considered saints, were not canonized. As Aviad Kleinberg has pointed out, however, "there was no way of curtailing this popular devotion by applying strict standards of bureaucratic barriers" (*Prophets* 29). The hermits Roger and Sigar, for example, drew pilgrims, both common and royal, to their shrines at St. Albans (*Gesta Abbatum* 105-106), although they never were officially canonized. For a detailed account and an early example of the transformation of the process of canonization which is both English and contemporary with Christina, see Raymonde Foreville and Gillian Keir, *The Book of St. Gilbert*. For issues concerning saints and the processes of canonization, see Aviad Kleinberg's *Prophets in Their Own Country*.

as a place to take her monastic vows, Anonymous tells us that “there were in our community certain souls whom she cherished more than those of other monasteries, some of whom owed their monastic vocation to her” [“quia in nostra congregacione nonnulli erant quorum animas omnibus aliorum locorum cariores habebat. de quibus aliquot ipsa feceret in ea monachos”] (ch. 50). Of these, he names Alvered, who appears to Christina in a vision, and was “notus ac familiaris” [“known and friendly”] to her (ch. 56). It is her vision of Alvered, during which she is commanded to warn Geoffrey from a wicked course of action, which brings her in contact with the Abbot and marks the beginning of their relationship. Her brother, Gregory, also a monk at St. Albans, is named as well, “whom she cherished with extraordinary affection for the *gracefulness of his conduct* and the staunchness of his belief” [“ob cuius morum venustatem. fideique constanciam. eum miro diligebat affectu”] (ch. 70). It may be that Evianus, who appears to her when her prayers are answered, was also in life a monk at St. Albans, although the author does not say so specifically. Christina’s sister Margaret, as suggested in chapter one, appears to have moved from St. Albans to be with her sister at Markyate, and others from among the almonry nuns may have done likewise. There is also the episode where the young Christina marks a cross on the door of the Abbey church with her fingernail to signify her longing to be there (ch. 4). Moreover, her connection with St. Albans, and particularly her spiritual direction of its abbot, is shown receiving heavenly approval when, during a vision, she is brought into the abbey church of St. Albans where she sees the Pilgrim who has visited Markyate (later identified with Christ), looking over the monks and approving of their service (ch. 80). Finally, Anonymous completes his portrait of her association with the abbey by imagining Christina with her patron, St. Alban, in heaven: “it should be

borne in mind that as our blessed patron St. Alban had her from the Lord as co-operator in building up and furthering his community on earth, so he had her afterwards as sharer of his eternal bliss in heaven” [“senciendum quod ipse benignissimus patronus noster Albanus [elegit] eam a domino quam in exco[lendo] et provehendo familiam suam haberet in terra cooperatricem et postmodum in celo felicitatis eterne consortem”] (ch. 50). The author’s references to an association between Markyate and the Abbey are frequent, and his purpose in such descriptions is surely to forge that link in the mind of the reader. Of course, saintliness would have to have been confirmed after death by miracles at the site of Christina’s burial, so this would have been only a beginning record, and indeed, Geoffrey likely expected to live long enough to see more confirmation of Christina’s saintliness, confirmation that would convince the world. Geoffrey, however, died first and perhaps after all it was only his zeal and authority that had kept the project going.<sup>188</sup>

The author himself says that he is telling the simple story of Christina’s life. He contrasts his “simple story” with the story of the bond of spiritual love that Christina and Abbot Geoffrey shared. That bond, focussed as it was on heavenly matters, he leaves to another to describe, or so he says:

For who shall describe the longings, the sighs, the tears they shed as they sat and discussed heavenly matters? Who shall put into words how they despised the transitory, how they yearned for the everlasting? Let this be left to someone else: my task is to describe quite simply the simple life of the virgin.

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<sup>188</sup> Rachel Koopmans sees the *Vita* as “the first step in establishing Christina as not only Geoffrey’s personal intercessor but as a woman worthy of general reverence as a saintly figure” (680-681).

[Quos enim singultus. que suspiria quos fletus. considentes et de supernis tractantes effuderunt quis edisseret? Quantum quod transit villipenderent. quantum quod permanet. appeterent. quis edicet? Aliorum ista sint. meum est simplicem virginis vitam simpliciter describere.] (ch. 69)

We would be forgiven for thinking, however, that this statement is not meant to be taken at face value. We will come to his portrait of their spiritual friendship in due course. Even as a description of the story of Christina's early life, however, "simple" is at least an odd term to use even if, as is possible, Anonymous was thinking of the moral aspects of the word's meaning, for Christina's life was not simple in any sense. Her refusal to undertake a conventional role assigned by her family and her choice of an alternate road led to a very complex string of events and involved her with clergy of all levels, from the humblest to the most exalted, not all of whom agreed with her interpretation of her situation; and we cannot forget that at one point she publicly agreed to her parents' arrangement of marriage with Burthred. Anonymous spends considerable time countering that awkward fact with episodes demonstrating the authenticity of her vow of virginity and her resolution in its maintenance, even bringing in higher ecclesiastical approval in the persons of the archbishops of Canterbury and York. Later, her difficulty in harnessing her own sexual urges in fulfillment of her vow of virginity is described in frank detail by the author, and he very realistically portrays how confused and worried Christina is about these urges and their meaning in regard to her vocation. Anonymous, it seems to me, takes an enormous risk in being so fully clear and descriptive of Christina's sexual desires, and it may be that this is a particular area where later

consideration would have resulted in revision.<sup>189</sup> On the other hand, it may be that this strategy was purposeful, since it allowed Anonymous to explore such issues as the relationship between sin and intention, the necessity of dependence upon Christ, and the heavenly acknowledgement, through vision, of specifically feminine issues, such as the sacrifice of maternity.<sup>190</sup>

Nor is the story written by Anonymous simple in any rhetorical or compositional sense, as I hope has been amply demonstrated in earlier chapters. In those parts of the story which have been revised he shows that he has considerable ability in the ordering of material, the drawing of analogies and in the use of literary language, and makes skillful use of *amplificatio* through dramatic writing and his accounts of Christina's visionary experiences. Moreover, Anonymous, like some other biographers of the same period, shows himself to be fascinated by the inner lives, or what we would now call the psychological states of his characters. Occasionally Anonymous steps in to explain motives directly, as he does when he tells us about the stubbornness of Christina's family. More often, though, psychological states, and their resolution, are more obliquely dealt with by anecdote, which often includes the visionary experience of his subject or of another character. As shown in the last chapter, this use of vision as resolution of psychological dilemmas is a significant aspect of the author's method. His work is thus

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<sup>189</sup> It may be useful here to remember the strategy of Aelred of Rievaulx who, by casting the experience into the third person, was able to acknowledge and discuss his own difficulty with sexual urges (*De Institutione Inclusarum*, cap.10, 440-475). Karras discusses this passage in "Friendship and Love in the Lives of Two Twelfth-Century English Saints," p. 312-313.

<sup>190</sup> Regarding the issue of intention with regard to sin, see above, n. 138. As is discussed later in this chapter, Christina is shown to be completely dependent upon Christ following the episode during which Sueno abandons her. Christina's sacrifice of maternity, the desire for which I believe is portrayed metonymically by descriptions of her sexual desire, is specifically dealt with by means of her vision of the Christ child (ch. 45).

another addition to that small but interesting segment of twelfth and thirteenth-century biography remarked on by David Farmer and R.W. Southern, which sought to explore the individual personality of the saint.<sup>191</sup> Southern, for example, has discussed Eadmer as the first to emphasize the private events and speech of his subject, in his *Vita* of Anselm (*Saint Anselm and His Biographer* 329-336). He suggests that these emphases were new to hagiography, in which traditionally “the only essential and invariable features were portents at birth, miracles and prophecies during life, a death-bed with its attendant signs, and a continuation of miraculous intervention after death” (321). It is interesting, in regard to the present study, that Southern notes that “Eadmer had few successors in the art of intimate biography” (336). It could be that the intimate style of Anonymous to some extent contributed to the marginalization of his work, even after the rift between Markyate and St. Albans was mended during Robert Gorham’s abbacy.

Curiously enough, it is the task that Anonymous disclaims that in the end preoccupies him, perhaps more than he had anticipated. It is apparent, however, that although the relationship between Christina and Geoffrey was important to him, so important, indeed, that most of the second part of his story is devoted to its exploration, there are two other relationships from the earlier part of the story that are important in Christina’s life as well, and in fact, Anonymous treats these three friendships of Christina: with Sueno, with Roger and finally with Abbot Geoffrey as representing the stages of her spiritual development. These friendships, it would seem, provide what there is of structure for the *Life* as a whole. Before discussing these relationships, it will be

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<sup>191</sup> See David Famer, *Saints*, p. xiii. R.W. Southern finds that “the taste for psychological elaboration became very widespread in the course of the twelfth century and left a deep mark on the literature of the period” (*St. Anselm and His Biographer* 335).

useful to give some brief consideration to monastic perceptions of friendship.

Medieval ideas on friendship had sources in both classical treatises, especially the *De Amicitia* of Cicero and in Biblical tradition, in the Old Testament stories such as that of David and Jonathan, and the Gospel depictions of Christ's human bond with the disciple John and with the family Lazarus, Mary and Martha. The Ciceronian thread was male-based, as were Old Testament examples.<sup>192</sup> With the Gospels, however, the possibility of male-female friendship became imaginatively possible. Jesus spent time teaching women, in particular Mary of Bethany and the woman of Samaria. Women were among his followers while He lived and women played a role in the early Church. This New Testament/Apostolic model was further reinforced in some early Church literature, especially the early saints' passions, where women are portrayed in leading roles. In Perpetua's *passio*, for example, she is shown as a leader of her companions, speaking up for them to authority figures and encouraging them to act bravely on behalf of their faith. Christianity was considered by its adherents to be a continuation and fulfillment of the Old Testament, but at the same time it was a new religion, or at least, a religion under a new covenant, introduced by Christ.<sup>193</sup>

Monastic writers, while using classical models of friendship, developed a more altruistic version of spiritual friendship in the cloister. One should love all of one's

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<sup>192</sup> James McEvoy usefully traces the transmission of classical understandings of friendship into the Middle Ages in his article, "The Theory of Friendship in the Latin Middle Ages." In the introduction to his book, *Friendship and Community*, Brian McGuire discusses the Biblical tradition. Rosemary Rader, in *Breaking Boundaries*, devotes a chapter to the leadership shown by early female martyrs (pp. 44-61).

<sup>193</sup> Perpetua's *passio* can be found in Herbert Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, as can stories of other early Christian women. For women in the early Church, see Jo Ann McNamara, *A New Song: Celibate Women in the First Three Christian Centuries* and Rosemary Rader, *Breaking Boundaries: Male/Female Friendships in Early Christian Communities*.

brethren, without regard as to person. Particular friendships in the monastery were technically frowned upon (Karras 306, 308). Like other stipulations of Benedict's Rule, however, the discouragement of friendship was frequently reconsidered according to circumstances, and until the late twelfth century at least, the ideals of spiritual friendship were not simply tolerated, but encouraged.<sup>194</sup> The twelfth century saw a great development of the ideals of friendship generally. The ideals of *amicitia* inspired a significant outpouring of literature on friendship among men. Even those, like the Cistercians, who claimed to follow the Rule closely, such as Bernard and Aelred, wrote works extolling friendship between likeminded men, that is monks. In its way, monastic friendship envisioned by Bernard and Aelred departed from the letter of the Rule in being, as Ruth Mazo Karras has shown, "particular and exclusive" as well as being described in highly emotive language (305, 308). Significantly missing from these works is any idea that men and women might find friendship as well within the context of spirituality. In fact, that idea is specifically rejected by several men of this period. For example, Aelred, in his book of instruction for recluses, warned that relationships, or even extended conversations between men and women, even if they began with the best intentions, were bound to cause grief (*De Institutione Inclusarum*, ch. 7).

Among the many ideals arising from the spirit of reform, the desire for a return to

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<sup>194</sup> The topic of friendship in this period has received thorough scholarly attention. A major contribution to the literature is Brian McGuire's *Friendship and Community*. Other works on more particular aspects of friendship include Gerd Althoff, "Friendship and Political Order"; A.M. Fiske, "Aelred's of Rievaulx Idea of Friendship and Love"; "Alcuin and Mystical Friendship"; "St. Bernard of Clairvaux and Friendship"; Joseph T. Lienhard, "Friendship with God, Friendship in God"; James McEvoy, "Theory of Friendship in the Latin Middle Ages"; Brian McGuire, "Listening to Heloise" and Rosemary Rader, *Breaking Boundaries*. Studies including significant discussion on Christina are Elisabeth Bos, "Patterns of Male-Female Religious Friendships"; C. Stephen Jaeger, *Ennobling Love* and Ruth Mazo Karras, "Friendship and Love in the Lives of Two Twelfth-Century English Saints."

a more perfect relation between men and women, rejecting human sexuality and returning to a *conversatio* such as had pertained originally in Eden before the Fall, although not universal, did recommend itself to some. “More perhaps than at any other time in Christian history (not excluding the present), male religious leaders in the eleventh and twelfth centuries were responsive to the needs of women and welcomed their presence and influence in religious institutions” (Constable, *Reformation* 65). Indeed the very idea of reform – of a return to the fundamentals of the faith, the *vita apostolica* – seemed to warrant a revival of earlier ways of being among Christians, male and female. We might cynically see this concern as a method rather to contain or restrict women. Thus Rosalyn Voaden suggests that while the Church’s concern for institutional care of women seeking a holy life may seem to be in order “to maintain the natural order and to assist the movement of women from the subordination of the order of creation to the equality of the order of salvation” (27-28), in reality it could also be that “church control of women was designed to protect male spirituality from female contamination, rather than to promote the spiritual growth and eventual salvation of those women” (28). She concedes that some churchmen did honour and provide support for women religious, but maintains, rightly I believe, that “such support was personal and arbitrary, within the power of the individual to give or withhold, rather than institutionalized and reliable, a right on which women could call at need” (31). We see the truth of this view confirmed in the events surrounding the composition of the *Life*. While Abbot Geoffrey is alive, he maintains the nuns at Markyate. After his death, support, if it continued at all, seems to have been less enthusiastic. It may be, then, that the relationships drawn by Anonymous in the *Life* reflect a more co-operative attitude among some members of the monastic community;

certainly the manner in which Anonymous describes these relationships does not suggest that he found them particularly unusual. However, the conflicts he also portrays show that these more inclusive attitudes did not form a universal ethos.

The portraits of friendships between Christina and various clerics drawn by Anonymous reflect her developing religious maturity and eventual achievement of the contemplative life. Through these relationships, Christina progresses from being, as a child, a pupil of Sueno, then continues her religious and contemplative training with Roger, and finally assumes the role of spiritual mentor to Geoffrey, among others. These portraits of her friendships are thus important thematically to the *Life* and, moreover, as historical data, add to our knowledge of how such mentorships may have been undertaken.

Sueno's role in the story is a reflection of the active life of canons in the Huntingdon community. As discussed earlier, he was evidently known to the family and entrusted with Christina's early education. He first meets her as a very young girl ("parvulam," "virguncula" ch. 3). Anonymous describes some of the educational process and shows how important the relationship is in encouraging Christina's religious tendency: "As the maiden had decided to preserve her virginity for God, the man of God strove by all the means in his power to confirm her in her decision" ["Virguncula statuit integritatem suam Deo servare. vir Dei omnimodo intendebat animum illius in statuto roborare" (ch. 3). He does this by both describing how difficult it will be to remain a virgin and also by praising the virgin life as a vocation. Although Anonymous does not say so, it is likely that the lives of saints provided examples for the canon's teaching. Christina's personal conversion took place during Sueno's mentorship, although while

she was away from home (ch. 4). Sueno confirmed the vow that she made at that time. The author later blames Bishop Ranulf for Christina's family problems, but the seeds for the confrontational atmosphere that later develops are sown here, when Sueno first encourages the young Christina's religious inclination and then confirms her personal vow, thus giving it, in her mind, an authority that would later be disputed by both secular and ecclesiastical authority. He is, in a very real sense, authorizing her exemption from any plan her family may have for her. In a way, Sueno's reformist emphasis on individual conversion and virginity, even if he followed Christina's demonstrated inclination, provided a space wherein Christina felt herself detached from her family and responsible for herself with regard to her salvation and life vocation. The psychological liberation she experiences at this stage is reflected throughout the *Life*. The effect of Sueno's intervention (for that is what it is, after all) is thus to symbolically free Christina from her family, joining her to the Heavenly family by marriage to Christ. Sueno's role, then, is that of a teacher who has become the friend of his student, whose concern for her welfare goes beyond her success as a pupil and who, in fact, oversteps to a considerable degree his authority with her.<sup>195</sup>

The relationship between Christina and Sueno is portrayed as very close. In a situation such as Christina's, where everything that she has come to believe in is being scorned by her family, the one person who validates her most personal beliefs is her sole friend, and in fact, that is what Anonymous calls him: "unicus amicus" (ch. 13). He is described as "the sharer of her secrets" ["secretorum suorum conscio"] (ch. 26). For

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<sup>195</sup> In *Spiritual Marriage*, speaking of a later period, Dyan Elliott remarks on how surprised parents and guardians could be that a "conventionally pious upbringing would stimulate so great an aversion to the marriage bed" (217).

example, Christina immediately tells Sueno of her vision of Mary's promise of deliverance (ch. 26). He becomes like a family member to her, providing the comfort and understanding that she might have expected to receive within her family. Anonymous says that "his friendly intimacy and sympathy had been to her such a source of strength that what she had suffered from others was accounted of little consequence" ["*cuius amica familiaritas atque compassio tantum illi ministrabat fortitudinis: ut pro minimo deputeret quantumcumque pateretur ab omnibus illis*"] (ch. 13). As a close family member might, Sueno acts in confidence on her behalf when, after the bishop's first decision, he asks Burthred to release her (ch. 21). Finally, Anonymous shows us that in Heaven's sight at least, Sueno is not an interfering old man but a strategic link in a series of events. As Sueno prays for Christina's deliverance he hears a voice reassuring him that she will soon be free and that he will then be able to see and speak with her (ch. 27). Christina trusts Sueno; he is her familiar friend, a substitute for her family during a difficult time. He validates her beliefs and encourages her.

The friendship faces the test of misunderstanding, during which its depth is shown and its strength, although sorely tried, endures. The relationship comes under strain when Sueno doubts Christina's strength of will, assuming that she has decided to marry, and the writer takes the opportunity to make a distinction between their levels of fortitude. Anonymous directly contrasts Christina's steadfastness with Sueno's weakness: "now, whilst the maiden stood firm, the man *deserted*" ["*ecce iam puella perseverante vir defecit*"] (ch. 13). However, Christina's steadfastness does not detract from her human sensibilities, but rather highlights them. The sorrow she shows at losing her friend, at having him think badly of her is effectively drawn. Anonymous here shows a remarkable

insight into the effects of shock and grief.

When she heard [that Sueno had abandoned her], she was struck with profound grief and sat so rigid and still for some time that you would have thought she was not a living person but an image carved in stone. Then, heaving deep sighs, she broke out into floods of tears and, with sobs punctuating her laments, she bewailed her lot over and over again as the most wretched and abandoned of all.

[Quo audito illa tunc demum immenso concussa dolore dirigit. et ita immobilis aliquandiu sedit: ut posset putari non esse homo sed potius insculpta marmoris hominis imago. Post hec trahens alta suspiria in profusionem lacrimarum erupit. et singulta querimonias interrumpente: se miser<r>imam. sese orphanam sepius [con]clamavit.” (ch. 13)

The result of the testing is increased strength and grace. She puts all her confidence in Christ at this point. This is portrayed as a significant act of faith, for at this point, Anonymous has only shown us one visionary experience, and that a minor, predictive dream (ch. 12). Her early religious attitude is shown to be based solely on faith, and this trial causes her to look to God for help, since her only human help has forsaken her. The moment is underlined as the point at which Theodora earns her new name: Christina. She feels an infilling of the Holy Spirit, and Anonymous says, “there is no doubt that at this juncture she, whose name was Theodora from baptism, deserved to be signed with the name of her creator by which she was afterwards called, namely Christina” [“Nec dubium quin hoc in articulo meruerit illo nomine sui [crean]tis insigniri. quo postea vocabatur [nempe] Christina. cui nomen a baptisate fuerat [Theodora]”] (ch. 13). This crisis marks the transition to the next stage in her religious development. Perhaps at this point,

Sueno's student has progressed beyond his ability to teach. In a sense, she is, through this test, weaned of her reliance on Sueno, in preparation for the next stage of her development.

It strikes me that Sueno's role in the story is incompletely worked out. Two things particularly stand out. First, where was Sueno during the hearing held in his own monastery on the question of Christina's betrothal, which necessarily involved discussion of her vow? Also later, although we know that Sueno has been praying for Christina's release, he seems completely taken by surprise when she makes her escape. The last we see of him, he is condemning Beatrix for driving her daughter away and prophesying doom on Autti's house (ch. 36). It is possible, of course, that further development of Sueno's role, if it existed, fell by the wayside when the story was transcribed in the fourteenth century.

Unlike the earlier friendship between Christina and Sueno, which seems to have evolved quite naturally as an aspect of the canon's ministry within the community, the relationship between Roger and Christina did not begin auspiciously, began actually, in complete misunderstanding. Roger rejected the idea of helping Christina escape at first, because he thought he was dealing with a runaway bride as, technically, he was. This misunderstanding overcome, he is relieved and happy when he finds that the young woman he had refused to help and who has disappeared, is safe at the recluse Alfwen's cell.

This association also moves through something like a test, but in this case the trial comes as soon as Christina's cell has been moved close to Roger's at Markyate. Actually, there are crises from the beginning. The idea was that Acio, one of the hermits

also living at Markyate, would act as go-between, so that Roger and Christina would not see or speak with one another directly. Anonymous describes their first meeting in detail, as a demonstration of God's will for their closer association. They unintentionally see one another face to face in Roger's chapel on the day of her arrival at Markyate:

The virgin of God lay prostrate in the old man's chapel, with her face turned to the ground. The man of God stepped over her with his face averted in order not to see her. But as he passed by he looked over his shoulder to see how modestly the handmaid of Christ had composed herself for prayer, as this was one of the things which he thought those who pray ought to observe. Yet she, at the same instant, glanced upwards to appraise the bearing and deportment of the old man, for in these she considered that some trace of his great holiness was apparent. And so they saw each other, not by design and yet not by chance, but, as afterwards became clear, by the divine will.

[Virgo Dei prostrata iacebat in o[rator]io seni. demersa facie ad terram. Super quam vir Dei transibat averso vultu ne videret eam. At ubi pertransierat respexit ut videret quam apte Christi ancilla sese composuisset ad orandum. quoniam hoc quoque censebat orantibus esse observandum. et illa nichilominus eodem puncto suspexit ad vivendum incessum et habitum senis. in quibus credebatur nonnullum vestigium apparere tante religionis. Et ita sese mutuo viderunt non sponte. sed non fortuitu: ceterum sicut postea claruit divino nutu.] (ch. 38)<sup>196</sup>

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<sup>196</sup>Here Christina, having escaped her marriage, "lay prostrate" ["prostrata iacebat"] in prayer, about to begin her ascent to God through contemplation. We are reminded, perhaps, of the Burthred figure in her "staircase vision," who also "lay prostrate" ["iacebat prostratus"], having been overthrown through the Virgin Mary's agency. In that vision, Christina safely evades Burthred, and comes to the staircase which

Thereafter, Roger hides her more closely, taking greater risks if they are discovered. Because of this need for secrecy, she becomes completely dependent upon him physically. In fact, the situation is unique in the story: we never, before or after the description of her relationship with Roger, see Christina in such a passive mode. The relationship is more intense than it had been with Sueno, perhaps because of this fear of discovery. Christina learns the discipline of contemplation from Roger, with whom she prays nightly when she is released from the little cell where she is incarcerated during the day. Anonymous uses the imagery of fire to describe the love between them. This fire has a Divine origin, and springs up when they first catch a glimpse of one another: “The fire, *truly*, which had been kindled by the spirit of God and burned in each one of them cast its sparks into their hearts by the grace of that mutual glance” [“Nempe calor qui succensus fuit Dei spiritu ardebat in singulis; scintillas suas iaculat[us] est in corda ipsorum altrinsecus suo modo gracia mutue visionis”] (ch. 38). The author carefully shapes the meaning of *amor* as it applies to Roger and Christina. They are described as being “one in heart and soul in chastity and charity in Christ” [“cor unum et anima una in caritate et in castitate in Christo”] (ch. 38), just as the apostles were after the Resurrection when they were filled with the Holy Ghost (Acts 4:32). It is because of the purity of their love, described thus in terms used of the apostles, that they are not afraid to live together in Roger’s cell. Having clearly described the godly nature of their love, Anonymous says that their “holy *love*” [sanctus . . . amor] “grew day by day, like a large flame springing from two brands joined together” [“sicut ex duabus facibus coniunctis flamma consurgit

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symbolizes the ascent to God.

amplior”] (ch. 38). We see too a continuation of the author’s programme of linking Christina with St. Albans. Here he associates Roger, a monk of St. Albans with Christina on earth and envisions them together in Heaven (ch. 38 and 39).

In a very real and practical sense, Roger takes the place of her now estranged father and calls her, in the only English words in the Latin text, his “Sunday daughter” [“sunendaege dohter”]. In the same passage, language is used that emphasizes his nurturing, paternal role with regard especially to Christina, but also to the others he cares for: “Just as much as Sunday excels the other days of the week in dignity so he loved Christina more than all the others whom he had begotten or nursed in Christ” [“quod ceteris omnibus quas Christo *genuerat* aut *nutrierat*. Christinam plus amaret: quantum dominica dies reliquis septimane feriis honorabilitate pre[staret]” (ch. 41) (italics mine). Like a father, he shows concern for her future welfare, and wants her to inherit his hermitage (“illam heremi sue post se heredem relinquere”) (ch. 42). Heaven blesses the plan through a vision Christina has of the Virgin, who gives her the hermitage. In a similar mode, nearing death, Roger seeks the support of Archbishop Thurstan, who is persuaded to take an interest in Christina’s case.<sup>197</sup> Roger thus reassures himself that after his own death, Christina will have means of support. As we know, however, Christina’s circumstances following Roger’s death are not as planned, and she goes through a period of intense testing, after which, relying on God, she begins a new life at Markyate.

One of the book’s most significant aspects, perhaps, and one that would not have

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<sup>197</sup> It is likely that any arrangement Roger had, as a monk of St. Albans, to receive a daily allowance for his maintenance at the hermitage, would cease with his death. Certainly when Christina leaves the “safe house” provided by Archbishop Thurstan and moves back to Markyate, she is shown living in extreme poverty until she meets Abbot Geoffrey (ch. 54). No doubt the contrast between the impoverished hermit and the abbot of a wealthy abbey is useful to the author’s purpose.

fared very well in the next century, is the championing of the spiritual friendship between Christina and Geoffrey. This friendship certainly had its unusual aspects, and there is clear evidence that the perception of many at St. Albans seems to have been that it consumed far too much of the abbot's time and, likely more importantly, of the monastery's resources.<sup>198</sup>

As discussed above, friendship in the monastic setting was highly valued, despite the ambivalence of Benedict's Rule, and had been since the beginnings of monasticism. This ideal of friendship was male-based. Another clear, if fragile, thread of friendship can be discerned within the monastic tradition, however, a thread that reaches back as far as the Gospel, and one that reflects, it may be said, a view more in line with the example of Christ in the Gospel. It is within this tradition, I believe, that of spiritual friendship between celibate men and women of God, that Anonymous places his portrayal of Christina and Geoffrey. In the case of Christina and Geoffrey, the text shows a very particular arrangement, in that Geoffrey is cast as a patron, providing for Christina's wellbeing, as well as a spiritual seeker, who comes to her for enlightenment and prayers, while Christina is shown to be solicitous for the welfare of Geoffrey's soul. It is valuable, moreover, that we are given a third-person perspective on the relationship: we watch this friendship develop, receiving insight into the effect it has on both Geoffrey and Christina. The mutuality of the relationship is stressed from the outset. "Their *love* was mutual," the author tells us, "but *of each one in proportion to* their standards of holiness" ["*Eratque amor mutuus, sed cuiusque pro modo sanctitatis*"] (ch. 58).

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<sup>198</sup> Regarding the dissatisfaction of St. Albans monks with Geoffrey's interest in Markyate, see the *Gesta Abbatum*, pages 95 and 103, and discussion in L'Hermite-Leclercq, "De l'ermitage au monastere," especially p.55 and Koopmans, pp. 684-685.

Mutuality in this case does not refer, then, to equality in the sense of being without differentiation, but is clearly to do with levels of holiness and a breaking down of worldly hierarchy for the sake of spiritual benefit.<sup>199</sup>

Christina's relationship with Geoffrey from the beginning reverses the usual female/male roles. By the time Christina meets Geoffrey, she is established spiritually, even if she is living in physical hardship at Markyate. Because of a dream she feels obligated to make the first advance. Geoffrey scorns her warning, telling her to ignore dreams. But this relationship is shown to be the will of God. Geoffrey has a warning dream of his own and comes to her as a result. Immediately, he takes in hand her material welfare. (This dream re-establishes her relationship with St. Albans Abbey, a tie which may have seemed to be in abeyance since Roger's death.) Geoffrey in turn seeks her prayers for him to aid the conversion he has undertaken from worldliness. It is an arrangement that suits them both: "Hence Thy virgin was relieved of material poverty, whilst Thy abbot was freed from the burden of spiritual troubles" ["Abhinc enim virgo tua per abbatem <ab> exteriorum attenuacione: abbas iam tuus per virginem ab interiorum aggravacione levatur"] (ch. 57). The antithetical structure and language used here emphasize the division of responsibility ("exteriorum attenuacione/ interiorum aggravacione levatur") and also, by addressing God ("tua virgo . . . abbas tuus") gives credit for this arrangement to Him.

That Christina is shown to confidently take on the spiritual mentorship of the

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<sup>199</sup>As Brian McGuire points out in his book *Friendship and Community*, "today mutuality in friendship is usually taken for granted: the sharing of selves is seen as the foundation of friendship." As he further explains, however, although medieval texts often show only one side of a relationship, mutuality is "by no means ruled out' (xv). In this case we have an opportunity to see the mutuality of the relationship.

abbot is remarkable as well as valuable. Aside from a brief uncertainty at the beginning about interfering in the abbot's affairs, Christina is depicted as utterly confident about God's will with regard to Geoffrey. It is as though once God has delivered him into her tutelage, she is able to proceed without any hesitation to instruct him in the spiritual life. Her concern is evident throughout, even if her methods may at times seem somewhat high-handed. Recall, for instance, that she seems to have had no qualms about criticizing him in person for faults she perceives (ch. 58). She seems indeed to exemplify Gregory the Great's dictum: "truly, a friend is called, as it were, a guardian of one's soul" ["amicus enim quasi animi custos vocatur"] (PL 176:1207)<sup>200</sup> Christina, Anonymous says, "was in some way more anxious for him than for herself" ["pro illo quam pro se modo quodam plus esset sollicita"] (ch. 64). She prayed to be "satisfied in her mind about the sure salvation of her beloved" ["de delecti vere salutis noticia satisfaciat animo"] (ch. 69). Finally she is rewarded through a vision of the Trinity, during which the Holy Spirit, in the form of a dove, seems to be about to alight on Geoffrey, and she understands that once he is filled with the grace of the Holy Spirit, he will be solely focussed on heavenly things (ch. 69).

Anonymous, it seems to me, is writing the story of their relationship as an exemplum of a kind of relationship that goes back to the early Church, and a relationship, moreover, which could be said to have the approval of Christ. To illustrate the nature of the relationship, he draws analogues with both the Gospel and the early Church. Christ, in the Gospels, taught women directly. In the *Life*, as discussed earlier, Anonymous

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<sup>200</sup>Translation mine.

draws a direct analogy between Christina and Mary of Bethany, emphasizing her role as someone directly taught by Christ, who leaves worldly considerations to others (ch. 80). Christina's sister Margaret, meanwhile, is compared to Martha, busy with practical things. In Christina's relationship with Geoffrey, it is Christina who prays, Geoffrey who sees to practical matters.

However, the author also points to the troubled aspects of this tradition. Christina, says Anonymous, could be considered another Paula, and Geoffrey another Jerome. In the fourth century, Jerome directed a monastery in Bethlehem, while the Roman widow Paula directed a house of celibate women. Their friendship was intimate and mutually beneficial. Anonymous draws attention to two aspects of the relationship in particular. One, by mentioning them at all, he reminds the reader that Jerome, through his preserved letters, remained an important authority of the Church, and that Paula, by virtue of being an important correspondent (and subject of correspondence) is firmly linked with him, and is remembered for her holiness and erudition. Secondly, by placing his reference where he does, Anonymous draws an analogy between the kind of criticism suffered by Jerome and Paula and that suffered by Geoffrey and Christina. In their time, Jerome and Paula were the subject of criticism and malicious gossip because of their intimate, spiritual friendship.<sup>201</sup> Likewise, Anonymous says, Geoffrey and Christina are unjustly accused of improprieties:

Thenceforward some who bore the habit of religion were pierced by the lance of envy. Some of them gossiped about things neither true nor having the appearance

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<sup>201</sup> For Jerome and Paula, see Jerome's letters in *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 22, especially 481-483, and also Rosemary Rader's discussion, pp. 99-103.

of truth, others tried to veil their fictitious tales under an appearance of truth, so that listening to them you might think that one was Jerome, the other Paula, had not one been a virgin and the other the mother of a virgin.

[De hinc quidam habitum religionis preferentes, invidie iaculo confodiuntur. Isti nec vera nec verisimilia garriunt. illi que confinxerunt quodam veritatis velamento palliare nituntur. ita ut alium Ieronimum aliam cerneres Paulam. si non ista virgo virginis illa mater fuisset.] (ch. 76)

Anonymous is confident, however, that they will be able to rise above scandal and that their relationship will prove useful and will benefit the Church, just as the relationship between Jerome and Paula did.

As mentioned above, it is in this series of relationships, I believe, that we find what structure there is to the *Life* as a whole. These relationships show Christina progressing from a childhood under the tutelage of Sueno, to a strictly enclosed life with Roger as counselor and spiritual director. This enclosed life is as close as she comes to being a recluse in the sense that Aelred, for example, would have found acceptable. However, Christina develops beyond this strictly enclosed state which is the highest state, it may be noted, that many churchmen of the time were willing to grant women. She has learned contemplation from Roger, and continues to practise it. In the relationship with Geoffrey, we find that she has assumed the role of mentor, not just to women or servants, but to the abbot of a major abbey. Her spiritual development, then, projects over the whole story, in an upward direction, with even a passage to link her in heaven with Roger and St. Alban (ch. 38 and ch. 50). What makes Christina's *Life* so unique both in tone and effect is that it *shows* us the friendships; we are not given many of Christina's words,

her revelation, as is the case for other mystics both of her own and later time. Rather we see the friendships in action, from an outside perspective. Given more time for the project, if indeed, this was part of a larger project, Anonymous might have added a further book of miracles and of Christina's own words.<sup>202</sup> As it is, I believe it is unique for its time in its portrayal of her friendship with Abbot Geoffrey.

From the outset, I have worked under the considered view that the *Life* is an incompletely revised work. It is as though a tapestry were only partly filled in. Some of the pattern glows in brilliant colour, but there is still a lot of empty canvas, much that we cannot know. The first part of the story, recounting Christina's family troubles and her escape, as I hope I have demonstrated, has been longer meditated on, and a form with which the monk was intimately familiar has been used to give the narrative coherence, as well as to provide literary associations appropriate to his moral purpose for his readers. The second part of the book, however, is more episodic. These two kinds of writing are not necessarily in conflict. The second part may be a result of less time for meditation, which, as we have seen, was an essential component of medieval composition. Even in the second part, however, we see Anonymous working in appropriate analogies and recording incidents illustrative of his underlying conception of Christina as a living saint. Although not completely worked out, it is clear that in the second part we have, in spite of Anonymous' protestation to the contrary, a record of the spiritual friendship between

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<sup>202</sup> There is the possibility, of course, that there were more of Christina's words, and more accounts of her miracles in the original biography, but that these were shed by the fourteenth-century compiler. Looking at the end of chapter 47, for instance, we see a possible gap which could accommodate a number of miraculous episodes. Moreover, the beginning of chapter 48 refers to cures that Christina obtained for others ("aliis"), suggesting perhaps that the story of the woman from Canterbury was only one story of several.

Abbot Geoffrey and Christina.

The first part, it seems to me, is where Anonymous breaks new ground in authorship, not simply in telling a story in the virgin martyr “style,” but in applying that form to a contemporary woman. Early virgin martyr stories were revived in the next century, in the vernacular, but even then, the stories themselves were safely distant.<sup>203</sup> Although one can perhaps safely celebrate the firmness of faith particularized in filial rebellion in a saint of the first century, one might have difficulty, in the twelfth century, approving of the same kind of rebellion in a child or a neighbour’s child, particularly in a daughter. Certainly we see in the text that Christina’s rebellion causes considerable disturbance in Huntingdon society. The text Anonymous composed, even setting aside the political uproar at the Abbey following Abbot Geoffrey’s death, was bound to remain at least a problematic text as long as society privileged family aspirations over individual ones, and that tendency was long-lived. As the textual history indicates, it was only in the fourteenth century that someone thought that Christina’s story might be sufficiently distant to be appropriate reading in the monastery.<sup>204</sup> Even then it only appears in one exemplar, and was not apparently copied into further manuscripts of John of Tynemouth’s *Sanctilogium Angliae*. It was perhaps still too close in time to be safe, even within the monastic setting.

If the first part of the story, however, was perhaps, not quite a good example to set

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<sup>203</sup> See Jocelyn Wogan-Browne’s works on vernacular virgin martyr stories of the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. These vernacular versions were of legends set in the early Christian era. Philip of Harvengt, of course, wrote the story of the rebellious twelfth-century woman Oda of Bonne Esperance. I have not explored the transmission and influence of that text. Later in the century, stories of individual mystics began to be influential.

<sup>204</sup> See Talbot’s “Introduction” to the *Life* for a discussion of John of Tynemouth’s project.

before impressionable young women, the second part was even more controversial and would raise objections on other grounds. Because of the unconventional portrayal of Christina's relationship with Geoffrey, Anonymous finds himself in potential conflict with part of his audience. He is at pains to defend the friendship between Geoffrey and Christina from charges of immorality. From the text as it stands, it seems probable that Anonymous intended to revise and emphasize his portrait of the spiritual love between Geoffrey and Christina, placing it firmly within the context of similar relationships stretching back to the Gospels. In this we can discern his reformist desire for the *vita apostolica*. Geoffrey was not alone in seeking out Christina's friendship. As the text shows, her friendship was sought out because it seemed to confer spiritual enlightenment. Simon of Bermondsey, the author tells us, "had a great respect for the virgin just mentioned: he cultivated her friendship, and spoke affectionately of her, since through being accepted into her familiar circle he had felt a greater outpouring of the Holy Spirit" ["virginem prefatam multo colebat studio. diligebat affectu. predicabat amore. utpote cuius familiaritatis dulcedine. sepius in se sancti spiritus perfusioem senserat gratiam"] (ch. 77). Anonymous thought he was writing for an audience that would appreciate such friendship, a strand of reform which he thought still had validity. As Heffernan finds in his study of medieval biography, however, "such narratives are designed to promote social cohesion. If the normative values are not present . . . it is unlikely that the text will receive community approbation" (18). That the idealism espoused by Anonymous did not persist into the second half of the twelfth century is, I believe, reflected in the *Life* and in the events which followed Abbot Geoffrey's death in 1146. It is possible that one reason that the *Life* did not find an audience outside Markyate in the next two centuries

was partly because of this focus in the second half of the book. As Constable has shown, “the attitude, even of those who were sympathetic to women and received them into their communities, seems to have changed in the second quarter of the twelfth century” and that around this time “traditional attitudes reasserted themselves” (*Reformation* 73).<sup>205</sup> The fate of the *Life* seems to me to be in line with the change Constable notes.

We can never know, of course, whether given time for revision and consultation with Abbot Geoffrey, Anonymous might have brought his story into line with more conventional attitudes, satisfying the conservative members of his audience. For my own part, I am glad that circumstances dictated otherwise. Painful as it must have been for Anonymous to give up his work before it was ready to face the critics, we reap the benefits now in being able to read this vivid and individualistic account of a twelfth-century woman, and at the same time, see more clearly some of the “chisel-marks” left by the artist.<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>205</sup> See Sally Thompson, *Women Religious*, pp. 212-216 for a similar view regarding the gradual change in attitude toward women in the course of the twelfth century. She finds that co-operation between the sexes could be “undermined by distrust of sexuality and fears of scandal” (213).

<sup>206</sup> Rachel Koopmans: “Most *vitae* surviving from the medieval period are carefully executed and completed texts. It can be very difficult for the observer to discern how these *vitae* were produced, as if one were searching for chisel-marks on a well-polished statue. The writer of Christina’s *Vita*, in contrast, was compelled to abandon his work with Christina only half-hewn from the block” (698).

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## Chronological Chart\*

Year	Christina	Abbots of St. Albans	Bishops and Archbishops	Kings and Popes	Contemporary Events and People	Year	
1045				1048-1054 P. Leo IX		1045	
1050						1050	
1055		1064-1077 Frederic		1061-1073 P. Alexander II 1066-1087 William I "the Conqueror"	1060-1130 Eadmer	1055	
1060				1073-1085 P. Gregory VII		1060	
1065						1065	
1070	Waltheof, Earl of Huntingdon, executed	1077-1093 Paul of Caen	1070-1089 Lanfranc, Abp of Canterbury		1075-c.1143 Orderic Vitalis 1078 Winchester council; marriage must be blessed by a priest	1070	
1075						1075	
1080				1087-1100 William II "Rufus"		1080	
1085				1086-1099 P. Urban II	1090-1143 William of Malmesbury	1085	
1090		1093-1097 Held by King Wm II	1093-1109 Anselm, Abp of Canterbury	1099-1118 P. Paschal II	1095 lvo of <i>Chartres Paganorum</i>	1090	
1095	c. 1096-98 bom	1097-1119 Richard	1094-1123 Bloet Bp Lincoln 1099-1128 Flambard Bp Durham	1100-1135 Henry I	1101-1106 Bp Flambard in Normandy 1106 Henry I takes Normandy	1095	
1100						1100	
1105	c. 1111-1112 Private vow of chastity c. 1113-1114 Bp Flambard's attempt to seduce Christina c. 1114-15 Bp Bloet's hearing c. 1115-1116 Eadwin's visit to Abp Ralph d'Escures c. 1115-1116 Flight to Flamstead		1114-1122 Ralph d'Escures Abp Canterbury 1115 Flambard ordains Thurstan priest		1110 Geoffrey Gorham produces miracle play of St. Katherine 1110 Geoffrey Gorham becomes monk at St. Albans	1105	
1110						1110	
1115				1118-1119 P. Gelasius II 1119-1124 P. Calixtus II	1115 Consecration of St. Albans Abbey Church c. 1115-1119 Dedication of Chapel to St. Alexits at St. Albans (by Bp Ranulf Flambard)	1115	
1120		1119-1146 Geoffrey Gorham	1119-1140 Thurstan Abp York			1120	
1125	c. 1118-1122 Al. Markyate with Roger c. 1118-1122 Burthrad freed their c. 1121-1122 Meeting with Abp Thurstan c. 1122-1123 Death of Roger c. 1122-23 Christina away from Markyate c. 1123 Return to Markyate c. 1124 First meeting with Ab. Geoffrey		1123-1136 William of Corbeil Abp Canterbury 1123-1148 Alexander Bp Lincoln	1124-1130 P. Honorius II 1130-1143 P. Innocent II 1135-1154 Stephen	c. 1120-1130 St. Albans Psalter	1125	
1130						1130	
1135					1123 First Lateran Council	1135	
1140				1143-1144 P. Celestine II	1125 Death of Gilbert, Sheriff of Huntingdon 1135-1154 Civil War: Stephen/Matilda 1136 Ab. Geoffrey sent to Rome re: Stephen's election 1139 Council of Innocent II 1139 Arrest of Bps Salisbury and Lincoln c. 1140-1141 Ab. Geoffrey to King's court 1140 Foundation of Scopwell Priory c. 1140 Gratian's <i>Concordantia Discordantium Canonum (Decretum)</i> 1143 K. Stephen at St. Albans 1146 (May?) K. Stephen at St. Albans 1148 (Nov?) K. Stephen at St. Albans		1140
1145	1145 Establishment of Markyate Priory 1146 Consecration of Church 1146 Death of Ab. Geoffrey	1146-1151 Radulf 1151-1168 Robert Gorham		1145-1153 P. Eugenius III 1154-1188 Henry II 1154-1159 P. Adrian IV		1145	
1150					1155 Ab. Robert visits P. Adrian IV; takes gifts of Christina's needlework	1150	
1155						1155	
1160						1160	
1165						1165	
1170						1170	
1175						1175	
1180						1180	
1185					1189 Death of Gilbert of Sempringham	1185	
1190						1190	
1195						1195	
1200					1202 Gilbert of Sempringham canonized	1200	

\* Talbot's dates have been used for the events of Christina's life (see Introduction, n. 3)

## APPENDIX 2

FINDING AID TO VISIONARY EXPERIENCE  
IN *THE LIFE OF CHRISTINA OF MARKYATE*

VISION/DREAM/SIGN	SUBJECT	CHAPTER
Visitation of a dove during pregnancy	Beatrix	1
Escape from devil by jumping fence	Christina	12
Two persons dressed in white who follow Christina	Jewess	23
“Staircase vision”	Christina	24-25
Vision of Mary, “greatest of women”	Christina	26
Sueno hears voice while at Mass	Sueno	27
Angels lead Roger to Markyate	Roger	28
Sensory – fluttering bird inside	Christina	33
Loric’s exhortation	Christina	36
Vision of threatening bulls	Christina	37
Toads invade cell, sit on Psalter	Christina	37
Miraculous singing at Markyate	Acio and Leofric	38
Roger’s fiery cowl	Christina	40
Christ with cross enters through locked door	Christina	41
Mary visits Burthred, reproaches him	Burthred	42
Queen of Heaven promises Markyate to Christina	Christina	42-43
Unchaste cleric as enormous bear	Christina	44
St. John, St. Benedict, Mary Magdalen visit	Unchaste cleric	45
Christ as small child	Christina	45
Margaret visits woman of Canterbury	Woman of Canterbury	46
An apostle heals woman of Canterbury	Christina	47
Virgin visits Markyate, heals Christina	Nun of Markyate	49
Angels visit Markyate, crown Christina	Christina	52
General apparitions and shapes	Christina	53

Rapt to Heaven – hears voice	Christina	54
Alvered visits Christina	Christina	56
Alvered visits Geoffrey	Geoffrey	56
Vision of Geoffrey with monks and nuns	Christina	59
Voice comes to Christina regarding Geoffrey's health	Christina	63
Christmas vision of Geoffrey in red cope	Christina	64
Vision of flowering herb, signifying Christina	Geoffrey	66
Vision of Christina in Abbot's cell	Geoffrey	67
Vision of Trinity and Abbot	Christina	69
Voice from heaven about Gregory	Christina	70
Geoffrey enclosed in a wall	Christina	71
Geoffrey enclosed in cloister	Christina	72
Vision: Christina embraces Geoffrey and is assisted by Jesus	Christina	73
Vision of Evianus, caressing face	Christina	75
Sensory: fluttering birds in breast	Christina	75
Vision of one to three lights	Christina	75
Vision of Christina	Monk of Bermondsey	77
Vision of headless body	Christina and nuns	78
Encouraging voice	Christina	78
Voice in heart, regarding Geoffrey's death	Christina	79
Vision of Christina and Geoffrey before Jesus at altar	Christina	79
Vision of Christ in choir of St. Albans Church	Christina	80
Pilgrim disappears from church at Markyate	Entire Congregation	81
Forbidden thoughts of maid	Christina	82
Knowledge of stolen goods	Christina	84
Knowledge of sister and husband's conversation	Christina	85

## APPENDIX 3

CHRONOLOGICAL BIBLIOGRAPHY OF  
STUDIES ON CHRISTINA OF MARKYATE

This list includes, besides items specifically dealing with the *Life*, studies on other topics which contain significant readings of episodes in the biography. I have not included works dealing with the *St. Albans Psalter* unless they dealt also in a significant way with the biography.

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