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**MARIAN LYRIC IN THE CISTERCIAN MONASTERY
DURING THE HIGH MIDDLE AGES**

by Brian Noell

I.

Marian devotion has a long history within Christendom, especially in the East. Festivals celebrating her as Theotokos or Mother of God seem to go back at least to the fourth century in the Greek speaking parts of the Roman Empire.¹ It was only in the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries, however, that the West developed a Marian theology which gave her the same exalted position that she had long held in the Byzantine Church. Anselm, monk of the abbey of Bec and later archbishop of Canterbury, led the way. He reasoned that God had originally created the world on his own, with no aid. When he reorganized the world through the birth of Christ, it was accomplished through the perfect vessel of the Virgin. The re-creation of the world was achieved through Mary; thus, she was its mother. In Anselm's system, God's fatherhood is paralleled by Mary's divine motherhood. If God, as the creator, is the greatest conceivable being, then Mary, as the mother of re-created being, must occupy the second place.²

By scholastic logic, the Virgin's role as the vessel by which God came to man made her equally the vessel for man to return to God. She was not quite God, but yet not like other human beings. She was a bridge erected so that God and man could be reunited with one another. She thus assumed the role in Western Christendom of the reconciler of man to God, an intercessor on behalf of those who felt unworthy to approach a lofty and remote Christ.

Whether this new development in theology brought about an increase in Marian devotion during this period or was merely a codification of already existing popular beliefs continues to be a subject of debate.³ Whatever may be the case, the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries saw a dramatic augmentation of official church ceremonial as invocations, litanies and especially hymns in honor of the Virgin were added to both cathedral and monastic liturgies.⁴

¹Jaroslav Pelikan, *Mary Through the Centuries* (New Haven 1996) 61.

²Hilda Graef, *Mary: A History of Doctrine and Devotion* (Westminster, MD 1985) 213.

³George Tavard, *The Thousand Faces of the Virgin Mary* (Collegeville, MN 1996) 90.

⁴For additional treatments of the role of the Virgin in high medieval liturgy see Do-

Marian hymnody took a variety of forms. Brief unmetred antiphons were the most easily integrated and thus the most commonly composed pieces. They accompanied psalm verses and were employed in all the daily offices (matins, lauds, vespers, and compline) as well as in the little hours (prime, terce, sext, and none). New Marian antiphons were easily inserted in the liturgical formula and became standard in both cathedral and monastic services.⁵

The most elaborate and innovative of the new Marian compositions were sequences, poetic-musical pieces placed between the alleluia and the gospel reading in the mass. This form had been in use since the ninth century, but was employed only sparingly until the twelfth. The poetic structure of the sequence changed considerably over the centuries. Early sequences employed irregular meter and very limited assonance. Later pieces, however, used consistent metrical patterns and extensive rhyme.⁶ The typical twelfth-century sequence featured rhyming trochaic stanzas (alternating stressed and unstressed syllables) of four, six, or eight lines containing seven or eight syllables per line. All the stanzas were perfectly identical in form.⁷ This repetitiveness was eased somewhat by the music which accompanied sequence texts. Melodies did not follow the stanzaic pattern of the poetry but unfolded according to their own logic. The twelfth-century sequence thus integrated poetic form and melody without making them absolutely dependent on each other.⁸ This created great opportunity for texts and music to be composed separately or for existing melodies to be plugged in to new poetic compositions.

The sequence became increasingly popular in the mid-twelfth century as a result of the artistic achievements of Adam, former cantor of Notre-Dame in Paris and canon of the Augustinian house of Saint Victor. It spread rapidly from the île-de-France and was introduced into the mass of cathedrals throughout France and beyond.⁹

minique Iogna-Prat, et. al, eds., *Marie: Le culte de la Vierge dans la société médiévale* (Paris 1996); Todd Ridder, "Musical and Theological Patterns involved in the Transmission of Mass Chants for the Five Oldest Marian Feasts" (Ph.D. diss., Catholic University of America 1993); Anne Walters Robinson, "Remembering the Annunciation in Medieval Polyphony," *Speculum* 70 (1995) 275–304.

⁵Graef, *Mary*, 229–230.

⁶S.F. Ryle, "The Sequence—Reflections on Literature and Liturgy," in *Papers of the Liverpool Latin Seminar 1976*, ed. Francis Cairns (Liverpool 1976) 171. For more on the initial development of the form see Richard Crocker, *The Early Medieval Sequence* (Berkeley 1977).

⁷Patrick Diehl, *The Medieval European Religious Lyric* (Berkeley 1985) 88.

⁸*Ibid.*, 89.

⁹See Margot Fassler, *Gothic Song: Victorine Sequences and Augustinian Reform in*

Sequences also found their way into the liturgy of most monastic orders during the course of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The Benedictines, the Premonstratensians, the Dominicans, and even some Franciscans made use of them. Among the exceptions were the Cistercians who resisted amending their official services.¹⁰ Although sequences were excluded from the Cistercian mass, they were nevertheless composed by the order's monks during this period. This apparent paradox may be explained by placing Cistercian sequences within a wider literary context. While the sequence had been ostensibly a liturgical form, in the late twelfth century it was coming to perform another function. It was increasingly used as a vehicle for individual poetic expression. The popularity of the sequence even spread beyond church walls and found its way into secular literature.¹¹ In its new guise the sequence could be accompanied by a melody. Increasingly, however, it appeared as verse alone.

The Cistercians, while not officially sanctioning this new use of the sequence form, at least tacitly approved it. The order permitted the creation of such compositions by its monks and allowed the poems to be preserved in monastic libraries, thus enabling the brothers to use them in private meditations. I believe this concession to individual expression and devotion was made as a response to spiritual longings which were going unheeded in Cistercian liturgy. The Cistercians went to great lengths to restore authenticity and purity to their official observances, seeking to root them in ancient and authoritative chant forms. Once officially established, liturgical structures became virtually unalterable. Nevertheless, Cistercian leaders seem to have recognized that their inflexible liturgy did not always address the changing needs of the community. Religious poetry was a vehicle by which the evolving spiritual concerns of the order's monks could be met without amending authoritative and inviolable liturgical forms.

Considering poetry's role as the communicator of new spiritual conventions, it is not surprising that a common subject for Cistercian sequences was the Virgin Mary. Her cult was growing within the order in the twelfth and thirteenth century and this devotion found an outlet in such poetic compositions. This paper will place lyric poetry dedicated

Twelfth-Century Paris (Cambridge 1993).

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 9.

¹¹It was employed, for example, in many of the poems in twelfth-century collections such as the *Carmina Burana* and the Ripoll Collection. Examples can be seen in F. E. Harrison, *Millennium: A Latin Reader* (Wauconda, IL 1968) 122–142 and also in Peter Dronke's *Medieval Latin and the Rise of the European Love Lyric*, vol. 2 (Oxford 1968) 334–420.

to the Virgin within the Cistercian context. I shall attempt to show that Marian verse, the sequence in particular, was well suited to the devotional needs of the monks of twelfth- and early thirteenth-century Cistercian houses. Furthermore, I will demonstrate that it conformed well to a monastic environment which focused on the religious value of interactions of the monks with written texts. Finally, I shall illustrate how poetry provided an expanded vocabulary for the expression of the ever growing devotion in the order to Our Lady. The paper will conclude with an analysis of a collection of verse from the early thirteenth century composed by an anonymous monk of Saint Mary of Noah (La Noë), a Cistercian house in northern France. By means of this voice I hope to explain how monks in Cistercian monasteries could and did express their deep devotion to Mary through the composition of lyric poetry.

The twelfth century was a time of unparalleled growth in monastic vocations. Men and women from all walks of life entered the cloister. The Benedictine chronicler Orderic Vitalis reported, "Monasteries are founded everywhere in mountain valleys and plains, observing new rites and wearing different habits; the swarm of cowled monks spreads all over the world."¹² The Cistercian order grew especially rapidly and was particularly diverse. In contrast to their Benedictine predecessors, the new order prohibited the reception of child oblates into their ranks.¹³ Thus, twelfth-century Cistercian converts were predominantly adult men and women, many with extensive knowledge of the world outside the cloister. A significant number of both aristocratic and less wellborn proselytes had been married previous to their novitiate. The better educated among them were aware of the burgeoning culture of courtly love that was sweeping the courts and schools of France. In fact, the Cistercian order grew up in the environs of Troyes, an area of France where courtly love was finding eloquent expression in the poetry of Chrétien and others. Some members of the order, such as Helinand, a renowned trouvère in the service of Philip Augustus, and the troubadour Foulquet, had themselves composed secular love lyrics.¹⁴ Early Cistercian communities thus possessed a ready constituency for Marian lyric. Familiar with the sentiments of worldly love and the poetry which was commonly used to express it, a significant number of twelfth-

¹²Quoted in Louis J. Lekai, *The Cistercians: Ideals and Realities* (Kent, OH 1977) 33.

¹³The trend towards the acceptance of only adult vocations was also to be found in other new orders such as the Augustinian Canons and the Carthusians. See Jean Leclercq, *Monks and Love in Twelfth Century France* (Oxford 1979) 9–10.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 14.

century Cistercian converts would have found a poetic genre expressing devotion to the Virgin in amorous terms quite familiar.

The Cistercian order drew those with extensive worldly experience because of its ability to direct longings for human love to the service of God. To explain this phenomenon Jean Leclercq has examined some of the Cistercian abbot Bernard of Clairvaux's lesser known sermons, private lessons given to the order's monks in intimate seminars. According to Leclercq, Bernard was deeply attuned to human emotional needs and sought to spiritualize the love impulses of his charges. In this context the Virgin became a substitute object of affection for monks struggling with their carnal appetites.

Bernard appropriates the sexual imagery of the Song of Songs, making it symbolic of the relationship between God and the beloved soul. He lifts human love from the spontaneous, emotional plane of consciousness to a higher conception, that of the transcendental love of God for man.¹⁵ The monk, who is called to "be perfect as your father in heaven is perfect" should faithfully reflect this pure and uncorrupted love. It is worth adding, however, that in the process of his analysis of the Song of Songs, Bernard validates the notion that transcendental love is similar to the sexual relationship between a man and a woman. But, unlike the latter, it is not an enslaving passion; it has been transformed into a deep spiritual longing. Leclercq concludes that it was natural, then, that the Cistercians would seek a feminine object to satiate this romantic impulse, an ideal woman worthy of such purified affection.¹⁶

A parallel to this Bernardine psychology can be found in a story from the *Dialogus Miraculorum*, a treatise compiled for the instruction of the order's novices around 1220 by Caesarius of Heisterbach. A young knight falls in love with the wife of his master, and, after hiding his passion for a year, confesses his affection. A chaste and honest woman, she repulses him. When he petitions a hermit for advice, the young knight is told to go to the church every day for the next year and beseech the Virgin to release him from his torment. On the last day of his penance he leaves the church and is greeted by an exceptionally beautiful maiden who stands there holding his horse. She tells him that she will be his bride and that their nuptials will be completed in the presence of her son. He then realizes that she is the Mother of God. From that moment he is delivered from his carnal temptations.¹⁷

¹⁵Ibid., 103.

¹⁶Ibid., 139.

¹⁷Caesarius of Heisterbach, *Dialogue on Miracles*, vol. 1, trans. H. Von E. Scott and C. C. Swinton Bland (London 1929) 500. The published Latin edition of this text is *Caesarii Heisterbacensis monachi ordinis Cisterciensis Dialogus miraculorum*, ed. J.

The idea of Mary as the great mediatrix between man and the divine, first announced by Anselm, also had an impact on increased Marian veneration in the order. Echoing the sentiments of his age, Bernard asserts in his *Sermon on the Twelve Stars* that Christ's divinity renders him difficult and frightening to approach. Thus, there is a necessity of a human mediator between man and God. Because of her unique position as the mother of God and her attested mercifulness and patience, Mary is an ideal candidate to be that intermediary.¹⁸

The Cistercians, inspired by the teachings of Bernard, became increasingly dedicated to the Virgin during the course of the twelfth century. And yet, the Cistercian liturgy did not embody this devotion. The founders of Cîteaux had made it a priority to reform the liturgy which they had inherited from their former house of Molesme. Around 1108¹⁹ they excised hymns that they felt to be unauthentic as well as purging psalms, prayers and litanies which they believed to have been attached to the daily offices since the days of Saint Benedict.²⁰ Marian pieces were among the elements cut out of liturgical observance in the reform.²¹ The inherited chant was replaced with so-called Ambrosian hymnody.²² This material was retrieved from Metz, where the chant tradition was supposed to have been preserved uncorrupted since ancient times. By pruning back the liturgy and utilizing only the hymns used by the early Benedictines, the Cistercian fathers attempted to purify their religious observance. The success of monastic worship, they believed, hinged on the simplicity of the services and the authenticity of the chant.

Despite the high ideals of the early Cistercians, by the 1130s this re-

Strange (Cologne 1851, reprint 1966). Marian miracle stories are contained in book 7.

¹⁸Graef, *Mary*, 239.

¹⁹The exact date has not been established but C. Waddell believes this first reform to have taken place about ten years after the order's founding. See *The Cistercian Hymnal*, vol. 1 (Trappist, KY 1984) 105.

²⁰Whether the missals inherited from Molesme contained sequences cannot be determined with certainty as these books have not surfaced. See Lancelot C. Sheppard, "The Cistercian Ordo Missae," *Downside Review* 67 (July 1949) 291–292. Some Benedictines did use sequences in their masses but there is some doubt that Molesme, itself a reform-minded establishment, employed such pieces. See Fassler, *Gothic Song*, 97.

²¹C. Waddell, "The Early Cistercian Experience of Liturgy," in *Rule and Life: An Interdisciplinary Symposium*, ed. M. Basil Pennington (Shannon, Ireland 1970) 85. In their zeal for reform the early Cistercians even trimmed the number of daily masses from two or three to only one, although they sometimes celebrated a second on Sundays. See Bede K. Lackner, "The Liturgy of Early Cîteaux," in *Studies in Medieval Cistercian History* (Spencer, MS 1971) 28.

²²These were believed to have been composed by St. Ambrose and therefore above reproach.

formed liturgical observance seems to have no longer satisfied the community. The discontent was partly due to the realization that the presumably authentic chant recovered from Metz had in fact been “corrupt” and was now in need of correction.²³ There also seems to have been an awareness that the existing liturgy did not address the evolving spiritual needs of the order. To address these issues a second liturgical reform was undertaken sometime before 1147. Additional hymns were introduced into Cistercian liturgical books, including a series of antiphons inspired by the Song of Songs for the feasts of the Assumption and the Nativity of Our Lady and the popular but “unauthentic” antiphon *Salve Regina*.²⁴

This reform, however, was not as comprehensive as it may seem. Cistercian leaders reinstated hymns that had been purged during the first reform, but allowed no new Marian compositions into the corpus of Cistercian chant. This accommodation to increasing devotion to the Blessed Mother among the order’s monks remained inadequate. Only in 1185 did the general chapter make further concessions by approving the daily recitation of the little office for the Virgin, which had been a common feature of western liturgies since the late eleventh century but had been previously eschewed by the Cistercians.²⁵

Cistercian leaders, despite the rise of Marian devotion within the community, consistently resisted the addition of Marian material to the liturgy. In this climate the evocation of Mary in extra-liturgical settings was likely an attractive alternative for the order’s monks. This is illustrated by the *Vita B. Davidis Monachi Hemmenrodensis*, which tells of a venerable old Cistercian of the mid-twelfth century who, not satisfied with the amount of Marian material in the order’s liturgy, enjoyed listening to a young novice singing “sequences and certain sweet songs about Our Lady.”²⁶

²³Bernard of Clairvaux, “Prologue to the Cistercian Antiphonary,” in *The Works of Bernard of Clairvaux*, vol. 1, *Treatises* 1 (Spencer, MS 1970) 161. The Latin text can be found in *Epistola S. Bernardi De Revisione Cantus Cisterciensis*, ed. Francisco Guentner, *Corpus Scriptorum De Musica* 24 (Rome 1974). It can also be accessed online at the Thesaurus Musicarum Latinarum website: www.music.indiana.edu/tml/12th/BEREPI_TEXT.html.

²⁴Waddell, “Early Cistercian Experience,” 88, 97. See also, Waddell, “The Origin and Early Evolution of the Cistercian Antiphonary,” in *The Cistercian Spirit: A Symposium* (Shannon, Ireland 1970) 219.

²⁵Archdale King, *Liturgies of the Religious Orders* (London 1955) 112. It should be noted, however, that in 1157 the little office was approved for use in the order’s agricultural settlements (granges) and by monks who were traveling. See also Graef, *Mary*, 230–231.

²⁶*Vita B. Davidis Monachi Hemmenrodensis*, ed. A. Schneider, *Analecta Sacris Ordinibus Cisterciensis* 11 (1955) 41–42. See also, Waddell, “Early Cistercian Experience,”

The desirability of such devotions is also attested to in the Cistercian *Dialogus Miraculorum*, which gives multiple examples of the use of Marian hymnody in private settings. One story tells of a priest who had been taught the antiphon *Salve Regina* by some Cistercians and would repeat it frequently. When a great storm blew up and he was in great fear of his life, Mary appeared to him and promised that no harm would come to him as he had sung this hymn so often.²⁷ Another story tells of a monastic teacher who would privately kneel before the altar in the crypt of his church, chanting the sequence “Hail, Glorious Star of the Sea.” One day when he reached the words “Virgin pray for us that we may be made worthy of that bread of heaven,” the Virgin appeared to him handing him a piece of bread. It had a sweetness that surpassed that of honey.²⁸

The case for the use of Marian lyric in private devotions in the Cistercian monastery is further reinforced by the presence of such verse in the order’s libraries. There exist multiple collections containing Marian pieces produced in Cistercian houses during the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. Among the most significant is a *miscellanea* from Cîteaux containing a variety of Marian sequence texts including those attributed to Adam of Saint Victor.²⁹ Another is a collection of exclusively Marian poems composed by an anonymous Cistercian in a monastery outside Rouen.³⁰ It is of course possible that the verses in these manuscripts supplemented the liturgies of the respective houses. But, given the Cistercian distrust of anything nontraditional and their deep commitment to simplicity in religious observances, this usage does not seem likely. Rather, these books were probably available to monks during periods of prescribed study. In this way the Marian poetry they contained came to be incorporated into the prayer life of individual monks.

In order to understand more clearly the potential religious signifi-

98.

²⁷Caesarius, *Dialogue on Miracles*, 497.

²⁸*Ibid.*, 499.

²⁹This manuscript is London, British Library, MS. Add. 15722, and is discussed in Christopher Page, *The Owl and the Nightingale* (Berkeley 1990) 165–167. Marian verse from the collection is published in G. M. Drevés and C. Blume, *Analecta Hymnica* (Leipzig 1895–1915) vol. 54, 323–324, 383–384; vol. 20, 45–46, 55–56, 150; and vol. 39, 97–98.

³⁰This is Rouen BM 652 published in Drevés and Blume, *Analecta Hymnica*, vol. 48 (Leipzig 1905) 274–297. Also worthy of note are Troyes BM 990 and Troyes BM 914, MSS from Clairvaux which feature Marian verse from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. See A. Vernet, *La Bibliothèque de l’Abbaye de Clairvaux du XII^e au XVIII^e siècle*, vol. 2 (Paris 1997) 32 and 485–490.

cance of Marian lyric for individual Cistercians it will be useful to place this literature within the text-based pattern of worship that predominated in the monastery. The religious atmosphere of Cistercian houses, like that of all monastic establishments, was dependent on the constant interaction of monks and nuns with mutually reinforcing texts which were grounded ultimately in the most authoritative of all texts, the Bible. It will become clear in view of this framework that Marian verse conformed well to monastic expectations of what a religious text was supposed to be like and thus could be used with impunity in the religious exercises of Cistercian vocations.

The textual foundation of monastic devotion was laid by liturgical literature. This body of material included texts from the Bible, such as the psalms or canticles, or those which have taken their inspiration from the scriptures, such as antiphons or hymns. Chanting these texts in daily, weekly, and yearly cycles brought the worshiper's total concentration to biblical language and themes. The Bible, it should be remembered, was the voice of divine presence on earth for a twelfth-century monastic, a source in which all the solutions to all the dilemmas of existence were contained. Unlocking the mysteries of the scriptures could only be achieved by ardent meditation on sacred words. In liturgical prayer, monks and nuns disciplined their minds by the repetition of the formulas which God had presented in the scriptures, formulas which would free them from earthly concerns and the burdens of sin and give them a foretaste of salvation to come. In this process liturgical texts were internalized, becoming a baseline by which all other texts could be assessed.

Another textual activity which characterized monastic life was the so-called *lectio divina*. In medieval monasteries a prescribed period of time was set aside each day for the careful reading of devotional literature. The *lectio* frequently involved the contemplation of scripture or the fathers (both Greek and Latin) but could also include the study of sermons, epistolary literature, theological treatises, Christian poetry, hagiography, and even history.³¹ This activity had been prescribed by Saint Benedict, but was scaled down over the years as monasteries built up their liturgical observances. The Cistercians, whose liturgical reforms drastically curtailed the amount of time monks and nuns spent in choir, reinstated the careful rumination on religious texts to a position of importance in devotional life.

³¹See Anne Lawrence, "English Cistercian Manuscripts of the Twelfth Century," in *Cistercian Art and Architecture in the British Isles*, ed. Christopher Norton and David Park (Cambridge 1986) 284–298.

It should be recalled that “reading” in the Middle Ages was seldom an exclusively visual experience. When one read a text, one also pronounced the words and listened to what they said. In this way the text literally spoke to the reader.³² This technique was utilized partly because individuals did not read merely for pure enjoyment, they wanted to remember what the text contained. As books were expensive to produce and thus not widely available, the memorization of important texts was a crucial element to learning.³³

The pronunciation of the words of the text in order to remember them was an important element in *lectio divina*. The sacred reading as practiced by medieval monks and nuns, however, went one step further. Sanctified words were not internalized to facilitate knowledge itself, but to be reminders to the monastic of how best to orient him/herself to life. *Lectio divina* was meditative activity which made one open to the moral teachings and spiritual precepts of the texts.³⁴ In this activity, the monastic listened to the authors of the texts speaking directly to him/her, exhorting him/her to continue on the hard road to God.

Reading aloud was not confined to the *lectio*, but was continued at meal times when the Benedictine rule was recited. The rule was, like the texts encountered in sacred reading and the liturgy itself, internalized through repetition. This was yet another way in which the monastic was buoyed up in the life of devotion. The rule was not merely an account of how the community should be organized, it was a description of the ideal Cistercian monastery. The monk or nun could thus imagine his/her own community to be the embodiment, even the fulfillment of the rule.³⁵ This knowledge created a confidence that one should continue on one’s path, striving to internalize the principles of the rule and to be worthy of it.

Cistercian life was focused around repeated worshipful interactions of monks and nuns with a set of core texts. Such textual meditations, using the spoken word or musical performance as a vehicle for concentration, were keys to spiritual fulfillment for those in the Cistercian community. They curbed carnal appetites and focused the individual’s

³²Jean Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God*, trans. Catharine Misrahi (New York 1961) 19.

³³The proliferation of tracts on techniques to maximize retention attests to the importance of this forgotten art throughout the medieval period. See Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory* (Cambridge 1990).

³⁴A revealing though modern description of the spirituality of the Cistercian *lectio* can be found in Andre Louf, *The Cistercian Way*, trans. Nivard Kinsella (Kalamazoo 1983) 74–79.

³⁵M. B. Pranger, *Bernard of Clairvaux and the Shape of Monastic Thought: Broken Dreams* (Leiden 1994) 88–89.

attention on God. Moreover, the texts utilized in these exercises were intertwined, forming a web of connections which reinforced the notion that the monastic calling was indeed the truest way to Christ. Liturgical literature, the texts of the *lectio*, and Benedict's rule were all mutually interpenetrating. They all pointed ultimately to the living word of Scripture, the answer to all the dilemmas of both personal and communal life.

Marian lyric fit comfortably into the textual framework around which the Cistercians built their lives. Like these other texts, it used the human voice and sometimes melody to convey its message. Perhaps more importantly, it depended on officially sanctioned Christian literature, liturgical texts, and especially the Bible to be an effective spiritual vehicle. Marian poetry's rhetorical connection with these works probably allowed Cistercian vocations to acknowledge its legitimacy and may have encouraged them to make use of it in their individual *lectio*.

A closer look at the rhetorical techniques used in the composition of sequences and other lyrics will reveal the compatibility of Marian verse with the other texts used in Cistercian devotional life. It will also illustrate how this new literary form could come to be accepted by individual monks and the community as a whole. Like other texts in the Cistercian corpus, Marian lyrics repeatedly alluded to or imitated other well-known works. This process, one of the dominant technical devices employed in medieval hymnody, is known as *contrafactura*.³⁶ A composer was first of all obliged to quote or paraphrase biblical and patristic phraseology in his works. Such repetition anchored his composition within legitimate literary tradition and lent authority to poetic figures of his own which appeared in the piece. In addition, composers used officially sanctioned melodies over and over as bases for composition. In fact, previously composed musical exemplars often determined the poetic meter in which an author would work.³⁷ Sometimes, not having musical models available to him when he was writing his pieces, a poet would follow the stanzaic scheme of an existing text rather than its music. Thus the piece could be accommodated to the familiar melody which accompanied its poetic model.³⁸ Finally, *contrafactura* was used by composers as a means to gloss earlier compositions. For example, the family of Victorine sequences based on the antiphon *Ave Maris Stella* had a complex set of relations with the original composition.

³⁶Diehl, *Medieval European Religious Lyric*, 12.

³⁷John F. Benton, "Nicolas of Clairvaux and the Twelfth-Century Sequence, with Special Reference to Adam of St. Victor," *Traditio* 18 (1962) 159.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 162–163.

They commented first on the melody of the original antiphon, weaving it in and out of new melodic formulas. Furthermore, they glossed the original text with new language, enriching its meaning.³⁹ The employment of *contrafactura* linked new Marian material to the interlocking network of Cistercian texts. Its constant reference either musically or textually to authoritative sources was a ticket to acceptance within the order.

Typology was another technical device that affixed new Marian verse to legitimate tradition. This technique, widely used in biblical analysis, became by the twelfth century a fixture of hymn composition as well.⁴⁰ In typological exegesis, the writer used the events and descriptions of Old Testament history to explicate the fulfillment contained in the gospels. These were, in turn, used to explain contemporary theological dogmas. Through typology Mary's perpetual virginity was equated with the fountain sealed, and the garden enclosed in the Song of Songs (Cant. 4.12), the uncut cedar in Lebanon of Ecclesiasticus (Ecclus. 24.17), and the closed door of Ezekiel (Ezek. 44.2). Her inviolate purity was prefigured by the burning bush which was not consumed (Exod. 3.2), and Gideon's fleece (Judg. 6). She was also the second Eve, redeeming the misdeeds of the first and ushering in a new age of salvation. As a human vessel for the word she was the temple of God, the ark of the new covenant, the throne of Solomon, the flowering rod of Aaron (Num. 17.8) and of Jesse (Isa. 11.1).⁴¹

The employment of typology, like the use of *contrafactura*, placed the new Marian lyric squarely within the textual world familiar to the monastic. Similar to other texts of the *lectio* and the liturgy itself, it was firmly anchored in the realm of biblical symbols. This grounding enabled Cistercian leaders to admit this poetry into their textual corpus and empowered monks to use it in individual devotions.

Although the new religious verse adhered to the conservative textual norms of the monastery, it was not without creative impulse or novelty. It did not merely refer to existing texts that may have had mariological significance but enriched them through a frequently complex system of musical and textual references. In addition, it recombined the vocabulary and symbology being bandied about by theologians, echoing and elaborating the latest conceptions of the Virgin's significance. By means of its evocative language, extra-liturgical Marian poetry actually made a contribution to the ideological expansion of the Virgin's role in

³⁹Fassler, *Gothic Song*, 322–326.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 79–80.

⁴¹F. J. E. Raby, *A History of Christian Latin Poetry* (Oxford 1927) 363–375.

the economy of Christian salvation. The new religious lyric, much of which characterized Mary as mediatrix, reinforced the notion put forth in Bernard's second homily on the Virgin that it was she, not a distant God on high, who would lead the devotee to redemption:

Whether you are being tossed about by the waves of pride or ambition or slander or jealousy, gaze up at this star, call out to Mary. When rage or greed or fleshly desires are battering the skiff of your soul, gaze up at Mary. When the immensity of your sins weighs you down and you are bewildered by the loathsomeness of your conscience, when the terrifying thought of judgement appalls you and you begin to founder in the gulf of sadness and despair, think of Mary. In dangers, in hardships, in every doubt, think of Mary, call out to Mary. Keep her in your mouth, keep her in your heart. Follow the example of her life and you will obtain the favor of her prayer. Following her, you will never go astray. Asking her help, you will never despair. Keeping her in your thoughts, you will never wander away. With your hand in hers, you will never stumble. With her protecting you, you will not be afraid. With her leading you, you will never tire. Her kindness will see you through to the end.⁴²

II.

The composition of Marian lyrics and other poetry in Cistercian monasteries reached its peak in the late twelfth century. By this time individual expression within the cloister seems to have gotten somewhat out of hand. In 1199 the general chapter stepped in and forbade versifying by the order's monks, perhaps fearing that the composition of poetry was breeding pride and vanity among the brethren.⁴³ The changing attitude of Cistercian leaders toward verse is expressed particularly well in a poem by Iter of Vassey, probably written in the first decade of the thirteenth century.⁴⁴ He mused, "Neither metrics nor verses bring health to the soul. True restorers are piety, tears and good works. Monks chant the psalms, let others make rhymes . . . If I were myself a true monk, I should weep tears for my sins. To weep is fitting for a monk, the writing of poetry is not."⁴⁵

The legislation of 1199 and Iter's protests notwithstanding, the composition of lyric poetry by Cistercian monks persisted well into the

⁴²Bernard of Clairvaux, *In Laudibus Virginis Matris Homilia* II 4–13, trans. Marie-Bernard Said and Grace Parigo in *Magnificat* (Kalamazoo 1979) 30–31.

⁴³Leclercq, *Love of Learning*, 172. See also William Paden, Jr., "De monachis rithmos facientibus: Hélinant de Froidmont, Bertran de Born and the Cistercian General Chapter of 1199," *Speculum* 55 (1980) 669–685.

⁴⁴Leclercq, *Love of Learning*, 172. See also Jean Leclercq, "Les Divertissements Poétiques d'Iter de Vassy," *Analecta Sacris Ordinis Cisterciensis* 12 (1956) 297.

⁴⁵Quoted in Leclercq, *Love of Learning*, 172.

thirteenth century and continued to be embraced by at least some Cistercian communities. The collection of Cistercian Marian lyrics to which I would now like to turn was created during this twilight period, probably around 1215.⁴⁶ I have already mentioned this manuscript, catalogued as Rouen BM 652 and written by an anonymous monk of the northern French monastery Saint Mary of Noah (La Noë).⁴⁷ The work was bound and housed along with other sanctioned manuscripts in the abbey library where the brothers could easily access it.⁴⁸ The collection attests to the fact that poetry remained a legitimate way for early thirteenth-century Cistercians to express their personal devotion to the Virgin.

The work is sizable, containing some twenty poems of varying length and meter. The focal points of the collection are lengthy rhymed sequences which are prefaced by shorter poems in dactylic hexameters or elegiac couplets. There is a prose introduction which makes it clear that the collection was authored by a single person and that, although the work can be broken up into smaller pieces, it was conceived as a unit.

It is important to note at the outset that the author calls his work a celebration (*laus*) and a mirror (*speculum*) of the nourishing mother. The mirror metaphor experienced a sudden rise in popularity during the twelfth century and appeared with increasing frequency in the titles of the period's literature.⁴⁹ Often these works were attempts by their authors to provide exhaustive descriptive knowledge of a given subject such as the church, faith, or love. It is possible that our author may have known the "mirror" works of other Cistercians such as William of Saint Thierry's *Speculum fidei* and the now lost *Speculum beati Bernardi*,⁵⁰ both of which appeared in the twelfth century. He seems also to have been familiar with Aelred of Rievaulx's *De Speculo caritatis*, whose prologue shares some common elements with that of his collection.⁵¹

⁴⁶J. Szövérfy, *Latin Hymns*, Typologie des Sources du Moyen Age Occidental 55 (Turnhout 1989) 87. See also Szövérfy, "Maria und die Haretiker: Ein Zisterzienserhymnus zum Albigenserkrieg," *Analecta Cisterciensia* 43 (1987) 228–229. Szövérfy's dating of the piece is based on its specific anti-Albigensian content, which is best explained if placed in the context of the Cistercian involvement in the papal crusade against this group in the second decade of the thirteenth century.

⁴⁷See n. 30 above.

⁴⁸See A. Bondéelle-Souchier, *Bibliothèques Cisterciennes dans la France Médiévale* (Paris 1991) 163.

⁴⁹Herbert Grabes, *The Mutable Glass*, trans. Gordon Collier (Cambridge 1982) 25.

⁵⁰Because no manuscripts of this document have surfaced, its authenticity as the work of Bernard has not been verified.

⁵¹See Aelred of Rievaulx, *De Speculo Caritatis*, ed. A. Hoste and C. H. Talbot, Cor-

Both prologues feature apologies for the works' prolixity and explain that division has been made so that the reader may select which sections he wishes to read. Although this may be to a certain extent *pro forma*, the similarity of tone and style of the prologues is nevertheless notable.

Our poet uses the mirror metaphor not only in the title of his work but as a recurrent figure within it. He exploits the theme to great effect, directing the reader's reflections to the important role of Mary in the salvation of both the world and the individual. First and foremost he sets up a mirror to reflect an essential truth which, although not visible directly to men, could nonetheless be perceived through its reflection. He sees Mary as the mirror by which the luminosity of heaven can shine on men. He calls her "mirror of the king, glory and all sweet radiance" and "Virgin mirror of heaven, of light and the world."⁵² Mary's mirror function has an amplificatory component as well. She is "glory, praise and honor magnifying Christ."⁵³ The author also envisions himself as a mirror reflecting the light to which the Virgin directs him. He says in one of his later poems, "The end of the work nears in which you, Virgin, have held me so that I might reflect (*specular*) here and on these things."⁵⁴ Finally, the mirror metaphor has a moral aspect. When one regards oneself in a mirror he/she sees a variety of blemishes. The mirror is a tool which helps one identify and rectify the imperfections that mar his/her beauty.⁵⁵ Thus, it becomes a symbol for the attempt to wash away bad habits and sin which make one unattractive to God. The author of our collection calls the Virgin a "maidenly mirror, purifying the eye."⁵⁶

In his prologue the writer begins by explaining the circumstances of the work's creation. He composed it during an illness which confined him to bed during the Lenten season.⁵⁷ The intent of the collection appears to be threefold. First, the author wishes to use eloquence and poetic form to evoke the Virgin in her majesty and thereby inspire others to devote themselves to her. He hopes that through his words the

pus Christianorum, *Continuatio Mediaevalis*, vol. 1 (Turnhout 1971) 1.3. An English translation of this passage appears in *Mirror of Charity*, trans. Elizabeth Connor (Kalamazoo 1990) 75.

⁵²Dreves, *Analecta Hymnica*, vol. 48, 278, Incipit titulus: "regis speculum, decus omne iubarque suave. Virgo, poli speculum, lucis et orbis."

⁵³Ibid.: "Christum magnificans gloria."

⁵⁴Ibid., 296: "Finis adest operis, specular quo, virgo, haberi. Quoque libri finis clauditur, hic et in his."

⁵⁵Grabes, *The Mutable Glass*, 49.

⁵⁶Dreves, *Analecta Hymnica*, vol. 48, 281, Incipit titulus: "Virgineum speculum, purificans oculum."

⁵⁷Bernard also composed his four homilies to the Virgin during an illness.

sweetness of Mary would “caress,” “entice,” “warm,” and “inflame the love and veneration of the glorious ever virgin and mother of God.”⁵⁸ Second, he seeks a reward for himself, a place in heaven in exchange for his service to her. He prays, “Holding confidence in her and faithfully entreating, I earnestly request the pious clemency of the most pious virgin.”⁵⁹ Finally, he sets out to criticize heretics who disparage the incarnation. Viewing the material world as evil, they assert that if Jesus was manifest in the flesh he would have been polluted by the birth process. Our author is incredulous that they would see such a propitious event as impure: “That which is sweet seems bitter for those not loving it. But alas those who call the good evil and that which is evil good are replacing light with shadows and, in this turnabout, are placing that which is sweet into the category of bitter!”⁶⁰

The prologue concludes with an explanation of the work’s arrangement. The author recognizes that the collection is long and that the reader may be too sick or busy to devote him/herself to it in its entirety. Or, he/she might become bored with so many poems or find him/herself straying from the text. He hopes its division into five sections will enable the reader to take on as much or as little of the text as he/she wishes. The important thing, the author asserts, is that the reader gain some benefit from reading about the Blessed Virgin.⁶¹

Although the book is divided into five sections, the writer observes that if the prologue, opening title, and closing section are included in the chapter numbering, it will have seven or perhaps eight parts. Its separation is of such importance that he devotes the rest of the prologue to explicating the significance of the work’s possible division into seven or eight parts rather than five.⁶² To the modern reader this exercise seems like a needless digression. Yet, our author clearly believes that the symbolism of the numbers seven and eight gives added significance to the poetic collection. This discussion of numerology is a cue to the reader to be attentive to the immutable truths which undergird the work.

In his analysis the writer follows Augustine, whose ideas were at the

⁵⁸Dreves, *Analecta Hymnica*, vol. 48, 274: “Quod leni consonantia resonans et dulci currens eloquio mentes legentium, animos audientium dulcedine sua demulceat, demulcens alliciat, alliciendo foveat, fovendo provehat et accendat ad amandum et venerandam venerabilem et gloriosam semper virginem et Dei genetricem Mariam.”

⁵⁹Ibid., 275: “Piam etiam piissimae virginis clementiam, fiduciam habens in ea, supplex fidenter exposco . . .”

⁶⁰Ibid., 274: “Non amantibus enim videtur amarum, quod dulce est. Sed vae, qui dicunt malum bonum et bonum malum, ponentes tenebras lucem et, quod dulce est, in amarum et e converso!”

⁶¹Ibid., 275.

⁶²Ibid.

root of medieval numerology. Seven, in the Augustinian system, represents perfection or totality for two different reasons. The first is wholly mathematical. Seven is made up of three and four added together. Three is the first truly odd number; four is the first truly even one. Thus, the sum of the prototype odd and even numbers, seven, may be said to encompass all others.⁶³ In addition, three is representative of the trinity and has heaven as its realm. The number four represents the four directions of the earth and thus has a terrestrial domain. These numbers, when added together, symbolize the unification of heaven and earth. The number seven, then, in both mathematical and symbolic terms, represents a combination of two essential realms into a perfect, universal totality.⁶⁴

Since the universe is encompassed by the number seven, eight must represent immortality or the essential unity beyond time and space. Augustine remarks in defense of the exalted status of eight that it is the number of those who did not perish in the flood. Moreover it symbolizes Christ's circumcision and resurrection. Most important, however, God returned to the realm beyond space and time on the eighth day after the creation of the world.⁶⁵

From his observations on the creation Augustine extrapolated that there would be eight historical ages; seven epochs representing the seven days of creation would be succeeded by a return to the divine source. The seventh and eighth ages are the preeminent ones in Augustine's scheme—the former being the epoch of the unification of heaven and earth following the incarnation of Christ and the latter representing eternal salvation. He undergirds his argument with a scriptural reference that one should “give a portion to seven and also to eight.”⁶⁶ Our author takes up this refrain and attaches to it a string of symbolic references. Seven parts must be given in exile while eight are given in the joy of the fatherland, seven parts are given in the garments of life, eight are rendered when one is liberated from them, seven parts are given in the crown of life, eight in that of perpetual glory. He gives seven parts who attends to the church and to the care of his soul on earth; he gives eight parts, “who flies through the sevenfold grace to the

⁶³Vincent Foster Hopper, *Medieval Number Symbolism* (New York 1938) 84.

⁶⁴It is worthy of note in this connection that the Cistercian author of the *Dialogus Miraculorum* dedicates his seventh book to the miracles of the Virgin. Caesarius asserts in his prologue that “seven is the number of virginity since no number below the number of 10 can be generated from it” (Caesarius, *Dialogue on Miracles*, 453).

⁶⁵Hopper, *Medieval Number Symbolism*, 85.

⁶⁶Ibid.

glory of the supernal vision of the eightfold and eternal beatitude.”⁶⁷ In the manner of Augustine our author associates the number seven with the time period sanctified by the incarnation and the number eight with the hereafter.

The numbers seven and eight also are echoed by the poems themselves. It will be recalled that sequences are generally composed of lines of seven or eight syllables in length. The majority of the sequence texts in this collection are of this type.⁶⁸ Thus, the metrics of the sequences, as well as the division of the work, bring the collection into line with eternal and immutable symbolic relationships established by God. The organization of the work according to the standards of Christian numerology makes it a microcosmic approximation of the divine plan. By echoing transcendental numerical relationships, the collection is brought into harmony with the cosmos itself. The poet’s insistent numerological digression, then, can be seen as a sort of orientation to the truths that lie within the collection’s layout, a clue to the individual reader to search for deeper meaning in the architecture of the work.

Although sequences are a major component of the collection, the author also composes in classical (quantitative) meters. The Cistercians did not have schools where the works of the ancients were taught⁶⁹ but educated members of the order, entering monastic life as adults, would have gone through the standard medieval *cursus*. Roman poetry was still regarded by grammarians as the Latin language at its best and was used to instruct students how to read and write well.⁷⁰ Despite the celebration of the ancients by the *grammatici*, the attitude of twelfth- and thirteenth-century poets to their Roman predecessors was ambivalent. Some authors imitated the classics so precisely that their works were long considered to be of Roman provenance.⁷¹ Others merely reintroduced pagan themes into their works to expand their artistic palates. Our author represents a third and perhaps the dominant position of the age. Poets of this orientation eschewed pagan motifs altogether, viewing

⁶⁷Dreves, *Analecta Hymnica*, vol. 48, 275: “qui per septemplicem volat gratiam ad supernae visionis octonarium et aeternae beatitudinis gloriam.”

⁶⁸The author does, however, include one poem with five syllables per line and one with six.

⁶⁹Leclercq, *Love of Learning*, 142.

⁷⁰Ibid., 152. Horace and Virgil were special favorites of both schoolmasters and monks and allegorical interpretation of their poetry brought them into the stream of Christian time. These writers became prophets of Christianity and as a result their works could be admired, appropriated, and even imitated (ibid., 170).

⁷¹Janet Martin, “Classicism and Style in Latin Literature” in *Renaissance and Renewal in the Twelfth Century*, ed. R. L. Benson and G. Constable (Cambridge, MA 1982) 553.

them as inimical to the Christian faith.

This period also witnessed a divergence of views on the extent to which inherited poetic forms could be modified. Some asserted that they should be emended to conform to contemporary aesthetics. Others believed that the ancients had arrived at an ideal model for poetic composition and that the forms should not be altered.⁷² In this dispute our poet comes out on the side of the progressives. Although he composes in dactylic hexameters and elegiac couplets, he takes a distinctly medieval pleasure in rhyme. In his playful manipulation of traditional poetic forms he displays the individual creativity characteristic of the best versifiers of the high middle ages.

The author employs two different techniques which were popular among certain poets of the era. The first is the so-called leonine pattern in which rhyme links the syllable of the first half of the third or fourth foot of the verse with the last syllable of that verse.⁷³ For example:

Sed quia confusus aegre dediscitur usus
Et semel infusus vix evacuatur abusus
Qui non suffundi flammantis sulphure mundi
Qui non confundi vult in barathro pereundi⁷⁴

He also uses *versus caudati*, in which a series of two or more lines are linked by end-rhyme:

Sancta parens et virgo carens omnino nocivis
Nobilis aulica, sed quasi publica, sed sacra civis⁷⁵

The writer demonstrates a preference for medieval aesthetics when composing in classical meters and is clearly attuned to contemporary trends in lyric poetry. One senses in his work a stylishness that one might not expect from a monk cloistered away from the literary fashions of the schools and courts.

Analysis of his quantitative compositions reveals that our author was a master of this type of verse and was able to use it skillfully in the service of his specific concerns. One example will suffice to show how the writer utilizes his considerable knowledge of the mechanics of quantitative verse to evoke an important idea in Cistercian theology. In his introductory poem, written in dactylic hexameter, he describes the door to eternal life which is opened to the believer through his partici-

⁷²Ibid., 557–560.

⁷³Ibid., 558.

⁷⁴Dreves, *Analecta Hymnica*, vol. 48, 293, stanza 9.

⁷⁵Ibid., 296, ll. 1–2.

pation in the eucharist. The poem emphasizes that the grace received by the monk is more dear to God than that of the average believer because it is obtained in the process of struggle against vice and temptation. One line in the poem stands in stark contrast to the rest because it begins with three spondees (a unit of measure composed of two long syllables). The effect is to slow the meter down and cause the reader to focus on the words being used. The key word in the line is *contemplativi* and the passage can be translated, “For the sake of the contemplative, the struggling, and the untaught one, martyrdom, contrition and divine incense inwardly and on high infuse the out of doors with the scent of sorrow.”⁷⁶

The focus on the word “contemplative” has a double sense. First, the meter matches the meaning of the word. Just as the repetition of three spondees retards the poem, contemplation is a reflective activity that slows the pace of life. More importantly, the focus on this word leads the reader to recall a key concept in Cistercian thought on the religious life. The word *contemplatio* had been used by patristic writers to signify the monk’s heartfelt reflection on God. Writers like Cassian and Augustine had in mind the contemplation of God in heaven. Theirs was an abstracted love for a distant deity. The term was given a new sense by Bernard and his followers who saw it rather as an affection for the real persons of the Bible.⁷⁷ In Bernard’s *contemplatio* the monk dwells on the sufferings of the incarnated Christ and the actual experiences of Mary in her conception, birth, and rearing of the son of God.

Our author reflects this Bernardine concern with the earthly lives of his sacred subjects. Speaking of the desirability of Marian devotion he says, “Nothing is more worthwhile for men, nothing to the ends of the earth than to venerate Mary and to love and to attend to her with her son. For this is to enjoy the love of her and her son and their joy.”⁷⁸ The writer rejoices in the very human love that this mother and child had for each other. He suggests that a devotee shares emotionally in this relationship and thus amplifies his commitment to his faith.

In his use of poetic form to highlight the key concept of *contemplatio* the author demonstrates a high level of proficiency. He also enriches his

⁷⁶Ibid., 275, Incipit titulus: “Contemplativi, certantis et inchoativi/ Gratia, martyrium, contritio, tus quoque dium./ At super, intro, foris redolent incensa doloris.”

⁷⁷Christine Mohrmann, “Observations sur la Langue et le Style de Saint Bernard,” in *Sancti Bernardi opera*, ed. J. Leclercq, H. M. Rochais, and C. H. Talbot, vol. 2 (Rome 1958) xx.

⁷⁸Dreves, *Analecta Hymnica*, vol. 48, 287, stanzas 25–26: “Ergo nihil hominibus,/ Nihil in mundi finibus,/ Nihil est utilius,/ Quam Mariam venerari/ Et amare et sectari/ Cum eiusdem filio.”

work with a variety of other techniques. He makes ample use of *contrafactura*, echoing other hymns and especially the writings of Saint Bernard. At one point, he revisits the theme developed by Bernard in his second homily on the Virgin, evoking Mary as the guiding star by which shipwreck on the sea of life can be averted.⁷⁹

Oh, solar star of the sea, haven and refuge, healthful in your brightness, mountain and consolation, radiance and solstice of your offspring, the true sun: thus exhort your son on my behalf without delay lest I who am at death's door would incur shipwreck, but that I will have the benefit of you, a guide by means of the light of your virtues.⁸⁰

He also reflects Bernard and his followers in his cultivation of sensuousness and even eroticism. It will be remembered that the love scene in the Song of Songs was central to Bernard's theology.⁸¹ His student Amadeus of Lausanne applied the Canticle to the relationship between God and Mary. Amadeus says,

Your Creator has become your Spouse, he has loved your beauty . . . He has coveted your loveliness and desires to be united to you. Impatient of delay, he hastens to come to you . . . Hurry to meet him that you may be kissed with the kiss of the mouth of God and be drawn into his blessed embraces.⁸²

The author of our collection also applies the theme of the lovers in the Song of Songs to the relationship between Mary and God. The Virgin is

⁷⁹Bernard was not the first medieval writer to make use of this metaphor. It seems to have been in service at least since the ninth century. Such luminaries as Walafriid Strabo, Fulbert of Chartres and Peter Damian had employed it before the abbot of Clairvaux. Bernard, however, took the metaphor to new poetic heights. Indeed, when in 1953 Pope Pius XII issued an encyclical on Bernard he chose these lines from among the saint's voluminous writings to quote *in extenso*. See Waddell's "Introduction" in *Magnificat*, xvii-xviii. See also Pelikan, *Mary Through the Centuries*, 93-94.

⁸⁰Dreves, *Analecta Hymnica*, vol. 48, 281, stanzas 7-9: "O solaris stella maris,/ Portus et refugium,/ Salutaris in praeclaris/ Mons et refrigerium,/ Veri solis, tuae prolis/ Iubar et solsticium,/ Absque mora sic exora/ Tuum pro me filium,/ Ne, qui mortis sum in portis,/ Incurram naufragium,/ Sed te duce tua luce / Fruar virtualium."

⁸¹Bernard authored eighty-six sermons on the Canticle between 1135 and 1153. Although the Song of Songs had been evoked by churchmen of earlier ages, the book only came into its own as an exegetical device in the twelfth century. Bernard's extensive writings as well as those of the school of St. Victor in Paris were at the root of the new interest in the Canticle. Under their influence and that of the Benedictine Rupert of Deutz, the Song of Songs expanded into a topos for the relationship of Mary and God. See Ann Matter, *The Voice of My Beloved* (Philadelphia 1990) 123-177; and Hilda Graef, *Mary*, 210-264.

⁸²Quoted in Graef, *Mary*, 245.

the one who “would glory with Christ and who would walk with him through the lands of balsam, who lives with him among the cedars where they are placed in the garden of scents.”⁸³

Not only does the poet use the Song of Songs to make the relationship of Mary with God more human, he gives other Old Testament passages a similar treatment. Typological metaphors are used to create an almost erotic sense of the immaculate conception. Prominent among these is the burning bush which appeared to Moses on Mt. Sinai.

This man will see a burning bush once it is pointed out, the glory of the bush pleasing to God, the virginal uterus impregnated divinely, not in genital ardor not in marital heat nor in excess but by the vital spiritual flame of the holy spirit.⁸⁴

Although the sentiment is professedly chaste, the metaphor gives the reader a sense of the conception of Jesus as a sexual act involving the passion of both parties.

The Old Testament story of Gideon’s fleece becomes another metaphor which reinforces the physicality of the immaculate conception. In this story the Hebrew boy Gideon is visited by an angel who instructs him to organize a raid against the tribe’s enemies. Not among the leaders of the band, Gideon hesitates to respond to the call. He requests that God give him a sign that he should act on his vision. He places a fleece on the threshing floor and asks God to moisten one side to prove that he had indeed called him to action. The next morning the fleece is damp on that side. Just to be sure of the message he repeats the procedure, requesting God to moisten the opposite side. This occurs and Gideon is given confidence to lead his people to defeat their enemies.

The dew on the fleece, for our poet, is a metaphor for the descent of the holy spirit on Mary, yet goes beyond this. It evokes the sexual act itself: “Dew of the divine, font of piety, blessed manna, sweetly he appeared, nobly laying a covering on you from himself.”⁸⁵ The physical presence of the dew again reinforces the notion that the conception of Jesus, although immaculate, was undeniably a sexual experience.

⁸³Dreves, *Analecta Hymnica*, vol. 48, 285, stanza 4: “Quae cum Christo gloriaris/ Et cum ipso spatiaris/ Per arva balsamatum;/ Quae cum ipso cohabitas/ Intra cedros ibi sitas/ In hortis aromatum.”

⁸⁴Ibid., 290, stanzas 30a–b: “Hic visurus inflammatum/ Rubum, quondam designatum,/ Rubi decus Deo gratum,/ Virginalem impregnatum/ Uterum divinitus, Non ardore genitali/ Nec calore maritali/ Neque luxu, sed vitali/ Dei flamma, spiritali/ Rogo sancti spiritus.”

⁸⁵Ibid., 297, ll. 15–16: “Ros deitatis, fons pietatis, manna beatum/ Dulce paravit, nabile stravit te sibi stratum.”

The sensuality of the poems in this collection is augmented by the conflation of Old Testament metaphors. One example is the previously mentioned passage where the author evokes the disporting of the bride and groom in the Song of Songs. The quoted passage, in fact, collapses imagery from the Canticle with that of Ecclesiasticus 24. In the next stanza the bride actually becomes the cedar described in Ecclesiasticus 24.13 and then is transformed into Aaron's rod from Numbers 17.8. She is then impregnated by the dew from heaven, recalling Judges 6. Next, she brings forth the nuts representing Christ which shifts the reader's attention back to Numbers. The description of the quality of the fruit, surpassing cinnamon and balsam in sweetness evokes both the Canticle and Ecclesiasticus again.

The conflation of biblical symbols immerses the reader in sensuality. The honey, the manna, and the fountains flow all at once. Barren rods flower and put forth fruit. Intoxicating scents waft over the reader in repetitive waves. The effect is to establish the connection between divine events and sense perceptions, to equate divine occurrences with the ultimate pleasures available to man.

This sensuality reinforces the fact that the mystery of the incarnation was not an abstract event, but took place on the physical plane. The poet makes it clear that the immaculate conception and birth of Christ was accompanied by real human sensations on the part of the mother. He says, "God is present and is seen and is touched and held, ensconced in a small vessel."⁸⁶ A corollary of the Virgin's experience of divine motherhood was a sense of exaltation, joy and power. Her experience, the writer affirms, gives her a very special role in the economy of salvation. He echoes the theology of Anselm and Bernard, asserting that it is by means of the Virgin that God is made accessible to men. Through her "the invisible is seen, the impalpable is touched and the incomprehensible is understood."⁸⁷

In the view of our poet it is Mary's function to act as intermediary between man and the deity. He writes, "For, as the mother of the savior it is yours alone to compel your son in the federation of piety, thus it would be customary always for you to appeal to him for us."⁸⁸ Because she, as a mortal, gave birth to God she has a responsibility not only to her son but to her fellow men. Participating in both mortality and di-

⁸⁶Ibid., 290, stanza 27a: "Deus adest et videtur/ Et palpatur et tenetur/ Inclusus in vasculo."

⁸⁷Ibid., stanza 28b: "Videtur invisibilis,/ Palpatur inpalpabilis/ Et incomprehensibilis/ Tenetur per virginem."

⁸⁸Ibid., 280, stanza 19: "Tuum est enim proprium./ Ut tuum cogas filium/ Pietatis foedere/ Sicut mater salvatoris,/ Ut sit ei semper moris/ Nobis condescendere."

vinity she is able to move freely through both realms. She is “the one who is with us and human and who on our behalf is in the house of the Lord with those who dwell there.”⁸⁹ Thus she becomes an advocate for her devotees in the court of heaven:

For the aid of sinners above the choruses of angels you climb to the heavens for the cause of salvation flying among the heavens and to the highest reaches. Do sinners keep you there in glory inside the doors of our king? Are you not in the kingdom of the sun on behalf of the transgressors so that on their behalf you might always speak?⁹⁰

She also returns to earth to help those in need. She is a spiritual physician, administering the medicine by which the believer, marred by original sin, can be cured: “Oh queen, divine praise, light and honor of men, you gave birth to the Lord, threefold medicine to us . . . With this divine medicine you ought to have compassion for me, often afflicted, and heal me by means of your office.”⁹¹

She is a special advocate of monastics whom she aids in their struggle against temptation: “Oh, sublime one, you are in the lower regions piously supporting the humble (monks) those who are striving but as they are weak, frequently stumble.”⁹² At another point the author prays, “deign to give me, your servant, a drink from the river of the graces so that I would be purified by the luminous leaven of old and be emancipated wholly for divine work.”⁹³ He also describes the process by which Mary can be brought to the monk’s side, “circling in meditation he comes close to this divine one, recalling and venerating Mary and so also her virtue, so as to know salvation.”⁹⁴

Finally, the Virgin is the means by which heterodox Christians can

⁸⁹Ibid., 287, stanza 28: “Quae nobiscum est et homo/ Et pro nobis est in domo/ Deicum indigenis.”

⁹⁰Ibid., 279, stanzas 11–12: “Tu ad opus peccatorum/ Super choros angelorum/ Scandis ad caelestia/ Tu in causa salvandorum/ Intras caelos et caelorum/ Volans ad sublimia.

Numquid ibi peccatores/ Intra regis nostri fores/ Te habent in gloria?/ Nonne propter transgressores,/ Ut pro eis semper ores,/ In solis es regia?”

⁹¹Ibid., stanzas 5, 7: “O regina, laus divina,/ Lux et decus hominum,/ Medicina nobis trina/ Genuisti Dominum./ Hac divina medicina/ Mihi saepe saucio/ Misereri et mederi/ Debes ex officio.”

⁹²Ibid., 283, stanza 8: “O sublimis, es in imis/ Pie fovens humiles,/ Qui nituntur, sed labuntur/ Saepius ut fragiles, . . .”

⁹³Ibid., 281, stanzas 4–5: “O praeclara, Deo cara,/ Tuo mihi servulo/ Sic dignare propinare/ Gratiarum rivulo,/ Ut fermento luculento/ Expiatus veteri/ Et divino sim omnino/ Mancipatus operi, . . .”

⁹⁴Ibid., 293, stanza 10: “Huic homo suspiret, gyrans meditando regyret/ Hanc circumdiam, recolens veneransque Mariam,/ Sic et virtutem, sic percipiendo salutem . . .”

be brought back into the orthodox fold. Although in his poem directed against the heretics the author never mentions a specific sect, he is clearly referring to the Albigensians. At one point he calls his adversaries “publicans,” a common epithet hurled at the Cathars by their opponents.⁹⁵ In addition, the writer repeatedly associates the heretics with the Jews who, like the Albigensians, denied that Jesus was the physical incarnation of God.⁹⁶ The schismatics are lost, he suggests, because they have not acknowledged the great mystery of Christ’s birth, life, death, and resurrection. They envision the mortal birth of Jesus as impossible because it would implicate the Lord in the sins of the world. The poet seems to think that if heretics would reflect on the Virgin’s role in bringing life to Jesus and her subsequent position as mediator between heaven and earth, they could be converted to the truth. He confidently asserts, “He who wishes to know Mary and her divine offspring should come to the church to learn the mysteries.”⁹⁷

Rather than dwelling morbidly on the evils of heresy, however, the author exalts in the fact that the economy of salvation makes possible redemption for all. The Virgin is the pivot of that system. Privy to both the earthly and heavenly domains she understands the types of love unique to each realm. She has known the bonds of human affection but is also intimately acquainted with the boundlessness and ultimate satisfaction of divine love. Moreover, she is keenly aware of the human longing for divine love and the selfishness that thwarts men from discovering it. Recognizing the dreadful state that human beings find themselves in, she exhibits an inexhaustible concern for them. She is their passionate advocate before the divine judge, certain of the purity of their innermost intentions. She also administers to their earthly needs, demonstrating first hand the selfless love which proceeds from the divine.

This outpouring of love from the vessel of the Virgin is a central theme in the work and is of a piece with the idea of *caritas* envisioned by Cistercian mystics such as Bernard and Aelred. In their writings, these visionaries urged monks to remove themselves from the selfish conceptions of love that characterized their relationships in the world and move toward a love rooted in God. Our collection is an innovative poetic treatise on the same theme, one which, as the title suggests,

⁹⁵Ibid., 288, stanza 4b.

⁹⁶See, for example, 289, stanza 16a; and 290, stanza 31a. The relationship of this set of poems to the struggle against Albigensianism is treated in depth in Szövérfy, “Maria,” 223–232.

⁹⁷Dreves, *Analecta Hymnica*, vol. 48, 290, stanza 29b: “Sed qui nosse vult Mariam/ Et ipsius prolem diam./ Veniat ad ecclesiam / Discere mysteria . . .”

functions as a mirror by which the light of divine love could be reflected on the monastic reader in his private devotions. Holding and directing that mirror is the queen of heaven, ever virgin, blessed Mary, full of grace.

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