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Introduction

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IT IS OFTEN ASSUMED THAT medieval women had no control over their sexual lives other than to flee to a nunnery to escape marital duties and that clerics either loyally—and totally—abstained from sex or, disobedient to the reform movements of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, engaged in illicit sex and pseudomarrriages. The articles in this special issue of the *Journal of the History of Sexuality* explore a middle ground in which some bishops and monks skirted the religious laws to experience real sexuality—often through imagined sexual relationships, friendships, and theoretical meditations—and how some women expressed their sexuality even in nunneries, hermitages, and other religious institutions. What is striking—indeed, paradoxical—about all these expressions of sexuality by clerical men and pious women is that for the most part the eroticism inherent in all of these erotic expressions consisted of forms of “sex without sex.”

This issue of the *Journal of the History of Sexuality* devoted to medieval sexualities had its genesis in the spring of 2007 at the 42nd International Congress on Medieval Studies in Kalamazoo, Michigan, which hosted three separate sessions on the various vestiges of erotic desire and its relation to spirituality, friendship, and the divine in the medieval world. The proceedings of the sponsored sessions revealed a strong interest in the way medieval sexuality and eroticism were constructed, expressed, distorted, and even sublimated well before they were even acknowledged by contemporaries

We wish to thank Mathew Kuefler for his timely and generous invitation to write on medieval eroticism and the impact it had on medieval persons and extend our deepest thanks to all seven contributors to this issue for their exceptional articles. We are also grateful to Michael H. Gelting for his meticulous proofreading. We also thank Jennifer N. Brown and Marla Segol for their useful suggestions and sustaining humor at the outset of our joint project as well as the Texas Medieval Association and the Society for Medieval Feminist Scholarship for sponsoring two of the three sessions at Kalamazoo.

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and certainly before their recognition by modern scholars, who still try to make sense of the ever-shifting boundaries of the cultural expression of such feelings and urges. The participants in these sessions paid special attention to the impact of spiritualized eroticism and homoerotic desire upon the formation of medieval identities, sensibilities, and mores—personal, social, and political. Four of us—Sally N. Vaughn, Christina Christoforatu, Jennifer N. Brown, and Marla Segol—who either organized or presided over these 2007 Kalamazoo sessions undertook to think more critically about the conflicting constructions of medieval sexuality and their ties to gender, identity, and spirituality in a special issue devoted to medieval sexuality. We hope that our collective efforts will serve as a catalyst for further research in the field of medieval sexuality and will inspire more sustained discussion of the impact of medieval eroticism in modern theories of sexuality.

The seven articles included in this special issue bring together original research that illuminates the reconstructive power of desire in its various manifestations and informs us not only of the presence of eroticism in medieval religious communities but of its varying and ever-shifting boundaries. We characterize these expressions of desire and eroticism as “reconstructive” because in each of the cases discussed in this volume the expressions of desire and eroticism therein change or reconfigure the nature of the individual or the community or both involved in formulating that erotic expression. And in every case we are dealing with the impact of “sex without sex” on the spiritual and mental landscapes of these individuals and their communities.

Although the medieval men and women expressing their sexuality who are discussed in this volume represent varied and often contradictory constructions of sexuality in their respective accounts, the seven articles in which their experiences are described are united by a number of shared characteristics. First, they all explore a realm of sexuality relatively unexplored in medieval literature, namely, that of recluse eroticism as it was conceived, practiced, and distorted by religious men and women whose social and professional duties precluded them—indeed, banned them—from engaging in anything remotely erotic, even in spirit, but who circumvented the strictures imposed by their respective institutions to express their sexuality nonetheless. Second, each of these essays considers medieval conceptions of the body as those are rendered by real people in real-life situations and deems them integral to medieval constructions of the self. Finally, they all situate the varied constructions of medieval sexuality in the context of the larger religious community that contributed to the shaping of its members’ spiritual identity.

Let us begin by surveying the historiographical literature pertinent to this issue, taking each article’s topics and subjects one by one in short summaries as our starting points. Our special issue commences with Megan McLaughlin’s study of the challenges to episcopal sexuality connected with the reform movements of the eleventh century. Her exhaustive and original

study draws attention to the political dynamics of clerical eroticism—usually discussed only in connection with lesser clerics, not bishops—and offers valuable insights into how such episcopal eroticism was constructed and even distorted in order to preserve clerical identities and the reputations of their respective persons and institutions. McLaughlin's article exposes the realities of the late-eleventh-century ecclesiastical struggles with carnality through the bishops' own very personal struggles with their sexual bodies and through an impressive wealth of historical evidence that brings to the fore the double standards bishops and their respective institutions often used to relax ancient regulations concerning clerical celibacy. While several important studies of bishops and episcopal culture in general are extant, virtually no scholars have studied episcopal sexuality per se, as McLaughlin does here.¹ Equally impressive in this study of episcopal sexuality is McLaughlin's discourse on the juxtaposition of unorthodox medieval sexual practices (and varying conceptions of them) with contemporary views of sexual perversion. McLaughlin's observation that the manipulation of religious and ethical restrictions came to both threaten and perpetuate episcopal promiscuity resonates well with contemporary audiences who are familiar with the trauma clerical temptation can cause individuals and whole communities whose faith has been severely shaken.

Another particular eleventh-century bishop, Anselm, archbishop of Canterbury, figures strongly in Sally N. Vaughn's article not in the sense of a sexuality involved or projected in episcopal administrative roles, as McLaughlin's study of French and German bishops portrays continent bishops, but through his use of the erotic language of desire in his large number of friendships with both men and women. Numerous studies have been done on friendship, monastic friendship in particular.² It has often been noted that monks indulged in very erotic language in their expressions

¹ Perhaps the best study of episcopal function and practice, still valuable and unsurpassed by the many individual studies of individual bishops, is Robert Benson, *The Bishop Elect: A Study in Medieval Episcopal Office* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1968). See also, for England, Everett U. Crosby, *Bishop and Chapter in Twelfth Century England: A Study of the "Mensa Episcopalis"* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); and, for the bishops of France, see the interesting article by John S. Ott, "Educating the Bishop: Models of Episcopal Authority and Conduct in the Hagiography of Early Twelfth Century Soissons," in *Teaching and Learning in Northern Europe, 1000–1200*, ed. Sally N. Vaughn and Jay Rubenstein (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2006), 217–54.

² See, for example, Brian Patrick McGuire, *Friendship and Community: The Monastic Experience, 350–1250* (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1988); Julian Haseldine, ed., *Friendship in Medieval Europe* (Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing, 1999); C. Stephen Jaeger, *Ennobling Love: In Search of a Lost Sensibility* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999). On love and courtly love see James A. Schultz, *Courtly Love, the Love of Courtliness, and the History of Sexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006). On friendship see the various articles in *Viator: Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 38, no. 2 (2007), ed. Cary Nederman et al., an entire issue devoted to friendship; see also Paul Conner, *Friendships between Consecrated Men and Women and the Growth of Charity* (Rome: Pontifica Facultas Theologica, Institutum Spiritualitatis Teresianum, 1972).

of friendship for each other—particularly Saint Anselm.³ But the inventiveness and intentionality of such a use of erotic expression between chaste men and women is just beginning to be discovered. One of the pioneers in this new investigation is Dyan Elliott, who in her book *Spiritual Marriage: Sexual Abstinence in Medieval Wedlock* addresses chastity within marriage. As Elliott rightly remarks, “Most of the church fathers were apprehensive of human sexuality, as sexual relations were generally considered to be a reminder of humanity’s fallen state.”⁴ Perhaps the most comprehensive of modern works on medieval sexuality in general, both within and without marriage, is Ruth Mazo Karras’s important book, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe: Doing unto Others*.⁵ Yet medieval men and women enjoyed close friendships with each other without sex or marriage, as H. M. Canatella and Sally N. Vaughn observe in their articles, the former through her study of a mutually rewarding and long-lasting friendship between a churchman, Goscelin, a monk of Saint Bertin, and a nun and later a recluse, Eve of Wilton; the latter through her reconstructive study of the intense, passionately charged language of Saint Anselm, abbot of Bec and later archbishop of Canterbury. Both Anselm and his possible protégé, Goscelin, used passionately charged language in their letters to their correspondents, yet their intent was far from erotic. Anselm’s intense language of love, for example, is scattered throughout his writings as he is addressing masters, students, parents and children, and even spouses indiscriminately. Women,

³ See, in particular, McGuire, *Friendship and Community*, 210–30 (on Anselm’s letters), 231–96 (on Anselm’s successors), 296–338 (on Ælred of Rievaulx); and R. W. Southern, *Saint Anselm: A Portrait in a Landscape* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 138–65; S. N. Vaughn, *St. Anselm and the Handmaidens of God: A Study of Anselm’s Correspondence with Women* (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2002). Holle Canatella, “Friendship in Anselm of Canterbury’s Correspondence,” *Viator* 38, no. 2 (2007): 351–67, is the latest word in this debate. Colin Morris links such erotic language, specifically of Anselm, to a new sense of individualism in *The Discovery of the Individual* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), 49–64, 76, 82–86, 96–101, 173–74, 180–86. On Anselm’s erotic language see, most recently, J. P. Haseldine, “Love, Separation and Male Friendship: Words and Actions in Saint Anselm’s Letters to His Friends,” in *Masculinity in Medieval Europe*, ed. D. M. Hadley (New York: Addison Wesley, 1998), 238–55. On the possibility of such erotic language reflecting homosexuality and on medieval homosexuality in general see John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980); and for an updated view of the Boswell thesis see Mathew Kuefler, ed., *The Boswell Thesis: Essays on Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006). For a contrary view see Jean Leclercq, *Monks and Love in Twelfth Century France: Psycho-Historical Essays* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1979). On men in general in the Middle Ages see *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages*, ed. Clare A. Lees (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993); and Joan Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science, and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

⁴ Dyan Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage: Sexual Abstinence in Medieval Wedlock* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993), 4.

⁵ Ruth Mazo Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe: Doing unto Others* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

conversely, were neither sexualized nor desexualized by Anselm and Goscelin. Anselm, at least, was addressed with similar fervor. Both Anselm and Goscelin viewed women as cherished friends and even exalted their women friends for their contributions to the relationships.

The exaltation of women by religious men, however, was by no means a new phenomenon in the early eleventh century but dates to the beginnings of the Christian Church. Indeed, as early as the late fourth century Saint Jerome was cultivating friendships with aristocratic women, in particular, the aristocratic woman Paula and her daughters, one of many friendships that Rosemary Rader discusses fully in her book *Breaking Boundaries: Male/Female Friendship in Early Christian Communities*.⁶ Indeed, women were very prominently and actively engaged in the day-to-day operations and spiritual sustenance of the early Christian churches and their clerical members.⁷ Jerome's letters to Paula, for instance, were often cited as models for such enriching friendships in the eleventh century, with which this issue begins.⁸

One of the most outstanding expressions of the kind of friendship practiced by Saint Jerome and emulated by Anselm some seven hundred years later is an eleventh-century friendship recorded by Goscelin of Saint Bertin in his *Liber confortatorius*, a chastely erotic missive to the nun and future recluse Eve of Wilton.⁹ Other such spiritual friendships between women and male clerics include one by the well-known twelfth-century mystic Christina of Markyate and a chaste friendship between a holy woman, Marie d'Oignies, and her male confessor, Jacques de Vitry, that Jennifer N. Brown identifies in her article on the late-twelfth- and early-thirteenth-century *vita* that documents their tempestuous relationship.¹⁰

But in each of these rare cases the sources capturing the nature of the clerical friendship and its impact on the participant and the community at large were written by men. Indeed, such erotic expressions of desire among women (and in a few cases by women) have been little noticed, but

⁶ Rosemary Rader, *Breaking Boundaries: Male/Female Friendship in Early Christian Communities* (New York: Paulist Press, 1983).

⁷ On women in the early church see W. H. C. Frend, *The Rise of Christianity* (Augsburg: Fortress, 1984), a new edition of his monumental work on early Christianity that chronicles in great detail the prominence of women in the rise of the church.

⁸ On Jerome as a model for such male-female friendships see Barbara Newman, "Flaws in the Golden Bowl: Gender and Spiritual Formation in the Twelfth Century," *Traditio* 45 (1989–90): 111–46. On Jerome as a model for Anselm's friendships with women see Vaughn, *St. Anselm*, 2, 5, 135, 155–57, 174.

⁹ For the many recent works on Goscelin and his friend Eve of Wilton see H. M. Canatella's article in this special issue.

¹⁰ On Christina of Markyate see *Christina of Markyate: A Twelfth Century Holy Woman*, ed. Samuel Fanous and Henrietta Leyser (New York: Routledge, 2004); and Christopher Holdsworth, "Christina of Markyate," in *Medieval Women*, ed. Derek Baker (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978), 185–204; see also *The Life of Christina of Markyate, a Twelfth-Century Recluse*, ed. and trans. C. H. Talbot (Oxford: Clarendon, 1959).

our collection includes one *vita* of a woman written by another woman: Virginia Blanton's article on the paradoxical ties between sexual desire, chaste marriage, and Christian martyrdom examines the Old French *La vie seinte Audrée*, written by a certain Marie who may possibly have been Marie de France, the famed twelfth-century poet, as it weaves together historical and linguistic evidence to bring Audrée's *vita* and the intentions of its female narrator to life. The narrator draws the reader into the sociopolitical and spiritual contradictions of the late twelfth century as she skillfully situates Audrée, the Anglo-Saxon queen and founder of the English monastery at Ely, as a woman who successfully negotiated the social demands of marriage while faithfully preserving her virginity for God. In what can only be described as a rare and most opportune circumstance, a woman wrote about women's sexuality and sexual experience—although in this case the focus is on the avoidance of such an experience.

The women of Barking Abbey in England also wrote about sexuality and chastity, as Nicole R. Rice informs us in her examination of a fifteenth-century Middle English manuscript that appears to have been copied, if not authored, by a certain Matilda Hayle. The text is remarkable—indeed, singular—in its depiction of monastic chastity as inseparable from the states of wifehood and widowhood. It stands in direct contradiction to the kind of destructive anxiety of homoerotic desire Michelle M. Sauer observes in the eremitical and anchorite religious communities she examines in her article. Unlike Rice, however, who illuminates the communal experience of the nuns of Barking, Sauer explores expressions of solitary spirituality, piety, and homoeroticism in eremitical and anchorite communities that were bound by custom-made rules specifically created for their secluded members. Many such rules contained passages outlining the perils of homoerotic desire and its inevitability, often with relative specificity and directness, thus uncovering intense anxiety about same-sex relationships and homosexual desires within monastic communities and offering advice for its banishment.

Hence, in their respective articles all seven authors in this special issue explore the rich and varied expressions of chaste sexuality that have hitherto been merely glanced at by scholars. More importantly, they give a new context to such eroticism by considering the reconstructive power of desire in specific historical places and through specific historical actors. All seven articles examine medieval eroticism—ranging from the spiritual and introspective to the carnal and subversive—and defend (as well as challenge) in their arguments the restorative power of sexual and spiritual expression, whether idealized, repressed, or distorted, taking into account its transformative effect both on the ones who expressed it and on those who received it.

H. M. Canatella explores the place of the hagiographer Goscelin of Saint Bertin in the northern European intellectual milieu of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, while Sally N. Vaughn likewise examines the contribution and

legacy of Goscelin's possible mentor and probable exemplar, Saint Anselm of Canterbury. Both Canatella and Vaughn examine the impact of their subjects' tracts on the religious and literary communities they sustained and in particular consider the extent to which these spiritual leaders challenged and helped transform well-established notions of eroticism and sexuality. Goscelin, through his mentoring of his student Eve, explored the possibilities of erotic language to express the close emotional ties between teacher and student as well as the reciprocal spiritual teaching and learning that resulted from those ties; Goscelin's probable spiritual model, Anselm, likewise considered the spiritual value of women as wives and mothers in the language of eroticism and desire.

Jennifer N. Brown and Virginia Blanton shift the thematic focus to the contradictory roles of women as both wives *and* virgins in later medieval hagiographic literature, each exploring ways in which sexuality was simultaneously celebrated and denied to (or by) female mystics in their roles as both wives and nuns.¹¹ Brown explores such perplexing contradictions in the life and spiritual choices of a late-twelfth- and early-thirteenth-century mystic and one of the earliest of the Beguines, Marie d'Oignies.¹² Specifically, she unveils the paradoxical roles Marie assumed for herself in her early marriage as a chaste wife and, later in life and after the death of her husband, in the convent she joined. In her younger years Marie denied herself and her young husband the sexual pleasures of the body, dedicating herself and her husband to God instead. Yet Marie's union with God and her relationship with the brothers at the priory of Oignies, as Brown observes, suggest a sexuality in Marie that was vehemently denied in her relationship with her husband: both to her hagiographer, Jacques de Vitry, and to the brothers of the priory Marie vacillated between being seen as a kind of mother and as a kind of wife. Jacques, in fact, describes in remarkable detail one monk's sexual urges (perhaps his own?) in particular as he touches Marie's hand, only to be rebuffed by her vision of the words *Noli me tangere* (Do not touch me), which she claims not to have understood

¹¹ On virginity in general see Kathleen Coyne Kelly, *Performing Virginity and Testing Chastity in the Middle Ages* (London: Routledge, 2002); on virginity in the central Middle Ages see Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, *Saints' Lives and Women's Literary Culture, c. 1150–1300: Virginity and Its Authorizations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); on virginity in late medieval England in particular see Sara Salih, *Versions of Virginity in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2001). On medieval women see Henrietta Leyser, *Medieval Women: A Social History of Women in England, 450–1500* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995); and Juliette Dor, Lesley Johnson, and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, eds., *New Trends in Feminine Spirituality* (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 1999). On women saints see Catherine M. Mooney, ed., *Gendered Voices: Medieval Saints and Their Interpreters* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999).

¹² On the Beguines see Walter Simons, *Cities of Ladies: Beguine Communities in the Medieval Low Countries, 1200–1365* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001).

but were sent to her by a “jealous” God.¹³ Brown’s analysis of Jacques de Vitry’s *vita* of Marie finds it filled with strikingly sexual images, indeed, dripping with an intense sexuality throughout, whether on the part of its author, Jacques, or attributed by its author to his subject, Marie.¹⁴

Virginia Blanton similarly focuses her attention on the perplexing callings that an Anglo-Saxon queen who became an abbess, Saint Æthelthryth (Audrée in French), experienced and tried to suppress as reinterpreted by a woman author in an Anglo-Norman poem specifically written for an audience of virgins, widows, and chaste married women. In contrast to the hagiographical trope according to which virgins and girls forced to marry had to find some way to persuade their husbands to agree to a chaste marriage, Audrée experienced sexual desire before her marriage and indeed was inflamed by it once she married. Thus, she was obliged to mortify her flesh to control these desires. Yet unlike the ascetic desert fathers and mothers of the earliest centuries of Christianity or even Christina of Markyate, whose sexual suffering was inflicted by evil forces, the desires experienced by Audrée were unequivocally sexual and inherently ontological, according to her account.¹⁵ Marie in her portrayal of Audrée clearly meant for her female audience to understand not only that sexual desire is natural and inherent in all humans and not a particular result of being female but also that it was even present in the lives of saints.¹⁶

Nicole R. Rice and Michelle M. Sauer focus their attentions on the influence of eroticism on the construction of spiritual identities in medieval monastic communities. Rice looks at the nuns of Barking Abbey in fifteenth-century England and their conceptions of their own roles within the community and specifically at their conceptions of their status as virgins—whether previously married or not. In her analysis Rice reconstructs the teaching of the community of nuns that the status of virgin can be reattained through the dedication of each member as a bride of Christ. She sees an interactive interpretation of the model virgin, model wife, and

¹³ The words refer to the Latin version of the command spoken by Jesus to Mary Magdalene after his resurrection (John 20:17).

¹⁴ On the intensity of medieval sexuality see Dyan Elliott, *Fallen Bodies: Pollution, Sexuality and Demonology in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999); Amy Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy: Mysticism, Sexual Difference, and the Demands of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); and Pierre Payer, *The Bridling of Desire: Views of Sex in the Late Middle Ages* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993).

¹⁵ On the desert fathers and mothers see *The Desert Fathers*, trans. Helen Waddell, ed. John F. Thornton (New York: Vintage Books, 1998); David G. R. Keller, *Oases of Wisdom: The Worlds of the Desert Fathers and Mothers* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical, 2005); Graham Gould, *The Desert Fathers on Monastic Community* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993); and Laura Swan, *The Forgotten Desert Mothers: Sayings, Lives and Stories of Early Christian Women* (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 2001).

¹⁶ On medieval saints in general see Donald Weinstein and Rudolph M. Bell, *Saints and Society: The Two Worlds of Western Christendom, 1000–1700* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

model widow, each as a manifestation of an ideal bride of Christ. These common ties of interactive models for the brides of Christ tied the community into a firmly bonded sisterhood.

In a fifteenth-century rule for male hermits Sauer, along somewhat different lines, traces the influence and subsequent alteration of religious rules to practitioners of solitary spirituality such as hermits and anchorites by introducing modern readers to an underrecognized and never-before-translated manuscript (now found in the British Library, Manuscript Sloane 1584) that contains the Rule of Saint Celestine. Sauer traces the impact that the “alteration” of the guidance offered in the rule had on the religious community to which it was addressed and offers remarkable insight into homoerotic desire and the rhetorical and logistical arguments mounted against its expression.¹⁷ In doing so Rice gives us a new glimpse of medieval ideas about desire and eroticism as she further examines varying forms of chastity presented in a fifteenth-century collection of poems, prayers, and other texts that derive particular meaning from the social milieu of Barking Abbey.¹⁸ The precious literary evidence included in the second part of the composite manuscript Rice examines (called British Library, Manuscript Additional 10596) presents monastic chastity as inseparable from wifhood and widowhood and human passions as integral aspects of human nature that ought to be neither denied nor repressed.

Now that we have surveyed the historical literature relevant to this issue in each of the short summaries of its essays, let us turn to a discussion of the interconnections between its articles in expanded comparisons of our authors’ contributions. Our special issue begins chronologically with Megan McLaughlin’s article, “The Bishop in the Bedroom: Witnessing Episcopal Sexuality in an Age of Reform,” which examines the sexual and spiritual politics of eleventh-century early reform bishops. McLaughlin notes that most attention to clerical sexual behavior from the eleventh century on was focused on the “lower” clergy, but bishops were also questioned. Her study brings to the fore the double standards bishops and their respective institutions used to relax ancient regulations concerning clerical celibacy and, through canon law and various legal texts, shows that the manipulation of religious and ethical restrictions came both to threaten and to perpetuate episcopal promiscuity. It was in the eleventh

¹⁷ On issues of illicit, especially homosexual, desire see Clare A. Lees, “Engendering Religious Desire: Sex, Knowledge, and Christian Identity in Anglo-Saxon England,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 27, no. 1 (1997): 17–46; Karma Lochrie, *Heterosyncrasies: Female Sexuality When Normal Wasn’t* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005); Karma Lochrie, *Covert Operations: The Medieval Uses of Secrecy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999); and Cary Howie, *Claustrophilia: The Erotics of Enclosure in Medieval Literature* (New York: Palgrave, 2007).

¹⁸ On the reading of such manuscripts in the late Middle Ages see Mary C. Erler, *Women, Reading and Piety in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

century that such legal documents redefined clerical marriage as heresy to make prosecution of offenders easier, giving their enemies a new and useful weapon—sometimes whether or not the bishop had committed a sexual offense. McLaughlin finds that episcopal bedrooms were in fact public spaces, often monitored by an episcopal entourage as witnesses to episcopal chastity—to which not all bishops adhered. Such an age of reform as the eleventh century generated a good deal of controversy over the proper conduct of bishops and a good deal of perplexity as to appropriate conduct. A Continental bishop was not usually a monk, but even if he were a monk, a bishop had an obligation to converse with women, who were, after all, part of his secular flock, making such a bishop vulnerable to accusations of impropriety.¹⁹ Consequently, the campaign for celibacy was beginning to alienate bishops from both women and men. This is the age in which *gesta episcoporum* came to be written as “how to” manuals to control sexuality so as to propagate chastity. Real witnesses to the bishop’s conduct were with him constantly. These *gesta* also served as a kind of clerical witnessing that publicized a bishop’s good deeds. These texts included admonitions about both postponing episcopal office until the sexual heat of youth had passed and controlling what sexual heat remained thereafter through abstention from aphrodisiac food and drink and from such lust-inducing activities as bathing. McLaughlin’s portrait of the episcopal bedchamber milieu reveals the solutions real bishops found to such real dilemmas.

While McLaughlin finds eleventh-century bishops becoming more and more alienated from their female constituencies (and sometimes from their provocative male constituencies as well), she tells us that they also managed to present a public image of their chastity through witnesses and such propagandistic tracts as the *gesta episcoporum*. H. M. Canatella and Sally N. Vaughn, at the other end of the spectrum, present nearly opposite circumstances for their eleventh-century monastic subjects, Goscelin of Saint Bertin and Saint Anselm, respectively. Here, in what must be called counterintuitive circumstances, it is monks who revered women, while McLaughlin’s bishops either fled from them or demonized them. In sharp contrast, the monk Goscelin and the monk-archbishop Anselm expressed strong approval of both women and sexuality—theoretical in Goscelin’s case but real in Anselm’s case.

¹⁹ In England the situation after the Norman Conquest was somewhat different; many of the Norman bishops, especially the archbishops of Canterbury and the bishops of Rochester, were both monks and bishops. In Normandy both before and after the Conquest monk-bishops such as Maurilius, archbishop of Rouen, and William Bona Anima, archbishop of Rouen, were common. But England and Normandy were exceptional and somewhat different from the Continent. Even so, monk-bishops occurred from time to time among the Gregorian reformers and in other situations. For example, before the reform movement began Bardo of Mainz was a monk-bishop ridiculed for his lack of learning, but the reformer Desiderius, abbot of Montecassino, became Pope Victor III, and popes Gregory VII and Urban II had been monks of Cluny before their elevation to the papacy.

In her article “Long-Distance Love: The Ideology of Male-Female Spiritual Friendship in Goscelin of Saint Bertin’s *Liber confortatorius*” Canatella argues that the nun Eve and her close friend, teacher, and mentor, Goscelin, enjoyed an intimate and mutually beneficial spiritual friendship. In this relationship, as Goscelin described it, he respected Eve’s spirituality and intellect, and he regarded their friendship as ennobling of them both. Many scholars have questioned Goscelin’s true feelings for Eve because the language he addressed to her is so filled with sexual allusions. Thus, they argue, Goscelin was articulating his real sexual feelings toward Eve. Canatella counters that friendship is a type of love in the language of the New Testament and it is thus not necessarily sexual but could—and indeed was—expressed in passionate yet spiritual terms, such as in the Song of Songs. Canatella does not note a single instance in *Liber confortatorius* that shows Goscelin trying to control his sexual urges in any way. Rather, she describes how the rhetoric of sexual, physical love was transformed into spiritual love through a deep friendship between a cleric and a pious woman.

Goscelin, we must note, wrote at a time when a new wave of spiritual friendship was sweeping over Europe, conferring a new sense of importance on the individual, as Colin Morris has argued, while simultaneously there was arising a new devotion to the Virgin Mary.²⁰ Goscelin’s erotic language reflects quite closely the language of desire from the Song of Songs, for God equals love, and love has many varieties of expression. One of the extraordinary aspects of Goscelin’s letter to Eve is his switching of gender roles in his characterization of the two of them: in the course of the narrative both Goscelin and Eve take on the characteristics of a mother in the birthing, nurturing, and teaching of the other. Both also take on the aspects of the other’s child, given birth, nurtured, and taught by the other. Consequently, a woman, as both child and mother, teacher and student, nurturer and nurtured, assumes a remarkably elevated role (as did the Virgin Mary in the same century) in the life of her male friend.

This unusual, rather astonishing, adoration of women is encountered in the letters of yet another religious figure, Saint Anselm of Bec (also known as Saint Anselm of Canterbury), who, like Goscelin of Saint Bertin, glorified and praised the female sex with remarkable honesty and generosity. But where Goscelin focused only on Eve of Wilton, Anselm included a large number of women in his circle of friends. Vaughn argues in her article, “Saint Anselm and His Students Writing about Love: A Theological Foundation for the Rise of Romantic Love in Europe,” that Anselm’s equally erotic language in expressing love and friendship is also misinterpreted. Anselm indeed wrote passionate letters to his fellow monks of Bec and to his own students. But Vaughn also demonstrates that Anselm used sexual imagery not only to his monks but also to many others: he wrote

²⁰ Morris, *Discovery*, 121–38; see also n. 3 above.

loving, erotic words of love and adoration to his master, Lanfranc, to his male students, to parents and children, to married couples (including the king and queen of England), and to a number of his aristocratic women friends (especially the countess Ida of Boulogne) as a way of showing the passionate emotion that love is. Ultimately, the love that Anselm expressed is synonymous with God, who is love, after all, in Christian theological tradition, and love is the greatest commandment. Indeed, so intensely did Anselm write of his love for his male friends that he has been thought homosexual by some modern scholars, although never in his own times. Modern historians also credit Anselm with creating a revolution in the expression of human emotions. Colin Morris, namely, credits him with initiating the discovery of the individual through the intensity of such emotions, and even if some people have objected that such a claim is overstated, in retrospect Anselm does emerge as a precursor to courtly love—both in his letters and in his more spiritual writings—as he conceived of the promise and spiritual rewards of love a century before *fin amour* (courtly love) became a commonplace in European literature.²¹ Here we see a pattern very similar to the views of loving friendship of Goscelin of Saint Bertin—and very similar patterns of gender role reversal.

One need only consider Anselm's numerous references to women as agents of positive change and equals, his exaltation of marriage, and his profound respect for mothers, fathers, and others who nurture to begin to understand his all-encompassing sense of love. Indeed, Christ is a mother, as Carolyn Walker Bynum has so famously demonstrated—and Anselm was the first to notice this.²² Yet Anselm describes Christ as both mother *and* father. Vaughn argues that Anselm saw the reciprocity of marital and parental love as ennobling both participants, just as Canatella demonstrates that Goscelin saw his mutual and reciprocal love with Eve as enriching both friends and as generating goodness and virtue in both. Vaughn argues that Anselm's view of love was rooted in his theological veneration of the Virgin, whom he viewed as the supreme mother and wife writ large, and that this vision endowed both women and the sexual union of marriage with a dignity in real life that C. Stephen Jaeger saw only emerging in the literature of the twelfth century and beyond.²³ Vaughn perceives this respect for love as the real theoretical foundation to the later rise of romantic or courtly love in Europe.

Anselm was no stranger to the physical desires of sexual yearnings, as he showed in his meditation on lost virginity. He shared this understanding of sexual desire with Jacques de Vitry, who was clearly physically attracted to the holy woman Marie d'Oignies, Jennifer N. Brown argues, as seems

²¹ Morris, *Discovery*, 59, 76, 83, 96–125, 143, 160.

²² Carolyn Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

²³ Jaeger, *Ennobling Love*; see also n. 2 above.

clear from the *vita* he wrote after her death. Marie was part of the Beguine movement in Liège (now in Belgium), whose bishop Jacques was. But where we have a very sketchy picture of Anselm and Ida, we have a very emotionally intimate view of Eve and Goscelin's spiritual relationship to her through his eyes; with Marie and Jacques we have much more physical imagery with a central preoccupation with Marie's very material body. Moreover, where Jacques' *vita* of Marie deals explicitly with his own sexuality and hers, Goscelin and Anselm merely allude to sexuality. Unlike Goscelin, Jacques was wracked with forbidden, perverse desire for Marie. Yet as her confessor he seemed to revel in the pleasure of her secret confessions.

We are reminded that earlier in Marie's life, well before her friendship with Jacques, she was forced to marry at a young age. She and her husband lived in a chaste marriage at the priory of Oignies. Brown constructs Marie as thus both resisting carnal and sexual desires and participating in the priory as a sexualized space, vacillating between a kind of mother, a kind of wife, and Christ's bride and lover. It is Jacques who described her "ecstasy of ardor" for such a religious life and the punishment of her body, which then freed her from such desires. Here are excesses of mortification never hinted or implied in the friendship relations of Goscelin and Anselm but recalling the efforts to control physical desire in the eleventh-century bishops described by McLaughlin. Nor are these excesses of mortification apparent in the lovely and tender recollections of married life in *La vie sainte Andrée*, as described by Virginia Blanton, or among the nuns of Barking, as detailed by Nicole Rice. Jacques de Vitry comes across as an overly lascivious confessor in his deep familiarity with Marie's body and sensuality. Indeed, he portrayed both Marie and her husband as tormented by lust, a torment they answered with a lust for devotion and physical torment and mortification—indeed, a kind of martyrdom of their sexual desires and one seen as equal to "real" martyrdom.

Where Goscelin and Anselm focused on love and divine friendship as a way to understand physical love between men and women and our author of *La vie sainte Andrée* and the nuns of Barking recalled fond memories of married life as a preparation for becoming Christ's bride, Jacques de Vitry emphasized the extremes of desire and sexuality in expressing his love and attraction for Marie d'Oignies. Such was the impact of the Beguines on a society that was dealing with new interpretations of sexuality, for the Beguines enjoyed a remarkable freedom of practice, life, and movement never before seen in women's religious movements, accordingly, rendering them sexually suspect. It is this suspicion that Jacques de Vitry sought to counter with his *vita* of Marie as an example of the ideal Beguine as a lay religious. But like Goscelin's relationship with Eve and Anselm's view of the ideal marital relationship, Marie d'Oignies and Jacques de Vitry's relationship is also reciprocal in its dynamics of powers: Jacques knows and controls Marie's earthly self, while Marie's divine access knows and controls Jacques' spiritual self. At the

same time, the entire *vita* and relationship, as Brown describes it, is soaked in lust, desire, and sexuality, sometimes expressed and sometimes sublimated but always pervasive and strangely reciprocated on a number of levels. The extremes of desire and eroticism Jacques de Vitry expressed are mirrored in the extremes of Marie d'Oignies' bodily mortification.

A chaste marriage and a new sense of martyrdom such as Marie d'Oignies' are also central features in Virginia Blanton's essay, "Chaste Marriage, Sexual Desire, and Christian Martyrdom in *La vie sainte Audrée*." *La vie sainte Audrée* is the life of Saint Æthelthryth, a long-dead Anglo-Saxon queen and the founder and abbess of the English abbey of Ely. What is significant for this collection is the intention, centrality, and substantial inventive rewriting of its female author, who significantly changed and shaped the story of Ely's female founder to fit the life experiences of her female audience at the nunnery of Campsey Ash in Suffolk, England. Through a series of interjections she made it clear to these women how they could model their own lives on a saint who had also had such real-life experiences as two marriages and carnal desire. Moreover, this author illustrated how women of her generation could also attain martyrdom not by being tortured or killed for their beliefs but by resisting carnal desires. This view is in striking contrast to Jacques de Vitry's tortured portrayal of Marie d'Oignies.

Our author invented a whole new story for both Audrée's first and second marriages. She characterizes the first marriage as a chaste one, but, since Saint Paul had enjoined married couples to be one flesh, the couple was joined into one body and heart, a spiritual union. What is unique here is the account of Audrée's great pain of unfulfilled sexual desire for her husband, told from a woman's point of view. She is torn between her desire for sex and for spiritual reward. Her body is not sexless but innately and intrinsically sexual: no devils arise to torment her, and yet even virgin saints were shown to have sexual impulses.

Like Marie d'Oignies, this Audrée fights off desire through mortification but with far less violence and pain than Marie d'Oignies suffered. Audrée genuinely and lovingly mourns her husband's early death. She is an example for the female monastic audience of her story of the real-life experience she represents. Sexual desire remains the enemy and threatens the nuns' faith and resolve to be brides of Christ, but their resistance to it through self-mortification is their martyrdom. Blanton views this recasting of the terms of virgin martyrdom as creating a new paradigm: even holy virgins have sexual desires, and martyrdom can be won by managing these desires. In this way Audrée's story was reconfigured to make it comprehensible to the thirteenth-century women who heard it. Audrée is a virgin and a wife, a widow and a divorcée, a princess and a queen, a nun and an abbess—and yet a credible woman. Thus, she would serve as a suitable model for a diverse assemblage of the nuns of Campsey Ash, who would have included virgins, married women, widows, and others.

In her essay, “‘Temples to Christ’s Indwelling’: Forms of Chastity in a Barking Abbey Manuscript,” Nicole Rice addresses some of the same issues as Blanton: the acceptance of sexual desire by those tormented by it as natural and inherent in all persons, even in saints, but with additional attention to its nature and reconstructive potential as opposed to its control either through the violent mortification practiced by Marie d’Oignies or the more gentle mortification of the vowesses of Campsey Ash. Like Ely, Barking was founded by an Anglo-Saxon queen, Ethelburga, and rapidly developed into an unusually wealthy Benedictine abbey with a respected tradition of literary composition, reading, and book ownership. The documents preserved in the second part of the manuscript Rice examines, British Library, Manuscript Additional 10596, consist of a unique combination of devotional texts, prayers, and a series of petitions to saints. These literary compositions collectively highlight the potential for shared exemplarity among continent wives, chaste widows, and virgins. Like the story of the founding abbess of Campsey Ash, the contents of the manuscript seem to seek to teach Barking’s female inhabitants how to live and how to view their special status. One particular prayer in the manuscript, the prayer to “all holy virgins in heaven,” makes virgins exemplary for all women, including those in other sexual states, beseeching virgins that “as you sanctified your bodies and your souls with chastity, with maidenhood, with widowhood, continence, and temperance, and in passion of martyrdom, as temples to Christ’s indwelling, so may you pray devoutly to God on account of the excessiveness of our sins.” The prayer invites all nuns to participate in and benefit from the virginity that can be shared, if only in principle, and offers new insights into monastic sexuality at least in relation to book culture and life in the Barking cloister. The book of Tobit and the story of Susannah from the book of Daniel, which are also included in the manuscript, hold up the exemplars of faithful wifehood and married continence. Like the nuns of Campsey Ash, the nuns of Barking may well have included many widows who looked back on their married life with joy. A good married life in these texts, as in Anselm’s accounts, thus becomes a model of virtue, and marriage as well as widowhood could be an avenue to chastity.

Michelle M. Sauer brings the collection to a close with her essay, “Uncovering Difference: Encoded Homoerotic Anxiety within the Christian Eremitic Tradition in Medieval England,” in which she examines the reconfigurative power of desire as it is demonstrated through the written word and in the solitary spirituality of the eremitical and anchorite communities of England in the late eleventh and early thirteenth centuries. Sauer uncovers the homoerotic tensions encoded in various sets of rules created for the members of specific recluse communities of the Middle English period and discovers that homoerotic desire, as it emerges in them, is far more dynamic and complex than it has appeared to be in previous studies. Her study of the treatment of homoerotic desire in varied texts

reveals significant anxiety arising from homoerotic encounters—both real and sublimated—and proceeds to investigate why the concerns about same-sex desire encoded in them were altered in successive rules as the centuries progressed.

Reading between the lines and interpreting the implications of the various rules, Sauer unravels a complicated and simultaneous awareness and denial of homoerotic desire arising from the circumstances even of the most isolated of hermits. Moreover, this duality reflects larger themes of human existence and mutuality. Although it is isolation that is most sought by hermits, that longing for singleness is simultaneously denied in the practice of employment of companions and servants—and it is here that Sauer finds the most evidence of homosexual desire, if not activity, among both men and women hermits.

Running through all seven essays in this volume is the theme of erotic desire among medieval men and women and how they transformed it through their own spiritual and carnal negotiations. Although its expression may have taken different forms in each of the circumstances (the love and joy or the pain and torment generated by sexual desire), not one of these historical actors remained unchanged by it. Indeed, what is striking about all these expressions of eroticism—whether expressed or sublimated—is that erotic desire almost always takes the form of chaste erotics as the participants engage in “sex without sex.” In fact, there is a good deal of it—and a lot of passion in the language and thought of all of the surviving accounts of these medieval persons. Indeed, in the creative hands of medieval men and women, passionate erotic desire was manipulated to fashion new, imaginative, and reconstructive models and exemplars, whether they took the form of an exalted view of women as wives and mothers and friends or a loving vision of what it means to be a bride of Christ even after one had been a bride of men. The implication in all of these expressions is that the joys of marriage might prepare a widow for the joys of becoming a bride of Christ. And, indeed, what is most impressive about these widely varied case studies of how real medieval people, whether clerics or pious women, handled and interpreted their erotic desires is the varied and inventive creativity with which they transformed such erotic desire into constructive social models for behavior, inspiration, and spirituality. What is more striking yet is how these people accepted their sexual desires with a kind of fervor and honesty that seems to us not only uncharacteristic and unorthodox but also counterintuitive to their spiritual quest. Yet their stories provide examples of and evidence for the assertion of medieval personal identities that were individual and not solely submerged into their communities and lived imbued with reciprocity and the joy of living this life on earth as well as anticipating future rewards in heaven. Such were the creative interpretations and uses of erotic desires as sex without sex in medieval Europe.