The literary culture of fifteenth-century East Anglia is rightly celebrated for its many notable English texts, patrons, and readers, and recent scholarship continues to enrich this picture.¹ The francophony of this literary culture and its supra-regional dimensions, however, have received less explicit attention.² I want here to look at the book and life of a fifteenth-century East Anglian “chaste matron,” a role much illuminated by Carolyn Collette’s work.³ In the later fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the public female image and agent of spirituality is as likely to be the secular married or widowed woman as the professed religious. My chaste matron is Elizabeth de Vere, Countess of Oxford (d. late 1473/early 1474), a woman already known to English-language literary history, but who also offers an occasion for considering the underexplored presence of francophone spirituality in late medieval women’s lives and objects in England. Her book is a compendium of twenty-eight religious treatises in French (now Oxford, Magdalen College MS lat. 41). Elizabeth de Vere gave the volume to Barking Abbey in 1474: it turned out to be the Abbey’s largest and last collection of continental French writings before the Dissolution.

The book’s opening text immediately inscribes a devotional culture in which the role of the book is always already internalized for its users, and in which the materiality of the manuscript provides metaphors with which to think and desire:
Ly livres en quoy nous devons especialement lire sans nul entrelaissement si est la doulce remembrance de la mort et de la passion Jhesu Crist de quoy ce livre parle asses, comme vraieyment ly vraiz amans des ames nous ayma. Ce fu le doux Jhesu Crist qui volt morir pour nous. Et si est ly livres en trestout le monde ly mieudres en quoy nous aprendrons plustost a amer nostre seigneur. C’est li doux crucifixion Jhesu Crist.4

[The book in which we ought specially to read without intermission is the sweet remembrance of the death and passion of Jesus Christ, about which this book has much to say of how truly the true lover of souls loved us. This was sweet Jesus Christ who willingly died for us. So it is the best book in all the world for learning most immediately how to love our lord. It is Christ's sweet crucifixion.]

Interrelations between memory, desire, and the material book are assumed in this devotional reading: the reader’s recollection of the Passion is embodied in the codex that reactivates it, even as the book serves as a stimulus to opening up and perusing that recollection. The book’s parchment is said to be Christ’s pure flesh and the holiness of his sinless life (Ly parchemins de ce livre c’est la pure char et la sainté qui nasqui et morut sanz pechie): the book’s leaves are the torments he suffered for the sake of sinful humanity, for, “just as when we turn through all the leaves of a book, so when we turn and turn through again the whole life of our true friend Jesus Christ we never find anything there except pain, suffering and anguish until his blessed soul parted from his body.”5 The book is ornamented in blue and red, blue from the lividity of Christ’s discolored flesh when he deprived himself of bodily beauty for our sake and, since a book is “much more handsome when ornamented with red and blue together,” there is also the red of the precious blood expended for us on the cross.6

In Magdalen MS lat. 41, these metaphors are particularly pertinent. The book, 218 folios and 265 x 185mm, is a little smaller than the dimensions of a sheet of letter-sized writing paper, but is a substantial and elegant codex. Written in two columns, its steady gothic textura quadrata is marked by blue and red capitals for paragraphs and by the occasional restrained illumination of capitals in titles. It is very much a book for readers and hearers and does not rely on visual realizations of its metaphors in the mise-en-page. A small crux in these metaphors is especially suggestive of the familiar materiality of manuscripts for the audience interpellated by the opening text: as
the codicological embodiment of the “sweet, amorous and humble words” Christ spoke from the cross, some manuscripts offer the reading _pertues_, “holes,” where other copies have _serres_, “book clasps.” “Clasps” makes more immediate sense, but the scribes who read _pertues_ may have been thinking of the practice of incorporating holes in parchment books into devotion as signs of the piercing of Christ’s body, and perceiving here a metaphor that reliteralizes the book as beloved and agonized object.⁷

This is not the only moment of the book’s self-presentation as a vehicle for contemplation, but it is an important one. Although the opening text is listed as the _Lamentacions saint Bernard_ in Magdalen lat. 41’s table of contents (fol. 1ra), it is not by Bernard, but is rather a small compilation drawing on several works. These include one often attributed to him, the _Liber de passione Christi et doloribus et planctibus matris eius_ or _Quis dabit_, second in popularity only to the Pseudo-Bonaventuran _Meditationes vitae Christi_.⁸

The initial allegory of Christ’s crucifixion as book frames a version of the _Quis dabit_, a narration of the Passion by the Virgin and a demonstration of “Saint Bernard’s” empathic response; these are succeeded by an allegory of Adam’s soul as a king’s daughter weeping over the arms of the noble king’s son who marries her, and who dies fighting for the restoration of her heritage.⁹ At the _Lamentacions_’ conclusion, having cited a flurry of authorities (Hugh of St. Victor, Augustine, Chrysostom, Bernard) reprehending those who do not feel compunction, the text offers a “contemplacion” of paradise and the heavenly city.

Combining _courtoisie_ and contemplative ambition, this text assumes an already sophisticated and habitual reading culture in its audiences. Lament and gratitude for Christ’s sacrifice is a major theme, but the _Lamentacions_ does not aim simply at evoking affect.¹⁰ Its more exegetical passages show a concern for argument by metaphor and for scriptural authority (or, perhaps, for evoking scriptural memory by well-known phrases, in a kind of enthymemic argument by recollection), but they appeal to readerly experience and recollection as well as offering exegetical instruction.¹¹ This is a text and a book for readers of some spiritual aspiration, though not necessarily for professional contemplatives.

The book as a whole is an extremely rich and highly structured assembly of texts that continues many of the themes sounded at its opening. Intentionality can be too readily ascribed to the thematic sequences and convergences in a codex, but, especially given the relative stability of contents and their arrangement in Magdalen lat. 41 and in the collection’s seven other
known copies, it would be hard not to see this as a purposive compilation.\textsuperscript{12} Both in its individual items and in its performance as a whole book, the manuscript bespeaks a sophisticated vernacular culture of orthodox and engaged late medieval devotional reading.

What kind of object might this book be for a fifteenth-century noblewoman such as Elizabeth de Vere?

\textbf{THE MATRON}

As countess to the twelfth Earl of Oxford, Elizabeth de Vere (née Howard) was a member of a family with investments in literary culture. The de Veres seem to have owned the Ellesmere manuscript of \textit{The Canterbury Tales}, which has a flyleaf poem in praise of the de Vere lineage.\textsuperscript{13} Elizabeth’s second son, John, was one of Caxton’s patrons, and John de Vere’s second wife, another Elizabeth de Vere (née Scrope), owned collections of Middle English devotional writing (which she in turn gave to Barking Abbey before her death in 1537).\textsuperscript{14} The Elizabeth de Vere who had earlier given her French book to Barking is named as a special benefactor in the Syon Abbey \textit{Martirloge}, and was a member of the confraternity of Lydgate’s monastery, Bury St. Edmunds; Lydgate was appointed as Prior of Bury’s cell at Hatfield Broadoak (of which the de Veres were patrons) from 1423 to 1434.\textsuperscript{15} She is also among the Pastons’ correspondents.\textsuperscript{16}

Elizabeth de Vere’s best-known literary role, however, is as destinataire of the first of Osbern Bokenham’s \textit{Legendys of Holy Wommen}. Bokenham, an Augustinian friar at Stoke by Clare, gives a well-known representation of the 1445 Twelfth Night celebration in nearby Clare Castle as a foundational scene for his legendary. It is a scene of “reuel and daunsyng” for the younger members of the Clare family, but amidst it, Lady Isabella Bourchier (d. 1484) solicits from Bokenham a Life of Mary Magdalen that she much desires “in englysshe to han maad.”\textsuperscript{17} She wants this Life to be along the lines of what Bokenham has already begun for Elizabeth de Vere, a Life of Elizabeth of Hungary, the early thirteenth-century Hungarian princess, and Margravine of Thuringia, famed as a married, ascetic, and charitable saint:

\begin{verbatim}
      . . . whos lyf alone
     To alle wyuys myht a merour be
    Of uery perfeccyoun in sundry degre,
\end{verbatim}
Whos holy legend as at þat tyme
I newly had begunne to ryme
At request of hyr to whom sey nay
I neyther kan, ne wyl, ne may,
So mych am I bounden to hyr goodnesse,
I mene of Oxenforthe þe countesse,
Dame Elyzabeth Ver by hyr ryht name,
Whom God euere kepe from syn & shame. (ll.5046–56)

Bokenham’s praise of Elizabeth de Vere deploys her primarily as exemplary commanditaire of his text, not necessarily as a patron. This scene focuses on representing a regional socio-spiritual community centered on Clare with its great secular and attached religious households. The noblewomen of East Anglia play the role of leading chaste matrons, but other women from local magnate and gentry families and their retainers also become dedicatees of Lives in the Legendys. At the time of the legendary’s composition, when Lady Isabella Bourchier and her husband held Clare Castle, Isabella’s brother, Richard, Duke of York, was a distant and unengaged patron of Bokenham’s priory at Stoke by Clare. Cynthia Camp has cogently argued that one of Bokenham’s purposes in writing the Legendys was to remind the duke of his ties and obligations as the new patron of the friary. The women Bokenham links with his legendary may be not so much figures of patronage for the text as emblems of the regional spiritual community to which Bokenham sought to draw Richard of York’s attention.

Bokenham’s Legendys have attracted much discussion as a foundational female literary tradition in a burgeoning East Anglian literary culture. The figure of Elizabeth de Vere alerts us to the way in which, for all its imaging in what Bokenham terms “the language of Suthfolk speche” (l.4064), the territory of his English chaste-matron community is that of a multilingual culture. If, from an English-language perspective, this is a foundational late medieval female literary tradition, it is one preceded and accompanied by established francophone traditions of household reading and spirituality: an East Anglian late medieval English culture with multilingual roots, modalities, and connections. Alongside English and Latin works, insular and continental French books continued to link various persons and places across the East Anglian and Essex landscape in the fifteenth century: at Pleshey Castle, for instance, Eleanor de Bohun’s dispositions for her large and largely French library in 1399 include seven substantial volumes in French (a Bible,
decretal collections, the *Historia scholastica*, and so on) for her daughter
Isabella, who became abbess of the Minoresses (themselves founded from
Longchamps outside Paris) at Aldgate in London by 1421–22. Sir Thomas
Crofts, dying at the nunnery of Bungay, gave a French Old Testament copied
in England to the small house of canonesses at Flixton in his will of 1442.

In 1448, Dame Agnes Stapleton bequeathed a volume of French saints’ lives
to a laywoman, and a crucifix “et unum librum de frenshe” to the Abbess of
Denny. Richard Rous’s 1464 bequest of three *libros gallicos* to the canon-
esses at Campsey was conditional on their returning a fourth *librum gallicum*
to his son and heir. Elizabeth de Vere’s will does not survive, but her son
left a chest of “frenshe and engliisse bokes.”

The map and the image of East Anglian chaste-matron culture in and
beyond magnate and religious houses is thus incomplete without the di-
Dimensions signaled by French. We might want to reconceive that map less as
a bounded insular region than as an area consisting of two coasts and their
hinterlands, linked by the Middle Ages’ fastest form of transport, water, and
readily crossed in both directions by French, the Middle Ages’ most impor-
tant transregional vernacular. Like many of her contemporaries, Elizabeth
de Vere had links on both sides of the Channel: her father-in-law had cam-
paigned in France and was at Harfleur and Agincourt; her husband was
at Calais in 1436 and Oye in 1439; when she herself was about thirty, she
spent the year 1441–42 at Rouen in the retinue of Richard, Duke of York,
at the time Lieutenant General of France, together with her neighbors from
Clare Castle, Henry and Isabella Bourchier (herself countess not only of
Essex but also of Eu in Normandy), and other magnates. The de Veres
may have enjoyed French cuisine: at all events they had two cooks from
France in their household. The continental romance writer Philippe de
Rémi deploys an idea of the de Veres as francophone transregional figures
in his late thirteenth-century romance, *Jehan et Blonde*: the Earl of Oxford
is said to have good French because he has been to France to learn it, while
the Duke of Gloucester (the hero’s rival for the Earl of Oxford’s daughter) is
extensively mocked for his inept French-speaking.

By the time Elizabeth de Vere donated her French book to Barking in
late 1473 or early 1474, her life must have seemed unimaginably remote from
any such image as Bokenham’s 1445 festive scene of a young noble chaste
matron and her family in pleasant and pious celebration at the heart of a
socio-spiritual community. The date given in the memorandum of donation
Barking added to the book is February 26 (1474). It may be merely coin-
cidental, but nevertheless prompts reflection, that February 26 is the day in 1462 when Elizabeth’s husband was executed as a Lancastrian loyalist (and hence traitor to the Yorkist Edward IV) and that this execution was preceded a couple of days earlier by the execution of Elizabeth’s eldest son, Aubrey. A little over a decade later, when she gave her book to Barking, Elizabeth de Vere’s surviving second son John was in prison in Calais, her daughter-in-law destitute, and Elizabeth herself, a considerable heiress in her own right, had recently been stripped of everything she owned.

Although she had been arrested in 1462 when her husband and eldest son were attainted for treason and their lands confiscated, Elizabeth de Vere was eventually released and permitted to resume her own lands. She went to live at her manor of Wivenhoe, inherited from her mother. Her second son, John, received his father’s lands from a conciliatory Edward IV in 1464. However, in 1471, John de Vere, a Lancastrian once more, fled to France and was captured and imprisoned at Calais. At this point, Elizabeth quickly transferred her lands to feoffees to prevent further confiscation. But the future Richard III, Richard, Duke of Gloucester, in whose custody his brother Edward IV now placed Elizabeth de Vere, took her under duress from Stratford-at-Bow nunnery, where she was visiting, to a London townhouse in 1473. Here, by several eyewitness accounts, the distressed and frail countess was made to convey her lands to Richard of Gloucester. She was then allowed to return to Stratford-at-Bow and died soon after.

**THE BOOK**

There is little direct evidence as to how Elizabeth de Vere weathered the storms of her later life, apart from her reported distress at the enforced surrender of her lands to Richard of Gloucester. But the book she gave to Barking can be usefully considered against the savage and rapid changes that could occur in elite women’s lives and those of their families. While it is unclear when and how the twelfth countess acquired the book, considering the valences its texts might have held and reading the texts themselves in the light of their owner’s experiences can vivify our understanding of both.

Oxford, Magdalen College MS lat. 41 was made in France, most probably in Paris, in the late fourteenth century, and arrived at Barking, on the evidence of its own memorandum of donation, shortly after Elizabeth de Vere’s death in late 1473 or early 1474. There is thus nearly a century be-
tween the book’s making and the donation, but the Countess of Oxford was not simply getting rid of an old-fashioned anthology. Apart from the characteristic long currency of manuscripts, the specific grouping of some twenty-eight texts in Elizabeth de Vere’s book had continued to be copied throughout the fifteenth century. At least four of the extant eight copies of this collection are fifteenth century, and the latest was made in 1474, the year of the Barking memorandum, for Jacques d’Armagnac, Duc de Nemours (a gorgeous deluxe copy for a noted bibliophile by the duke’s priest and scribe, Michel Gonnot).39

Magdalen lat. 41 is elegant and serviceable rather than deluxe, a fitting gift for a prestigious and learned nunnery, but it is also a collection, as the Duc de Nemours’s copy suggests, wanted in magnate households (the book’s opening Lamentaciones de saint Bernard indeed envisages its audiences as “hommes et femmes,” fol. 3ra, line 16), and equally pertinent for secular houses.41 The collection inhabits the rich territory where lay and clerical desires and interests meet and where French is an established language of écriture sainte for patrons, producers, and audiences. Traditions and precedents for spirituality as sponsored by chaste matron figures in religious and secular households alike were well established in cross-channel francophony, as also in insular textual culture.42 Elizabeth de Vere’s collection of texts is, among other things, an enlarged version of comparable earlier collections made for noblewomen patrons, sometimes women of considerable wealth, who were interested in maintaining particular styles of spirituality across their various residences as they moved their households between them.43

In the manuscript’s program, self-disgust and awareness of individual and collective debt to Christ’s redemptive grace are to be the dynamic of a considerable amount of self-fuelling devotional work by the book’s readers and audiences, leading to an enriched inner and outer spirituality. The Lamentaciones are succeeded by two mini-florilegia much read in the later Middle Ages and each dedicated to the wretchedness of the human condition and the cultivation of self-knowledge as a means to loving God (the Meditaciones of St. Bernard, text 2, and the Pseudo-Augustine Meditaciones, text 3, “Les contemplacions saint Augustin”: see Appendix).44 Spiritual movement and progress towards the heavenly court are predicated in the arrangement and themes of this section of the manuscript: text 4 (Comment on doit Dieu amer) instructs the reader on how to love and on love in heaven, text 5 (La voie . . . en paradis) on how to go to paradise and the etiquette and feasting there. Text 6 (L’ordonance du char Helye le prophete) is an allegory
on Elijah’s chariot and its horses, fierily making their way to heaven (while allegorically discarding hypocrisy and conforming the inner and outer). Text 7 (Un preschement de nostre Seigneur) is, appropriately, Sully’s sermon on the parable of the wedding feast and the kingdom of heaven. From this account of the heavenly court, text 8 moves to the nature of the heart in which God dwells (Les vii. choses que cuer en qui Dieu habite doit avoir), and, in text 9 (Comment iii. pechiez mortelz sont segnefiez par iii. bestes sauvages), to how the four wild beasts of sin have to be hunted out from Christ’s forest and served up to him as so much roasted venison if one is, in the exemplum of text 10 (De la demande . . .), to get through the king’s gates into the city.45

The next set of treatises reemphasizes the dire state of humanity without redemption: the weighty translation of Innocent III’s De miseria (text 11) is a still stronger account of the wretchedness of the human condition than the manuscript’s earlier Meditaciones de saint Bernart (text 2).46 The De miseria translation is partly answered by text 12’s treatment of the spiritual profit of worldly tribulations (Des tres grans proffis espirituelz . . .),47 and by texts 13 and 14 on avoiding sin and temptation. These are also a preparation for the salvific sacramental ritual that chiefly addresses humanity’s wretchedness, the Mass. At the center of the collection is an account of how to think and behave during the Mass (text 16), preceded by a short narrative text on Adam and Eve and their son Seth’s journey back to the earthly Paradise (De l’aage Adam et comment il envoia Seth son filz . . ., text 15). After the treatise on the Mass, there follow instructions on confession (text 17); then, in texts 18–21, the teachings of St. Louis (Louis IX, d. 1270) for his son Philip and his daughter Isabelle, and the exemplary deaths of Louis himself and his daughter-in-law, Jeanne de Châtillon, Countess of Alençon and Blois (d. 1292).48 At text 22 (Le livre que fist maistre Hugues de St Victor), the nature and goals of contemplation are further detailed in Pierre de Hangest’s French version of Hugh of St. Victor’s De arrha animae. This influential work addresses the soul’s need to love in the right way through the metaphors of the bridegroom’s gifts, understood as his pledge of final union.49 The ethics of everyday life are then treated via two proverb collections ascribed to Seneca (23) and Cato (24), and the manuscript concludes with a final subsection of ars moriendi works (25–28, incorporating the Pater noster at 27). The last of these is Augustin Bongenou’s early fourteenth-century verse meditation, “de la mort,” with his acrostic signature built into the lines.50

The manuscript is thus an ambitious and programmatic collection, a portable spiritual library. It offers much for personal devotional reading and
for use by a range of people in a large religious or secular household. And although its spiritual program is relatively conservative, the book’s allegories are not readily dismissible. At first glance they can seem like opportunistic wooing of the reader or hearer with laid-on ultra-aristocratic courtoisie. But the manuscript’s ordering of its texts carries meaning, and the allegories make intellectual and affective demands of their audiences.

In the collection’s central treatment of the Mass, for instance, it may seem initially odd or overly simple that text 16, the *Devise de la messe* (explanation, description, plan or design of the Mass) is preceded by the narrative of Adam and the mission he gives Seth in text 15. But another fourteenth-century guide to the Mass made in French in England suggests the logic of this pairing: at the *introit*, the lay participants are instructed to “consider the desire the holy patriarchs and prophets had that our Lord should come to ransom them.” As Aden Kumler has pointed out, the image with this rubric shows a hell-mouth containing Adam and other patriarchs within the same pictorial space as the celebrant priest. The priest sacramentally brings Christ in the Mass, and the congregants represent the human longing for redemption made present by Adam and his companions. In Magdalen lat. 41, Seth journeys to the gates of Paradise to quest for oil of mercy before the Mass treatise occurs in the volume, but Adam’s redemption from hell is only fully realized in the sacrifice embodied in the Eucharist. Magdalen lat. 41 amplifies the collaboration of layperson and priest in the Mass by conjoining the narrative of humanity’s need and efforts with an account of God’s. There is a two-sided agency here.

The *Devise de la messe* is a text found with innumerable variations in late medieval books of hours and prayer collections, and also in the *Menagier de Paris’s* vast householding compilation for a young wife. Both the *Menagier*’s and Elizabeth de Vere’s versions frame the Mass in terms of the longstanding allegory of the *introit* as a king’s entry into a city, but Magdalen lat. 41 places more emphasis on the ways in which human worship intersects with, rather than merely parallels, that of the angels.

Apres chante on la loenge des [fol. 153va] angelz qui sans fin dient Sanctus, sanctus, sanctus devant la Trinité [et] qui descendent pour appareillage le lieu et la table ou Dieux repaist les siens amis. Si doit on de cuer et de bouche loer Dieu aavcques les angelz . . . et devons avoir parfaite connoissance aavcques cherubim et parfaite amour aavcques seraphim. (Magdalen Lat. 41, fol. 153rb-153va, italics mine).
[Then there is chanted the angels’ song of praise, who forever sing Sanctus, sanctus, sanctus before the Trinity and who come down to prepare the place and the table where God feeds his friends. Then one must praise God with heart and mouth with the angels. . . . And we ought to have perfect knowledge with the cherubim and perfect love with the seraphim.]

Here, the reader is invited not only to imitate the song of angels but also to sing and worship with them. By contrast, in the Menagier the angels similarly prepare the table where God will feed his friends on the mere sight of himself (par son seul regard repaistra ses amis), but the response prescribed is to be very attentive to God’s coming (entend l’on a voir sa venue) and to prepare oneself as good loving subjects do at a king’s entry (comme bons amoureux subgiez s’appareillent quant le roy entre en sa cite), by praying mentally or in a low voice (en pensee et bassee voix). There is no thought of equaling the angels as courtiers.54

While it is certainly true that neither the Devise nor the manuscript as a whole engages with the contentious late fourteenth- and fifteenth-century issues of transubstantiation, soteriology, or the role of the priest, there is a rich system of signification and intertextual development at work across Magdalen lat. 41’s texts. Its version of the Devise builds on existing familiarity with the Mass and its meaning, emphasizing participation in a court and its feasts that are at once eternal, stable, and sacramentally accessible. If one’s hostel is made fit for God to lodge in here, one may be able to lodge in God’s house hereafter: yet this overarching notion of an ultimately stable court is not a distant goal or metaphor but something interpenetrated with life in its earthly habitation. The Devise presents the Gospel as the rules and the form of service by which the Lord’s table and banquet may be known (li rieules et li ordenaires par quoy nous devons congoistre la table et la refection avec nostre seigneur, fol.152va): living the Gospel becomes commensality with God. The Devise gives context to the feasting, pursued in the registers both of contemplation and the courtesy book, that is one thematic strand of the collection (as in Paradise in the Lamentacions, text 1, and in texts 5, La voie . . . en paradis, and 7, Sully’s wedding feast sermon). Class awareness and aesthetics deeply structure this model of devotion, but they do not necessarily exclude those of less than noble rank, any more than does a magnate’s feast. At the beginning of the manuscript, the Lamentacions’ allegory of Adam’s soul as a noblewoman fought for by a king’s son uses an aristocratic exemplum, but
one that applies to all humans. Spiritual aspiration is in any case encoded as the elite and the refined and offered as attractive in a wide range of medieval texts.

The movements between ferocious abjection of world and self and ardently aristocratic courtoisie across the book’s collection also make for engagement: orthodoxy is anything but dull here and includes a surprising range of viewpoints. On the one hand, in the translation of Innocent’s De miseria, for instance, there is the foulness of human conception, of nourishment in the womb on deflected menstrual blood, of being born, squalling, to the knowledge of mortality (fol. 89r), and the unpleasant contrast with the created world where the plants and trees put forth flowers and fruits, and humans produce saliva, urine, and excrement (et tu aportes de toi la salive et le pissant et la fiente, fols. 89v-90r). Life on earth is warfare and even to the animals we should rule we are but proie and viande. There is the violence of lordship and la misere des serfs, serfs who are often “terrified by threats, oppressed and exhausted by forced labour, afflicted and injured by wounds and beatings, and robbed of what they own” (Bk. 1, ch. xv of De miseria, fol. 92v).

And there is lordship’s pointlessness: “Je me purchaçay chanteurs e chanteresses, henaps et orciaux”—“I acquired musicians, drinking cups and sacred vessels,” says Solomon (fol. 91vb)—and for what? The man of sense endures this world as an exile and is enclosed in his body as in a prison (fol. 94vb).

On the other hand, God’s love is to be responded to with fin’amors intensity and integrity, just as (in text 4, fol. 67va) one praises a gold cup by saying that is entirely of refined gold (fin or), and not of gilt. Like the Magdalen at Christ’s tomb, one intensely seeks news of the beloved and sends jewels and fine gifts of devout prayer and pure meditation; one weeps lacerating tears with the desire of being with him and faithfully (loyaument) accepts his gifts, the jewels of poverty, anguish, tribulation, and adversity, with which he inflames those he loves. “Je bat et chastie ceulx que j’aime,” says the manuscript’s Christ (fol. 68vb).

THE MATRON AND THE BOOK

Elizabeth de Vere’s book vigorously constructs exile and alienation as the human condition, in order to offer a home at an inviolately and permanently stable court, where allegiance is always to the same king and to an uncontest-
ed throne. So too the manuscript’s library of texts, portable through change and exile, is also a constant virtual court community, in which one is both in stasis, always in a posture of existential humility and abjection, and yet always also dynamically rising or slipping downwards in relation to the king over specific points of behavior and feeling. The book’s spirituality is imagined and performed in a household community participating metonymically in the royal household of God, and pursued in the magnate household of earthly court or cloister. This spirituality might well speak with special eloquence to the privileged and yet catastrophe-ridden lives led by many noblewomen and their families during the English conquest of France and the Wars of the Roses. The collection in Magdalen lat. 41, as earlier noted, remained remarkably stable from the late fourteenth to the late fifteenth centuries and must have been familiar to many elite people from either side of the Channel. For this Countess of Oxford at the end of her life in 1473/74, the family life, home, and good works that supported chaste married piety as represented in Bokenham’s *Legendys* were over, and nunneries had become a refuge, or perhaps even, in the light of Richard of Gloucester’s depredations, the only place left to Elizabeth de Vere. Her French book perhaps offered perspectives close to her late life experience of the misery of the human condition, together with its counterpart, the hope of stable dwelling in God’s secure household.

The historical connections between Elizabeth de Vere and her book can be only suggestive, not proven, but the multilingual nature of the contributions made to devotional culture by “chaste matrons” as patrons and practitioners is not in doubt. In the spirit of Carolyn Collette’s explorations of Anglo-French culture, we can bring the traditions of cross-channel francophone spiritual writing back from the desert in which they currently live, suspended between scholars of English and French. Whether the subjectivities of a book are more illuminated by the history of its owner or vice versa is a matter for discussion, but I would argue that even one such object as Elizabeth de Vere’s book (let alone the others of its kind) enforces a more complex account of late medieval English women’s literary culture than anglophone nationalizing literary history permits, together with some opportunities of reimagining women’s lives.
### Appendix: Contents of Oxford, Magdalen College MS lat. 41

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Folios</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. fols. 2ra-14vb</td>
<td>[acephalous] Lamentacions saint Bernart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. fol. 15r</td>
<td>Les meditacions de saint Bernart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. fol. 38r</td>
<td>Les contemplacions saint Augustin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. fol. 67r</td>
<td>Comment on doit Dieu amer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. fol. 71r</td>
<td>La voie par quoy nous devons aler en paradis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. fol. 78v</td>
<td>L’ordenance du char Helye le prophete</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. fol. 81r</td>
<td>Un preschement de nostre Seigneur (Maurice de Sully)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. fol. 82v</td>
<td>Les .vii. choses que cuer en qui Dieu habite doit avoir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. fol. 84v</td>
<td>Comment .iii. pechiez mortelz sont segnefiez par .iii. bestes sauvages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. fol. 85v</td>
<td>De la demande que fist la mere saint Jehan et saint Jaque</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. fol. 86r</td>
<td>Le livre de la misere de l’omme (Innocent III, <em>De miseria</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. fol. 121r</td>
<td>Des tres grans proffis esperituelz que les tribulacions font</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. fol. 147r</td>
<td>Enseignemens pour eschiver les pechiez de luxure, d’avarice, e d’accide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. fol. 147v</td>
<td>Comment on se doit garder contre aucunes temptacions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. fol. 150r</td>
<td>De l’aage Adam et comment il envoia Seth son filz en paradis terrestre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. fol. 151v</td>
<td>De la devise de la messe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. fol. 155r</td>
<td>L’ordenance comment on se doit confesser</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. fol. 160r</td>
<td>Les enseignemens saint Loys au roy Phelippe son filz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. fol. 161v</td>
<td>Les enseignemens saint Loys a la roynie de Navarre sa fille</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. fol. 163v</td>
<td>La fin saint Loys qu’il ot a sa mort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. fol. 164r</td>
<td>L’ordenance de madame la contesse d’Alensson et de Bloys a sa trespassement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. fol. 177v</td>
<td>Le livre que fist maistre Hugues de St Victor de l’arre de l’ame</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. fol. 204v</td>
<td>Les proverbes en prose que fist Seneca li philosophes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. fol. 207r</td>
<td>Les dis et proverbes des sages et premierement Catons dist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. fol. 209v</td>
<td>Le dit des philosophes d’Alixandre le grant quant il fu mort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. fol. 210r</td>
<td>Le livre qui est appelé “Je vois morir”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. fol. 214r</td>
<td>La Pater nostre en francois</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. fol. 214v</td>
<td>La meditacion de la mort (with acrostic signature verses by Augustin Bongenou)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Notes

I am much indebted to Nancy Bradbury and Jenny Adams for their editorial insight and suggestions, and for the opportunity to pay tribute to Carolyn Collette, whose generous friendship and courage and creativity as writer, academic, and teacher offer an inspiring model. I am grateful to the Princeton Institute for Advanced Study for a semester’s membership and the National Endowment for the Humanities for a Fellowship that provided research time, and to Dr. Laurie Postlewaite for the invitation to speak at the 2014 Barnard College Conference on “Female Community in the Ancien Régime” at which some of this material was aired. Dr. Rebecca June provided meticulous copy-editing help with an earlier version and Danielle Sottosanti and Elizabeth Light, PhD candidates at Fordham, have checked subsequent versions.


2. For a valuable account of fourteenth-century French religious writing, however, see Catherine Batt, trans., Henry of Lancaster: The Book of Holy Medicines, FRETs 8 (Tempe, AZ: ACMRS, 2014), 1–64.


4. A leaf at the end of the capitulum and the beginning of the first text in Oxford, Magdalen College MS lat. 41 has been removed, perhaps because it was one of what may have been two illustrated pages in the volume (the only illustrations in it, if so, see further n. 40 below). Text lacking due to the loss of the leaf is supplied here from Paris, BnF f. fr. 916, fol. 1r-v (punctuation and capitalization mine, i/j, u/v normalized).

5. “ainsi come nous tournons [MS trouvons] touz les fueilles d’un livre, tournons et retournons toute la vie a nostre vray amy Jhesu Crist, ja n’y trouverons se tormens non et douleur et angoisse jusques atant que la benoicte ame lui parti du corps” (BnF f. fr. 916, fol. iv).

tacular Carthusian development of entire pages of blood drops and blood (Plates 1 and 2).


8. The prologue allegory appears to be an addition particular to the French text. As with a number of the works in Magd. lat. 41, there is no critical edition of the French *Lamentacions de saint Bernard* (also sometimes attributed to Augustine or Anselm) or of its Latin sources. The *Quis dabit*, actually by Ogier of Locêdio (1136–1214), Abbot of the Cistercian monastery of Locêdio in Piedmont, is printed in PL182.1134–1150 and by W. Mushacke, ed., *Altprovenzalische Marienklagen des XIII Jahrhunderts* (Halle: Niemeyer, 1890), 41–50: a thirteenth-century Turin manuscript is edited by C. W. Marx, “The *Quis dabit* of Ogerius de Tridino, Monk and Abbot of Locêdio,” *The Journal of Medieval Latin* 4 (1994): 118–29. T. H. Bestul edits and translates the *Quis dabit* from British Library MS Cotton Vespasian E i, *Texts of the Passion: Latin Devotional Literature and Medieval Society* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), Appendix I, 165–85. The continued popularity of the text in the fifteenth century is suggested by the twenty-nine printed editions between 1467 and 1568 (Bestul, *Texts of the Passion*, 210, n. 127, and see his discussion of thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Latin Passion texts, 43–60). I have not been able to find a likely source manuscript, but the collection of Latin texts attributed to Gerson, Bernard, Anselm, and Augustine in BnF lat. 3352, an early s. xv compilation given to Charles d’Orléans by the King of England’s notary and secretary in Rouen and subsequently owned by Jean d’Angoulême, gives a good idea of the tenor and currency of the pseudo-Bernardine texts in fifteenth-century religious culture (see BnF Gallica digitization and description at http://archiveset-manuscrits.bnf.fr/ead.html?id=FRBNFEAD000061241).


10. Inset within the book allegory, for example, is exegesis of the lividity in Christ’s flesh using biblical citations: Christ’s flesh was beautiful because his mother is “pulcra . . . ut luna, electa ut sol [Cant. 6.9], c’est à dire belle comme l’âme eslevee comme le soleil entre les estoilles, et apres ‘Pulcra es et decora’ [Cant 6.3] et telle la mere come le filz,” and he himself is *speciosus forma pre filiis hominum* [Psalms 44.3] and yet *non erat . . . species* [Isaiah 53.2]. (Text missing from Magd. lat. 41 supplied from BnF fr. 916, 1vb: the Magd.lat.41 text is extant only from fol. 2ra.) The French text here seems closer to the *Quis dabit* version in PL182.1135B-C than to Mushacke, p. 44, in Bestul, p. 170 or Marx p. 124/78–82, but the discussion and citation of authorities
is developed in the French beyond the Latin in any of the versions (whether directly or through an intermediary in either language is unclear without work beyond the scope of this paper). The Latin citations are not arcane or highly scholastic and are translated, but they imply or impart familiarity with argument from scripture.


12. Other manuscripts are BnF f. fr. MSS 916, 918, 19271, 22921; MS nouv. acq. fr. 10237. Alexandra Barratt identified BnF MS nouv. acq. fr. 6881 as the missing continuation of BnF f. fr. 918 (“A Reconstruction of an Old French Anthology of Religious Prose,” *Romania* 103 [1983]: 371–73), and identified a copy in Lyon, Bibliothèque municipale MS 1234, and a partial copy in Nantes, Bibliothèque municipale MS 212. See eadem, ed., *The Book of Tribulation*, Middle English Texts 15 (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1983). Joseph Morawski (to whom the Magdalen manuscript was unknown) identifies three variant forms of the collection in his edition of *Les Diz et proverbes des sages* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1924), xii–xviii, but none concerns more than a couple of texts among the twenty-eight or so.


18. Whether Elizabeth de Vere had given active patronage to the Life, or whether Bokenham was repaying some earlier obligation is not known. It is possible that Bokenham had some earlier connection with Elizabeth de Vere that made him “bounden to hyr goodnesse”: if he came from Old Buckenham in Norfolk, he came from the same area as the chief seat of the Howards, her natal family, while her de Vere marital family was based at Hedingham Castle in Essex, some eight miles south of Clare in Suffolk.

19. In addition to Lady Bourchier, there are several connections of Elizabeth de Vere’s among the dedicatees to whom other lives are assigned in the compiled Legendys of 1447: St. Katherine for Katherine Howard (Elizabeth de Vere’s natal family), wife of John Howard of Stoke Neyland near Clare Castle, and for Katherine Clopton Denston (local gentry from Melford near Clare); St. Agatha for Agatha Flegge (wife of John Flegge, a retainer of Richard, Duke of York); St. Anne for Anne, daughter of Katherine Clopton Denston and her husband, John, (local gentry as above): see further Sheila Delany, “Matronage or Patronage? The Case of Osbern Bokenham’s Women Patrons,” Florilegium 16 (1999): 97–105, and for the Legendys’ East Anglian career, see A. S. G. Edwards, “The Transmission and Audience of Osbern Bokenham’s Legendys of Hooly Wummen,” in Late Medieval Religious Texts and their Transmission: Essays in Honour of A. I. Doyle, ed. A. J. Minnis (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1994), 157–67.

20. Cynthia T. Camp, “Osbern Bokenham and the House of York Revisited,” Viator 44.1 (2013): 327–52. This seems more convincing than seeing Bokenham’s work as “Yorkist” in the later sense of that term: in 1445, the first Battle of St. Albans was still a decade away. Elizabeth de Vere (a Howard by birth but married into what became a Lancastrian family) and her cousin John Howard (later a leading Yorkist) seem to have remained on good terms at least until the 1460s (see Anne Crawford, “Victims of Attainder: The Howard and de Vere Women in the Late Fifteenth Century,” Reading Medieval Studies 15 [1989]: 63–64). The figure of Elizabeth de Vere would be unlikely to function as anything but a positive example of local magnate relations around the priory in the 1440s.


22. These francophone book-gifts have been well noted by historians of women’s reading but the extant volumes little studied. I cite from French-language wills here: John Nichols, A Collection of All the Wills . . . of Every Branch of the Blood Royal from the Reign of William the Conqueror to that of Henry the Seventh Exclusive (London: Society of Antiquaries, 1780), 177–86.


27. For Elizabeth’s father-in-law and for her husband, see *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (henceforth ODNB) Richard de Vere, eleventh Earl and John de Vere, twelfth Earl. For the de Veres in Rouen, see James Ross, “Essex County Society and the French War in the Fifteenth Century,” in *Conflicts, Consequences, and the Crown in the Late Middle Ages*, ed. Linda Clark (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell, 2007), 60.


30. The memorandum (Magd. lat. 41, fol. 218v) is in English (which by the later fifteenth century was increasingly used where French or Latin had been the default option in nunneries, as in secular houses). The date has been gone over in a second hand, in an apparent attempt to clarify the minims. It has been variously read as 1474/75 and 1476/77 (Doyle, “Some Books,” 235. n. 7). I am grateful to the librarian and fellows of Magdalen College, Oxford, who permitted me a high resolution digitization of the manuscript in which the alteration to the date is easier to read: I read it as 1474.

31. The family of a man attainted for treason traditionally became legally dead at his execution; wives were sometimes imprisoned in nunneries or kept under house arrest, though they were also sometimes allowed to keep their marital jointure lands: Crawford, “Victims of Attainder,” 61–67 (62 for Elizabeth de Vere’s arrest). Michael Hicks edits and discusses the depositions made by Elizabeth de Vere’s feoffees and servants when in 1495, her son John had them testify to the coercion of his mother as part of his own securing of the de Vere lands: see M. A. Hicks, “The Last Days of Elizabeth, Countess of Oxford,” *English Historical Review* 103, no. 406 (1988): 76–95.
32. Amidst his own sudden changes of fortune, John de Vere was able to sentence to death John Tiptoft, Earl of Worcester, who had presided over his father and older brother’s attainders and execution and to secure Bosworth and the death of Richard III for Henry Tudor: see further Ross, *John de Vere* and ODNB, *John de Vere*, thirteenth Earl of Oxford (1442–1513).

33. Hicks, “The Last Days,” 87–95 makes a strong case for the value of these eyewitness depositions as evidence.

34. The date of Elizabeth de Vere’s death cannot be ascertained for certain beyond very late 1473 or early 1474, and her will does not survive. Her book may have gone to Barking because her third daughter Mary was a nun there (Ross, *John de Vere*, 18). The de Veres had long-standing connections with Barking, and Anne de Vere was its Abbess from 1295–1318: see E. A. Loftus and H. F. Chettle, *A History of Barking Abbey* (Barking, UK: Wilson and Whitworth, 1954), 36–38.

35. Books of executed nobles were often returned to the widows after initial confiscation: see Jenny Stratford, “The Early Royal Collections and the Royal Library to 1461,” in *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain, Volume III, 1400–1557*, ed. Lotte Hellinga and J. B. Trapp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 258–59. The volume may have been originally acquired by Elizabeth’s husband, John, twelfth Earl of Oxford, or by Elizabeth or her husband when they were in Richard of York’s entourage in 1440–41 in Rouen (itself an important center of book production by the 1440s), if she did not acquire it in later life, perhaps during her widowhood. Following its stay at Barking, the manuscript went after the Dissolution to Coughton Court, Warwickshire, the final home of Elizabeth Throckmorton (d. 1547), last abbess of Denny, and three of her nuns, whence it was donated by Sir Arthur Throckmorton to Magdalen College in 1626.

36. That the chances and changes of fifteenth-century elite women’s lives were a subject for contemporaries is testified to by Christine de Pizan’s *Epistre de la prison de vie humaine*, ed. Angus J. Kennedy (Glasgow: University of Glasgow French Department, 1984) and Alain Chartier’s post-Agincourt poem, *Les quatre dames*, ed. J. C. Laidlaw, *The Poetical Works of Alain Chartier* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 196–304, and see further Christopher Allmand, “After Agincourt: Women and Pain,” *History Today* 62.2 (2012): 30–35, accessed Sept. 14, 2014 http://www.historytoday.com/christopher-allmand/after-agincourt-women-and-pain. The analyses in Hicks, “The Last Days,” and Crawford, “Victims of Attainder,” are also eloquent. It is worth noting that under comparable circumstances some women fought their corner as far as possible: in 1326, Elizabeth de Burgh, Lady of Clare, at a much younger age than Elizabeth de Vere, was imprisoned in Barking Abbey after her attainted husband’s death and had to give up her lands to the Despensers: she and one of her staff or counsellors drew up a document in Anglo-Norman and Latin protesting the coercion, before de Burgh went to join Queen Isabella’s rebellion against Edward II: Jennifer Ward, ed., *Elizabeth de Burgh, Lady of*
Clare, 1295–1360: Household and Other Records, Suffolk Record Society 57 (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell and Brewer, 2014), xvii.

37. The decoration, script, and the language of its scripta all suggest continental provenance, probably Paris, as the place of the manuscript’s making. On the date of Barking’s memorandum of donation (Magd. lat. 41, fol. 218v), see n. 30 above.


40. The manuscript is written in a professional textura throughout, in a single hand, in two columns, without illustrations. However, one leaf has been cut out between the table of contents and the first item (one other is similarly lost at the beginning of the prologue to item 22, a translation of Hugh of St. Victor’s De arriba anime), and it seems very likely that this was because these leaves had illustrations, such as occur in this position in the anthology copies in BnF f.fr. 916, fol. 1r; BnF f. fr. 22921, fol. 1r; Lyons, Bibliothèque municipale MS 1234. In another of the textura copies of the anthology, BnF f. fr. 19271, the leaf that most probably held an opening illustration has been similarly taken out and the Lamentaciones text is first present, accephalously, on fol. 2r.

41. The opening illustration for the collection is in several extant cases a crucifixion, but BnF f. fr. 916, fol. 1r, Jacques de Nemours’s copy, shows a congregation of contemporary fifteenth-century women and men—another fifteenth-century socio-spiritual community—listening to Christ (who is barefoot in a brown robe), while a Cistercian monk, presumably representing St. Bernard rather than his fellow Cistercian Ogier of Locedio, is visible in a window, writing his text, from the courtyard in which the listeners sit.


43. A cross-channel example that has had recent attention is a collection of nineteen texts made for Marie de Bretagne (d. 1339). All three extant copies of the collection represent a figure of this granddaughter of Henry III in identical iconography, contemplating a crucifixion where the upright of a Tau cross is the spine of a large bifolium and Christ’s hands reach to the edge of the verso and recto: see Aden Kumler, “Translating ma dame de Saint-Pol: The Privilege and Predicament of the Devotee in the Legiloque Manuscript,” in Translating the Middle Ages, ed. Karen L. Fresco and Charles D. Wright (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2012), 35–53 and fig. 3.4; Huot, “Polytextual Reading,” 208–9 and fig. 1; Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, “Making a Home with God: Elite Women as Aliens in Late Medieval England,” paper delivered at the British Academy conference on Aliens, Foreigners and Strangers in Medieval England, c. AD 500–1500, 26–27 March 2015.


45. I have not been able yet to identify texts 5–6 and 8–10 other than to find that text 5 (La voie . . . en paradis) is not closely related to Robert de Sorbonne’s De Tribus Dietis. For the Sully sermon (text 7), see C. A. Robson, Maurice de Sully and the Medieval Vernacular Homily with the Text of Maurice’s French Homilies from a Sens Cathedral Chapter Ms (Oxford: Blackwell, 1952), 188–90.

46. There were three prose and several verse versions of Innocent’s De miseria in French: Magd. lat. 41’s is exemplified in thirteen other manuscripts, but the critical edition planned by Robert Bultot never appeared. Manuscripts of this and the other translations are listed in De Miseria condicionis humanae, ed. Robert E. Lewis (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1978), 67, n. 10.

47. On the version of the Livre de tribulation in Magd. lat. 41, see Barratt, ed., Book of Tribulation, 18–20.

49. Pierre de Hangest is briefly discussed among other translators of De arrha by Geneviève Hasenohr and Robert Bultot, eds., Le Cur Deus homo d’Anselme de Canterbury et le De arrha animae de Hugues de Saint-Victor (Louvain-la-Neuve: Institut d’études médiévales de l’Université catholique de Louvain, 1984), 88–89 (an edition of Pierre Crapillet’s translation). De Hangest’s substantial translation is extant in eight manuscripts. The only other manuscript currently known to me that includes Magd. lat. 41’s prologue is Arsenal MS 2247, where Hangest’s text occurs alongside Gregory the Great’s Dialogues with a miniature of an unknown noblewoman presenting the manuscript to Charles V.

50. Bongenou seems to have been active in Picardy or Artois in the earlier fourteenth century: his acrostic appears in proverb compilations in BnF n.a.fr. 6882 and 10327, and he may be the compiler of this group of memento mori texts and proverbs (“Notice de”Augustin Bongenou” dans la base Jonas-IRHT/CNRS [permalink: http://jonas.irht.cnrs.fr/intervenant/5258”]), though not necessarily (pace Morawski, Diz et proverbes, xv) of the whole anthology.

51. The manuscript (MS BnF f. fr. 13342) contains a copy of the Mirour de seinte eglyse of Edmund of Canterbury as well as a treatise on the mass, and is connected through its artists with the Queen Mary Psalter: Aden Kumler, Translating Truth: Ambitious Images and Religious Knowledge in Late Medieval France and England (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 122–26 and fig. 37. It is digitized at http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b105094193/f95.image. For images of acolytes pushing laypeople out of the sanctuary and of elite men and women witnessing the elevation and taking communion, see Alixe Bovey, “Communion and Community: Eucharistic Narratives and their Audiences in the Smithfield Decretals,” in The Social Life of Illumination, ed. Coleman, Cruse, and Smith, 53–82.


53. On the tradition that humans can directly participate in the song of the an-


**Works Cited**


Hanna, Ralph, and A. S. G. Edwards. “Rotheley, the De Vere Circle, and the


