

SCHOOLGIRL GRAMMAR: GENDER AND LITERACY IN THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES

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Sophia D'Ignazio

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Sophia D'Ignazio

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This dissertation examines girls' and women's experience of gender in education and literary culture in the early middle ages. I argue that women's writing in the seventh to eleventh centuries was an ordinary though now poorly recognized extension of the wide participation by girls and women in the use and transmission of literate Christian learning. This project helps to historicize the notion of literacy as a technology of power, as I demonstrate that women's literate activity in monastic and court life existed concurrently with their social and political subordination to men. In contrast to prevailing assumptions, I argue that access to literacy was not gendered, and that literacy held no particular association with male gender for early medieval readers and writers. Chapter one explores how literacy pedagogies and elementary schooltexts such as the psalms shaped readers' and writers' later negotiations between grammatical gender and social gender in literature beyond the classroom. Chapter two explores the symbolic gendering of educational and intellectual authority as female in metaphorical language and literary personifications, in light of the real presence of women educators in early medieval England and Francia. Chapters three and four examine women's lived experiences of literacy in the context of a changing social gender paradigm in monastic culture across the eighth and ninth centuries. The two chapters challenge the reception of early medieval monastic women writers as "female," which falsely signifies a shared experience of difference and subordination in literary culture across time. Together, my dissertation argues that early medieval girls and women were neither differentiated nor disadvantaged by their gender as participants in literate culture; rather,

early medieval grammatical culture normalized girls' and women's writing and affirmed women's intellectual life.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Sophia D'Ignazio graduated from The Baldwin School for girls in 2008. She studied English and French literature at Barnard College, 2008-09. She studied Anthropology and French at Middlebury College, earning a B.A. in 2012. She earned a M.A. in Medieval Studies at the University of York in 2015, and studied medieval literature at Cornell University 2016-22.

For Catherine M. D'Ignazio, *optima nutrix et mater*.

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Introduction: Early Medieval Schoolgirls

Domina magistra Felhin, date mihi licenciam in hac nocte vigilare cum magistra Adalu, et ego vobis ambabus manibus confirmo atque iuro, ut per totam noctem declinare volo aut legere aut pro seniore nostro cantare. Valete et, ut peto, facite. *Valete in domino.*

Dear Teacher Felhin, give me leave to keep vigil this night with Teacher Adalu, and I affirm and swear to you with both hands that I shall not cease either reading or singing on our Lord's behalf the whole night through. Farewell, and do as I ask. *Farewell in the Lord.*¹

This brief letter from a ninth-century schoolgirl to her teacher reminds us that “exceptional” women writers such as Leoba of Tauberbischofsheim and Dhuoda first undertook the task of learning to read and write as a thoroughly unexceptional one, just as their male contemporaries did. Stephen Stofferahn's assessment of this letter from an unnamed schoolgirl shows that small, anonymous pieces of evidence can have enormous potential for expanding our understanding of girls and women in education and literary culture in the early middle ages.² My dissertation examines the gendered experience of literacy education and literary culture in the early middle ages. It is oriented toward the ordinary, now mostly anonymous world of girls' and women's reading and writing, and analyzes such bits and pieces of evidence from early medieval grammatical and book culture to reassess some of the best known examples of writing by, for, and about women.

¹ Steven A. Stofferahn, “A Schoolgirl and Mistress Felhin: A Devout Petition from Ninth-Century Saxony,” in *Women Writing Latin: From Roman Antiquity to Early Modern Europe* vol. II, eds. Laurie J. Churchill, Phyllis R. Brown, and Jane E. Jeffrey, 25-36 (NY: Routledge, 2002); the letter is preserved in Düsseldorf, Landes- und Universitätsbibliothek *Sammelhandschrift* B.3, f. 305v.

² Stofferahn, “A Schoolgirl and Mistress Felhin,” 25, Stofferahn translates “domina magistra Felhin” as “Mistress Felhin” and “magistra Adalu” as “Lady Adalu”; I translate the two instances of “magistra” occurring in the same sentence with the same word, “teacher”; I translate “domina” here as “dear,” to recognize its part in the polite address of a letter, but it might alternately be translated to mean “person in-charge.”

This dissertation bridges studies of grammar and literacy training, which have focused on schoolboys in all-male classrooms, and studies of women's writing, which have focused principally on authorship to the exclusion of investigations of the schooling necessary to acquire the skills to read and write.³ Although numerous studies have shown that women were authors, scribes, and book owners in the early middle ages, few studies acknowledge that all those women were also once students.⁴ My project is part of a wide-ranging conversation about women in medieval literary culture.⁵ Where my dissertation joins the conversation is in relation to the

³ Notable studies of early medieval education which imply all-male students through omission of gender discussion and the mention of male teachers and/or male students include Scott D. Gwara, ed., *Anglo-Saxon Conversations: the Colloquies of Aelfric Bata*, trans. David W. Porter (Rochester: Boydell Press, 1997); Carin Ruff, "The Hidden Curriculum: Syntax in Anglo-Saxon Latin Teaching," Ph.D. thesis, University of Toronto, 2001; and Irina Dumitrescu, *The Experience of Education in Anglo-Saxon Literature* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2018). The term "schoolboy" appears here and there in scholarship on early medieval education, but Stofferahn's is the only use of the term "schoolgirl" I have come across; e.g. Nicholas Orme, *Education in the West of England 1066-1548* (Exeter: University of Exeter, 1976), 237-239, index entry "schoolboys—see pupils" but no "schoolgirls" or "girls", instead there is "women, education of."

⁴ Exceptions include Dagmar Schneider, "Anglo-Saxon Women in the Religious Life: A study of the status and position of women in an early mediaeval society," Ph.D. thesis (University of Cambridge, 1985) and John Contreni, "The Carolingian Renaissance: Education and Literary Culture," in *Carolingian Learning, Masters, and Manuscripts* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1992) who discuss women's education as preparation for literate activity; Elizabeth Tyler, "Crossing Conquests: Polyglot Royal Women and Literary Culture in Eleventh-Century England," in *Conceptualizing Multilingualism in Medieval England, c.800-c.1250*, 172-196 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011) and "The Vita Ædwardi: The Politics of Poetry at Wilton Abbey" *Anglo-Norman Studies* 31 (2009), 135-156, and elsewhere, discusses royal women's education in relation to literary patronage.

⁵ Important studies demonstrating early medieval women's literacy include Lina Eckenstein, *Woman Under Monasticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1896); Bernhard Bischoff, "Die Kölner Nonnenhandschriften und das Skriptorium von Chelles," *Mittelalterliche Studien* 1(1965), 17-35; Jean Leclercq, *Aspects of Monasticism*, trans. Mary Dodd (Kalamazoo, MI, 1978; Paris, 1968); Schneider, "Anglo-Saxon Women in the Religious Life"; Christine E. Fell, "Some Implications of the Boniface Correspondence", in *New Readings on Women in Old English Literature*, ed. by Helen Damico and Alexandra H. Olsen (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 29-43; Janet Nelson, "Women and the Word in the Earlier Middle Ages," in *Women in the Church*, eds. W. J. Sheils and Diane Wood, 53-78 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990); Rosamond McKitterick, "Nuns' Scriptoria in England and Francia in the Eighth Century," *Francia* 19 (1992), 1-35, and "Women and literacy in the early Middle Ages" in *Books, scribes and learning in the Frankish kingdoms, 6th-9th centuries*, 1-43 (Aldershot: Variorum, 1994); P. R. Robinson, "A Twelfth-Century

assumptions about gender and literacy at the foundation of that scholarly conversation. This dissertation challenges two, mutually reinforcing assumptions about literacy in the early middle ages: first, that literate culture was predominantly male and therefore literate women were “extraordinary” and marginalized; second, that literacy and social power were correlated. The two false assumptions find articulation in Martin Irvine’s *The Making of Textual Culture: “Grammatica” and Literary Theory, 350-1100* (1994). Irvine claims that grammatical culture “created a special kind of literate subjectivity, an identity and social position for the *litterati* which was consistently gendered as masculine and socially empowered.”⁶ Irvine’s claim characterizes the assumed correlation between literacy, maleness, and social power taken for granted in much research on early medieval education, literary culture, and women writers.⁷

Scriptrix from Nunnaminster,” in *Of the Making of Books: Medieval Manuscripts, their Scribes and Readers: Essays Presented to M. B. Parkes*, eds. P. R. Robinson and Rivkah Zim, 73-93 (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1997); Michelle Brown, “Female-Book Ownership and Production in Anglo-Saxon England: The evidence of the Ninth-Century Prayerbooks” in *Lexis and Texts in Early English: Studies Presented to Jane Roberts*, eds. Christian. Key and L. Sylvester, 45-67 (Amsterdam: Rodolpi, 2001); Alison I. Beach, *Women as Scribes: Book Production and Monastic Reform in Twelfth-Century Bavaria* (Cambridge UP 2004).

⁶ Martin Irvine, *The Making of Textual Culture: “Grammatica” and Literary Theory, 350-1100* (Cambridge UP, 1994), 2; cf. Irvine’s later essay, “Heloise and the Gendering of the Literate Subject,” in *Criticism and Dissent in the Middle Ages*, ed. Rita Copeland, 87-114 (Cambridge UP, 1996), in which he makes the same claim, but appears to undermine his own argument; the same associations motivate the representation of literacy in terms of binary gender hierarchy and social power in Seth Lerer, *Literacy and Power in Anglo-Saxon England* (Lincoln: Univ. Nebraska Press, 1991), in which he equates literacy with maleness (paternity) and social power (kingship), as opposed to orality, femaleness (maternity), and erasure, and imagines an early English cultural movement “beyond the language of the mother to the texts of intellectual Christian paternity” (91).

⁷ For example, Syliva Parsons and David Townsend, “Gender,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Medieval Latin Literature*, eds. Ralph Hexter and David Townsend, 423-443 (Oxford UP, 2012) for the early middle ages broadly, and Lisa M. Weston, “Where Textual Bodies Meet: Anglo-Saxon Women’s Epistolary Friendships,” in *Friendship in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Age*, eds. Albrecht Classen and Marilyn Sandidge, 231-246 (New York: de Gruyter, 2010) for early English-Latin networks. Irvine’s claim is based on Latin grammatical culture; I have found no such claims for English literacy explicitly as gendered male.

In contrast, this dissertation contends that access to literacy was not gendered: girls and women were no less likely to be educated in literacy than were boys and men. The second, related argument is that literacy was not a proxy for social power. Access to literacy did not grant access to social power, nor did social power depend on literacy. Early medieval women remained legally and socially subordinate to men, even as they had equal access to education and literary culture. Although there are many examples of royal women and abbesses who wielded exceptional political and administrative authority, it is clear that within a social group, free women did not hold equal rights to free men with respect to property ownership or self-governance.⁸ Without financial and reproductive independence, women were not liberated by literacy. Monastic and secular women who did have public power, such as abbesses and queens, used literacy in the exercise of that power.⁹ But for those women (just as for their male peers), literacy was a mechanism for political expression, not something which conferred power. For example, Felice Lifshitz describes the feminist resistance to male clerical misogyny in the biblical art and commentaries made by monastic women in the English missionary region of the Main River Valley in Francia in the eighth century.¹⁰ Although they were using literacy for political expression, they had not overcome gendered barriers to acquire literacy in the first

⁸ Anne L. Klinck, “Anglo-Saxon Women and the Law,” *Journal of Medieval History*, 8 (1982), 107–21; Mary P. Richards and B. Jane Staneld, “Concepts of Anglo-Saxon Women in the Laws,” in *New Readings on Women in Old English Literature*, eds. by Helen Damico and Alexandra H. Olsen (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 89–99; Christine E. Fell, *Women in Anglo-Saxon England* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), esp. 56-73; Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society*, esp. 44-50.

⁹ Felice Lifshitz, “The Historiography of Central Medieval Western Monasticism,” in *The Carolingians to the Eleventh Century II*, eds. Alison I. Beach and Isabelle Cochelin, 365-381 (Cambridge UP, 2020), 376; see also Andrew Rabin, “Courtly Habits: Monastic Women’s Legal Literacy in Early Anglo-Saxon England,” in eds. Blanton, O’Mara, and Stoop, 289-305, *Nuns’ Literacies in Medieval Europe: The Kansas City Dialogue*, who argues that although early English law limited women’s agency, women understood and made use of the law to their own ends and conceived of themselves through that use as legal subjects.

¹⁰ Felice Lifshitz, *Religious Women in Early Carolingian Francia: A Study of Manuscript Transmission and Monastic Culture* (New York: Fordham UP, 2014).

place, nor did their command of literacy and intellectual culture grant them a reprieve from sexist reforms.¹¹

If literacy meant power within the classist patriarchal societies of early medieval England and Francia, then women and people of low social status would have been barred from literacy. But our sources indicate that women, secular students of high and low social statuses, and some slaves were educated in literacy. The tenth-century will of a noble Englishwoman named Athelgifu, for instance, enjoins three of her female slaves, Aelfwaru, Leofrun and Aethelflaed, and one enslaved priest to sing psalms on behalf of her soul for one year after her death.¹² In the ninth century, King Alfred's youngest son Æthelweard was sent to study in a school "with all the nobly born children of virtually the entire area, and a good many of lesser birth as well."¹³ The Alfredian preface to the Old English translation of Gregory I's *Pastoral Care* states that "all freeborn people" should study reading and writing in English, and some should also study in Latin.¹⁴ In 789, the *Admonitio Generalis* announced the establishment of schools for the children of free and peasant families in the Carolingian kingdom, and surviving inventories from rural parishes in the ninth century indicate that local priests kept books and could teach reading and writing.¹⁵ The *Rule of St. Benedict*, used throughout the early middle ages, describes the same process of petition and admission to monastic communities for the children of noble and poor

¹¹ Lishitz, *Religious Women*, 13-14, 24.

¹² Dorothy Whitelock, *The Will of Aethelgifu: a tenth century Anglo-Saxon manuscript* (Oxford: Roxburghe Club membership, 1968); regarding noblewomen, ninth-century wills from Carolingian aristocrats show parents leaving books to their daughters, Rosamund McKitterick, Rosamund, ed., *The Carolingians and the Written Word* (Cambridge UP, 1989), 245-250; as I show in chapter one, the psalms were closely connected to literacy training, and were learned through reading and copying, not only aurally.

¹³ Simon Keynes and Michael Lapidge, trans., *Alfred the Great, Asser's Life of King Alfred and other contemporary sources* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2004), 193-194.

¹⁴ Keynes and Lapidge, *Alfred the Great*, 123-127.

¹⁵ Contreni, "The Carolingian Renaissance"; *Capitularia Regum Francorum I*, edited by Alfred Boretius (Hanover, 1883), 59-60.

families; there is no evidence of financial or class barriers to monastic life (and thus to potential literacy training) until the late eighth-century.¹⁶

I propose that literacy was not a site of gendered dominance before the rise of European universities, in contrast to prevailing assumptions. The correlation between gender and access to Latin literacy training and higher education, which scholars recognize in the late middle ages and well into the modern era, had no place in the early middle ages. Timothy Graham explains: “The gendering of Latin scholarship in the early 18th century is characteristic of the way the scholars imagine the gendered division of Latinity and scholarship to have obtained from the beginning of Church involvement in England.”¹⁷ The recent collection *Women Intellectuals and Leaders in the Middle Ages* is a good example of how later medieval women’s exclusion from public institutions of education is read backward onto early medieval Christian women’s lives.¹⁸ In fact, Latin literacy is one of the few areas of cultural pursuit that was allowed (and encouraged) for monastic women in the ninth century by male church reformers, who sought to consolidate ecclesiastical power within a male-only hierarchy.¹⁹

¹⁶ According to Suzanne Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society: Marriage and the Cloister, 500-900* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981), 164, “The rules did not limit membership to women of the upper classes. Both Caesarius’ Rule and Aurelian’s adaptation of it envisioned poor as well as wealthy women among the sisters of a community. Aurelian’s Rule clearly stated that freedwomen could be accepted as postulants if they had their master’s permission. Caesarius’ Rule stressed that noble origin or wealth was not to be taken into consideration in the selection of an abbess...Only in the late eighth century did the requirement of an entrance fee become customary both in female and male communities.”

¹⁷ Timothy Graham, “Female Agency in Early Anglo-Saxon Studies: The ‘Nuns of Tavistock and Elizabeth Elstob” in *New Readings on Women and Early Medieval English Literature and Culture*, eds. Helene Scheck and Christine E. Kozikowski (ARC Humanities Press, 2019), 240.

¹⁸ Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, Katie Ann-Marie Bugyis, and John Van Engen, eds., *Women intellectuals and leaders in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2020): the three essays in the collection on early medieval Christian women (out of twenty-one total essays) explore women’s literary, intellectual, and professional lives according to the interpretive framework of women’s exclusion from formal, normative education, and while that framework may be illuminating for late medieval women’s intellectual creativity and achievements, it is misleading for the earlier period and reinforces the “exceptionalism” narrative.

¹⁹ See chapter 4 for a discussion of the effects of Carolingian reform on monastic women.

The associations between maleness and literacy (especially Latin literacy) on the one hand and femaleness, orality, and vernacularity on the other are deeply rooted in post-medieval studies of the middle ages.²⁰ Feminist and non-feminist scholars alike continue to treat early medieval literacy as primarily associated with men and maleness, to the general exclusion of women. Women writers are treated as “exceptional” or “marginal” participants in an otherwise male practice. This narrative remains dominant even as research amply demonstrates the active engagement in literate culture by women across the early medieval ages.²¹ Because the assumptions that access to literacy was gendered and connected to gendered social power serve as premises rather than as subjects of scrutiny in their own right, they do not easily offer themselves for rebuttal. I cannot contest previous scholars’ interpretations of the evidence for

²⁰ The justification for the collection, *Women Writing Latin: From Roman Antiquity to Early Modern Europe* vol. II, eds. Laurie J. Churchill, Phyllis R. Brown, and Jane E. Jeffrey (NY: Routledge, 2002) 2, argues, “It has been usual to associate women with the development of the vernaculars and men with the uses of Latin that survived well into modernity. The etymology of the word *vernacular*, deriving from *vernaculus*, ‘of or belonging to homeborn slaves,’ suggests an opposition to rather than a shared participation in literacy...Even if Latin literacy actually includes far more women than have been recognized, however, the cultural values associated with literacy in general and Latin literacy in particular nevertheless derive from beliefs about literacy as a male enclave. Therefore, the three volumes of *Women Writing Latin* contribute to a larger endeavor of rethinking assumptions about literacy based on conventional gender ideologies”; see also the introduction to Diane Watt, *Women, Writing and Religion in England and Beyond, 650-1100* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), especially pp. 5-10, on the omission of early medieval women’s writing in literary histories.

²¹ A selection includes Katrinette Bodarwé, *Sanctimoniales Litteratae: Schriftlichkeit und Bildung in den Ottonischen Frauenkommunitäten Gandersheim, Essen und Quedlinburg* (Münster: Aschendorff, 2004); the three part collection edited by Virginia Blanton, Veronica O’Mara, and Patricia Stoop, *Nuns’ Literacies in Medieval Europe* (Turnhout: Brepols), *The Hull Dialogue* (2013), *The Kansas City Dialogue* (2015), and *The Antwerp Dialogue* (2017); Felice Lifshitz, *Religious Women in Early Carolingian Francia*; Jinty Nelson, “Alcuin’s Letters Sent from Francia to Anglo-Saxon and Frankish Women Religious,” in *The Land of the English Kin: Studies in Wessex and Anglo-Saxon England in Honour of Professor Barbara Yorke*, eds. Alexander James Langlands and Ryan Lavelle, 355-372 (Leiden: Brill, 2020); and Watt, *Women, Writing and Religion*.

gender and literacy, because there has been no interpretation of the evidence. The assumption that literacy was male by default or by definition, is just that: an assumption.²²

In an important introduction to early medieval education, Henri Marrou stakes the claim that literacy was integral to and virtually universal in male monastic culture.²³ He bases this claim in part on evidence for the importance of literacy in monastic Rules for women, in conjunction with the assumption that men must have been more frequently educated than women. Citing literacy rules for women in the Rules of Caesarius of Arles, Radegonde, Leander of Seville, and Donatus, he explains, “If the study of letters is recommended to such an extent among women (where, as we can well believe, ‘culture’ was less widespread), such study is *a fortiori* all the more recommended for monks.”²⁴ He points to literacy rules for monastic men in the Rules of Tarnant, Ferreol of Uzès, the Rule of the Master, and the Rule of St. Benedict.²⁵ Although he offers examples of the same number of Rules requiring literacy for men and women, he assumes that men were necessarily more educated than women. The assumption models the appropriation of evidence of women’s education for “normative” (that is,

²² Vernacular writing for later medieval religious women’s communities in post-Conquest England—such as the *Ancrene Wisse* in the thirteenth century—has been interpreted in relation to women’s exclusion from literary prestige languages (namely Latin and French) which may have required more formal education than “vernacular” literacy; although the gendered politics of literacy after the rise of European universities in the twelfth century and the attendant professionalization of Latin are outside the scope of analysis in this dissertation, one important claim of this dissertation is that the gendered politics of late medieval literacy cannot responsibly be read backwards onto the early middle ages. The economic and symbolic value of literacy in Latin and English were not static across the middle ages; see below for a discussion of the scope of this dissertation.

²³ Henri Irénée Marrou, *Histoire de l’éducation dans l’antiquité*. 7. éd (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1948), 439, “Le cénobitisme [occidental], les lettres y sont de règle...la lectio divina, la lecture des Livres saints et d’abord de l’office, paraît inséparable du plein exercice de la vie monastique.”

²⁴ Marrou, *Histoire de l’éducation dans l’antiquité*, 440, “Si l’étude des lettres est si recommandée chez les femmes (où comme on peut bien le supposer la culture était moins répandue), elle l’est *a fortiori* tout autant pour les moines.”

²⁵ Marrou, *Histoire de l’éducation dans l’antiquité*, 440.

male-centered) histories of education, which consequently erase women from the very histories built upon the evidence of their pasts.

The persistence of Marrou's assumption might be explained in part by nineteenth- and twentieth-century scholars' personal familiarity with gendered barriers to education. Still, the tenacity of the unexamined premise that access to literacy was gendered in the early middle ages is astounding in light of the fact that no contemporary sources suggest an association between maleness and literacy, or suggest that women had any less business acquiring and using literacy than men had. Fortunately, the argument for women's equal access to literacy does not have to be made from absence. I here assemble evidence for the normalcy of women's literacy. The evidence pertains primarily to monastic culture, although some secular women and men were also literate.²⁶ The evidence also suggests a greater emphasis on women's literacy than on men's within monastic circles.

Women's Literacy Education: Evidence and Absence

In terms of quality of education, Patrizia Lendinara writes that early medieval men's and women's education was equal: "In respect of schooling, women seem to have had the same opportunities as men...Nuns apparently followed the same curriculum as monks."²⁷ The qualitative parity of men's and women's education has been accepted widely among scholars; now, the assumption is simply that fewer women than men had less access to literacy training.

²⁶ Throughout this dissertation, I refer to ecclesiastical communities of all types as "monastic," following Sarah Foot, "Anglo-Saxon Minsters: A Review of Terminology," in *Pastoral Care Before the Parish*, eds. John Blair and Richard Sharpe (Leicester UP, 1992), and *Veiled Women I: The Disappearance of Nuns from Anglo-Saxon England* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), 26-30, as many of the terms for different ecclesiastical communities and personnel in Latin and Old English were used interchangeably; I use "monastery" as the equivalent to the Old English catch-all term, *minster*.

²⁷ Patrizia Lendinara, "Worlds of Anglo-Saxon Learning," in *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature*, eds. Malcolm Godden and Michael Lapidge (Cambridge UP, 2013), 302.

The literacy requirements of monastic life make access to monastic life one proxy for access to literacy and literary education. Some scholars attribute presumed unequal access to literacy to the fact that fewer monastic communities for women than for men are known from extant evidence. Andrew Rabin's comment is representative of this view: "whatever the true number [of religious women's communities] may be, it remains dwarfed by the number of contemporary male houses."²⁸ However, the number of men's and women's monastic houses missing from the documentary record remains unknown.²⁹

Furthermore, the discrepancy between the number of known men's and women's houses may be misleading. Sarah Foot has argued that women's houses in England were less likely to leave documentary evidence of their existence and therefore more likely to be underrepresented in the extant record. Changing land management practices among the English aristocracy contributed to the disappearance of religious women's communities from the documentary record beginning in the eighth century.³⁰ New taxes on land set aside to support monastic communities run by unmarried and divorced women relatives outweighed the potential spiritual benefit to the families of male landowners. Without protected land donated by male relatives, the communities led by women (who could not own land, except in very specific circumstances) were more likely to dissolve after a single generation, and these ephemeral houses did not have

²⁸ Rabin, "Courtly Habits: Monastic Women's Legal Literacy," 136.

²⁹ John Godfrey, "The Place of the Double Monastery in the Anglo-Saxon Minster System," in *Famulus Christi: Essays in Commemoration of the 13th centenary of the birth of Bede*, ed. Gerald Bonner, 344-350, (London : S.P.C.K., 1976) also claims that nunneries were always a minority among monastic communities in early medieval England, although he concedes it is impossible to know how many monasteries there were at all in the pre-Viking period, and that there were undoubtedly many monasteries that have disappeared without record.

³⁰ Sarah Foot, *Veiled Women I*, especially, p. 21.

the opportunity to transact wealth in ways which would leave a documentary record of their presence.³¹

Katrinette Bodwaré examines differential pressures on men's and women's monastic archives which might explain the surprisingly small number of charters preserved from early Frankish women's communities. The lack of preserved charters from specific women's communities "conflicts sharply with [the communities'] economic and political importance in the early medieval period."³² Chelles is a good example. Home to a famous scriptorium and royal leadership, including Charlemagne's sister Gisela (d.810), Chelles nevertheless has no charters, while contemporary men's houses such as St Gallen, Fulda and St Denis preserve extensive records of private and royal donations.³³ It is not the case that Chelles and other influential women's houses did not receive donations. Nor were Chelles and other women's houses unable to create and preserve archival material.³⁴ Higher frequency of destruction and closure of women's communities than of men's communities during the middle ages may explain some of the differential loss. Bodwaré also hypothesizes that the greatest damage to women's archives occurred after the middle ages, through generations of selective preservation and destruction of archival material by officials who did not consider women to be of significant relevance to institutional history.³⁵ Lifshitz adds that too few known and surviving books have been attributed

³¹ Sarah Foot, "Flores Ecclesiae: Women in early Anglo-Saxon monasticism," in *Female vita religiosa between Late Antiquity and the High Middle Ages: Structures, Developments, and Spatial Contexts*, eds. Gert Melville and Anne Müller, 173-185 (Berlin-Münster: LIT Verlag, 2011); Klinck, "Anglo-Saxon women and the law."

³² Katrinette Bodwaré, "Gender and the Archive: The preservation of charters in early medieval communities of religious women," in *Saints, scholars and politicians: Gender as a tool in medieval studies. Festschrift in Honour of Anneke Mulder-Bakker on the Occasion of Her Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, eds. Mathilde van Dijk and Renée Nip (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), 119.

³³ Bodwaré, "Gender and the Archive," 119.

³⁴ Bodwaré, "Gender and the Archive," 122-3.

³⁵ Bodwaré, "Gender and the Archive," 129.

to women's communities. What, she asks, of the libraries of Remiremont, Pfazel, St. Irmina/Oeren, Nonnberg, Altmünster, Leoba's retreat outside Mainz, and Schwarzach, all of which must have possessed more than the one or two books ascribed to them?³⁶

Although a large portion of the evidence for women's monastic life has been lost, it is possible to extrapolate from the evidence of known monastic communities that women may have had access to monastic life and literacy training in equal numbers to their male counterparts. Sarah Foot provides the best assessment of the numbers of men's and women's monastic communities in early medieval England: of the 212 monasteries and bishoprics she identifies in England up to the mid-ninth century, 69 are known with certainty to have housed women.³⁷ The size of monastic communities generally ranged from 5 to 20 members, although there are accounts of much larger communities of men and women, and monasteries would have fluctuated in size. With the potential range in community size from 5 to 20 members, the number of known men's and women's communities alone does not exclude the possibility that as many or more women than men were living in monastic communities until the mid-ninth century in England. If we assume a comparable rate of literacy between men and women monastics, then there could have been an equal or greater number of literate monastic women in comparison to monastic men. The evidence from monastic rules and ecclesiastical reform legislation gathered below may also suggest that there was a higher rate of literacy among monastic women than

³⁶ Lifshitz, *Religious Women in Early Carolingian Francia*, 28, 194, notes that book production by men in the Main Valley could not have begun until the Würzburg scriptorium began under Bishop Wulfgar c. 810; nevertheless, some scholars have attributed number of eighth-century manuscripts to male scribes in Würzburg rather than to the well attested scriptoria in the women's houses of Karlburg and Kitzingen.

³⁷ Sarah Foot, *Monastic Life in Anglo-Saxon England c.600-900* (Cambridge UP: 2009), 32, 174-175, and *Veiled Women I*, 11-17, on the evidence available for post-Viking age women's houses.

monastic men in the early middle ages.³⁸

The *Regula cuiusdam ad virgines* (RCV), one of three seventh-century Rules written for women, notes that girls admitted to the monastery must learn to read so that they can “use their literacy for liturgical purposes.”³⁹ The RCV also prescribed psalm practice for adult members. During the day when the women were to be engaged in manual work, they were to go over the psalms in their minds:

But in manual work the remembrance of the work of God should be kept, that is to say, that while on the outside the hands are occupied with works according to the opportunity of the season, on the inside the mind becomes sweet through the tongue’s meditation of the Psalms and the remembrance of the Scripture.⁴⁰

This means that the psalms would have been memorized. The recitation of psalms was also used as a disciplining technique for women who showed up late to services: the late arriver would be put in “time out” for the remainder of the service and then required to “sing twelve Psalms on top of the series of the service.”⁴¹ The psalms also served as the blueprint for appropriate behavior and thinking.⁴² In this way, the psalms were tied to all aspects of the girls’ and women’s lives.

³⁸ Gisela Muschiol, “Men, Women, and Liturgical Practice in the Early Medieval West,” in *Gender in the Early Medieval World: East and West, 300– 900*, eds. L. Brubaker and Julia M. H. Smith (Cambridge UP, 2004), 200, writes, “Rules of women’s religious communities, in particular, stressed that girls living in a convent were to learn at least how to read, and indeed nuns reading from the Bible, whether privately or aloud to others, were quite common in the early Middle Ages. *Frequenter legere* (read frequently) was the injunction applied to the Scriptures. Besides reading, the art of writing was practiced in convents, as the numerous nun’s scriptoria in the Frankish lands testify.”

³⁹ RCV 24, “De nutriendis infantibus”: “Habeant lectionis usum, ut sub puerili aetate discant quod ad perfectam deducti proficiant...”, ed. and trans. in Albrecht Diem, *The Pursuit of Salvation: Community, Space, and Discipline in Early Medieval Monasticism (with a critical edition and translation of the Regula cuiusdam ad uirgines)* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2021), 144-146.

⁴⁰ RCV, 12.11, 112-113.

⁴¹ RCV 8.9, 98-99, “illa in ecclesia pro ipsa tarditate posita duodecim psalmos supra cursus seriem cantet.”

⁴² RCV App.20-23, 148-149, “For everyone sings the Psalms wisely who does not contradict the praising voice through harmful works and who, as much as it behooves, continues with all zeal to serve the divine power with solicitous concern for practice of piety. Let therefore our mind enter [the gate] so dedicated to singing Psalms, so ready for prayer that it, not shackled by any obstacle of worldly desire, is not darkened by any fault of the world, but that it strives for eternal rewards,

Another seventh-century Rule for women, Caesarius of Arles' *Rule for Nuns*, includes the requirement that girls only be admitted to the community when they are old enough to learn to read.⁴³ This passage is cited by Marrou in his discussion of universal male monastic literacy. Caesarius' *Rule for Monks* includes no literacy requirement or literacy-related age requirements for admission.⁴⁴ The *Rule for Nuns* requires that all members study literacy and that each woman spend two hours a day reading.⁴⁵ The *Rule for Nuns* also presumes writing ability among at least some members, as it prohibits the nuns from sending letters to their families without permission (*recap.* VI). Although Caesarius also presumes some reading and writing ability among monks in his *Rule for Monks*, it is notable that there are more frequent references to literacy in the *Rule for Nuns*.⁴⁶

Literacy among some male community members was certainly necessary, and the psalms were clearly part of the monks' life, as portrayed in Caesarius's *Rule*. For instance, the *Rule for Monks* quotes Ephesians 5:19 enjoining the singing of psalms and hymns aloud and in the heart (*cap.* XIX). It appears therefore that the monks would have been familiar with the psalms, but for

always dedicated and elevated in the heavens by humility and purity and adorned with most eager devotion"; this appendix immediately follows the final chapter on the education of children and ends the RCV.

⁴³ Caesarius of Arles, *Regula ad virgines*, in *Œuvres monastiques I*, ed. De Vogüé, Adalbert and Joël Courreau, 170-272, *Sources Chrétiennes*, vol. 345 (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1988): "Et si fieri potest, aut difficile, aut ulla unquam in monasterio infantula parvula, nisi ab annis sex aut septem, quae jam in litteras discere et obedientiae possit ontemperare, suscipiatur. Nobilium filiae sive ignobilium, ad nutriendum aut docendum, penitus non accipiantur"; "Omnes litteras discant; omni tempore duabus horis, hoc est a mane usque ad horam secundam, lectioni vacent" (8, 17); "Cum vero psalmis et hymnis oratis Deum, id versetur in corde quod profertur in voce. Quodcunque operis feceritis, quando lectio non legitur, de divinis Scripturis semper aliquid ruminare" (18, 20).

⁴⁴ Caesarius of Arles, *Regula ad monachos*, ed. Adalbert de Vogüé and Joël Courreau, SC 398, 204-226 (Paris: Cerf 1994)

⁴⁵ Caesarius of Arles, *Regula ad uirgines*, 170–272.

⁴⁶ A comparison of terms makes this clear; for example, *lectio* appears in 7 chapters in the *Rule for Nuns* and only once in the *Rule for Monks*; *littera* appears in 4 chapters in the *Rule for Nuns* and never in the *Rule for Monks*; *tabula* once in the *Rule for Nuns*, never in the *Rule for Monks*; and the verb *psallo* in 4 chapters in the *Rule for Nuns*, twice in the *Rule for Monks*.

some of the monks it may have been a familiarity gained only aurally. The monks are also enjoined to recite the antiphons according to the psalter and to recite Matins, and direction is given to the manner of voicing and singing of the psalms and prayers (cap. XXI). At a minimum therefore, at least one of the monks was able to read and lead the prayers. However, there is no certainty that each monk was expected to be able to learn the liturgy by reading for himself, in contrast to the universal reading requirement for nuns. Whether or not fewer monks than nuns were literate or were simply less encouraged to pursue literacy, it is clear that Caesarius did not consider individual literacy as important in male monastic life as in women's monastic life.

Caesarius also emphasizes reading among women in his "Sermo ad sanctimoniales": "Let her read the *lectio* very often or absorb with the full desire of her heart the words of the reader" and "also dedicate the greater part of the day to holy work, become accustomed to spending time in reading."⁴⁷ The women were to read often or meditate on the words they heard read, and to dedicate time to reading each day. The *Life of Caesarius* also portrays literacy and psalmody as central to the women's community which Caesarius founded for his sister. The *Life* reports: "The mother Caesaria's work along with her community so flourished, that amidst psalmody and fastings, vigils and readings, the virgins of Christ lettered most beautifully the divine books, having the mother herself as teacher."⁴⁸

The *Rule of Donatus*, another seventh-century Rule directed explicitly to women, specifies two hours of daily reading time.⁴⁹ The injunction to read daily echoes the language on

⁴⁷ Caesarius of Arles, *Sermo ad sanctimoniales*, PL 67, col. 1121D, "Lectionem aut ipsa frequentius legat, aut legentis verba tota pectore aviditate suscipiat"; "Meliolem quoque diei partem sancto operi dedicate, lectioni vacare consuescite."

⁴⁸ Trans., McCarthy, *The rule for nuns*, 25; *Vita Caesarii*, ed. Bruno Krusch, MGH *Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum* 3 (1896 Hanover).

⁴⁹ *Regula Donati and Pseudo-Columbani Regula Monialium (frag.)*, ed. Victoria Zimmerl-Panagl, CSEL 98 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015); the *Rule of Donatus* is closely patterned on the *Rule of St. Benedict* in many instances, although changes are notable: e.g., the discussion of reading is moved forward in the *Rule of Donatus* (cap. 20) relative to its place in the *Rule of St. Benedict*

daily reading from the sixth-century *Rule of St. Benedict*, originally written for men. Whereas the *Rule of St. Benedict* includes an explicit accommodation for those who cannot or will not read during the reading hours, the *Rule of Donatus* offers no exception to the daily reading requirement for women. It makes no suggestion that some of the monastic women may be unwilling or unable to read. The *Rule of Donatus* also incorporates the line from Caesarius's *Rule for Nuns* enjoining constant rumination on the words of scripture whenever one is *not* reading. The *Rule of Donatus* repeats Caesarius' requirement that initiates' only be accepted at the age of literacy, and commands that girls and women not be accepted into the community unless they intended to remain as consecrated members, not even "for the sake of education." This warning suggests that formal education was built into community life and that it was sought out by some families who wished their daughters to receive an education without committing to religious life. The *Rule of Donatus* also echoes the *Rule of St. Benedict* in prohibiting private ownership of objects, specifically including tablets and pens (*tabulae et grafium*) (cap. VIII.1). This prohibition suggests that the women would indeed own personal writing instruments if they were allowed to, which implies their ability to use them.

Although the *Rule of St. Benedict* does not require universal literacy or discuss literacy training, it makes the psalms an integral part of community life. The whole psalter is to be sung through each week and the order and schedule of psalmody are discussed at length.⁵⁰ Time after Matins is set aside for monks who haven't finished memorizing psalms to have lessons to learn

(cap. 48), perhaps showing an added emphasis on the importance of reading; *Regula Benedicti*, ed. by Rudolph Hanslik CSEL 75 (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1960).

⁵⁰ *The Rule of Benedict*, trans. Carolinne White (New York: Penguin, 2008), 73; *Regula Benedicti* 18.23, "dum omnimodies id adtendat, ut omni ebdomata psalterium ex integro numero centum quinquaginta psalmorum psallatur et dominico die semper a caput reprendatur ad uigilas."

them.⁵¹ This accommodation seems to apply to already literate monks who have not finished learning the psalter and other designated readings. While reading and intimate knowledge of the psalms make up an important part of the community life envisioned by Benedict, universal literacy apparently is not expected. As noted above, the *Rule* discusses reading as part of the work of daily life. Time for reading and access to books are granted for those who wish each day, but it is understood that not all wish to or are able to read. Monks who will not or cannot read are given other employment:

On Sunday they should all spend time reading, apart from those who have been assigned various tasks. But if anyone is so lacking in concentration and so lazy that he refuses to or is unable to study or read, he should be given a task or craft to prevent him being idle.⁵²

For admission to the monastery, a hand-written petition is required, but accommodation is made for illiterate persons: illiterate initiates were allowed to have another monk write the petition on their behalf (cap. 58). There is no requirement that illiterate initiates be instructed in literacy, nor is there any mention of literacy training in the description of the twelve-month initiation process. In fact, it is possible that those monks who needed to spend time after Matins studying the psalms and *lectiones* might have done so with the aid of another who could read aloud to them. As in Caesarius' *Rule for Nuns*, there is an injunction against exchanging letters without permission, which implies that some of the monks were expected to be able to read and write on their own; however, that ability was not necessarily assumed of all.⁵³

⁵¹ *Regula Benedicti* 8.2, “Quod vero restat post vigiliis a fratribus qui psalterii vel lectionum aliquid indigent meditationi inserviat”; “The time, however, which remains over after the night office [Matins] will be employed in study by those of the brethren who still have some parts of the psalms and the lessons to learn,” trans. in Jane Toswell, *The Anglo-Saxon Psalter* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014), 22.

⁵² *Rule of St. Benedict* 48, 73.

⁵³ *Rule of St. Benedict* 33.3, 90: The list of personal property items forbidden to monks includes writing materials: “neque aliquid habere proprium, nullam omnino rem, neque codicem neque tabulas neque graphium...” (no one should...possess anything of his own - nothing whatever, not a book or writing tablet or pen or anything at all), trans. White, 55.

The eleventh- or twelfth-century Wintenev version of the *Rule of St. Benedict*, which was created for women, follows the *Rule of St. Benedict* as regards reading.⁵⁴ There is no requirement for universal literacy and no requirement that girls only be accepted on condition of learning literacy or at the age of literacy. The women are afforded daily reading time, but as in the *Rule of St. Benedict* accommodation is made for those women who do not wish to or cannot read at the designated time. After meals, the women are enjoined to occupy themselves with the psalms or other readings: “Post refectioem autem suam: uacent lectionibus suis aut psalmis.”⁵⁵ As in the *Rule of Benedict*, the Wintenev *Rule* sets aside time for those community members who needed to finish learning part of the psalms or *lectiones*.⁵⁶

The sixth-century *Rule of the Master* is one rule written for male monastics which does envision universal literacy in the monastery. The *Rule* implies that the young monks are to learn literacy with *tabulae* et *codices*, that is, with wax tablets and books to read or copy from.⁵⁷ The students were to work on learning to read and write for three hours a day. Older illiterate monks were also expected to learn literacy.⁵⁸ As in Caesarius’ *Rule for Nuns*, the *Rule of the Master* orders the monks to meditate on the psalms: “Therefore during these three hours let them read and listen in turns, and by turns let them teach letters and the psalms to those who do not know

⁵⁴ Arnold Schroer, ed., *Die Wintenev-Version der Regula S. Benedicti: Lateinisch und Englisch mit Einleitung, Anmerkungen, Glossar und einem Facsimile*. Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1888.

⁵⁵ *Wintenev-Version* 48.13, “Post refectioem autem suam: uacent lectionibus suis aut psalmis.”

⁵⁶ *Wintenev-Version* 8.3, “Quod uero restat post uigilias: a sororibus que psalterii uel lectionum aliquid indigent. meditationi inseruiatur.”

⁵⁷ *Regula Magistri*, ed. Adalbert de Vogüé and Joël Courreau, *Sources Chrétiennes*, vol. 105-107 (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1964), 50.16, “Cum ergo in hoc spiritali opere has tres horas peregerint, repositis tabulis et codicibus, diuinis ad tertiam laudibus surgant” (When they have passed these three hours in this spiritual work, after they put down the wax tablets and books, let them rise for Terce with divine prayers).

⁵⁸ *Regula Magistri* 50.12-13, “In his tribus horis infantuli in decada sua in tabulis suis ab uno litterato litteras meditentur. Nam et inalfabetos maiores usque ad quinquagenariam aetatem litteras meditari hortamur.

them.”⁵⁹ Perhaps the psalter was among the *codices* the young and old students were studying from.

Legislation from ecclesiastical councils corroborates the prevalence of literacy among monastic women in the eighth and ninth centuries.⁶⁰ The Council of Clovesho in 747 required bishops, abbots, and abbesses to force children in their monasteries to study: “Therefore let children be compelled and occupied in schools for the love of sacred scripture, so that through this they may be found to be well educated for all kinds of use to the Church of God.”⁶¹ In 847, the Council of Mainz required universal monastic women’s literacy education and underlined the importance of psalms in the women’s communities: “Religious women living in a monastery must study reading and singing, the celebration of the psalms and prayer. And equally they must celebrate the canonical hours.”⁶² The Council made no equivalent requirement for literacy among male monastics, although the council did decree that the *capitula* should be read and understood by all priests (*sacerdotes*) so that they could preach accordingly.⁶³ Many (but by no means all) monks would have been priests at the time.⁶⁴ And several decades earlier, the second Council of Nicaea had required full knowledge of the psalter among all bishops, indicating that bishops were expected to be literate.

⁵⁹ *Regula Magistri* 50.14-15, “Simul ergo in his horis et psalmos meditari a nescientibus ordinatione praepositorum suorum admonemus in unaquaque decada. Ergo in his tribus horis inuicem et legant et audiant, uicibus litteras et psalmos ignorantibus ostendant.”

⁶⁰ See Contreni, “The Carolingian Renaissance,” 717-8, on women’s place in the literate Carolingian world.

⁶¹ A. W. Hadden and W. Stubbs (eds.), *Councils and Ecclesiastical Documents Relating to Great Britain and Ireland*, 3 (1871), 365, “Proinde coherceantur et exerceantur in scholis pueri ad dilectionem sacrae scientiae, ut per hoc bene eruditi inveniri possint ad omnimodam Ecclesiae Dei utilitatem.”

⁶² *Capitularia Regum Francorum II*, ed. Alfred Boretius and Victor Krause, MGH (Hanover, 1897), 180, “Sanctimoniales vero in monasterio constitutae habeant studium in legendo et in cantando, in psallimorum celebratione sive oratione. Et horas canonicas...pariter celebrent.”

⁶³ MGH Capit. 2, 176.

⁶⁴ Mayke de Jong, *In Samuel’s Image: Child Oblation in the Early Medieval West* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), especially 132-144.

Benedict of Aniane's *De institutione sanctimonialium* promulgated by the Council of Aachen in 816 commanded that "girls in monasteries must be educated with great diligence."⁶⁵ Benedict copies Jerome's fourth-century letter to Laeta on the education of her daughter as the authority on the manner in which monastic girls should be educated. The order of girls' instruction should begin with the psalms, followed by Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Job, the Gospels, Acts of the Apostles, and Epistles, and they "should love sacred books instead of gems and silk."⁶⁶

The psalms were the foundation of monastic literacy throughout the early middle ages, and manuscript evidence confirms the importance of the psalms within the intellectual and spiritual life of women's communities.⁶⁷ In the eighth century, the women of Karlburg copied patristic commentaries on the gradual Psalms, suggesting that their community "likely held to the more demanding version of the liturgy of the hours," that is, psalmodizing eight times a day, every three hours, to sing through the 150 psalms cycle each week. This was also the schedule used by the women of Laon, Remiremont, Notre Dame de Soisson, and Fécamp.⁶⁸ A group of manuscripts produced at Chelles includes Cassiodorus' *Expositio psalmorum* and three copies of Augustines' *Ennarationes in psalmos*.⁶⁹ The *Ennarationes* also appear in the Guntza group of manuscripts (produced jointly by the women of Karlburg and Kitzingen).⁷⁰ Two surviving Old English-Latin glossed psalters, the Salisbury Psalter (Salisbury, Cathedral MS 150, written

⁶⁵ *Concilia Aevi Karolini*, ed. Albertus Werminghoff, MGH Conc. 2,1 (Hanover and Leipzig, 1906), 452-454, "XXII. Ut erga puellas in monasteriis erudiendas magna adhibeatur diligentia."

⁶⁶ MGH Conc. 2,1, 453, "Pro gemmis et serico divinos codices amet. Discat primo psalterium. Erudiat in proverbii Salomonis ad vitam. Consuescat in Ecclesiasten calcare quae mundi sunt. Sectetur in Iob virtutis et patientiae exempla. Ad evangelia transeat, numquam ea positura de manibus. Apostolorum acta et epistolas tota cordis inbuat voluntate; et sic per ordinem seriem novi veterisque testamenti."

⁶⁷ Lifshitz, *Religious Women*, 88.

⁶⁸ Lifshitz, *Religious Women*, 88.

⁶⁹ McKitterick, "Nuns' scriptoria," 4-5.

⁷⁰ McKitterick, "Nuns' scriptoria," 22.

c.975) and the Royal Psalter (London BL Ms Royal 2 B v, written c.1100) were produced by and for women religious.⁷¹

Saints' Lives are another source for depictions of literacy in women's monastic communal life. Albrecht Diem notes that many *vitae* of abbesses celebrate their subjects' learnedness and teaching, and that many of those abbesses are possible authors of anonymous saints' lives written in their communities.⁷² Diem writes that, "In general, the hagiographic language of education, knowledge, and teaching is not marked by gender differences, and no *vita* of a female saint describes its protagonist as learned against the odds of her own gender."⁷³ Saints's Lives also depict communal psalmody, which was a primary object of literacy training. For example, the eighth-century *Life of Bertila* shows psalmody as an integral part of community life of Chelles, where Bertila was abbess. Communal psalmody forms the backdrop during Bertila's central miracle, when she brings a deceased sister back to life. Later, on Bertila's deathbed, she "is energetic in giving thanks to God in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, exhorting those tending her to sing to God."⁷⁴

Psalms were also part of early study and the fabric of community life in the monasteries in which Leoba was educated and ruled as abbess. Rudolf's ninth-century *Life of Leoba* depicts psalmody as an ordinary part of life in Wimbourne Abbey, where Leoba lived as a young person. When a (universally disliked) teacher died, the abbess required all the women community members to sing psalms, practice vigils, and pray on the teacher's behalf.⁷⁵ According to Rudolf,

⁷¹ Celia and Kenneth Sisam, eds., *The Salisbury Psalter: edited from Salisbury Cathedral ms. 150*, Early English Text Society, O.s. 242 (London: Oxford University Press, 1959); George Brown, "The Psalms as the Foundation of Anglo-Saxon Learning," in *The Place of the Psalms in the Intellectual Culture of the Middle Ages*, ed. Nancy Van Deusen, 1-23 (Albany NY: SUNY Press, 1999), 16-24.

⁷² Diem, *The Pursuit of Salvation*, 171.

⁷³ Diem, *The Pursuit of Salvation*, 171.

⁷⁴ *Vita Bertilae abbatissae Calensis*, ed. W. Levison, MGH SS rer. Merov. 6, 103, 108.

⁷⁵ Rudolf of Fulda, *Vita Leobae*, ed. Oswald Holder-Egger, MGH SS 15,1, 123.

Leoba's education at Wimbourne included reading and listening to scripture, studying grammar and other liberal arts, and reading patristic writings and canonical decretals. Later, at Leoba's own monastic establishment in Germany, she required all the women members to sing through the entire psalter as they processed around the church, holding their arms out, like walking crosses, as part of a public relationships operation following a local scandal.⁷⁶

Schoolgirl Grammar Curriculum: A Case Study

Rita Copeland writes that grammatical doctrine is “embodied in the living presence and authority of teachers,” whose physical and social power in the classroom constitutes the foundation of the authority of the taught discipline of grammar itself.⁷⁷ Although Copeland does not specifically envision women teachers as a part of this discussion, her point stands: grammatical doctrine depends on the instruction imparted by a teacher to students in real, embodied relationship. This allows us to ask how the gender-diversity of early medieval grammatical educational spaces influenced the diversity of Latin grammatical usage (and by extension, English grammatical usage). Copeland's statements also remind us that monastic students learning Latin literacy from abbesses and other women instructors would have associated female embodied authority with Latin grammatical doctrine. The immanence of the female teacher tempers the distant maleness of the *auctores*. It is the grammar teacher who interprets and imparts the science of language, whose authority is the basis for any assimilation by the students of authors' implementation of grammar rules.

Educated in Latin literacy and the liberal arts by women teachers at the West Saxon double monastery of Wimbourne in the early-eighth century, Leoba, future missionary abbess of

⁷⁶ Rudolf of Fulda, *Vita Leobae*, 125-127.

⁷⁷ Rita Copeland, ed. *Criticism and Dissent in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge UP, 1996), 6, 9.

Tauberbischofsheim, would have encountered Latin literacy as something transmitted and used by women on a regular basis. Her poetry teacher Eadburh would have been an immediate source of Latin poetic authority, and both Eadburh and her abbess Tetta had friendships with Boniface, which were carried out through written correspondence and book exchange. Beyond their immediate experiences in the classroom, Leoba and her peers had models of mixed-gender literary and intellectual exchange in the letters of Jerome, as Weston herself points out.

Unfortunately, no record of the book holdings or school curriculum from Leoba's Wimbourne survive, so it is not possible to reconstruct Leoba's education with specificity. It is clear from an extant letter of hers addressed to the missionary Boniface, however, that Leoba studied at least grammar and poetic composition. She writes to Boniface that Eadburg has been her poetry teacher, and that Eadburg herself is engaged in scriptural studies. Rudolf's *Life of Leoba* from the mid-ninth century includes a story about another teacher, a hated *magistra*, at Wimbourne. The story takes place during Tetta's abbacy, so it is presumably contemporary to Leoba's tenure and education at Wimbourne, but Leoba is not mentioned in the story. The story itself does not describe the school's curriculum, and the only information given about pedagogy is that the *magistra* in question is remembered as being far too harsh with her students.

Furthermore, scholars agree that Rudolf's depiction of Wimbourne is more closely patterned on ninth-century idealized monastic life than on Wimbourne's eighth-century reality.⁷⁸

Information about the learning at other monastic sites in near contemporary sources suggest other possible subjects of study and educational experiences that may have been available to Leoba and her peers at Wimbourne. In the late seventh-century prose treatise on chastity, *De virginitate*, Aldhelm applauds the studies of the Old and New Testaments, patristic

⁷⁸ See for example, Barbara Yorke, "Rudolf of Fulda's Vita S. Leobae: Hagiography and Historical Reality," in *Anglo-Saxon England and the Continent*, eds. Hans Sauer and Joanna Story with Gaby Waxenberger, 199-216 (Tempe: ACMRS, 2011).

commentaries, histories and chronicles, grammar, orthography, metrics, and exegetical methods undertaken by his women addressees at Hildelith's school at the double monastery of Barking Abbey.⁷⁹ In the second decade of the ninth century, the *Institutio Sanctimonialium* required monastic schoolgirls learn the psalter, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Job, the Gospels, Acts of the Apostles, and the Epistles, in line with Jerome's fourth-century prescription for the education of the daughter of his correspondent Laeta.⁸⁰ In a letter c.729-804 from Alcuin of York to the Irish Church, Alcuin lays out elementary and advanced studies that should be undertaken by contemporary religious:

Wherefore, most holy Fathers, urge your youths to learn the traditions of the catholic doctors most diligently, to work with every effort to learn the arguments of the catholic faith...but still the knowledge of secular literary studies should not be despised, but grammar should be passed on like a kind of foundation for the tender age of children, and the other disciplines of philosophical subtlety [should be taught], as far as [the students] are able to climb by certain steps of wisdom toward the highest peak of evangelical perfection.⁸¹

Other possibly useful analogues for some of the curriculum at Wimbourne may be the list of subjects reportedly taught by Theodore and Hadrian at Canterbury, as well as the partially reconstructed eighth-century library holdings of Malmesbury, Whitby, and Nursling. Bede reports that Theodore and Hadrian

⁷⁹ Aldhelm of Malmesbury, *Prosa de virginitate cum glosa latina atque anglosaxonica*, ed. Rudolf Ehwald, add. Scott Gwara, CCSL 124/124A (Turnhout: Brepols, 2001); Aldhelm, "De virginitate," in *Aldhelm: The Prose Works*, trans. Michael Lapidge and Michael Herren (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer: 1979), 62, "Now, sagaciously inquiring into the rules of the grammarians and the teachings of experts of spelling and the rules of metrics (as they are) measured out into accents (and) times, fitted into poetic feet, broken up into cola and commata - that is into pentimemes and eptimemes - and indeed, divided into a hundred kinds of metre."

⁸⁰ MGH Conc. 2, I, 453.

⁸¹ Ernestus Dümmler, ed. *Alcivini sive Albinii epistolae*, MGH Epp. II, 4, 1-61 (Berlin, 1895), Ep. 280, 437, "Unde, sanctissimi patres, exhortamini iuvenes vestros, ut diligentissime catholicorum doctorum discant traditiones, et catholicae fidei rationes omni intentione adprehendere studeant ... Nec tamen saecularium litterarum contempnenda est scientia, sed quasi quoddam fundamentum tenerae infantium aetati tradenda est grammatica, aliaque philosophicae subtilitatis disciplinae, quatenus quibusdam sapientiae gradibus ad altissimum evangelicae perfectionis culmen ascendere valeant."

were men of learning both in sacred and in secular literature, they attracted a large number of students, into whose minds they poured the waters of wholesome knowledge day by day. In addition to instructing them in the holy Scriptures, they also taught their pupils poetry, astronomy, and the calculation of the church calendar. In proof of this, some of their students still alive today are as proficient in Latin and Greek as in their native tongue.⁸²

Aldhelm attests to studying Roman law, meter, astronomy and computus under Theodore and Hadrian in the 670s.⁸³ Theodore's *Penitential* claims that crowds of men and women eagerly studied under Theodore, desiring to learn from someone of such remarkable knowledge in liberal studies.⁸⁴ Perhaps some of these women were in the generation of Leoba's teachers at Wimbourne. Theodore's own correspondence with contemporary abbesses might also suggest another avenue by which some of the Canterbury curriculum material could have reached the schools of double monasteries, such as Whitby and perhaps Wimbourne.⁸⁵

Lapidge prints a list of over two dozen texts taught at the Canterbury school, based on students' lecture notes preserved in the "Leiden Glossary."⁸⁶ The texts include hagiographical writing (the Evagrius Latin translation of Athanasius's *Life of St. Antony*, Sulpicius Severus's *Life of St. Martin* and *Dialogues of the Italian Fathers*, and an anonymous *Life of St. Eugenia*); historical writing (Jerome's *De viris illustribus*, Eusebius's *Ecclesiastical History* in Rufinus's translation, Gildas's *De excidio Britanniae*, and Orosius's *Historia adversum paganos*); monastic

⁸² Bede, *A History of the English Church and People*, trans. by Leo Sherley-Price (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), IV.2, 205; Theodore also apparently wrote about and gave instruction in medicine, Michael Lapidge, "The School of Theodore and Hadrian" *Anglo-Saxon England* 15 (1986), 50.

⁸³ Rudolf Ehwald, ed., *Aldhelmi Opera Omnia*. MGH Auctores Antiquissimi XV (Berlin, 1919), 476-7; Michael Lapidge and Michael Herren, *Aldhelm: The Prose Works* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1979), 152-3; Lapidge, "The School of Theodore and Hadrian," 52.

⁸⁴ *Poenitentiale Theodori*, praef., cited in Schneider, "Anglo-Saxon Women in the Religious Life," 144-145, "Multi quoque non solum uiri, sed etiam feminae de his ab eo inextinguibili feruore accensi sitim hanc ad sedandam ardenti cum desiderio frequentari hujus nostri nimirum saeculi singularis scientiae hominem festinabant."

⁸⁵ Lapidge, "The School of Theodore and Hadrian," 46; and Michael Lapidge, "The career of Aldhelm" *Anglo-Saxon England* 36 (2007), 26.

⁸⁶ Lapidge, "The School of Theodore and Hadrian," 54-55.

and pastoral treatises (Cassian's *De institutis coenobium*, *Regula S. Benedicti*, Gregory's *Regula pastoralis*); grammatical writing (Donatus's *Ars maior*, Phocas, the *Ars de nomine et verbo*, and the *Hermeneutmata pseudo-Dositheana*); scientific writing (*De ponderibus*, Eucherius's *Instructiones* on weights, and Isidore's *De natura rerum*); commentary and biblical apparatus (Augustine's *Sermones*, Cassiodorus's commentary on the psalms, Jerome's commentary on the Gospel of Matthew, Pseudo-Clement's *Recognitiones*, and glosses on Old and New Testament books); and church canons and papal decretals. Six of those seven broad subject areas are attested by Aldhelm in the prose *De virginitate* as subjects of study at Hildelith's school.

Lapidge has also reconstructed the libraries available to certain early English authors, including Aldhelm at Malmesbury in Wessex from c.680 and the anonymous author of the *Life of St. Gregory* at Whitby in Northumbria in the late seventh and early eighth centuries.⁸⁷ Although Whitby was distant from Wimbourne in Wessex, both foundations catered to the education of women religious. Lapidge writes that the anonymous author of the Whitby *Life of St. Gregory* had access to at least Gregory's *Dialogues*, *Homilia in Evangelia*, *Moralia in Iob*, and *Regula Pastoralis*; Jerome's *Epistola*; Sulipicius Severus's *Life of St. Martin*, and the *Liber pontificalis*.⁸⁸

Closer to Wimbourne, Boniface studied grammar, rhetoric, and scripture at Nursling in Wessex in the first quarter of the eighth century, before becoming the instructor there, according to Willibald's *Life of Boniface*.⁸⁹ At Nursling, only 28 miles from Wimbourne, Boniface gave lectures which were attended by men and women monastics from nearby monasteries. Those lectures may have covered the material included in Boniface's grammatical treatise. In his *Grammar*, Boniface makes use of Donatus' *Ars maior*, Priscian's *Institutio de nomine et*

⁸⁷ Michael Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library* (Oxford UP, 2006), 178-191.

⁸⁸ Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Library*, 37-40.

⁸⁹ Willibald, *Life of St. Boniface*, in eds. Thomas F. X. Noble and Thomas Head, *Soldiers of Christ: Saints and Saints Lives from Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Pennsylvania State UP, 1954), 25-63.

pronomine et verbo, Isidore's *Etymologiae I*, Asporius, Charisius, Phocas, Audax, Diomedes, Sergius, Vergilius Maro Grammaticus, Aldhelm, and perhaps the *Regulae* (pseudo-) *Augustini*, and an unidentified Insular source. The *Caesura versuum*, also likely written by Boniface, excerpts extensively from Isidore's *Etymologiae* and the widely-known Servius' *Centimetrum*.⁹⁰ Lapidge specifies Boniface's use of books VI and VIII of Isidore's *Etymologiae* and the *enigmata* and *Carmen de virginitate* of Aldhelm, and adds to the list of Boniface's sources: Vergil's *Aeneis*, *Bucolica* and *Georgica*; Sedulius's *Carmen Paschale*; Prudentius' *Psychomachia*; Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.⁹¹ These sources would then have been available for Boniface's lectures attended by Leoba's contemporaries.⁹²

English students would have been taught about Latin metrics after learning the alphabet, the parts of speech (Donatus, *Ars minor* and again in the *Ars Maior II*) as well as about letters and syllables (*Ars Maior I*). Still, it remains impossible to ascertain the exact course and method of literacy instruction, and curricula may have changed from one generation to the next as new treatises on metrics and grammar became available. For example, Aldhelm did not learn about quantitative hexameters until his adulthood when he studied at Canterbury.⁹³ He reports having had a certain exposure to metrical composition beforehand, but learned a new approach and gained a much deeper understanding of metrical composition at Canterbury. We might ask: for Leoba's contemporaries, how had metrical instruction changed since their teachers' generation

⁹⁰ Vivien Law, "The study of grammar," in *Carolingian Culture: emulation and innovation*, ed. Rosamond McKitterick, 88-110 (Cambridge UP, 1994), 66-67; according to Law, 62, Boniface's grammatical pedagogy diverges from the well-established Insular tradition of grammatical doctrine by depending on ancient sources for examples more than on the common Insular stock of examples.

⁹¹ Michael Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Library*, 37-40.

⁹² Schneider, "Anglo-Saxon Women in the Religious Life," 145, points out that Ecburh's recollection of Boniface's *magisterium* "by day and night" (noted in a letter to Boniface in the same collection containing Leoba's letter) suggests that Boniface also came to her community (wherever it may have been) as a visiting teacher.

⁹³ Ruff, "The Hidden Curriculum," 74.

learned from Theodore and Hadrian? Christine Fell has noted the heavy Aldhelmian influence on the writing of Boniface's English correspondents. Aldhelm's *Epistola ad Acircium* alongside Bede's *De arte metrica* and *De schematibus et tropis* were important expositions of Latin hexameter poetry in England by the time Leoba studied under Eadburh.

What Leoba's early-eighth century case study shows, along with the wide-ranging evidence for girls' and women's literacy across early medieval England and Francia, is that literacy was ordinary for girls and women in monastic life. The number of literate girls and women may have equaled or exceeded the number of literate boys and men, but the argument in the following chapters is not solely quantitative. This dissertation is about cultural expectations and the ways in which girls and women were recognized as integral participants in literate culture.

Method and Scope

Although the evidence for monastic women's participation in literary culture is extensive, direct evidence for girls' and women's writing is relatively scarce.⁹⁴ Evidence for schoolgirls' experiences learning literacy is even harder to come by. Early medieval women's literacy is underrepresented in the documentary record in comparison with their contributions to literate culture and material transactions; it is also underrepresented in comparison with contemporary men's literacy. Historians and literary scholars following the traces of early medieval women's

⁹⁴ The same is true for men's writing; authorship of a large portion of extant literature from the early middle ages is anonymous, and many manuscripts were written by unidentifiable scribes; that men could be authors is never challenged, however scholars of women's writing must defend the possibility of women's writing, as Alison Beach, "Listening for the Voices of Admont's Twelfth-Century Nuns," in *Voices in Dialogue: Reading Women in the Middle Ages*, eds. Linda Olson and Kathryn Kerby-Fulton (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 187, explains, "Scholars attempting to identify female authors...must shoulder a double burden of proof. First he or she must prove that a woman *could* have behaved or worked in ways that contradict long-held suppositions about women's intellectual activities."

writing can benefit from the methodologies developed by Black feminist historians, who have developed “usable hands-on tools” for working with the limitations (and epistemological violence) of traditional archives.⁹⁵ Marisa Fuentes explains the epistemological challenge of studying enslaved subjects in traditional archives: “How do we construct a coherent historical accounting out of that which defies coherence and representability?” Fuentes’s approach recovers the erased subjectivities of enslaved women in colonial Bridgetown, Barbados, by “productively mining archival silences and pausing at the corruptive nature of this material.”⁹⁶ In “A Note on Method” in *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*, Saidiya Hartman writes,

Every historian of the multitude, the dispossessed, the subaltern, and the enslaved is forced to grapple with the power and authority of the archive and the limits it sets on what can be known, whose perspective matters, and who is endowed with the gravity and authority of historical actor.⁹⁷

It is important to note that the “archive” of early medieval women’s writing does not encode or reproduce the kind of violence committed upon the enslaved and colonized people who are the subjects of studies by Marisa Fuentes, Saidiya Hartman, Tiya Miles, and Anjali Arondekar.⁹⁸

Some of the “silencing” of early medieval women in the archive is the result of early medieval policies and modes of preservation and reproduction, which favored records associated with men, some the result of later historical analyses.⁹⁹

⁹⁵ Tiya Miles, *All that she carried: the journey of Ashley’s sack, a Black family keepsake* (New York: Random House, 2021), 17.

⁹⁶ Marisa Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 1, 5.

⁹⁷ Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward lives, beautiful experiments: intimate histories of social upheaval* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2019), 7.

⁹⁸ Saidiya Hartman, “Venus in Two Acts” *Small Axe* 26, 12.2 (2008), 1-14; Anjali Arondekar, “Without a Trace: Sexuality and the Colonial Archive” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 14.1-2 (2005), 10-27; Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives*; Miles, *All that she carried*.

⁹⁹ Bodwaré, “Gender and the Archive”; Foot, *Veiled Women I*; and Felice Lifshitz, “Demonstrating Gun(t)za: women, manuscripts, and the question of historical ‘proof’,” in *Vom Nutzen des Schreibens: soziales Gedächtnis, Herrschaft und Besitz im Mittelalter*, eds. Walter Pohl and Paul Herold, 67-96 (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2002); Mary Garrison, “‘Send More Socks’: On Mentality and the Preservation Context of

Two methods discussed by Tiya Miles in the introduction to *All That She Carried* are particularly relevant to the project of uncovering early medieval girls' and women's experience in literate culture. Miles encourages historians to "seek out the actual material —the *things*" which were "touched, made, used, and carried."¹⁰⁰ Physical manuscripts remain a critical resource on real women's participation in literate culture. Manuscripts record layers of writers' and readers' interaction with texts in the forms of composition and arrangement, corrections, comments, reorganization of material, and damage. In chapter one, I use an Old English prayer written in a psalter manuscript produced by and for women, to investigate how readers interpreted a certain morphologically masculine grammatical construction in relation to social gender in monastic spirituality. In chapter three, I interpret visible scribal corrections in a manuscript copy of an eighth-century letter collection to help reassess the early reception of men's and women's writing in Latin. The second "usable tool" Miles describes is "dogged documentary collection and analysis" in the face of scarcity of evidence.¹⁰¹ Although I cannot claim to have gathered data so thoroughly or assiduously, the enormous potential of the few bits and pieces collected and analyzed in this dissertation argue for perseverance in collecting evidence of early medieval girls' and women's literacy.¹⁰²

As a project focused on girls and women, this dissertation is primarily in conversation with other studies on women. It aims to contribute to the ongoing question of what feminist

Letters," in *New approaches to medieval communication*, ed. Marco Mostert, 69-99 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1999).

¹⁰⁰ Miles, *All that she carried*, 19.

¹⁰¹ Miles, *All that she carried* 17.

¹⁰² Examples of such work include the studies of women's monasticism by Dagmar Schneider, "Women in the Religious Life," and Sarah Foot, *Veiled Women I and II*, which this dissertation relies upon.

medieval literary studies should look like.¹⁰³ It does so by shifting away from a narrative of absence and marginalization toward a narrative of abundance and diversity. Some feminist scholars have sought to recuperate early medieval women writers' place in literary history by articulating women's expected places at the margins and in the erasures of male-centered literary history, without challenging the underlying premise of male literary hegemony. Diane Watt's concept of "male overwriting" is an excellent example of an approach focused on erasure which does substantially advance the field's perception of the extent and impact of early medieval women's writing on the traditional (male) literary canon.¹⁰⁴ Watt discusses cases in which women's writing was appropriated by male authors, and the women's authorial status consequently subsumed by the male authors in literary history. One of Watt's examples is Rudolf of Fulda's "overwriting" of the first-hand accounts of Leoba by women from her community, in his *vita* of the saint.

Watt's fruitful concept expands the grounds of women's authorship even though it does not challenge the underlying assumption that literacy and authorship were predominantly male. As I will show in chapters 3 and 4, however, this approach reproduces the erasure of women in literary reception. Other scholarship focused on the erasure of women's writing has undermined

¹⁰³ Judith Bennett, *History Matters: Patriarchy and the Challenge of Feminism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006); Mary Dockray-Miller, "Old English Literature and Feminist Theory: A State of the Field", *Literature Compass* 5, no. 6 (2008): 1049-59; Elizabeth Robertson, "Feminism and Medieval Studies: Where have we been, where are we now, and where are we going? Or, what has happened to women in feminist studies of the middle ages?" in *Founding Feminisms in Medieval Studies: Essays in Honor of E. Jane Burns*, eds. Laine E. Doggett and Daniel O'Sullivan, 237-246 (Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2016); Helene Scheck and Christine Kozikowski, eds., *New readings on women and early medieval English literature and culture: cross-disciplinary studies in honour of Helen Damico* (Leeds: Arc Humanities Press, 2019); Samantha Katz Seal and Nicole Nolan Sidhu, "Feminist intersectionality: Centering the margins in 21st-century medieval studies," *postmedieval* 10.3 (2019), 272-278; M. W. Bychowski and Dorothy Kim, "Visions of Medieval Trans Feminism: An Introduction" *Medieval Feminist Forum* 55.1 (2019), 6-41.

¹⁰⁴ Watt, *Women, Writing and Religion*, 4, introduces "overwriting" as the book's framing concept.

the project of reclaiming women's writing. My analyses in this dissertation are often directly in contest with those of Clare Lees and Gillian Overing. Lees's and Overing's influential monograph, *Double Agents: Women and Clerical Culture in Anglo-Saxon England* (2001), investigates women in early English literary culture through "paradigms of absence."¹⁰⁵ The authors theorize "the twin disappearance of the oral and feminine trace" from the literary record.¹⁰⁶ Lees and Overing explore women's erasure as a mechanism by which early English male writers established literary authority, and as the self-sabotaging mechanism by which early English women attempted to participate in literary culture.

As *Double Agents* shows, the assumption that literacy was predominantly male leads to the determination that women's literacy was by definition unusual and/or masculinizing. Among other modes of disappearance, Lees and Overing argue that early medieval women's literate engagement constituted a performance of male subjectivity. An earlier essay collection edited by Patricia Labalme, *Beyond Their Sex: Learned Women of the European Past* (1980), illustrates the limitation of this view: the title "Beyond their sex" reinforces the very male literary hegemony the collection seeks to disrupt. More recently, the notion of women's self-erasure through literacy is taken up in Lisa Weston's scholarship on early English women's literary networks. Weston sees women's use of literacy within textual communities as the adoption of male identity.¹⁰⁷

My own approaches to gender and literacy find models in research by Stephanie Hollis, Elizabeth Tyler, and Felice Lifshitz. Focusing on groups of women in widely different spheres of early medieval literary culture, Hollis, Tyler, and Lifshitz investigate women's literary lives as

¹⁰⁵ Lees, Clare E. and Gillian Overing, *Double Agents: Women and Clerical Culture in Anglo-Saxon England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001).

¹⁰⁶ Lees and Overing, *Double Agents*, 40-45.

¹⁰⁷ Lisa M. Weston, "Conceiving the Word(s): Habits of Literacy among Earlier Anglo-Saxon Monastic Women," *Nuns' Literacies in Medieval Europe: The Hull Dialogue*, eds. Virginia Blanton, Veronica O'Mara, and Patricia Stoop, 149-167 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), and "Where Textual Bodies Meet."

sites of political and cultural expression in contact with patriarchal institution and culture, rather than as “exceptions that prove the rule” of male literary hegemony. Hollis’s indispensable study, *Anglo-Saxon Women and the Church: Sharing a Common Fate* (1992), examines English monastic women’s status before the Norman Conquest through clerical writings to and about women.¹⁰⁸ Hollis distinguishes between women’s status as participants in literary culture and their subordinate social status within patriarchal cultures. Her readings of the literary portraits of early English monastic women often parallel my own.

Tyler’s research on secular royal women’s education and queens’ Latin literary patronage in the tenth and eleventh centuries challenges the traditional narrative of women’s limited Latinity.¹⁰⁹ My project is indebted to Tyler’s demonstrations of the cultural currency of women’s education and literary production in pre-Conquest England. My project is similarly indebted to the work of Felice Lifshitz on eighth-century monastic women in Francia. Her historically localised, granular readings of texts composed and edited by women situate monastic women’s intellectual work in relation to diachronic networks of feminist text transmission and in relation to contemporary debates on women’s spiritual worth.¹¹⁰

The scope of this dissertation includes Latin and Old English writing from England and Francia, in the seventh to ninth centuries. I also analyze some Old English texts from tenth and eleventh-century manuscripts, namely, *Beowulf* and several Latin-Old English glossaries, and Aelfric of Eynsham’s tenth-century grammatical works. The literary cultures of England and

¹⁰⁸ Stephanie Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women and the Church: Sharing a Common Fate* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1992).

¹⁰⁹ Elizabeth Tyler, *England in Europe: English Royal Women and Literary Patronage, c.1000-c.1150* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017); “Fictions of Family: The Encomium Emmae Reginae and Virgil’s Aeneid” *Viator* 36 (2005), 149-179; “The Vita Ædwardi”; and “Crossing Conquests,” on women’s education in English royal nunneries, where elite lay women as well as religious women were educated.

¹¹⁰ Lifshitz, *Religious Women*, see especially xvii-xix, 193-206.

Francia were closely entwined in the early middle ages, through the movement of people and books, in monastic and secular cultures.¹¹¹ The project was originally conceived as a strictly early medieval English project. However, the sharing of teachers, texts, and ideas back and forth across the Channel makes a strict division between English and Frankish cultures of education impractical, and the paucity of evidence encourages making use of what can be learned from across the entire region of close culture exchange.

My interest is in the unnamed and “unexceptional” students, teachers, and writers whose gendered experiences in literate culture will only be recovered through the patient accumulation over time of bits and pieces of anonymous evidence and through comparison with the small handful of women writers and scribes whose names we know. Even these named women, who are “exceptional” in that their names have evaded loss through unusual fame or chance, are unexceptional (at least among monastic women) in being literate and pursuing intellectual lives. Likewise, celebrated women thinkers like Hildegard of Bingen could be “exceptional” among men and women in their thought, but “unexceptional” in their ability to write. In chapters three and four I look closely at the writing of two named women, Leoba of Tauberbischofsheim and Hugeburc of Heidenheim. Both were West Saxon monastic women working abroad in Francia, several decades apart. Their writings offer a window into the lived experiences of women writers, as they negotiated mixed-gender literary cultures and changing institutional pressures on monastic women.

¹¹¹ Wilhelm Levison, *England and the Continent in the Eighth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1946); Patrick Wormald, Donald Bullough, and Roger Collins, eds., *Ideal and reality in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon society: studies presented to J. M. Wallace-Hadrill* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983); Janet L. Nelson, “England and the continent in the ninth century: I, ends and beginnings,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 12 (2002), 1-21; and Tyler, *England in Europe*.

In chapter four, I address the gendered reception of several named women writers from the tenth century and later—from Hrotsvit of Gandersheim to Margery Kempe—in order to demonstrate how scholars have interpreted writing by all medieval women as distinct from mainstream medieval literary history on account of the women’s perceived “female” gender, and therefore without any historical specificity regarding educational practices or social gender construction. I do not directly analyze the writing by these women in my discussion of women’s literary self-portraits as authors, however. By the tenth century, following the Carolingian reforms, monastic culture was more thoroughly gender-segregated, and Hrotsvit and Hildegard wrote from within all-female communities. I choose not to include writing from all-female communities because it is too easy to write it off as “women’s literary history,” falsely presented as something separate from “literary history.” Instead, I have chosen to investigate girls’ and women’s education and literary lives where they are fully enmeshed with the (male) people, places, and texts which have traditionally been taken to represent normative educational and literary history.¹¹² My aim is to contribute to an inclusive history of education and literary culture which recognizes girls’ and women’s integral roles. Accounting for girls’ and women’s learning *within* normative histories should allow historians and literary scholars to recognize the diversity of early medieval literary practices and early medieval gender identities.

The organizing principle for this dissertation is Sandra Harding’s contention that social gender oppression occurs at three levels: the structural, the symbolic, and the individual.¹¹³ To approach an understanding of the significance of gender in early medieval literary culture, I examine how gender operates at these three levels. Chapter one primarily examines the structural

¹¹² It is important to note, however, that women’s literary collaboration with men did not end with the tightening of women’s segregation and claustration, as Alison Beach’s research on twelfth-century Frankish manuscript culture shows, Beach, “Listening for the Voices of Admont’s Twelfth-Century Nuns.”

¹¹³ Sandra G. Harding, *The science question in feminism* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1986), 16-17.

level of literary culture, namely, grammatical doctrine and literacy pedagogies. Chapter two explores gender in symbolic language about teaching and intellectual authority. Chapters three and four examine gender in the writing and reception of two eighth-century women writers.

Outline of Chapters

Beginning with the grammar classroom in chapter one, “Weeping for David: Gender In and Beyond the Language Classroom,” I ask how students learned to use and interpret grammatical gender through the language of the psalms. I situate the psalms in relation to the language pedagogy of speech-in-character rhetorical composition exercises. Just as the young St. Augustine famously wept along with Vergil’s Dido in his rhetoric training school days, medieval schoolgirls learned the language of emotional expression through David’s anguish in the psalms. The psalms were interpreted as carrying the voices of many different speakers at once—the voices of David, Christ, Mother Church, and the contemporary Christian supplicant, whether male or female, among others. Asking how the psalms’ multivocality and unfixed speaker gender shaped medieval students’ use of grammatical gender, this chapter grounds my investigation in the following chapters of writers’ senses of literary and spiritual authority as gendered, and their performances of authorship in relation to social gender identities. I show that instances of grammatical gender transgression in Old English and Latin writing have their roots in the gender diversity of classroom literature.

Chapter two, “Teaching as Mothering,” explores the symbolic representation of educational authority as female and maternal in Latin and Old English literary and educational cultures. Latin Lady Philosophy and her Old English counterparts (masculine Wisdom and feminine Reason), Mother Church, and the feminized Liberal Arts in Martianus Capella’s *Marriage of Mercury and Philology* metaphorically locate ideals of sacred knowledge and

intellectual authority in the reproductive female body. Tracing metaphors of teaching as mothering and breastfeeding, this chapter reassesses the connection between idealized teacher figures and real women in education.

Chapters three and four investigate gender in literary culture at the individual level, before and after the Carolingian reforms beginning in the late eighth century. The two chapters explore the gendered experience of two women writers in mixed-gender literary networks in the eighth century. My approach follows Judith Bennet's recommendation for "the complementary study of *both* gender constructions *and* women's experiences" to access "the radical potential of women's history."¹¹⁴ Resituating Leoba's writing within her historical context of mixed-gender education and monastic intellectual life, chapter three contrasts Leoba's self-presentation as a "monastic" author with present-day scholars' reception of Leoba as a "female" author. Early Christianity made space for a third gender, which was characterized by asceticism and sexual chastity. This third gender, sometimes identified with the more restrictive notion of "virginity" in previous scholarship, was available until the late eighth century to all early medieval Christian men and women professors of chastity, including widowed and divorced individuals. In chapter four, I trace the re-imposition of "female" gender identity on monastic women during the Carolingian reforms. Writing a few decades after Leoba, Hugeburc of Heidenheim illustrates the new pressures on monastic literary culture and gender identities. Hugeburc's writing reflects monastic women's continued participation in education and intellectual production alongside men, even as women's social gender and material independence were constricted.

Throughout this dissertation, I use the term "female" to refer specifically to the subordinate social gender identity assigned to girls and women in binary social gender schemes.

¹¹⁴ Bennett, *History Matters*, 25, echoing Joan W. Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York, Columbia UP, 2018).

Because one claim of this dissertation is that social gender was not a fixed, binary scheme throughout the early middle ages, I use the term “woman” or “girls and women” when I deliberately do not identify the women’s social gender identity, which may have been either “female” (in the binary scheme) or “chaste” (in the monastic three-gender scheme) depending on the particular circumstances.

Chapter One

“Weeping for David”: Gender in and beyond the Language Classroom

Grendles modor, ides aglæcwif yrmþe gemunde, se þe wætereges an wunian scolde.

Grendel’s mother, woman warrior, remembered desolation, he who had to dwell in fearful waters.

Anon., *Beowulf*, 1258b-1260

Tu es enim dux uitae, tu magistra uirtutis, tu es qui tamquam regula in directum ducis, tu es qui a recto numquam discedis, tu es qui a ueritate numquam auerteris.

For you are the guide of life, you, teacher of virtue, you are he who like a ruling-stick leads onto the right path, you are he who never departs from correctness, you are he who never turns from the truth.

Isidore of Seville, *Synonyma*, II.102

This chapter reassesses the role of gender in defining the Christian literate subject in early medieval literary culture. It undertakes this reassessment by investigating the grounds of literary culture, namely, grammar pedagogy and grammatical usage. I explore the interpretation of grammatical gender in the psalms, the primary literacy training text, as an illuminating point of contact between literacy formation and students’ gendered subject formation. I argue that reexamining grammar pedagogy in light of girls’ and women’s presence in the language classroom helps us recover the diversity and creativity of early medieval Latin and Old English grammatical usage and reveals the gender-inclusiveness of early medieval literate culture.

In the two excerpts beginning this section, grammatical gender discord appears within a single interpretive level. In single sentences, feminine antecedents (*modor* and *magistra...tu*) take masculine relative pronouns.¹¹⁵ The properly feminine forms would be “seo þe” (she who)

¹¹⁵ On its own, the personal pronoun *tu* (the grammatical antecedent of *qui* in the *Synonyma* excerpt) is gender-common, that is, it can agree with words of masculine, feminine, or neuter grammatical gender; here the “tu” clearly anticipates feminine-gender accord, as the “tu” is the vocative pronoun referring to grammatically feminine *Ratio* (Reason) and modified in the preceding clause by feminine “magistra” (and, earlier, by masc./fem. gender-common “dux”).

in Old English, and “tu es quae” (you are she who) in Latin. These examples of cross-gender pronomial accord invite us to ask how schoolgirls’ and schoolboys’ encounters with gender in the language classroom shaped writers’ grammatical usage in literary texts beyond the classroom.

Too often, literate persons and literate culture have been assumed to have been male by default. Scholars’ willful amnesia about the widespread and utterly ordinary literary activities of schoolgirls and women teachers and writers in the early middle ages has narrowed our view of the richness and diversity of early medieval Latinity and Old English literary culture. This diminished view of early medieval literary history does not admit the complexity necessary for exploring how girls and women negotiated their social subordination alongside Christian ideals of fraternity and social unification in Christ in their reading, their writing, and their intellectual engagement with Christian texts. By re-examining language pedagogy and grammatical doctrine, in light of schoolgirls and women teachers in the classroom, this chapter seeks to better understand girls’ and women’s place in the cultural horizons represented in early medieval literary culture.

In this dissertation, the terms “sex” and “social gender” as they pertain to human identity are interchangeable; as far as I can tell, patristic authors and grammarians saw no material difference between “sex” (as a binary male/female designation assigned at birth) and “gender” (as a binary male/female performance of sex according to cultural norms). For them, a person of female sex would be assumed to be of (what we today call) female gender, while a person of male sex would be of (what we today call) male gender. Like Alicia Spencer-Hall and Blake Gutt, editors of *Trans and Genderqueer Subjects in Medieval Hagiography*, I understand sex to be contingent on gender, and not the other way around. Sex is therefore socially constructed.

While I disagree with the patristic authors and Latin grammarians on whether sex and (what we call) gender are determined socially or biologically, we agree that sex and gender are co-determined and are therefore not materially different.¹¹⁶ The Latin grammarians assume binary (male/female) cis-gender in human subjects, and do not discuss transgender identities, though trans and nonbinary social gender identities were recognized within certain social and political spheres in the middle ages.¹¹⁷ I do not discuss transgender identity in this dissertation, but chapter three treats the flowering of a nonbinary gender identity for women (and men) monastics within their spiritual lives in the early middle ages, before the Carolingian reform re-imposed binary social gender within monastic culture.

Christian literacy training taught students to recognize an unfixed, fluid relationship between grammatical gender and social gender, including students' own gender identities, and the genders of authorial personas and speaking subjects in texts. The multiple gendered identities layered in schooltexts helped to make the relationship between grammatical and social gender dynamic for students learning Latin and formal English literacy with those texts. Through such didactic genres as psalms, colloquies, and rhetorical composition exercises, students practiced

¹¹⁶ This dissertation discusses both grammatical gender (a feature of linguistic accident) and what I call "social gender," that is, the gender or sex identity characteristic of individual humans in early medieval and most present day societies; Alicia Spencer-Hall and Blake Gutt, eds., *Trans and Genderqueer Subjects in Medieval Hagiography* (Amsterdam UP, 2021), write that [social] gender is a "cultural imposition" which is "deeply important to many people's sense of their own identity, yet incredibly difficult to define" (296), and that "Gender precedes and establishes sex, only to posit itself as an effect of sex" (312); the relationships between "sex," social gender, and grammatical gender are discussed in greater detail in Part II of this chapter.

¹¹⁷ On medieval nonbinary gender identities (e.g. eunuchs in the Byzantine court, and Christian ascetics), see Leah DeVun, *The Shape of Sex: Nonbinary gender from Genesis to the Renaissance* (New York: Columbia UP, 2021), and Roland Betancourt, *Byzantine intersectionality: sexuality, gender, and race in the Middle Ages* (Princeton UP, 2020); on transgender identities in ancient and medieval cultures, see Greta LaFleur, Masha Raskolnikov, and Anna Kłosowska, eds., *Trans Historical: Gender Plurality Before the Modern* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2021), Spencer-Hall and Gutt, eds., *Trans and Genderqueer Subjects*; and Domitilla Campanile, Filippo Carla-Uhink, and Margherita Facella, eds., *Transantiquity: cross-dressing and transgender dynamics in the ancient world* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017).

identifying with and performing same and different gender identities. The earliest extant English language grammar was written in the tenth century; until that time, early English students learned grammar through Latin language treatises.¹¹⁸ Fortunately, the bilingual nature of early English educational practice and literary culture allows for some comparative study.

This chapter is not expressly concerned with recovering the social gender identity of anonymous Latin and Old English authors; instead, it asks how the performance and assimilation of different gendered voices through literacy training shaped the possibilities for all literate persons to use and interpret grammatical gender in ways which dignified their lived experiences as Christian women and men. The first part of this chapter, “Forming the Literate Christian Subject,” focuses on literacy pedagogy. It explores how the use of psalms as a schooltext in formal language education encouraged a more flexible understanding of the relationship between grammatical gender and social gender than has been understood recently. Though the psalms are widely recognized as the foundational early medieval literacy text, the pedagogical implications of the psalms’ in the literacy curriculum has not been explored. I contribute to that project by examining the psalms in relation to other language learning genres such as colloquies and speeches-in-character, both of which have received more pedagogical study than the psalms.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ Joyce Hill, “Latin Learning in Anglo-Saxon England: Traditions, Texts, and Techniques,” in *Learning and Literacy in Medieval England and Abroad*, ed. Sarah Rees Jones, 7-29 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003); Donald Bullough, “The Educational Tradition in England from Alfred to Aelfric: Teaching utriusque linguae” *Settimane di Studio del Centro Italiano di Studi sull’Alto Medioevo* 19 (1972), 46-478; Mechthild Gretsch, *The Intellectual Foundations of the Benedictine Reform* (Cambridge UP, 1999); Helmut Gneuss, “The origin of standard Old English and Aethelwold’s school at Winchester” *Anglo-Saxon England* 47 (2008), 63-83.

¹¹⁹ Scott D. Gwara, *Latin colloquies from pre-conquest Britain edited from Oxford, St. John’s College, MS. 154 and from Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Bodley 865* (Toronto: PIMS, 1996); Gwara, *Anglo-Saxon Conversations*; Irina Dumitrescu, “The Grammar of Pain in Ælfric Bata’s Colloquies” *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 45:3 (2009), 239-253; Irina Dumitrescu, “Violence, Performance and Pedagogy in Ælfric Bata’s Colloquies” *Exemplaria* 23.1 (2011), 67-91; Elizabeth P. Archibald, “Whose Line is it Anyway? Dialogue with Donatus in Late Antiquity and Early Medieval Schools” *The Journal of Medieval Latin* 23 (2013), 185-199; E. Ann. Matter, “Alcuin’s Question-and-Answer Texts” *Rivista di Storia Della Filosofia* 45.4

Building on that scholarship, I investigate students' grammatical and literary formation through the psalms.

The second part of this chapter turns to the interpretation of grammatical gender in literary texts beyond the classroom. Readers' and writers' understanding of language and gender gained through grammatical training infused all of literate culture in the early middle ages. Isidore of Seville writes that grammar is the "origo et fundamentum liberalium litterarum" (the source and grounds of all literature).¹²⁰ By homing in on several ambiguous uses of noun and pronoun gender (such as the examples from *Beowulf* and the *Synonyma* above), I reassess early medieval interpretations of grammatical gender doctrine in light of female literary participation. My re-readings point toward the linguistic and ideological diversity characterizing early medieval Latinity and Old English literary practice.

Part I: Forming the Literate Christian Subject

Nam enim tirones incohant a genesi, non ab apostolo, non inter initia auctoritas euangelica sancta pulsatur; sed, licet psalterium quartus codex sit auctoritatis diuinae, primum tamen tirones incohantes scripturas sanctas, inde legendi faciunt decenter initium.

A further peculiarity of the psalter is that it is the entry into the divine law. Novices do not begin with Genesis or St Paul; initially we do not knock on the door of the sacred authority of the gospel. Though the psalter is the fourth book authorized by God, it is fittingly the first with which novices begin when embarking on the holy Scriptures.¹²¹

(1990), 645-656; Marjorie Curry Woods, "Rape and the Pedagogical Rhetoric of Sexual Violence," in *Criticism and Dissent in the Middle Ages*, ed. Rita Copeland, 56-86 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Carol Dana Lanham, "Freshman composition in the Early Middle Ages: Epistolography and Rhetoric Before the *Ars Dictaminis*" *Viator* 23.1 (1992), 115-134.

¹²⁰ Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae siue originum libri XX*, I.5.I, edited by W. M. Lindsay (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1911).

¹²¹ Cassiodorus, *Expositio psalmorum*, ed. M. Adriaen. CCSL 97-98 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1958), praefatio cap. 16, l.39; trans. by P. G. Walsh in Cassiodorus, *Explanation of the Psalms 1-50* (New York: Paulist Press, 1991), 41.

In early medieval England and Francia, the psalms were the foundational Latin learning text for male and female students, both in monastic and (at least some) lay educational settings.¹²² In his widely read commentary on the psalms, Cassiodorus calls the psalms an “enkuklios paideia” (general course of study) and claims that the book of psalms alone contains sufficient material for a liberal arts education: “de grammatica et de etymologiis, de schematibus, de arte rhetorica, de topicis, de arte dialectica, de definitionibus, de musica, de geometria, de astronomia et de propriis locutionibus legis diuinae, seriem refertam esse monstrauius” (We have shown that the series [of psalms] is crammed with [points of] grammar, etymologies, figures, rhetoric, topics, dialectic, definitions, music, geometry, astronomy, and expressions peculiar to divine Scripture).¹²³ Describing the literacy pedagogy of medieval Christian classrooms broadly, historian Henri Marrou writes,

The child is put directly into contact with a text, the text ... of holy scripture: the teacher takes a tablet and copies the text on it that will serve as the subject of the lesson: most often starting with the text of a psalm; for mastering the psalter, the foundation of the Office, is the primary objective of education. The child learns this text by heart as the child speaks it.¹²⁴

Marrou explains that medieval Christian pedagogy was based on reading texts, specifically scriptural texts, and especially the psalms. This was a different method from the analytical,

¹²² Toswell, *The Anglo-Saxon Psalter*; Rosamond McKitterick, ed., *The Uses of Literacy in Early Medieval Europe* (Cambridge UP, 2009); McKitterick, *The Carolingians and the Written Word*; Patrick Wormald and Janet Nelson, eds., *Lay Intellectuals in the Carolingian World* (Cambridge UP, 2007).

¹²³ Cassiodorus, *Expositio psalorum*, ps. 150, l.148; trans. Walsh, *Explanation*, 15; Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library*, 296 (App. E), identifies citations of the *Expositio* by well-known writers in England including Theodore and Hadrian (5 citations), Bede (90), Alcuin (11), Asser (8), Lantfred (19), Abbo (16), and Byrhtferth (32).

¹²⁴ Marrou, *Histoire de l'éducation*, 445-446: “l'enfant est mis directement aux prises avec un texte, le Texte...sacré. Le maître prend une tablette et y copie le texte qui va servir de thème à la leçon: le plus souvent pour commencer celui d'un Psaume; car maîtriser le psautier, base de l'office, est le premier objectif de l'enseignement. Ce texte, l'enfant l'apprend par coeur en même temps qu'il le dit.”

building-blocks approach of ancient schools. Marrou identifies learning to read the psalms as both the method and primary aim of medieval elementary literacy education. Similarly, Pierre Riché writes that in Merovingian France, the psalms were used as the primary literacy learning text in all educational environments: learning literacy and learning the psalms went hand in hand. According to Riché, copying, listening, and memorizing the psalms by singing were students' ways into learning the rules of grammar, not the other way around.¹²⁵

An episode in the Merovingian *Life of St. Rusticula* (abbess of Arles c.575-632) offers a glimpse into the way early monastic students learned the psalms. As a five year-old child in the monastery, Rusticula reportedly napped through the entire Office, while the rest of the children were reciting their psalms, and the woman on whose knee Rusticula napped spoke the psalms into Rusticula's ear. When she woke up, Rusticula was able to reproduce each psalm that had been sung, "as if she had read it," even though she had been asleep the whole time.¹²⁶ The phrase "tamquam si eum legisset" (as if she had read it) tells us that reading from material texts, and not only repeating words heard aurally, was an important part of learning the psalms, and that the psalms were part of learning visual literacy. A set of early medieval wax tablets found preserved in an Irish bog, that likely belonged to a student, contains parts of Psalms 30-32 copied out. The tablets also show that psalms were learned not only through oral/aural repetition in daily and weekly prayer, but in formal language learning settings.¹²⁷

¹²⁵ Pierre Riché, "Le Psautier: Livre de lecture élémentaire," in *Études mérovingiennes. Actes des Journées de Poitiers*, 253-256 (Paris: A. et J. Picard, 1953), 256.

¹²⁶ *Vita Rusticula sive Marciae abb. Areltanesis*, edited by Bruno Krusch, in *Passiones vitaeque sanctorum aevi merovingici*. Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum 4, 339-351, (Hannover and Leipzig, 1902), 342.

¹²⁷ Martin McNamara and Maurice Sheehy, "Psalter text and Psalter study in the early Irish Church (A.D. 600-1200)," in *The Psalms in the early Irish Church*, ed. Martin McNamara, 19-142 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), notes the tablets contain the earliest extant example of Latin writing from Ireland; see also Michelle Brown, "The role of the wax tablet in medieval literacy: a reconsideration in light of a recent find from York" *The British Library Journal* 20.1 (1994), 1-16.

The psalms fulfilled a twin purpose in monastic education. Jane Toswell describes the role of the psalms in monastic childrens' education: "Oblates learned the psalter for two reasons: it taught the basic rules and methods of devotion to God, and also provided the rudiments of Latin grammar and syntax."¹²⁸ Toswell explains that the prevalence of the psalms in monastic life made the psalms "almost a physical part of the monastic individual, ready to leap to mind and mouth, wholly comprehended and internalized."¹²⁹ More than fifty surviving psalters and psalter fragments represent the "single largest set of extant manuscripts" from pre-Conquest England.

¹³⁰ The psalms were important across early English society, not only in monasteries.

Commissioned psalter manuscripts and anecdotal evidence demonstrate the importance of psalms for secular literacy, as well.¹³¹ In the ninth century in Wessex, King Alfred's own literacy training began with a book of English poems, followed by the daily Office and select psalms.

Alfred's son Edward and daughter Ælfthryth studied the psalms along with English poems and other English and Latin books.¹³² Old English glosses on the earliest surviving Latin psalters from England show that the psalms were read and used in both English and Latin.¹³³ In the late

¹²⁸ Toswell, *The Anglo-Saxon Psalter*, 5.

¹²⁹ Toswell, *The Anglo-Saxon Psalter*, 4.

¹³⁰ Toswell, *The Anglo-Saxon Psalter*, 20.

¹³¹ Patrick O'Neill, *Old English Psalms* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2016).

¹³² William H. Stevenson, ed. and trans., *Asser's Life of King Alfred, together with the Annals of Saint Neots*. Rev. edn. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959), 57-59. Asser does not specify in which language Alfred learned the Office and psalms; the comment in the preface to the *Old English Pastoral Care*, ed. and trans. in Elaine M. Treharne, *Old and Middle English c.890-1400*, 2nd edn. (Malden: Blackwell, 2010), 10-11, that "there were very few this side of the Humber who could understand their services in English" suggests that the liturgy was available in Latin and English at the time, and must imply that few people could *read* the English liturgy, because certainly English speakers would have understood the English liturgy aurally.

¹³³ Brown, "The Psalms as the Foundations", 1-23, understands vernacular glosses on the psalms as an indication that students learned the meaning of the psalms in Latin through English glosses; If that were the case, then monastic students would have learned language and emotional expression simultaneously in English and Latin, and would therefore have learned to express the voices and subject positions represented in the psalms in both languages; see also Alexander Rumble, "Cues and clues: palaeographical aspects of Anglo-Saxon scholarship," in *Form and*

ninth century, continuous Old English prose translations (or “paraphrases”) of the psalms were compiled, presumably in response to King Alfred’s proposed curriculum of English translations of Christian Latin texts.¹³⁴ Metrical paraphrases of all 150 psalms were also made, although only fragments of the metrical psalms 1-50 survive.¹³⁵

In monastic culture, the psalms were central to literate practice in women’s as well as men’s communities. The earliest extant mention of psalmody from England depicts monastic women and men singing together in celebration of the foundation of a new church:

Therefore let us all rejoicing celebrate this present day and let us chant hymns in turn to Christ the Lord! The months revolve with their successive feast-days, and cycles of years shall pass with the feasts in fixed order: (on this day each year) may antiphons strike the ear with their pleasing harmonies and the singing of psalms reverberate from twin choirs; may the trained voice of the precentor resound repeatedly and shake the summit of heaven with its sonorous chant! Brothers, let us praise God in harmonious voice, and let the throng of nuns also burst forth in continual psalmody! On these feast-days let us all chant hymns and psalms and appropriate responds beneath the roof of the church, intoning the melodies with the continuous accompaniment of the psaltery; and let us strive to turn the lyre with its ten strings—just as the psalmist urges us to “praise (the Lord) with ten strings”. ... Let each one of us adorn the new church with his singing, and let each lector—whether male or female—read the lessons from Holy Scripture.¹³⁶

The poem shows that psalmody was practiced jointly in mixed-gender monasteries in early medieval England. Even as monastic life became more gender-segregated in the eighth and ninth centuries, psalmody (and therefore literacy) remained central to religious life in women’s

content of instruction in Anglo-Saxon England, eds. Patrizia Lendinara, Loredana Lazzari, and Maria Amalia D’Aronco, 29-42 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007).

¹³⁴ On Alfred’s translation program, see Nicole Guenther Discenza, *The King’s English* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2005); the translated texts include psalms 1-50, Gregory I’s *Pastoral Care* and *Dialogues of the Italian Fathers*, Boethius’s *Consolation of Philosophy*, Augustine’s *Soliloquies*, Orosius’s *Histories against the Pagans*, Bede’s *Ecclesiastical History*, and excerpts from the Vulgate Exodus.

¹³⁵ O’Neill, *Old English Psalms*, ix; metrical fragments ed. and trans. in Christopher A. Jones, *Old English Shorter Poems, Vol. I: Religious and Didactic* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2012).

¹³⁶ *Aldhelm: The Poetic Works*, trans. Michael Lapidge and James L. Rosier (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer: 1985), 47-49.

monastic communities.¹³⁷ Until the end of the eighth century, when the Eucharist overtook the psalms' status as the most important part of the liturgy, women's communities were understood to have had more "prayer power" than men's, because of the greater emphasis apparently placed on psalmody in women's communities than in men's communities.¹³⁸ While monastic women were required to "study reading and singing,"¹³⁹ there was no requirement by the reforming councils for male monastics to be literate, unless they were ordained as priests or bishops: all priests (*sacerdotes*) were required to "read and understand" the capitula of the Council of Mainz (something naturally impossible to do without literacy training), and the second Council of Nicaea had required that all bishops know the full psalter.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁷ For instance, the Council of Mainz (847) required universal literacy education and psalmody among monastic women: "Sanctimoniales vero in monasterio constitutae habeant studium in legendo et in cantando, in psallimorum celebratione sive oratione. Et horas canonicas...pariter celebrent" (Religious women living in a monastery must study reading and singing, the celebration of the psalms and prayer. And equally they must celebrate the canonical hours), MGH Capit. 2, 180; see chapters two and four for further discussion of women's education during Carolingian reforms.

¹³⁸ Muschiol, "Men, women, and liturgical practice," 209; cf. Anne-Marie Helvétius, "L'organisation des monastères féminins à l'époque mérovingienne," in *Female vita religiosa between Late Antiquity and The High Middle Ages: Structures, developments and spatial contexts*, eds. Gert Melville and Anne Müller, 151-172 (Berlin-Münster: LIT Verlag, 2011), 168: "Une attention particulière mérite d'être portée à la prière d'intercession pour les vivants et les morts, qui apparaît comme l'une des spécialités du monachisme féminin des origines. À l'époque pré-carolingienne, la prière des moniales passait pour plus efficace que celle des hommes en raison de la pureté angélique des vierges...La lente évolution qui conduisit le clergé à imposer la messe comme le moyen d'intercession par excellence, au détriment du chant de louange des moniales, me semble aller de pair avec les efforts réalisés pour 'régulariser' la vie des moniales au moins depuis Césaire"; see also Muschiol, *Famula Dei: Zur Liturgie in merowingischen Frauenklöstern* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1994).

¹³⁹ "Sanctimoniales vero in monasterio constitutae habeant studium in legendo et in cantando, in psallimorum celebratione sive oratione. Et horas canonicas...pariter celebrent" (Religious women living in a monastery must study reading and singing, the celebration of the psalms and prayer. And equally they must celebrate the canonical hours), MGH Capit. 2, 180.

¹⁴⁰ MGH Capit. 2, 176; *The Seven Ecumenical Councils of the Undivided Church*, trans. H. R. Percival, in *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 2nd Series, ed. P. Schaff and H. Wace, repr. (Grand Rapids MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1955), 556.

Voce mea clamavi: Speaking the Psalms

Learning to use written language through the medium of the psalms shaped students' understanding of the social meaning of grammatical forms. Because many of the psalms are spoken from a first-person singular perspective, students gained familiarity with written language by practicing the expression of individual subjectivity—an "I".¹⁴¹ This is something the psalms share to a certain extent with colloquies and dramatic dialogues, such as Alcuin's eighth-century treatises on grammar, rhetoric, and dialectic. "Dialogic" schooltexts mimic and enable a question-and-answer approach to classroom instruction.¹⁴² In some texts, the speaking roles are identified by name. For example, Charlemagne and Albinus are identified as the two speakers in Alcuin's treatises on dialectic and rhetoric. In others, the unnamed speakers are identified by their role in the educational exchange: student and teacher; questioner and respondent. In many manuscripts, unnamed speaker roles are abbreviated with "I" and "R" for *interrogatio* (question) and *responsio* (answer), or with "M" and "D", for teacher and student. The M and D can be more difficult to interpret, since M could stand for "student" in Greek (*mathētēs*) or "teacher" in Latin (*magister*); likewise the D could stand for "student" in Latin (*discipulus*) or "teacher" in Greek (*didaskalos*).¹⁴³

As abbreviations lacking gender-inflection, the M and D designations do not mark speaker role gender. Of course, speaker role gender would be no guarantee of the genders of the

¹⁴¹ O'Neill, *The Old English Psalms*, xix-xx, points out that the translator of the Old English metrical psalms emphasizes the first-person perspective by changing many verbs in third person or in second person plural into first and second person singular.

¹⁴² On question-and-answer dialogues, see Lloyd William Daly and Walther Suchier, *Altercatio Hadriani Augusti et Epicteti Philosophi* (Urbana: The University of Illinois Press, 1939), 11-19; Matter, "Alcuin's Question-and-Answer Texts"; Archibald, "Whose line is it anyway?"; and Rumble, "Cues and Clues"; Dumitrescu, *The experience of education*, 4-5, summarizes the importance of literary dialogue in the early English educational tradition.

¹⁴³ Archibald, "Whose line is it anyway?"

text's users, just as the designated speaker's occupation (student or teacher) or age might not match the reader's. Students using educational dialogue texts may have performed either role, or both. Alcuin's *Ars grammatica* dramatizes one of the student speakers (named Saxo) who steps in to act as the teacher figure when the *magister* is absent, and answers the questions by a younger student (named Franco). Following Saxo's example, users of the texts could take on both questioner and answerer roles to learn the content of the lesson and to practice formulating questions and organizing instructional material.

The psalms lack the responses of an interlocutor, but as prayers, the psalms also represent communicative address, spoken by an "I" to a "you". In the psalms as schooltext, when the student performs the psalmist's voice, the student practices forming first-person discourse and expressing the self in prayer. For instance, in Psalm 3, verses 4-6, the psalmist (and student) cries,

Tu autem Domine susceptor meus es gloria mea et exaltans caput meum; voce mea ad Dominum clamavi et exaudivit me de monte sancto suo; ego dormivi, et soporatus sum exsurrexi quia Dominus suscipiet me.¹⁴⁴

But you Lord are my protector, my glory, and the one lifting up my head; with my voice I have cried to the Lord and he has heard me from his holy mountain. I have slept and been asleep, I have risen up, because the Lord will protect me.

Pronouncing these verses, a literacy student learns their vocabulary, grammar, and syntax in the context of an emotive expression of self: the self ("meus," "mea," "meum") is in relation to God (vocative addressee and nominative subject of "susceptor es...exaltans"); the self ("ego") cries out and sleeps; the self knows safety and its cause ("quia Dominus..."). Memorizing the psalms gives students access to a wealth of examples and material for describing and responding to

¹⁴⁴ *Biblia sacra: iuxta Vulgatam versionem*, 5 edn., Robert Weber and Roger Gryson (Stuttgart: Württembergische Bibelanstalt, 1994).

different experiences. In that way, the psalms help form an individual's subjectivity.¹⁴⁵ An important part of subject formation involves the identification and expression of gender. During the middle ages, authorship of the psalms was attributed to King David. In the moment of utterance, then, the literacy student practices expressing their own gendered subjectivity through the language of David's male "I".

Grammatically, the first person voice is not gendered, or rather it is not gender-exclusive. According to the Latin grammarians, *ego* is common of three genders (as is *tu*). That is, *ego* can refer to grammatically masculine, feminine, or neuter subjects. The "I" of the psalms, therefore, is a convenient vehicle for cross-gender and multi-gender performance. The psalms' "I" can simultaneously carry the male subject perspective of David as psalmist and the male or female subject position of the contemporary supplicant. Exegetical traditions attributed the voice of the psalms to different male and female subjects—from David and Christ to Mother Church and the contemporary Christian supplicant, whether male or female. The gender-commonality of *ego* and much connected first-person discourse means that male and female supplicants' own gendered subject perspectives were grammatically accommodated by the language of the psalms. In the few instances where the language of the psalms is exclusively marked as grammatically masculine, however, male and female students practiced voicing a masculine "I." As I demonstrate below, such same- and cross-gender performance taught students to recognize a flexible and performative, rather than stable and "natural," relationship between personal gender in writing and personal gender in social experience.

The coming together of the student's "I" and the other speaking subjects' "I"s contained in the psalms (such as David's or Mother Church's) was an important exegetical tenet expressed

¹⁴⁵Stephanie Clark, *Compelling God: Theories of Prayer in Anglo-Saxon England* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018), 7, writes that the supplicant "reinterprets" the events of their own life through "the narrative of the Psalms and other prayers."

by Athanasius of Alexandria in the third century. In the letter to Marcellinus, Athanasius celebrates the psalms' ability to model emotional expression, teaching the user how to convey in language any emotion arising from any circumstance. Athanasius urges that the psalms must be uttered without embellishment, so that the saints who had spoken the words of the psalms before, "recognizing their own words, may pray with us."¹⁴⁶ Athanasius writes that the psalter

has this peculiar marvel of its own, that within it are represented and portrayed in all their great variety the movements of the human soul. It is like a picture, in which you see yourself portrayed and, seeing, may understand and consequently form yourself upon the pattern given. Elsewhere in the Bible you read only that the Law commands this or that to be done, you listen to the Prophets to learn about the Saviour's coming or you turn to the historical books to learn the doings of the kings and holy men; but in the Psalter, besides all these things you learn about *yourself*. You find depicted in it all the movements of your soul, all its changes, its ups and downs, its failures and recoveries. Moreover, whatever your particular need or trouble, from this same book you can select a form of words to fit it, so that you do not merely hear and then pass on, but learn the way to remedy your ill...and in every case the words you want are written down for you, and you can say them as your own.¹⁴⁷

Scholars of medieval education have explored the instructional value of strong emotion. Marjorie Curry Woods and Carissa Harris have shown how the emotional trauma surrounding literary representations of sexual violence was an important part of late medieval language and cultural pedagogies. Within the classroom, emotionally evocative speeches from classical literature were valued for their mnemonic force.¹⁴⁸ Outside the classroom, obscenity and literary scenes of sexual violence instructed audiences about gendered power.¹⁴⁹ Irina Dumitrescu similarly locates pain and suffering at the center of many early English depictions of schooling and spiritual instruction.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁶ Athanasius of Alexandria, "Letter to Marcellinus," translated in *On the Incarnation*, 97-119 (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1996), 116.

¹⁴⁷ Athanasius, "Letter to Marcellinus," 103.

¹⁴⁸ Marjorie Curry Woods, *Weeping for Dido: the classics in the medieval classroom* (Princeton UP, 2019).

¹⁴⁹ Carissa M. Harris, *Obscene Pedagogies: Transgressive Talk and Sexual Education in Late Medieval Britain* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2018);

¹⁵⁰ Dumitrescu, *The experience of education*.

Woods investigates grammatical glosses on late medieval schooltext manuscripts, which show that teachers explicated lexical and grammatical points in the passages depicting rape.¹⁵¹ Woods outlines a long history of the classroom use of literary depictions of sexual violence from antiquity to the late middle ages. The best known illustration of this school practice comes from Augustine's *Confessions*, in which Augustine recounts weeping along with Dido's character in the *Aeneid* while he memorized passages describing her betrayal and death as part of his rhetoric instruction.¹⁵² Augustine also recalls studying Terence's portrayal of Jupiter raping Danae,¹⁵³ and remembers performing a speech of his own composition in the character of an enraged Juno for a school competition:

I was to declaim a speech that Juno made when she was angry and grieved because she could not repel the Trojan king from Italy. Juno had never made such a speech, I was told; but we were forced to follow the wandering footprints of poetic fictions and express in prose what the poet had expressed in verse. And the speaker who would gain the most applause would be the one who, without compromising the dignity of the person being portrayed, most effectively conveyed the emotions of anger and grief and found suitable words to express his meaning.¹⁵⁴

Augustine's account highlights performance as another important feature of language pedagogies. The student in a way takes on the speaking subject's pain and strong emotions by voicing the character's words and stepping into the character's subject perspective. Woods demonstrates that, like Augustine, late medieval schoolboys learned Latin language and style through the voices of injured women in classical literature. Woods argues that these texts taught schoolboys a masculinity based on domination, in addition to teaching them Latin grammar. In scenes of sexual violence enacted by male characters against female characters, Woods writes

¹⁵¹ Woods, "Rape and the Pedagogical Rhetoric of Sexual Violence."

¹⁵² Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions*, trans. Thomas Williams (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2019), I.13.20, 12.

¹⁵³ Augustine, *Confessions*, I.16.26, 15.

¹⁵⁴ Augustine, *Confessions*, I.17.27, 16.

that schoolboys could “try out the roles of both genders.... Rape scenes function in this tradition as the paradigmatic site for working out issues of power and powerlessness.”¹⁵⁵

Dumitrescu argues similarly that early English colloquy writers exploited the pedagogical value of performance at the turn of the eleventh century. Ælfric Bata’s *Colloquies* were designed to teach Latin conversation to English-speaking students. The opening exchanges of the *Colloquies* designate the speakers as male monastic students and their male teacher, fictional identities which would have been very familiar to Benedictine male monastic students: “In Bata’s *Colloquies*, as we have seen, the roles to be acted are vividly close to home. A boy memorising and repeating his lines... would have been taking on the role of someone like him, or, if he learned the master’s lines, of someone he might become.”¹⁵⁶ The characters portrayed in the *Colloquies* express different emotional responses to the physical violence of the fictional monastic classroom. Students using the *Colloquies* could practice their Latin by voicing different roles in the educational process, sometimes taking on the role of threatened student, sometimes taking on the role of abusive teacher.

In Roman schooling, a series of rhetorical exercises of increasing difficulty called *praeexercitamina* (or *progymnasmata* in Greek) taught students how to compose speeches, with the end goal of political or legal oratory.¹⁵⁷ One of these rhetorical exercises was

“impersonation”: “to compose an imaginary monologue that would fit an assigned person in

¹⁵⁵ Woods, “Rape and the pedagogical rhetoric,” 73; Woods also notes of late medieval schoolgirls’ education (p.86): “In the case of the reading of such texts in women’s communities or schools, which were rarer and tended to concentrate more but not exclusively on religious texts, the bifurcation could function in a complementary way.”

¹⁵⁶ Dumitrescu, *The experience of education*, 77-78.

¹⁵⁷ Lanham, “Freshman Composition,” 115-121; for an introduction to progymnasmata in the Latin schools, see Stanley F. Bonner, “Progress into Rhetoric: Preliminary Exercises,” in *Education in Ancient Rome: From the Elder Cato to the Younger Pliny* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 251; Michael McCarthy, “Augustine’s Mixed Feelings” *Harvard Theological Review* 102.4 (2009), 453-479, notes the record of *praeexercitamina* in the *Confessions*, book I.

certain circumstances.”¹⁵⁸ Augustine’s prizewinning speech in Juno’s character was an example of this kind of exercise. Students composed speeches carefully to reflect their subjects’ character, time of life, social status, and immediate circumstances.¹⁵⁹ Another exercise called “commonplace” or “thesis” required students to compose speeches praising or denouncing stock characters or stock topics. Commonplaces were often inserted into other “impersonations.”¹⁶⁰

Priscian describes the impersonation exercise, which he calls “allocutio” (or *prosopopeia*) in the *Praeexercitamina*:

Allocutio is the imitation of a speech accommodated to customs and thought-up persons, for example, what words Andromache could have said at Hector’s death...Allocutions are made both regarding definite and indefinite persons: of indefinite persons, as, what words someone could have said to his family when he was about to leave the county; but of definite persons, as, what words Achilles could have said to Deidamia when he was about to go to war at Troy. But some allocutions are simple, when someone talks to himself; some are double, when someone speaks to others: by oneself, as, what words Scipio could have said when he was returning as a victor; or to others, as, what words Scipio could have said to the army after victory. Moreover, in every case propriety of persons and circumstances has to be preserved. For some words are appropriate for a youth, some for an old person, some for a happy person, others for a sad person. But some allocutions are moral, others are passionate, others are mixed. Passionate allocutions induce suffering, that is endless commiseration, as, what words Andromache could have said at Hector’s death.¹⁶¹

In addition to Priscian’s description of the full curriculum of *praeexercitamina*, several impersonation exercises are described in the sixth century by Roman rhetorician Emporius and in

¹⁵⁸ Two types of impersonation were *ethopoeia*, a speech invented for a known historical or mythical person, and *prosopopeia*, a speech invented for a made-up person. The term *prosopopeia* was sometimes used to refer to any impersonation exercises. Murphy, “Roman Writing Instruction,” in *A Short History of Writing Instruction*, 66. Can I instead cite Murphy Rhetoric in the Middle Ages? Murphy, James J. *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages: a history of the rhetorical theory from Saint Augustine to the Renaissance*. Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2001. page?

¹⁵⁹ Bonner, “Progress into Rhetoric,” 253, 267-268.

¹⁶⁰ Bonner, “Progress into Rhetoric,” 263-265.

¹⁶¹ Priscian, *Praeexercitamina*, in *Prisciani opera minora*, ed. Heinrich Keil, *Grammatici Latini*, vol. 3 (Leipzig: Teubner, 1860), 437-438; *allucutio* is preceded by sections on *fabula*, *narratio*, *usus*, *sententia*, *refutatio*, *locum commune*, *laus*, and *comparatio*, and followed by sections on *descriptio*, *positio*, and *legis latio*.

the seventh century by Isidore of Seville in the *Etymologia*.¹⁶² Impersonation exercises were certainly known to some early English writers, including Bede and Alcuin, although direct evidence for rhetorical composition exercises in their late antique forms is slim for early medieval schooling.¹⁶³ Carol Lanham argues convincingly that rhetorical composition training persisted in the early middle ages in the form of letter-writing instruction.¹⁶⁴ Lanham and Dumitrescu also draw a connection between rhetorical training and the colloquy tradition. They call Ælfric Bata's *Colloquies* a "spectacularly extended example" of three *praeexercitamina*: imitation, paraphrase, and variation.¹⁶⁵

This chapter demonstrates that the psalms as schooltexts can also be understood fruitfully in relation to the tradition of rhetorical training. Many of the psalms contain speech that is precisely "accommodated" to a particular character or type of character in particular circumstances, in line with the composition rules of "impersonation" and "commonplace." Like young Augustine memorizing Dido's funeral monologue, students of the psalms could analyze style and expression in the psalms, and recycle those features in their own compositions (such as letters) when they wished to present a certain demeanor, or respond appropriately to particular circumstances. Athanasius makes this very point in regards to an individual's practice of spoken

¹⁶² James J. Murphy and Christopher Thaiss, eds., *A short history of writing instruction from ancient Greece to the modern United States*, 4th edn. (New York: Routledge, 2020): Emporius describes ethopoeia, commonplaces, and encomium; Isidore describes "fable" "history" in book I, and "sententia," "confirmation and refutation," "prosopopeia," and "ethopoeia" in book II; see also George A. Kennedy, *A New History of Classical Rhetoric* (Princeton, UP, 1994); and Monika Otter, "Vultus adest (the face helps): performance, expressivity and interiority," in *Rhetoric beyond words: delight and persuasion in the arts of the middle ages*, ed. Mary J. Carruthers, 151-172 (Cambridge UP, 2010).

¹⁶³ Kennedy, *A New History of Classical Rhetoric*, 115-118; Andrew Rabin, ed., *The Venerable Bede* (Farmington Hills, MI: Gale-Cengage, 2011).

¹⁶⁴ Lanham, "Freshman Composition," 121-122.

¹⁶⁵ Carol Dana Lanham and Irina Dumitrescu, "Writing Instruction from Late Antiquity to the Twelfth Century," in *A Short History of Writing Instruction from Ancient Greece to the Modern United States*, eds. James J. Murphy and Christopher Thaiss, 83-128, 4th edn. (New York: Routledge, 2020), 78.

prayer: “whatever your particular need or trouble, from this same book you can select a form of words to fit it.”¹⁶⁶ For example, a glance through the collected eighth-century correspondence of the English missionary bishops Boniface and Lull shows a wealth of psalm citations and allusions incorporated in the letter writing of monastic women and men who were trained in England in Francia.¹⁶⁷ Students of the psalms would not only learn expressions fit for particular circumstances, they would also learn to *fit* expression to circumstance, to match style and self-presentation to communicative aim.

So far, studies of early medieval grammar pedagogies have excluded schoolgirls. In studies of early medieval colloquies and dramatic dialogues, scholars tend to assume that the fictional speakers described in the opening frames directly reflect the users of the text, at least with respect to gender. For example, Katherine O’Brien O’Keeffe calls Aelfric of Eynsham’s tenth-century Latin language *Colloquy*

an instrument of installing in the boys Latin, the language of power and of monastic identity, and, thereafter, the forms of interpretation—tropes of words and thought—leading to techniques of reading, and through a critical use of memory, the internalization of proper discourses and bodies of knowledge.¹⁶⁸

O’Brien O’Keeffe’s tacit exclusion of schoolgirls in her discussion of the *Colloquy* as the grounds of students’ Latinity effectively excludes girls and women from monastic intellectual culture. Similarly, the colloquies of Ælfric of Eynsham and Ælfric Bata have often been treated as a “window” into the monastic classroom. Dumitrescu contests the transparency of such a “window,” arguing that the very fictionality of the caricatures in Bata’s colloquies are necessary to the colloquies’ pedagogical method; however, Dumitrescu follows previous scholars in

¹⁶⁶ Athanasius, “Letter to Marcellinus,” 103.

¹⁶⁷ Michael Tangl, ed., *Die Briefe des Heiligen Bonifatius und Lullus*. Berlin: Weidmannsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1916.

¹⁶⁸ Katherine O’Brien O’Keeffe, *Stealing Obedience: Narratives of Agency and Identity in Later Anglo-Saxon England* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 112.

assuming that the colloquies pertain only to male students.¹⁶⁹ Throughout her 2018 monograph, Dumitrescu consistently refers to “students” with masculine pronouns, indicating her underlying assumption (never explicitly argued) that schools in early medieval England were exclusively male spaces. Dumitrescu does not once mention a girl or woman in the capacity of student or teacher, with the exception of Mary in the Old English *Life of St. Mary of Egypt*. In the *Life*, Mary is certainly Zossimus’ spiritual mentor, but Dumitrescu makes no connection between the literary account of the desert mother as mentor and historical women in early medieval schooling.¹⁷⁰

Did schoolgirls use colloquies at the time that Ælfric of Eynsham and Ælfric Bata were teaching their male students? It seems a fair assumption that schoolboys used the colloquies, since both Ælfrics lived and taught in all-male communities.¹⁷¹ It is also possible that monastic schoolgirls had access to the colloquies at the same time. The English Benedictine regular text compiled by Æthelwold, the *Regularis Concordia*, addresses both male and female religious. Copies of the *Regularis Concordia* were adapted for male and female communities, and Rohini Jayatilaka has argued that Æthelwold originally produced the *Regularis* for female communities, and only later adapted it for male use.¹⁷²

Ælfric’s own writings also invite us to consider women’s literacy within tenth century Benedictine educational culture. Ælfric’s *Grammar*, one of two companion texts to his *Colloquy*,

¹⁶⁹ Dumitrescu, *The experience of education*, 64; see the introduction by David Porter in Gwara, ed., *Anglo-Saxon Conversations*.

¹⁷⁰ Dumitrescu, *The experience of education*, 60-89, 129-156.

¹⁷¹ Gretschi, *The Intellectual Foundations of the Benedictine Reform*; Michael Lapidge, “Ælfric’s Schooldays,” in *Early medieval English texts and interpretations: studies presented to Donald G. Scragg*, ed. Elaine M. Treharne, 301-309 (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2002); Hugh Magennis and Mary Swan, eds., *A Companion to Ælfric* (Leiden: Brill, 2009).

¹⁷² Rohini Jayatilaka, “The Old English Benedictine Rule: Writing for Women and Rule” *Anglo-Saxon England* 32 (2003), 147-87.

contains a deliberately gender-inclusive address in the Old English preface. Following a Latin preface, the Old English preface describes the purpose of the *Grammar*:

Ic Ælfric wolde þas lytlan boc awendan to engliscum gereorde of ðam stæfcræfte, þe is gehaten *grammatica*..., and ic þohte, þæt ðeos boc mihte fremjan jungum cildum to anginne þæs cræftes, oððæt hi to maran andgyte becumon.... jungum mannum gedafenað, þæt hi leornjon sumne wisdom and ðam ealdum gedafenað, þæt hi tæcon sum gerad heora junglingum, forðan ðe ðurh lare byd se geleafa gehealden.... hwanon sceolon cuman wise lareowas on godes folce, buton hi on jugoðe leornjon? is nu for ði godes þeowum and mynstermannum georgne to warnigenne.¹⁷³

The primary audience is *junge cildra*, meaning “young children.” The principle meaning of *cild* (child) does not specify social gender, though in some cases *cild* is used to indicate a male-gender child. Examples of gender-nonspecific uses given by the Dictionary of Old English appear in Ælfric’s *Colloquy*, *Glossary*, and *Catholic Homilies*; an example of specifically male-gender usage also appears in Ælfric’s *Catholic Homilies*.¹⁷⁴

Other terms of address in the preface point toward a mixed-gender audience. The term *þeow* (meaning “servant” or “slave,” equivalent to Latin *servus/a*) can be inflected with masculine or feminine endings to indicate male or female servants respectively. The dative plural form “þeowum” used here is identical for masculine and feminine, and could properly refer to male and/or female servants of God. The term *mynsterman* (also appearing in gender-common dative plural: “mynstermannum”) strongly suggests that the gender inclusiveness of the address is deliberate. As a compound word of *mann* (human person, equivalent of Latin *homo*) the term *mynsterman* properly means “monastic person,” not “monastic male.”¹⁷⁵ The gendered term for a

¹⁷³ I have excerpted exemplary portions; the entire Latin and Old English prefaces are edited in Julius Zupitza, ed., *Ælfrics Grammatik und Glossar* (Berlin: Weidmann, 1880), 1-3.

¹⁷⁴ *Cild*: *Dictionary of Old English: A to I* online, ed. Angus Cameron, Ashley Crandell Amos, Antonette diPaolo Healey et al. (Toronto: Dictionary of Old English Project, 2018).

¹⁷⁵ The Bosworth Toller dictionary translates Old English *mann* first as “a human being of any sex”; likewise, the Old English indefinite pronoun *man* (one, any, they) is gender inclusive; *mann* is also the Old English name of the rune for “M,” which is sometimes glossed with the Old English *ænig* (“any, anyone”), common of three genders, and the Latin *quis*, common of two genders (masc./fem.), while “ne ænig” glosses Latin “nemo” (no one).

male monastic (monk) in Old English would be *munuc* or *munecenu*.¹⁷⁶ The terms *preost* (priest), *bisceop* (bishop), and *abboda* (abbot) also indicate exclusively male-gendered clergy. While *mynsterman*, like its component term *mann* and like Latin *homo*, is grammatically masculine, neither component nor compound delimit male social gender. Ælfric could not have mistaken the term *mann* as a socially gender-exclusive synonym for *vir*, since Ælfric himself translates *mann* as *homo* and *wer* as *vir* in his *Grammar*. As an example of diminutive nouns, he gives: “*homo mann, homunculus* lytel man and *omuncio et cetera*.”¹⁷⁷ As an example of common gender third declension nouns ending in *-o*, he gives: “*hic et haec homo, huius hominis*; ægðer is man ge wer ge wif” (both are “human,” both man and woman).¹⁷⁸ While it remains lexically possible that Ælfric intended to address the Old English preface specifically to male audiences, it is equally possible that Ælfric intended to address all potential beginning students of Latin grammar, including schoolgirls. Ælfric’s deliberate use of gender-inclusive Old English terms (especially *cild* and *mynsterman*) points toward a mixed-gender audience.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁶ Bosworth, Joseph. *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online*, ed. Thomas Northcote Toller, Christ Sean, and Ondřej Tichy (Prague: Faculty of Arts, Charles University, 2014), <https://bosworthtoller.com/>.

¹⁷⁷ Zupitza, *Ælfrics Grammatik und Glossar*, 17.

¹⁷⁸ Zupitza, *Ælfrics Grammatik und Glossar*, 36; in the discussion of noun genders, 18, “Æfter gecynde syndon twa cyn on naman, masculinum and femininum, þæt is, werlic and wiflic. werlic cyn byd hic uir þes wer, wiflic haec femina þis wif. þa twa cyn synd gecyndelice on mannum and on nytenum” (according to nature there are two genders in nouns, *masculinum* and *femininum*, that is, masculine and feminine. Masculine gender is *hic uir* this man, feminine *haec femina* this woman. The two genders are natural in humans and animals); in the Glossary section on spiritual nouns, 297, “*homo mann. mas uel masculus* werhades mann. *femina* wifhades mann. *sexus* werhad oððe wifhad” (*homo* human, *mas* or *masculus* human maleness/manhood, *femina* human femaleness/womanhood, *sexus* maleness or femaleness); Priscian, *Institutiones Grammaticae* V, 146, l.3, gives *hic et haec homo* as an example of common gender third declension nouns ending in *-o*.

¹⁷⁹ Ælfric’s prologue to his Old English translation of Basil of Caesarea’s *Admonitio ad filium spiritalem* offers further evidence that Ælfric considered literacy an important project for women monastics as well as male monastics; Hugh Magennis and Mary Swan, eds., *A Companion to Ælfric* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 59-60, write: “The other substantial work written at Cerne [besides the teaching tools, *Grammar*, *Colloquy*, *Glossary*], perhaps not long before he went to Eynsham, is his vernacular version of Basil of Caesarea’s *Admonitio ad filium*

The Latin preface has traditionally been interpreted as addressing young males, though I argue that the Latin preface’s address was more likely intended as gender-inclusive. The Latin preface begins: “*Ego Ælfricus, ut minus sapiens, has excerptiones de Prisciano minore uel maiore uobis puerulis tenellis ad uestram linguam transferre studui*” (I Ælfric, though not very knowledgeable, strove to translate these excerpts from Priscian’s minor and major works into your language for you tender little children/boys [*pueruli*]).¹⁸⁰ In the Grammar and Glossary, Ælfric translates *puer* seven times as *cild* (child) and once as *cnapa* (boy): “*puer cnapa. puella mæden oððe geong wifmann*” (*puer* boy, *puella* girl or young woman);¹⁸¹ Ælfric also shows that *cild* translates “infant” (*infans*) of either (grammatical and social) gender: “*Hic et haec infans unsprecende cild*” (“masculine or feminine ‘infant’” preverbal child).¹⁸² The primary meaning of *puer* (and its diminutive used by Ælfric, *puerulus*) in other medieval English sources indicates a male child: “1. a male usu. below the age of puberty, boy.”¹⁸³ However, the term *puer* also has ungendered and specifically female meanings: “2. (male or female) child.” Attested ungendered and specifically female usages range from the sixth-century in Gildas’ *De excidio et conquestu Britanniae* to the fifteenth century in the Registers of the Archbishops of Canterbury.¹⁸⁴ One specifically female usage appears in the biblical commentaries from the Canterbury School of Theodore and Hadrian: “muliebria, i. menstrualia, quae incipiunt esse a quartodecimo anno

spiritualem. Its subject is spiritual warfare in the pursuit of particular virtues and against particular sins and it is addressed, following the source, to one ‘child’, or ‘son’; but as Ælfric notes at the end of the prologue, the message of the text is also suitable for monks and nuns living according to the Rule.”

¹⁸⁰ Zupitza, *Ælfrics Grammatik und Glossar*, 1.

¹⁸¹ Zupitza, *Ælfrics Grammatik und Glossar*, 301.

¹⁸² Zupitza, *Ælfrics Grammatik und Glossar*, 61.

¹⁸³ R. E. Latham, D. R. Howlett, and Richard Ashdowne, *Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015).

¹⁸⁴ Latham, Howlett, and Ashdowne, *DMLBS*.

pueris” (“womanly things,” that is: menstruation, which begins for girls [*pueri*] in the fourteenth year).¹⁸⁵

Like the prefaces in Ælfric’s *Grammar*, the Old English interlinear gloss to the first line of Ælfric’s *Colloquy* in London, British Library MS Tiberius A iii invokes a gender-inclusive educational context. The gloss uses one grammatically gender-common and one socially gender-inclusive Old English term to gloss the Latin terms *pueri* (boys/children) and *magister* (male teacher). The gloss to the line “Nos pueri rogamus te magister ut doceas nos loqui latialiter recte quia idiote sumus et corrupte loquimur” (We boys/children ask you male teacher to teach us to speak in Latin correctly because we are uninformed and speak incorrectly), glosses *pueri* with Old English *cildra* (children) and *magister* with Old English *lareow* (teacher).¹⁸⁶ *Cildra* is the plural for *cild*, a noun which is attested in grammatically neuter and masculine forms and usually indicates a young person without respect to gender, though in a few cases it refers specifically to a male child (as noted above). *Lareow* is a grammatically masculine noun meaning “teacher,” but it is used of female as well as male teachers: for example, the Old English translation of Bede’s *Ecclesiastical History* describes Aethelburg, first abbess of Barking monastery, as “Gode willsumra wifmonna lareow and festermodur” (teacher and foster-mother of women devoted to God).¹⁸⁷ The *Colloquy*’s Old English interlinear gloss therefore uses terms which reflect the potential inclusion of schoolgirls and women teachers in the fiction of the monastic classroom. To the extent that the gloss is itself based on the *Colloquy*’s pedagogical use, the gender-inclusiveness of the gloss might also point toward female users of the text.

¹⁸⁵ Bernhard Bischoff and Michael Lapidge, *Biblical Commentaries from the Canterbury School of Theodore and Hadrian I* (Cambridge UP, 1994), 324.

¹⁸⁶ The colloquy and gloss appear on ff. 60v–64v; of the four manuscripts of Ælfric’s *Colloquy*, only Ms. Tiberius A iii has an Old English interlinear gloss.

¹⁸⁷ Thomas Miller, ed., *The Old English Version of Bede’s Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (London: N. Trübner and co., 1890-1898), 252-384, translating: “Deo devotarum mater ac nutrix possit existere feminarum.”

The title of this chapter, “Weeping for David,” comes from Marjorie Curry Woods’s use of Augustine’s phrase “weeping for Dido” in the title of her monograph.¹⁸⁸ Students in the late medieval Italian classrooms studied by Woods’ were in fact all boys, but Woods’s articulation of gender performance in all-male classrooms offers us a model to take up and turn over. What about schoolboys performing male voices? What about schoolgirls performing male and female voices? Did schoolgirls use colloquies that gave them an opportunity to try out different positions of power and subjugation within monastic life? Did schoolgirls reading about sexual violence against women in saints’ lives or in classical literature imaginatively try out both genders, both positions of dominator and dominated? While the psalms do not narrate an experience of rape, they frequently voice the psalmist’s sadness, fear, and suffering:

Psalm 6.3-7: Miserere mei, Domine, quoniam infirmus sum; sana me, Domine, quoniam conturbata sunt ossa mea...Laboravi in gemitu meo; lavabo per singulas noctes lectum meum: lacrimis meis stratum meum rigabo.

Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I am weak: heal me, O Lord, for my bones are troubled... I have laboured in my groanings, every night I will wash my bed: I will water my couch with my tears.

The psalms also depict the psalmist’s will to dominate rather than be dominated by enemies, the elation of victory, and the terror of destruction:

Psalm 78.1-9: Deus, venerunt gentes in haereditatem tuam; polluerunt templum sanctum tuum; posuerunt Jerusalem in pomorum custodiam. Posuerunt morticina servorum tuorum escas volatilibus caeli; carnes sanctorum tuorum bestiis terrae. Effuderunt sanguinem eorum tamquam aquam in circuitu Jerusalem, et non erat qui sepeliret... Effunde iram tuam in gentes quae te non noverunt, et in regna quae nomen tuum non invocaverunt: quia comederunt Jacob, et locum ejus desolaverunt. Ne memineris iniquitatum nostrarum antiquarum.

O God, the heathens are come into thy inheritance, they have defiled thy holy temple: they have made Jerusalem as a place to keep fruit. They have given the dead bodies of

¹⁸⁸ Woods, *Weeping for Dido*.

thy servants to be meat for the fowls of the air: the flesh of thy saints for the beasts of the earth. They have poured out their blood as water, round about Jerusalem and there was none to bury them... Pour out thy wrath upon the nations that have not known thee: and upon the kingdoms that have not called upon thy name. Because they have devoured Jacob; and have laid waste his place. Remember not *our* former iniquities.¹⁸⁹

Like the accounts of sexual violence in classical schoolroom literature and representations of corporal punishment in monastic colloquies, frightening and emotional scenes recounted in the psalms would certainly have enabled schoolgirls to imaginatively try out the positions of persecutor and persecuted, sinner and penitent. Schoolboys' experience was gendered too. In the psalms, schoolboys and schoolgirls alike could explore positions of power and powerlessness, as they absorbed the language of the psalms.

Gender Performance in the Old English Prose Psalms

When the Old English paraphrases of the prose psalms were codified in the late ninth century, the anonymous Paraphrast followed the exegetical tradition which recognizes the voice of the contemporary supplicant as one of the important interpretive levels of the psalms. Introductory paragraphs to the Old English psalms 2-50 outline the multiple interpretive levels operating for each psalm, according to the Paraphrast. Usually, the Paraphrast identifies two historical levels, a Christological level, and a tropological level. Each level is associated with a different speaking voice. The voices most often identified belong to David as psalmist; to Hezekiah, descendant of David and King of Judah; to Christ; and to the contemporary supplicant.¹⁹⁰ The Paraphrast interprets David's voice as speaking historically about himself

¹⁸⁹ I added the emphasis to "our" to point out the speaker's fear for themselves attendant on watching another's destruction.

¹⁹⁰ On Old English Prose Psalms introductions, see Patrick O'Neill, "The Old English Introductions to the Prose Psalms of the Paris Psalter: Sources, Structure and Composition" *Studies in Philology* 78.5 (1981), 20-38, and *Old English Psalms*, xii-xiii; on the *voces* designated for each psalm, see Patrick O'Neill, "Strategies of Translation in the Old English

and/or prophetically about future historical occurrences.¹⁹¹ The Paraphrast consistently interprets Hezekiah's voice as historical. Christ is interpreted as speaking about his own life; and the contemporary Christian *vox* (voice) represents the tropological level.¹⁹²

Ðysne þriddan sealm Daud sang þa he fleah Absalon his sunu, and seofode þa yrmðe to Drihtne; swa deþ ælc þæra manna þe þisne sealm singð: his sylfes earfoðu, ægðer ge modes ge lichaman, he seofað to Drihtne; swa dyde Crist þonne he þysne sealm sang: be Iudeum he hine sang and be Iudan Scarioth þe hine læwde.

David sang this third psalm when he fled from his son, Absalom, and lamented that distressing situation to the Lord; so too does everyone who sings this psalm, lamenting to the Lord their own sufferings, spiritual and physical; likewise did Christ when he recited this psalm, singing about the Jews, and about Judas Iscariot who betrayed him.¹⁹³

According to this scheme, the psalms always carry at least one voice from a male-subject perspective (David's) and sometimes more than one male voice, and nearly always simultaneously carry the voice of the (male or female) contemporary Christian supplicant. It is obvious that in every case, the supplicant's voice is part of the expression of the psalm; but that contemporary, usually tropological, voice is also explicitly named in the majority of the Paraphrast's introductions. The editor of the Old English psalms explains how the Paraphrast extracted four exegetical levels from the three-fold interpretive scheme of the Old Irish *argumenta*. According to O'Neill, the Paraphrast "systematically" constructs the fourth clause,

Versions (Prose and Metrical) of the Psalms in the Paris Psalter" *Bulletin of the Institute of Oriental and Occidental Studies* 48 (2015), especially 149-152.

¹⁹¹ In the introductions to Psalms 28-34 and 37-50 (with the partial exception of 39), the different voices are all framed within David's prophetic voice, for example: "David sang this thirty-second psalm, praising the Lord and thanking him because he so miraculously freed him from all his troubles, and so honorably appointed him over his kingdom; and also he urged all people to thank God for all the good things which he did for them; and he prophesied also about Hezekiah, that he was destined to do the same, whenever he was freed from his difficulties; and he prophesied about everyone who sings this psalm; and he prophesied also about Christ, that after his resurrection he would teach the same thing to all people" (Ps. 32, *Old English Psalms*, 107).

¹⁹² Psalms 8, 18, 23, 44 are missing the explicit contemporary user voice designation; Psalm 23 has a general human interpretive layer only *within* the frame of David's prophetic voice; Only psalm 22 (p. 73) notes an extra, liturgical interpretive level for the psalm: "...and Christians also thank God in this psalm for their liberation from their sins after baptism."

¹⁹³ O'Neill, *Old English Psalms*, Ps. 3 intro., 6-7.

the moral or tropological clause, using phrases such as “*ælc man, ælc rihtwis man, cristene men, ælcum godum men, ælc welwillende man,*” which recall the Latin *omnis beatus homo* and Old Irish *cach noeb* (every holy person) of the Irish commentaries.¹⁹⁴ In the rest of the introductions, it is notable that the Paraphrast uses the gender-inclusive *mann* (human person) for the tropological clause, in imitation of the Irish commentaries’ use of *homo* and *cach noeb*.

On ðam nigoðan sealme Daudi hine gebæd to Drihtne and him þancode þæt his sunu and eac oðre fynd him ne mihton eall þæt yfel don þæt hi him geteohod hæfdon; and on þa ylcan gerad hine singð ælc rihtwis mann be his sylfes feondum; and be þam ylcan hine sang Crist, þa Iudeas hine woldan don mare yfel ðonne hig mihton; and swa dyde eac Ezechias, ða his fynd hine ne meahon ateon swa hy woldon.

In the ninth psalm David prayed to the Lord and thanked him that his son and other enemies besides failed to inflict on him all the harm they had planned for him; and in a similar situation every just person sings it about their own enemies; and Christ sang it about the same situation, when the Jews desired to inflict more harm on him than they could; and Hezekian too did likewise, when his enemies failed to harm him as they wished to.¹⁹⁵

As this example shows again, the Paraphrast is careful to use *mann* when explaining the meaning of each psalm for the contemporary supplicant. We can be sure that this is no accidental use of a gender-inclusive term in place of a specifically male term such as *wer* (adult human male), due to the appearance of the term *wer* at the beginning of Psalm 1, the only prose psalm lacking an introduction. As a female supplicant voiced each psalm, fulfilling the tropological level of the psalm, she would effectively gender the psalm’s subject position female.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁴ O’Neill, “The Old English Introductions,” 78.5, 33.

¹⁹⁵ O’Neill, *Old English Psalms*, Ps. 9 intro, 23.

¹⁹⁶ In chapter four, I complicate the male/female gender binary in early medieval monastic culture and argue that seventh- and early-eighth century monastic women could identify with a separate, third gender in their spiritual lives, rather than identifying as “female.”

The gender of the “*beatus vir*”

In the Old English psalms collection, Psalm 1 alone lacks an introduction. In Latin psalters, it alone lacks a title. Without title or introduction, Psalm 1 itself seems to act as an introduction to the other psalms, and its opening verse serves as a title of sorts. In its capacity as introduction (whether to the rest of Psalm 1 or to the rest of the psalter), the opening verse of the psalm is unusual in its apparent gender-exclusiveness. The psalm begins: “*Beatus vir qui non abiit in consilio impiorum*” (Blessed is the man who does not go into the council of the unrighteous). At first glance, the verse might seem to suggest that the spiritual value of Psalm 1, and of all the following psalms, pertains only to males. But addressing the psalms to only males would present a problem for Christian exegetes. It is counter-productive to the aim of encouraging a certain kind of spiritual formation among Christian women via the psalms, if the very first psalm seems to exclude all women from the possibility of spiritual achievement. If the operative concern is being a *beatus vir* (blessed man) instead of an *impius vir* (unrighteous man), then what of being a *beata femina* (blessed woman)?

Cassiodorus, Augustine, and Jerome all address the use of *vir* in the first psalm. Cassiodorus handles the *vir* as a reference to sex (that is, gender) differentiation, a creation-only attribute which distinguishes humanity from divinity.¹⁹⁷ For Cassiodorus, the psalmist’s use of *vir* is intended to bring to mind the dual nature of Christ, both human (with sex division) and

¹⁹⁷ The Latin grammarians and patristic authors draw no distinction between sex (as a binary male/female designation ostensibly assigned according sex organs) and gender (as a binary male/female performance of sex according to cultural norms); though I disagree that sex and/or gender are “biologically” determined or have a “physical” reality exceeding cultural norms, I agree that sex and gender are co-determined and not materially distinct; this view differs from popular 21st century understandings which accept gender as socially constructed but maintain that sex is an a-cultural, “biological” characteristic; but as Spencer-Hall and Gutt, *Trans and Genderqueer Subjects*, 312, explain, sex is determined by—not determining of—gender categories, which are themselves historically specific social constructs.

divine (undivided): “the humanity which He assumed is revealed, for ‘man’ [*vir*] describes sex in the flesh which is wholly absent from divinity. Since human nature had to be assumed by the Lord for our redemption, the psalmist aptly called Him ‘man’ [*vir*] so that we might believe Him to be one Person with two natures.”¹⁹⁸ By focusing on Christ’s dual nature, rather than maleness in general, Cassiodorus avoids the problem of women’s exclusion.

For Augustine too, the gender-exclusive term *vir* points to the condition of humanity, rather than to maleness. Augustine writes that the “*beatus vir*” should be understood specifically as Jesus Christ, the “lordly human,” as opposed to the “earthly human” (Adam and by extension his descendants) who consented to his wife, was tricked by the serpent, and as a result neglected God’s commands.¹⁹⁹ The contrast that matters, then, between the “blessed” and the “unrighteous” is not established as the contrast between man (*vir*) and woman (*mulier*), but as the contrast between God (Christ) and human (Adam). In using gender-specific *vir* to establish the contrast between human and God, Cassiodorus and Augustine bypass the opportunity for misogyny, where blessedness could easily have been joined to human maleness to the exclusion of human femaleness. Augustine also directs blame for Eve’s transgression onto the serpent, rather than leaving Eve as the sole agent of the transgression. The rest of Augustine’s commentary on psalm 1 uses gender-inclusive *homo* rather than exclusive *vir* to discuss the significance of the psalm for contemporary Christians, deliberately including all humans, regardless of gender.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁸ Cassiodorus, *Explanation of the Psalms*, trans. Walsh, 48.

¹⁹⁹ Augustine of Hippo, *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, ed. Hildegund Müller, CSEL 94 (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2004), 67: “De domino nostro Iesu Christo, id est homine dominico, accipiendum est...sicut homo terrenus qui uxori consensit deceptae a serpente, ut dei praecepta praeteriret.”

²⁰⁰ By contrast, Jerome, *Tractatus iix in psalmos*, ed. G. Morin, CCSL 78 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1958), 3-4, rejects the interpretation that “*beatus vir*” refers to Christ, because the “*beatus vir*” is compared to a tree in the third verse, and nothing can compare to God without falling short; Jerome writes that the psalm refers “*generaliter de iusto uiro dicitur*” (generally to the just man) and explains the use of *vir* instead of *homo* as indicating the imperfection of humanity that will become perfect in Christ: “*Beatus uir, non homo, sed uir, qui in perfectum uirum peruenit*

The gloss on Psalm 1.1, “*beatus vir qui non habiit in consilio impiorum,*” in Cambridge, Cambridge College Corpus Christi MS 411 reads: “*beatus est omnis homo qui non vult esse in consilio impiorum*” (f.1v). The gloss interprets the spiritual significance of gender-specific *vir* as gender-inclusive *homo*. In the Royal Psalter (London, British Library, Royal MS 2 B V) likely written by monastic women at Nunnaminster, Winchester, an Old English interlinear gloss translates *vir* as *wer* (adult human male), but a marginal gloss (identical to gloss in CCCC MS 411) interprets the psalm’s *vir* as signifying *homo* (human person).²⁰¹

The Old English Paraphrast translates the *vir* of Psalm 1 as *wer*: “Eadig byð se wer þe ne gæð on geþeagt unrihtwisra, ne on þam wege ne stent synfulra, ne on heora wol-bærendum setle ne sitt” (Happy is the man who does not enter into the counsels of the wicked, nor share the path of sinners, nor sit in their pestiferous seat).²⁰² As noted, the Paraphrast never uses *wer* in the introductions to the following psalms, and is careful to use gender-inclusive terms *man* (human person) and *ælc* (each one) to describe the exegetical level represented by the contemporary supplicant’s voice. The *wer* in the beginning of Psalm 1 might have been understood by readers as referring to any of the three male voices often identified by the Paraphrast as speakers in the other psalms: David, Hezekiah, and Christ. If Psalm 1 is taken to function exegetically in the same way as the next 49 psalms, a female supplicant could then understand that the *wer* in Psalm 1.1 referred to a particular male within a historical layer of the psalm’s meaning, but remained applicable to herself through the contemporary tropological level of the psalm’s meaning.

Christum”; Jerome seems not especially interested in the gender-exclusive marking of *vir*, rather he seems to be making a literary argument, in which *vir* looks forward to the epithet “*vir perfectus*” for Christ; as a result, Jerome does nothing to combat potential misogynist readings.

²⁰¹ Sisam and Sisam, eds., *The Salisbury Psalter*, 52-55; Brown, “The Psalms as the Foundation,” 7.

²⁰² O’Neill, *Old English Psalms*, Ps. 1:1, 2-3.



The frontispiece for the psalter text in London, British Library, Cotton Ms Galba A xviii visually represents the psalms as multi-voiced and multi-gendered. The full-page illustration depicts Christ, holding a book (perhaps the psalter itself) in his left hand; his right hand is held out, palm open, in a gesture of speaking or giving, as if to say that the following psalms contain Christ's speech given to the reader.²⁰³ Christ is surrounded by four hosts of figures, arranged vertically and separated by three banners, two of which bear text. Underneath the topmost host, the banner reads *omnis chorus angelorum* (the whole chorus of angels). Underneath the host in

²⁰³ The frontispiece (f.2v) and psalms are separated by a liturgical calendar, computistical texts and tables, liturgical texts, and prefatory material to the psalms beginning on f.30v.

the second highest tier, the banner reads: *omnis chorus prophetarum* (the whole chorus of prophets). The prophets are the only figures in the illustration without halos; halos adorn Christ, the angels, and the figures in the bottom two tiers. The bottom two tiers are separated by a banner without text, and the banner is broken through by the heads of three individuals rising up from the bottom tier. The middle head shows the only female figure (her gender is identifiable by her headdress), and may represent the Virgin Mary. Many of the figures in the bottom tier hold books in one hand and extend their other hand in expressions of preaching or benediction. Perhaps the bottom two tiers represent the living and dead saints.

Altogether, the frontispiece appears to depict six kinds of *voces* borne by the psalms. These are the many subjects who speak and have spoken the words of the psalms as their own: Christ; the angels; the prophets; the living and dead saints (a mixed-gender group, thanks to the single female figure in the middle of the two tiers of saints); and the contemporary supplicant (the one holding the book and looking at the illustration), who is indicated as the next speaker by Christ's direct gesture of handing down, and whose gender is not marked in any way by the illustration. Like Athanasius's and the Old English Paraphrast's interpretations of the psalms's simultaneous voices, the Galba A xviii psalter frontispiece incorporates the contemporary reader into a host of simultaneous, mixed-gender voices, whose shared words constitute the text of the psalms.

Several extant Latin psalters from early medieval England witness a different interpretive tradition from the Paraphrast's and Athanasius's prayer-oriented approach. These psalters contain glosses attributing different parts of the psalms to different speakers as if in conversation. Most often, the voices identified belong to Christ and *Mater Ecclesia* (Mother Church). This glossing tradition follows Cassiodorus's widely read commentary on the psalms. Cassiodorus identifies

the voice of an exemplary Christian supplicant in a small number of psalms. For Cassiodorus, each psalm carries a single principal voice, or two voices in dialogue within a single interpretive level. According to this view, the contemporary supplicant is always performing another's voice and perspective, whether Christ's male voice, the Church's female-personified voice, or another gendered voice.²⁰⁴

The vast majority of the first-person language in the psalms is properly gender-common, not gender-exclusive, at the grammatical level. This is unsurprising, as first- and second-person discourse contains fewer gender-exclusive markers than does third-person discourse. For example, personal pronouns in Latin and Old English are only gender-exclusive in third-person singular cases. All other personal pronoun forms are gender-common. This means that there are few instances in the psalms in which a supplicant would pronounce a grammatically gender-specific word modifying the speaker position, which might then disagree grammatically with the supplicant's own social gender.

The gender-commonality of the psalms would have caused students to assimilate Latin as a largely gender-inclusive language, indicating no grammatical preference for one social gender or the other as default speaking subject. At the same time, the exegetical traditions surrounding the voices carried by the psalms invited students to perform different gendered perspectives. The rare cases in which the psalms' first-person language was marked as grammatically masculine rather than gender-common showed students how grammatical gender forms did not have a fixed, natural relationship to social gender. For schoolgirls, this happened when their default feminine "I"s accommodated grammatically masculine subject markers. For schoolgirls as well

²⁰⁴ Cassiodorus attributes the *voces* of psalms 1-50 to David, Christ, Church (fem.), Synagogue (fem.), and the exemplary Christian supplicant.

as schoolboys, this also happened when the personified female voice of *Ecclesia* expressed grammatically masculine forms, as in Psalm 17.

In the tenth-century psalter CCCC MS 411, glosses on Psalm 2 attribute various verses to Christ and to the God the Father, following Cassiodorus's single-level exegetical approach. The subject of verse 6, "Ego autem consti[tu]tus sum rex" (I however was appointed king), is grammatically masculine, and attributed to Christ with the gloss "uerba domini saluatoris" (the words of the lord savior). A literacy student learning to interpret or construct first-person discourse by pronouncing this verse would practice modifying *ego* (I) with the verb's grammatically masculine form ("constitutus sum").²⁰⁵ Whether the verse were presented as bearing the voice of David, the voice of Christ, or both, schoolboys as well as schoolgirls reading this psalm would practice speaking from a grammatically masculine and socially male subject perspective.

Similarly, a note on verse 7 of Psalm 2, "dominus dixit ad me filius meus es tu" (the lord said to me: you are my son), glosses "dominus dixit ad me" with "vox paterna ad filium" (the fatherly voice to the son).²⁰⁶ The gloss interprets the speaker of the verse as Christ speaking about God as his own father (*dominus*), who in turn is speaking to Christ as God's son (*ego/me*). As the supplicant pronounces the verse, "dominus dixit ad me, filius meus es tu," in CCCC MS 411, the supplicant takes on the grammatically masculine voice of Christ. If the supplicant is a girl or woman, she pronounces the verse's first-person perspective in cross-gender language: the *ego* (accusative, *me*) of "dominus dixit ad me" is immediately masculinized by the lord's words

²⁰⁵ Unlike in Latin, Old English first-person periphrastic verbs do not mark gender; the corresponding line in the Old English psalm, O'Neill, *Old English Psalms*, 4-5, is: "And ic eom, þeah, cincg geset fram Gode" (But I, however, am appointed by God king); although *cincg* (king) is a masculine noun marking a male office, "geset" (appointed) is grammatically gender-common.

²⁰⁶ CCCC MS 411, f.2v.

“*filius meus es tu*” (you are my son). The subject’s *me* (me) is identified as masculine and male by the word *filius* (masc., “son”). A schoolgirl pronouncing this verse would practice speaking a grammatically masculine and socially male first-person perspective. For her, the usual feminine grammatical gender of her personal *ego/me* stretches to accommodate the masculine words of the verse and the male identity of Christ as speaker.

In the same psalter manuscript, the Latin title of Psalm 4 indicates that it is a “psalm of David”: “*in finem in carminibus psalmus david.*” Immediately below its title, Psalm 4 is marked: “*Vox ecclesiae cum martiribus et confessoribus*” (voice of the Church with the martyrs and confessors). In CCC MS 411, Psalm 4 is presented as having been composed by David with reference to his own experience and spoken by the personified female voice of the Church, which contains in it the Church’s many male and female saints. *Ecclesia* (Church) is a feminine noun in Latin. The phrase *vox ecclesiae* (voice of the church) personifies the church as a female figure.²⁰⁷ These indicators of voice invite the reader to interpret the first-person language of the psalm as simultaneously grammatically masculine, referring to male David, and grammatically feminine, referring to female-personified *Ecclesia*.

At one level, the contemporary supplicant would practice expressing first-person perspective through the feminized voice of *Ecclesia*—a cross-gender performance for a male supplicant and a same-gender performance for a female supplicant. At the same time, the words of Psalm 4 are grammatically gender-common. Because the psalm is written in first-person speech, with no adjectives or periphrastic verbs modifying the speaking subject, the words of the psalm do not specify a speaker gender: “*Cum invocarem exaudivit me Deus justitiae meae, in tribulatione dilatasti mihi. Miserere mei, et exaudi orationem meam*” (When I called, God of my justice heard me, in my affliction you amplified me. Have mercy on me, and hear my prayer).

²⁰⁷ On the tradition of the personified Church as idealized female teacher, see chapter two.

The speaker's subject position is forefront: when *I* called (*invocarem*), God heard *me* (*exaudivit me*), hear *my* prayer (*exaudi orationem meam*). Altogether, the supplicant (whatever their social gender) would add their own voice to the male voice of David and the female voice of personified *Ecclesia*. The supplicant practices first-person expression in gender-common language, which simultaneously agrees grammatically with at least one male and one female voice.

In the Royal Psalter, Psalm 4 is also attributed to *Ecclesia*. A note heading Psalm 4 indicates “uerba sunt sancte matris ecclesisae” (the words belong to Holy Mother Church), and a marginal gloss reads “Vox sanctae ecclesiae” (voice of Holy Church). Psalm 5 is also attributed to personified *Ecclesia*: “Totus psalmus iste prophertur ac persona catholice ecclesiae” (This entire psalm is spoken by and in the person of Catholic Church) heads the psalm, with the marginal gloss, “Vox ecclesiae” (voice of the Church).²⁰⁸ Psalms 4 and 5 bear both the male subject perspective of David as author and the female subject perspective of Mother Church as speaker. The (likely women) supplicants reading Psalms 4 and 5 from the Royal Psalter therefore voice same-gender and cross-gender perspectives. At the same time, the words of Psalm 5 contain no gender-exclusive markers. The verbs and pronouns are gender-common: for example, “orabo” (I shall pray) and “Ego...introibo” (I shall enter into”) in Psalm 5. First person singular possessive adjectives—*meus*, *-a*, *-um* (my)—agree in gender and case with the nouns they modify, not with the possessing subjects. All of these words allow for subjects of any grammatical gender. The supplicant can imaginatively layer multiple gendered subject perspectives within the first-person language, without having to reconcile cross-gender grammatical markers and speaking voices.

²⁰⁸ London, BL, Royal Ms 2 B v, f. 10v.

The heading to Psalm 17 in the Royal Psalter attributes the psalm to three levels of voice: the voice of the prophet (David), the voice of the Church, and the voice of Christ: “psalmus iste iii ordines habet. primus prophete. ii ecclesiae. in tertio est uox saluatoris inlapsa” (this psalm has three levels: the first is the prophet’s, the second is the church’s, in the third, the voice of the savior enters). The reader of Psalm 17 in the Royal Psalter manuscript would have added her own grammatically feminine, socially female subject perspective to two masculine voices and one feminine voice already contained in the psalm. Psalm 17 includes one of the few instances of specifically masculine gender-marked first person discourse in the Latin psalms. In verse 20, the supplicant pronounces “Et eduxit me in latitudinem; saluum me fecit” (And [the Lord] led me out into the expanse; he made me safe). A masculine singular accusative ending *-um* on “saluum” (*salvus, -a, -um*: safe, saved) modifies the speaker’s *me* (acc. of *ego*). In verse 24, the supplicant pronounces “Et ero immaculatus cum eo” (And I shall be spotless with him). The masculine singular nominative *-us* ending of “immaculatus” (spotless) modifies the first person subject (I) of the verb *esse* (to be; here in future tense, “ero”).²⁰⁹

In the second interpretive level of the psalm according to the heading, grammatically feminine *Ecclesia* speaks the morphologically masculine words “saluum me fecit” and “ero immaculatus cum eo,” inviting the reader to infer an accord of meaning between feminine subject and masculine (or neuter) predicate. This accord does not align with formal grammatical rules, which dictate grammatical gender accord between subject and predicate. To a student of Christian Latin literacy, however, it becomes clear that masculine/neuter accusative “saluum” modifies feminine *Ecclesia*, when *Ecclesia* is understood as the psalm’s speaker. The feminine

²⁰⁹ Compare the Old English Psalm 17, O’Neill, *Old English Psalms*, 54-55, verse 19 “...and gedyde me halne...” (and kept me safe”) where *-ne* “halne” marks masculine singular accusative, and verse 23, “..ic weorðe unwemme beforan him...” (I will be spotless in his sight) where the strong adjective “unwemme” is gender-common nominative singular.

and personified-female subject *Ecclesia* feminizes the otherwise masculine (-us) and masculine or neuter (-um) endings, because the adjectives *saluus* and *immaculatus* modify the feminine speaking subject. Similarly, a schoolgirl or female supplicant pronouncing this verse would accommodate these masculine and neuter forms to the first-person discourse which otherwise grammatically accorded effortlessly with her own feminine and female “I”.

As the grounds of Christian literacy, the psalms taught an inclusive rather than masculinizing Latinity and Old English grammatical practice. For the most part, schoolboys and schoolgirls practiced expressing their own gendered subjectivities through the gender-inclusive language of the psalms without grammatical discrepancy. Where discrepancy occurred, the multi-gendered voices of the psalms offered a way to accommodate grammatical discord through flexible, multiple identification. In other words, masculine grammatical markers did not intrinsically point to a male authorial voice, a male speaker, or a male reader. The implications of an unfixed relationship between grammatical and social gender in the psalms’ first-person discourse extend beyond the classroom. In the next section, I will argue that what appears to be masculinizing language in literature beyond the classroom was in fact understood to be gender-inclusive. Building on a grammatical culture shaped by writers’ early engagement with the psalms, early medieval Latinity and Old English literary practice held more space for women as literary subjects than has been understood recently.

Part II: Grammatical Gender Beyond the Classroom

Early grammarians recognized a link between biological sex and grammatical gender, but the limits of that link were not clarified.²¹⁰ The grammarians point to, but do not define, the

²¹⁰ According to Vivien Law, *The Insular Latin Grammarians* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1982), 20-21, Priscian’s *Institutio de nomine et pronomine et verbo*, along with Donatus’s *Ars*

relationship between the grammatical gender markers proper to an adult human subject and that subject's sex or social gender. The Roman grammarian Varro (d. 27 BCE) understood Latin grammatical gender to have been based on originally perceived accordance between words and the objects signified by the words. For Varro, the basis of grammatical gender was "natural gender" (to Varro, biological sex) but in some cases the "first namers" made mistakes or confusions.²¹¹ Citing Varro's explanation, "*genus a generando*" ("gender" from engendering/procreating), the late-fourth century grammarian Sergius writes that animals and humans have gender "by nature" and other objects have gender "by authority."²¹² Anthony Corbeill finds that Latin grammarians supported the idea of an originary biological sex basis for the grammatical gender of nouns. For those cases where grammatical gender was not easily explainable by natural gender, the primacy of biological sex as a basis for grammatical gender was still considered. Examples, such as inanimate objects in the neuter, because they could not procreate, and apparently misgendered nouns, such as feminine *aquila* for a male eagle, were considered as early mistakes in the language. Corbeill notes that Varro uses *virile* and *muliebre* rather than *masculinum* and *femininum* and understands this choice to indicate the close connection between biological sex and grammatical gender in masculine and feminine nouns.²¹³ Corbeill also points out a section in Priscian's *Institutiones grammaticae* (on the gender of third declension nouns ending in *-or*) showing Priscian's preference for biological sex as a determinant in grammatical gender. The only three words in this class which are feminine (all the

minor and *Ars maior*, and Book I of Isidore's *Etymologiae* "formed the core of the Insular grammarian's working library."

²¹¹ Anthony Corbeill, "Latin Grammatical Gender was Not Arbitrary," in *Sexing the World: Grammatical gender and biological sex in ancient Rome* (Oxford UP, 2015), 37; see also Vivien Law, *The History of Linguistics in Europe from Plato to 1600* (Cambridge UP, 2003), 42-48.

²¹² Sergius, *Explanatio in Donatum Lib I*, ed. Heinrich Keil, in *Grammatici Latini*, vol. 4 (Leipzig: Teubner, 1857), 492-3.

²¹³ Corbeill, "Latin Grammatical Gender was Not Arbitrary," 2.

rest are masculine) are so according to nature (and reproductive analogy): *soror* (sister), *uxor* (wife), and *arbor* (tree, which is considered the mother of its offspring). Of *soror* and *uxor* Priscian explains, “their very nature prevents these two from possessing the opposing gender.”²¹⁴

In Priscian’s *Partitiones xii versuum Aeneidos principalium* there is no directed discussion of the reason for the grammatical gender of nouns. However, Priscian identifies the gender of many of the nouns analyzed in the *Partitiones* and, in some cases, the noun’s gender is one of the topics of discussion. For only one noun, *vir*, which is the first noun analyzed, the gender of the noun (masculine) is attributed to both form and natural gender.²¹⁵ The grammatical gender of no other noun in the treatise is attributed to natural gender, even in nouns that are proper names of male characters (such as *Aeneas* and *Turnus*, both of which are noted to be masculine nouns).²¹⁶ With the exception of the gender of *vir*, the gender of nouns and pronouns is discussed only as a matter of form.

In the *Institutiones grammaticae*, Priscian writes that the two principal genders, masculine and feminine, come from the “capacity to generate,” following Varro.²¹⁷ This is an etymological argument, but it also implies a natural relationship between grammatical gender and sex. Three other grammatical genders are recognized: neuter, which is neither masculine nor feminine and is considered to be artificial because it is disconnected from “natural,” reproductive gender; common gender, by which one word form can accord with two or three genders (e.g., *hic sacerdos* or *haec sacerdos*, where *sacerdos*, “priest,” can take masculine or feminine modifiers to

²¹⁴ Priscian, *Institutionum grammaticarum libri I-XII*, ed. Martin Hertz, *Grammatici Latini*, vol. 2 (Leipzig: Teubner, 1885), book II, 154.7-14, “*quorum duo ipsa natura alterius esse generis prohibet.*”

²¹⁵ Priscian, *Partitiones xii versuum Aeneidos principalium*, ed. Heinrich Keil, in *Grammatici Latini*, vol. 3 (Leipzig, Teubner, 1860), 465.7-8, “*Cuius est generis? Masculini. Vnde hoc possumus scire? Tam ab ipsa natura eius quod significat, quam a terminatione et declinatione.*”

²¹⁶ Priscian, *Partitiones*, 481.27; 511.15.

²¹⁷ Priscian, *Institutiones grammaticae* V, 141.3-4, “*genus a generando.*”

refer to male or female priests, respectively); and promiscuous, by which a word designating naturally male *and* female subjects has only a single form (such as *haec aquila*, which takes morphologically feminine modifiers but refers equally to a male or female eagle).²¹⁸ Carolingian grammarian Remigius of Auxerre (d. 908), commenting on Donatus, writes that there are four noun genders: masculine, feminine, neuter, and common. Masculine and feminine are natural genders; neuter and common are artificial genders, according to Remigius.²¹⁹

It is clear to the grammarians that grammatical gender in current language is arbitrary to some degree, but the closer the words are to the generative aspects of human people, the more closely grammatical and natural gender seem to align. For example, *mas* (a male) and *femina* (a female) are masculine and feminine words respectively; *vir* (adult human male) is masculine and *mulier* (woman) is feminine. The grammarians agree that the secondary or “artificial” noun genders arise from the need to designate subjects which cannot naturally reproduce or are not distinguished according to their reproductive capacity. But they do not pinpoint when and why the relationship between so-called natural and grammatical gender breaks down in biologically-sexed or socially-gendered subjects. Disjunction between grammatical and human gender also occurs in Old English, as in the neuter words *wif* (woman) and *mægden* (girl) in contrast with the feminine word *ides* (woman).²²⁰

²¹⁸ Priscian, *Institutiones grammaticae* V, 141.8-15; Sergius, *Explanatio in Donatum Lib I*, 494, explains the difference between common and promiscuous gender as whether or not the biological sex of the subject/animal named can be discerned by sight—if so, common; if not, promiscuous.

²¹⁹ Remigius of Auxerre, *In Artem Donati minorem commentum*, in *Grammatici Latini*, Vol. VIII, ed. W. Fox (Leipzig: Teubner, 1902), 16.

²²⁰ Anne Curzan, *Gender Shifts in the History of English* (Cambridge UP, 2019), 36, explains, “nominal gender class assignments have both a syntactic and a semantic basis. Most words denoting men were grammatically masculine (e.g., *man*, *secg* ‘man’, *wer* ‘man,’ *fæder* ‘father,’ *cniht* ‘boy, young man’) and most denoting women were grammatically feminine (e.g., *mægð* ‘maiden,’ *cwen* ‘queen,’ *moðer* ‘mother’), with the few notable exceptions mentioned in most histories of English: the [masculine] noun *wifmann* ‘woman’ and the neuter nouns *wif* ‘woman,’ *mædge* ‘maiden,’ *bearn* ‘child,’ and *cil* ‘child.’ In addition, Corbett’s agreement hierarchy

Although grammarians' underlying arguments for grammatical gender suggest a "scientific" basis—*genus a generando*—discussions of the "natural" basis of grammatical gender suggest an understanding based on culturally constructed social-gender expectations. For example, Priscian points out places where the grammatical gender of a word is *not* as expected, based on the word's cultural connection to gendered subjects. This happens in his discussion of participles. Priscian writes that the inflected participles of verbs that pertain only or principally to males or females, such as *futuo* ("to have sex with a female," and ancestor of modern French *foutre*) and *nubeo* (to be veiled/married) should be expected to be masculine and feminine respectively.²²¹ However, the participles turn out to be of common gender, because they can be applied to subjects of the opposite gender either (culturally) incorrectly or because of poetic figure. A participle of any verb, even a verb associated "naturally" (that is, socially) with male or female subjects, can be of any gender because figuratively it must be able to agree with a subject of any grammatical gender. Priscian concludes that grammatical gender has an underlying relationship to natural gender, but that grammatical gender is not constrained by that underlying relationship.

One place where the lack of clarity surrounding the relationship between natural and grammatical gender causes difficulty is in the relationship between common-gender words and subjects which can be identified as having "natural gender." The most pertinent example of this is *hic et haec homo*, as individual humans are usually socially sexed or gendered. Furthermore,

manifests itself in Old English grammar, where there exist two systems of agreement, similar to many languages with grammatical gender: noun-phrase internal and noun-phrase external. Within the noun phrase, grammatical gender agreement in the inflectional endings of the noun and its modifiers is obligatory (with occasional exceptions for unnaturally gendered animate nouns such as masculine *wifmann* 'woman'), outside the noun phrase, however, grammatical gender agreement between anaphoric pronouns and their antecedents is often variable."

²²¹ Priscian, *Institutiones Grammaticae* II, 556.10, "quaedam verba, quae naturaliter ad mares pertinent vel ad feminas."

first- and second-declension adjectival endings do not have distinct common-gender forms in most case/number pairings. As a result, it is not possible to describe one *homo* at length in first, second, or third person discourse without necessarily attributing grammatical, and thereby social, masculinity or femininity.

Pronouns and articles paired with common nouns pose the same difficulty. In the case of common gender nouns such as *hic et haec homo*, it is unclear whether the addition of a gendered article or pronoun in connected writing delimits the gender commonality of the noun. Is the *homo* in “*homo, qui...*” effectively made masculine, or does it remain common? In the case of gender-common pronouns, the gender is determined by the grammatical gender of the noun which the pronoun refers to. Priscian gives “*haec*” as an example of a word that is common of two genders, because it can accord with the feminine (singular) as in “*haec mulier*” and the neuter (plural) as in “*haec mancipia.*”²²² The example of “*haec*” shows that it can be the particular form of a word, rather than a related group of word forms (such as *hic, hi...*) that is common of gender. In other words, it isn’t “the word meaning *this*” but rather “the particular form of the word meaning *this* spelled *h-a-e-c*” that is common of gender. In the chapter “*De genere pronomium*” Priscian writes that pronouns come in all five genders; these pronouns include *ego, tu, and se*, which are common of three genders.²²³

A clear discussion of gender agreement between nouns and pronouns is missing from the early Latin grammars. Carin Ruff shows that “pronomial reference, especially in relative constructions, is a weak point in the grammars,” despite the importance of pronomial reference for syntax.²²⁴ Isidore illustrates, but does not explain, pronomial reference in the *Etymologies* (I.viii “*De pronomine*”), and does include *quis* (indefinite, common of two genders) but not

²²² Priscian, *Institutiones grammaticae* XII, 597,12.33.

²²³ Priscian, *Institutiones grammaticae* XII, 586,12.16.

²²⁴ Ruff, *The Hidden Curriculum*, 217.

relatives (*qui*) among pronouns. Donatus entirely lacks discussion of noun-modifier agreement.²²⁵ As Ruff explains, Donatus’s discussion of the difference between barbarisms and solecisms offers an illustration of incorrect noun-modifier accord, but the discussion is centered around individual word morphology rather than the demands of syntax:

A solecism is a fault made against the rule of the grammatical art in the connection of the parts of speech. The difference between a solecism and a barbarism is this, that a solecism has in its parts of speech that disagree or that do not logically follow, whereas a barbarism occurs in the writing or pronunciation of individual words. Nevertheless, many err who think that a solecism can also occur in a single part of speech, if, pointing out a man, we were to say “her”, or a woman, “him”; or, when asked where we are going, we were to respond “at Rome”; or, greeting one person, we were to say, “Hey, y’all!” although certainly the foregoing pointing out or query or greeting takes its force from connected discourse.²²⁶

These examples of barbarisms (which are understood by others as solecisms because the mistakes exist in relation to connected discourse) show the importance of pronoun-noun gender agreement. Some paragrammatical texts and glossing techniques address this lacuna to a certain extent, but do not offer a prescriptive discussion.²²⁷

Neither relative *qui* nor indefinite/interrogative *quis* are accepted as real pronouns by Priscian, or by Alcuin following Priscian.²²⁸ Priscian notes that *qui* can be used in place of

²²⁵ Ruff, *The Hidden Curriculum*, 61-62 and 111; because the adjective was not discussed separately (called a *nomen adiectivum* in Priscian and *nomen appellativum* in Donatus), “the principle of gender-, number-, and case-concord between a noun and its modifier” is not related to adjectives.

²²⁶ Ruff, *The Hidden Curriculum*, 63, translating Aelius Donatus, *Ars minor* III.2, in *Donat et la tradition de l’enseignement grammatical: étude sur l’Ars Donati et sa diffusion (IVe-IXe siècle) et édition critique*, ed. Louis Holtz (Paris: CNRS, 1981), 655.

²²⁷ See e.g. Gernot Wieland, *The Latin Glosses on Arator and Prudentius in Cambridge, University Library, Ms Gg.5.35* (Toronto: PIMS, 1983), on dot glosses which connect pronouns with referents, cited in Ruff, *The Hidden Curriculum*, 217.

²²⁸ By contrast, Donatus does not separate relatives and interrogatives from pronouns, and does not discuss relative clauses, Ruff, *The Hidden Curriculum*, 29; see further Stella Merlin Defanti, “‘*Quis vel qui*’. A controversial classification in Latin grammatical sources”, in *Word, Phrase and Sentence in Relation*, ed. Paola Cotticelli-Kurras, 151-202 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020).

indefinite or interrogative *quis*, but that *quis* can never be used in place of the relative *qui*.²²⁹ In the nominative singular, *quis* is common of two genders (masculine and feminine), while relative *qui* has distinct masculine (*qui*) and feminine (*quae*) nominative singular forms. I argue, however, that early medieval readers and writers recognized the morphologically masculine form of the relative “qui” as a grammatically gender common (masculine and feminine) form. In other words, the form “qui” acted as an alternative to “quae”. A gender-common definite relative *qui* would allow us to translate the quotation from the *Synonyma* at the beginning of the chapter as, “You, (fem.) teacher of virtue, you are *she who [qui]* leads like a ruling-stick on the right path, you are *she who [qui]* never departs from correctness, you are *she who [qui]* never turns from the truth.”²³⁰ Gender-common *qui* would resolve the seeming grammatical gender discord between the feminine gender of Ratio’s appellation as “tu magistra” and the morphologically masculine relative “qui.”

If this principle were carried into Old English grammatical usage, then the morphologically masculine relative applied to Grendel’s mother in *Beowulf*, l.1260a, could also be interpreted as a gender-common relative: *Grendles modor, ides aglæcwif yrmþe gemunde, se þe wæteregesan wunian scolde*.²³¹ Syntactically, the relative construction *se þe* refers back to three nouns which identify the subject, Grendel’s mother: the feminine noun *modor* (mother), the feminine noun *ides* (woman), and the neuter compound-noun *aglæcwif* (“warrior,” literally, “misery-woman”). Separately, the noun component *wif* (woman) is also neuter. Although the

²²⁹ Priscian, *Institutiones grammaticae* XVII, 127,29, “et necesse est, eandem hanc [partem orationis ‘qui’] esse partem orationis quam ‘quis’, cum etiam obliqui in omnibus similes sunt eorum casus absque accentibus. Et ‘qui’ quidem pro ‘quis’ infinito vel interrogativo accipitur, ‘quis’ vero pro relativo numquam.”

²³⁰ Isidore of Seville, *Synonyma*, II.102, “Tu es enim dux uitae, tu magistra uirtutis, tu es qui tamquam regula in directum ducis, tu es qui a recto numquam discedis, tu es qui a ueritate numquam auerteris.”

²³¹ Anon., *Beowulf* 1258b-1260.

masculine relative *se* and the lead feminine noun *modor* do not accord in grammatical gender, it may be the case that the poet uses *se* as a gender-common equivalent of Latin *qui* to accommodate the grammatically mixed-gender noun group (*modor* fem., *ides* fem., and *-wif* neut.) We might translate the line semantically, to reflect the social gender of the subject: “Grendel’s mother, woman warrior, remembered desolation, *she* who had to dwell in fearful waters,” or syntactically: to reflect the flexible grammatical accord between the relative pronoun and three subject-nouns, “Grendel’s mother, woman warrior, remembered desolation, *the one* who had to dwell in fearful waters.” Later in the poem, when Beowulf goes to the mere to hunt for her, Grendel’s mother is once again given the masculine relative *se*: “*Sona þæt onfunde se ðe floda begong heorogifre beheold*” (Right away the sword-ready one who occupied the water’s course discovered that.)²³²

Important readings of these passages by feminist scholars interpret the poet’s uses of a masculine relative for Grendel’s mother in light of two other instances where the masculine definite pronoun *he* (instead of feminine *heo*) is used for Grendel’s mother (ll.1392b–1394b), and one instance where she is called a *secg* (male person) (l.1379a). In these readings, feminist scholars explain the grammatical masculinization of Grendel’s mother as an effort to regulate the gender-transgression of a threatening female body. Renée Trilling explains,

Grendel’s mother is a threat which must be eradicated immediately, and the text itself begins this eradication through the use of masculine pronouns to describe the threat...the active and powerful figure is identified by the masculine pronoun, regardless of her biological gender or even her primary identity as a mother. Neither the narrator nor the characters can comfortably attach a feminine pronoun to the perpetrator of an attack on Heorot. According to the text, then, the creature who attacks Heorot, and whom Beowulf tracks to the mere, is not a female after all – it has, on the literal level, become male, because an active body in this cultural economy is, by definition, a masculine one.²³³

²³² Anon., *Beowulf*, 1497b-1498a.

²³³ Renée Trilling, “Beyond Abjection: The Problem with Grendel’s Mother Again,” *Parergon*, 24.1 (2007), 1-20; see further, Jane Chance, “The Structural Unity of Beowulf: The Problem of Grendel’s Mother,” in *New Readings on Women in Old English Literature*, eds. Helen Damico

The possibility of the relative *se* as a gender-common marker applied to Grendel’s mother need not necessarily contradict feminist readings of Grendel’s mother as a threat to be managed. Even if we understand the relative *se* as gender-common, rather than grammatically masculine, in these two instances, the poet nevertheless chooses not to use the feminine relative *seo*. Using *se* passes over an opportunity to emphasize Grendel’s mother’s femaleness through morphologically and grammatically feminine markers. Still, several other examples in *Beowulf* of morphologically masculine relatives applied to grammatically feminine nouns suggest that we take seriously the possibility of Old English gender-common relatives.

Trilling points out that masculine pronouns—the relative *se þe*—are used to refer twice to the feminine word for “hand,” *seo hand* (ll. 1344a and 2685a); once to “old age,” *seo yld* (l. 1887b); and once to “fate,” *seo wyrd* (l. 2421a).²³⁴ Trilling notes that Bruce Mitchell and Fred Robinson explain the uses of masculine relatives for *seo hand* as “the triumph of sex over gender,” in which the male sex of the hands’ owners determined the grammatical gender of the relatives.²³⁵ In the cases of *yld* and *wyrd*, Mitchell and Robinson suggest that the powerful forces of time and fate “probably shifted in the poet’s mind to a masculine figure.”²³⁶ A more consistent interpretation of the cross-gender uses of relatives in *Beowulf*, I argue, is the possibility of

and Alexandra Hennessey Olsen (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1990), 248-261; M. Wendy Hennequin, “We’ve Created a Monster: The Strange Case of Grendel’s Mother” *English Studies* 89.5 (2008), 503-523; and Gillian R. Overing, “The Women of Beowulf: A Context for Interpretation,” in *The Beowulf Reader*, ed. Peter S. Baker, 219-260 (New York: Routledge, 2000).

²³⁴ Trilling, “Beyond Abjection,” 15; “nu seo hand ligeð, se þe eow welhwylcra wilna dohte” (1343b-1344a); “wæs sio hand to strong, se ðe meca gehwane min gefræge swenge oftersohte” (2684b-2686a); “op þæt hine yldo benam mægenes wynnum, se þe oft manegum scod” (1886b-1887b); “wyrd ungemete neah, se ðone gomelan gretan sceolde” (2420b-2421b).

²³⁵ Bruce Mitchell, *Old English Syntax*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), §2178 and §2358, cited in Trilling, “Beyond Abjection,” 16.

²³⁶ Bruce Mitchell and Fred Robinson, eds. *Beowulf: An Edition* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), note to l. 1887, cited in Trilling, “Beyond Abjection,” 16.

gender-commonality in relatives, as an extension of the gender-common interpretation of the Latin relative *qui*.

In Latin, there is no doubt that *qui* proper was understood to be morphologically masculine, with alternate feminine forms *quae* and neuter *quod*; the Insular tract *Declinationes nominum* declines distinct masculine, feminine, and neuter forms of *quis qui*: “masculino quis vel qui cuius cui...femininum quae vel qua cuius cui...Neutrum quod vel quid cuius cui...sic quisdam vel quidam, femininum quaedam, neutrum quodam, sic et quisquam vel quiquam...”²³⁷ Despite this formal clarity, however, several instances of morphologically masculine *qui/quis* and their compounds, such as *Synonyma*’s “tu magistra...qui,” cast doubt on the strictness of their masculine gender reference in actual usage. Two oblation charters from the register of Rheims dating to 881, preserved in Paris, BN lat. 13090, f.75r, show the use of *qui* to refer equally to men and women signatories. The first charter, by which a woman named Oda offers her son Emmo, ends with the signature: “Signu[m] odae qui hanc cartula[m] fieri [et] firmare rogav[it]” (The signature of Oda, who [*qui*] requested this cartulary to be made and confirms it). The second charter, by which the male Count Achadaeus offers his son Hilduin, ends: “Signum achadei comitis qui hanc cart[ul]a[m] fieri [et] firmare rogavit” (The signature of count Achadeus, who [*qui*] requested this cartulary to be made and confirms it). The morphologically masculine *qui* is used in both cases to refer to the signatories of the two charters, though one is female and the other is male. As formally structured documents, however, charters might represent a particular exception. Below, I examine literary uses of pronoun gender which show

²³⁷ Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS lat. 13025, f.42vb, “in the masculine ‘quis’ or ‘qui, cuius, cui’...feminine ‘quae’ or ‘qua, cuius, cui’...neuter ‘quod’ or ‘quid, cuius, cui’...likewise ‘quisdam’ or ‘quidam,’ feminine ‘quaedam,’ neuter ‘quodam,’ likewise also ‘quisquam’ or ‘quiquam’...” and so on.

flexibility and diversity in writers' uses of grammatical gender as reflections of mixed-gender literary culture.

Default Gender

According to the fourth-century Latin grammarians Servius and Probus, the masculine gender in Latin is the default gender; in cases where masculine and feminine nouns are jointly modified, they will be modified by a masculine adjective. Servius explains that this is because masculine gender is superior to feminine gender.²³⁸ Likewise, in the ninth century, Remigius of Auxerre demonstrates Donatus's figure "syllepsis" with the example, "...vir et mulier, qui noviter ad nos venerunt, magni sunt." "Magni" is the masculine plural nominative form of the adjective *magnus* (great). Remigius explains,

Although *vir* 'man' and *mulier* 'woman' are of masculine and feminine gender respectively, they are enclosed within one gender, i.e., the masculine, since when the two genders masculine and feminine are joined together, they are resolved into the superior gender.²³⁹

Priscian establishes a derivational hierarchy or, more accurately, a lineage of grammatical genders as a part of the lineage or hierarchy of word forms. The verb precedes the noun; masculine precedes feminine and neuter. In the *Institutiones grammaticae*, for example, the feminine noun *nutrix* is noted to be derivative; it is derived from the verb *nutrio*, via the masculine form *nutritor*.²⁴⁰ From masculine *nutritor* comes feminine *nutrix*. Priscian's order of words discussed in the *Institutiones grammaticae* is said to reflect a view of the hierarchy of words in being. Verbs in fact precede nouns, which are "born" (*nascor*) from verbs. The case can

²³⁸ Jaana Vaahtera, "On grammatical gender in ancient linguistics - the order of genders" *Arctos* 42 (2008), 247-266, 258.

²³⁹ Remigius, *In Artem Donati*, vol. 8, 270.4-8, cited in Vaahtera, "On grammatical gender," 258, "vir et mulier... Hic 'vir' et 'mulier' cum sint masculini et feminini generis, per unum genus i(dest) masculinum clauduntur, quia, ubo duo genera iunguntur masculinum et femininum, per illud, quod praecipuum est, resoluuntur."

²⁴⁰ Priscian, *Institutiones grammaticae* IV, 140.14; see also Priscian, *Partitiones XII*, VII.1, 494.

be made then that grammatical feminine and neuter forms are derived from masculine forms because this reflects a view of the natural hierarchy of male sex over female sex and non-generating subjects.

As Jaana Vaahtera points out, according to the grammarians, there are more than one possible system in contention for determining the collective gender of a mixed-gender group: word order and gender-hierarchy. In the system based on word order, collective accidents might be determined by the final item named in a group, because the final item is closest to the shared term in question and that closeness can exert an audible pull on the shared term. However, the gender-hierarchy outweighs the question of proximity and order for Servius. Servius in his commentary on Vergil appears to reflect the position that masculine grammatical gender subsumes the feminine in plural mixed-gender groups *because* male sex is *better*, more virtuous and therefore more powerful than, female sex: “whenever masculine and feminine are connected, the rule is that, even if the latter is feminine, we make the agreement with the masculine.”²⁴¹ Commenting on the Vergil’s use of masculine plural *soceri* (literally “fathers-in-law,” here, “parents-in-law”) to denote a *socer* (masc., “father-in-law”) and *socrus* (fem., “mother-in-law”) together, he asks, “why *ad soceros* although it is said both *socer* ‘father-in-law’ and *socrus* ‘mother-in-law’? Vergil makes the agreement with the better sex, i.e. with the masculine.”²⁴²

²⁴¹ Servius, *In Vergilii Aeneidos libros VI-VIII commentarii*, ed. Georgius Thilo (Leipzig: Teubner, 1883), on Aen 8,209: “ATQUE HOS quotiens masculinum et femininum iungitur, haec disciplina est, ut etiam si posterius est femininum, masculino respondeamus,” cited and trans. in Vaahtera, “On grammatical gender,” 258.

²⁴² Servius, *In Vergilii*, on Aen. 2,457: “AD SOCEROS quare ‘ad soceros’ cum ‘socer’ et ‘socrus’ dicantur? sed meliori sexui respondit, id est masculino”, cited and trans. in Vaahtera, “On grammatical gender,” 258; Vaahtera also notes that “Masculine plays a special role in many Indo-European languages, in the sense that it functions as the default gender.” As I discuss below, “default” gender operates differently between Latin, Old English, and Modern English, which each have different accommodations for marking the gender-inclusive.

Probus makes the same claim: “all feminine words that are found connected with masculine ones have to go under a word of masculine gender.”²⁴³

According to Vaahtera, discussions about the grammatical gender hierarchy in mixed-gender groups appear only in these two commentaries; they do not appear in any primary grammatical works. Vaahtera’s essay suggests that Latin uses the masculine as default, but that the rule is not widely discussed. What this doesn’t explain with certainty, however, is to what extent medieval Latin users would have encountered constructions such as *homo, qui...* as insisting on the masculinity of the default subject position, or simply as the linguistic default form reinforcing the grammatical gender-commonality of a sex-unspecified subject. Nor does a Latin “masculine default” account for the usage *magistra... qui* in Isidore’s *Synonyma*, where the subject is explicitly grammatically feminine and singular. I suggest there may have been different interpretations of grammatical doctrine at different times and places, leading to different usages of grammatical gender markers.

The preface to the late eighth-century *Lives of Sts. Willibald and Wynnebald*, composed by the West Saxon religious woman Hugeburc, includes an unusual instance of a feminine plural pronoun designating a mixed-gender group. Explaining that she chose to write the *Lives* because she is related to the brother saints, Hugeburc writes,

Sed qui me, indignam tamen, de illorum genealogii stirpe aliunde propagatam, forte de extremis ramorum cauliculis, me fore noveram, de tantis talisque virorum beatitudinibus vernerabileque vitae eorum...aliquid memoriae dignum lectoris legendi manibus inponere me libet. Quarum alter summe sacerdotalis infulae pastoralisque cure prerogativa prelati, inclitus crucicolus, multorum magne magister Willibaldus.²⁴⁴

²⁴³ Probus, ed. Keil, 127, 31-34, cited and trans. in Vaahtera, “On grammatical gender,” 258, “quaecumque generis feminini nomina generibus masculinis reperiuntur esse conuineta, haec sub sono generis masculini necesse est ut procedant.”

²⁴⁴ Hugeburc, *Vita willibaldi et wynnebaldi auctore sanctimoniali heidenheimensi*, ed. Oswald Holder-Egger, MGH Ss. 15,1, 80-117 (Hanover, 1887), 87.

But, although I am an unworthy woman, I know that I have flowered from the same genealogical root as those men, albeit from the lowest stalks of its branches, and therefore I have felt disposed to place in the hands of readers something worthy of remembrance concerning such great and venerable men...One among this group was a bishop raised to the highest degree of priestly rank and of pastoral care, that renowned lover of the cross and teacher of many, Willibald.²⁴⁵

Talbot translates “quorum alter” as “the first of these men,” leaving the “quorum” (feminine genitive plural form of the indefinite pronoun *quis*) as a mistake for the masculine genitive plural form, “quorum.” Talbot understands the plural group referred to as the exclusively male pair Willibald and Wynnebald. However, Hugeburc identifies herself as coming from the same “family tree” as the two saints. Her family connection to the saints serves as the justification and frame for the two *Lives*. If we understand the plural group denoted by the “quorum” as the whole group of relatives, or simply as the small family group including Hugeburc and the two saints, we have a mixed-gender group represented by a feminine plural pronoun. The feminine form then follows the female gender of the author.

This passage and the preface as a whole contain numerous transgressions of classical grammar (including errors of declension such as “genealogii” for “genealogiae” and “talis” for “talibus”) that together caution against overinterpreting such a small transgression as the “a” in “quorum” where we would expect an “o” (“quorum”). However, the “quorum alter” stands out among the other transgressions in pertaining to the social gender of author, subject, and audience. It appears in the part of the preface in which Hugeburc (as I argue in chapter four) is deliberately casting the authorial role of hagiographer as active and “female” and the audience role as passive and “male”, as a part of her critique of the new culture of hierarchical binary gender segregation in all parts of monastic life.

²⁴⁵ Hugeburc, *Vita willibaldi*, 87; translation adapted from C. H. Talbot, “The Hodoeporicon of St. Willibald,” in eds. Noble and Head, *Soldiers of Christ*, 145; Talbot translates the start of the last sentence “The first of these men was a bishop raised to the highest degree...”

The visual juxtaposition between the morphologically feminine plural “quarum” and the masculine singular “alter” (referring to Willibald) highlights the inclusion of a male subject under a feminine plural marker. Probus and Servius would find this inappropriate. But would a medieval woman writer who was likely educated by women as well as men, and who was writing in a mixed-gender community under the authority of an abbess, find feminine gender primacy in a mixed-gender group so surprising?²⁴⁶ To the extent that grammatical gender referring to human subjects was understood to relate to natural gender, as Latin grammatical tradition held, Hugeburc’s usage does not seem out of place. We might posit a third potential scheme for determining the plural gender form for mixed-gender groups to add to Servius’s two: perhaps grammatical gender primacy for mixed-gender groups *of which the writer is a member* could be determined by the writer’s (social and grammatical) gender. In cases of male authors writing about mixed-gender groups of which they were part, it would be impossible to distinguish between this organizing principle and that of masculine grammatical gender superiority. In the cases of female authors, however, the choice to use author gender as the principle for determining mixed-group gender markers would be apparent, as in Hugeburc’s case.

The two schemes for determining gender primacy in mixed-gender groups discussed by Servius depend on identifying the greater weight, or force, in a collection of subjects. In the word-order scheme, the proximity between the final word in a list and the collective signifier gives the determining force to that final word. In the hierarchical gender scheme favored by both Servius and Probus, the “natural” authority of masculinity determined the gender of the collective signifier. Hugeburc’s usage points to another important locus of authority, or

²⁴⁶ Hugeburc, *Vita willibaldi*, 106, calls Willibald her teacher, “Quid dicam nunc de Willibaldo, meo magistro et vestro alumno?” (What shall I say now about Willibald, my teacher and your student?); numerous contemporary examples of female teachers in mixed-gender communities, however, make it likely that Hugeburc studied under male and female teachers (see chapter two).

determining force, in writing: the author. The author carries a practical authority in the composition of language. Perhaps the writer's authority gives the determining force in a mixed group to the writer's own gender.

A second contemporary example of a woman writer's use of the feminine plural for a mixed-gender group of which she is a member appears in a letter from the religious woman Berhtgyth to her brother. Berhtgyth and Hugeburc were both members of the late-eighth century English mission in Francia under St. Boniface. Their educational training and literary cultures had much in common.²⁴⁷ Berhtgyth closes her letter to her brother with the prayer, "Valeamus angelicis victrices iungi milibus Paradisi perpetuis perdurantes in gaudiis," which the editor Kathryn Maud translates as, "May we thrive, victresses joined with the angelic thousands, living forever in the perpetual joys of paradise."²⁴⁸ Berhtgyth uses the form "victrices," the feminine plural nominative of *victor*, rather than the masculine plural "victores," to denote herself and her brother together. Diane Watt reads this seeming grammatical solecism as left-over evidence of an earlier version of the letter intended for a female recipient.²⁴⁹ Alternatively, I propose that Berhtgyth's feminine plural for a mixed-gender pair of which she is a member might, like Hugeburc's *quarum alter*, point toward an "author-principle" interpretation of the grammatical doctrine governing mixed groups current in the late eighth century.

Vaahtera points out that Remigius's comment, "per illud, quod praecipuum est, resoluunter" (when the two genders masculine and feminine are joined together, they are resolved into the superior gender), is not crystal clear. The word translated as "superior"

²⁴⁷ On shared Aldhelmian influence among the missionaries in Boniface's circle, see Fell, "Some Implications."

²⁴⁸ Maud, Kathryn, ed. and trans., *Berhtgyth's Letters to Balthard*, *Medieval Feminist Forum* 53.3, sub.ser. 7 (2017), 1-24, 16.

²⁴⁹ Watt, Diane, "A Fragmentary Archive: Migratory Feelings in Early Anglo-Saxon Women's Letters" *Journal of Homosexuality* 64.3 (2017), 415-429, 421.

("praecipuum") could instead be translated as "particular, peculiar." This would mean that Remigius's comment "could also allow the interpretation that the gender chosen depends on the case at hand."²⁵⁰ Vaahtera quickly rejects this interpretation, as she finds nothing in Remigius's example that would suggest contextual primacy as the determiner for the masculine. Nevertheless, Vaahtera's caveat opens the possibility that some teachers or users of Latin grammar might have interpreted Remigius's comment as license to determine default plural gender contextually. The "author-principle" might be one such example. Given the scarcity of authoritative commentary on the method for determining mixed-group gender, we can speculate some diversity in early medieval practices.

Generic and Gender-Specific Markers in Old English and Latin

The late-ninth century preface to King Alfred's translation of the *Pastoral Care* announces a program for translating books which are "most necessary for all people to know" in order that "all the youth now among the English freeborn people" may have access to the important knowledge that was previously only available in Latin:

For ðy me ðyncð betere, gif iow swæ ðyncð, ðæt we eac sumæ bec, ðy ðe niedbeðearfosta sien eallum monnum to wiotonne, ðæt we ðe on ðæt geðiode wenden ðe we eall gecnawen mægen, ond gedon, swæ we swiðe eaðe magon mid Godes fultume gif we ða stilnesse habbað, ðætte eall sio gioguð ðe nu is on Angelcynne friora monna, ðara ðe ða speda hæbben ðæt hie ðæm befeolan mægen, sien to liornunga oðfæste, ða hwile ðe hie to nanre oðerre note ne mægen, oð ðone first ðe hie wel cunnen Englisc gewrit arædan. Lære mon siððan furður on Lædengeðiode ða ðe mon furðor læran wille ond to heiran hade don wille.²⁵¹

Therefore it seems better to me, if it seems so to you, that we also should translate certain books which are most necessary for all people to know into the language that we can all understand, and also arrange it, as with God's help we very easily can if we have peace, so that all the youth now among the English freeborn people, who have the means to be able to devote themselves to it, may be set to study for as long as they are of no other use, until the time they are able to read English writing well. Afterwards one may teach further in the Latin language those whom one wishes to teach further and wishes to

²⁵⁰ Vaahtera, "On grammatical gender," 259n40.

²⁵¹ Keynes and Lapidge, eds., *Alfred the Great*, 124.

promote to higher office.²⁵²

How does Alfred's plan envision access to vernacular Christian literary studies? Alfred names young, freeborn people, from among the English. The only limitation placed on access to Old English literacy and literary studies in the preface relates to free-born status.²⁵³ It does not set out gender-based restrictions. The description of Old English is notably inclusive: it is "the language that we can all understand."

The translation given for this passage in Elaine Treharne's anthology of medieval English literature exemplifies the frequent translation practice of masculinizing terms in translation which are gender-inclusive in Old English. Treharne's translation reads: "we should also translate certain books which are most necessary for all men to know, and also arrange it...so that all the young freeborn men now among the English people...may be set to study."²⁵⁴ Translating *menn* and *gioguð* as "men" and "young men" imposes unwarranted gender-specificity on the Old English terms. The books which are "most necessary to know" are necessary for all persons, ungendered, not all "male persons." As the equivalent term for *homo*, Old English *mann* does not specify an individual's social gender. Therefore, when Alfred announces that the Christian learning contained in these "certain books" is relevant for *ealle menn*, Alfred uses a deliberately

²⁵² Translation adapted from Treharne, *Old and Middle English*, 13, with underlines indicating my changes, where Treharne translates *ealle menn* as "men", *eall sio gioguð ðe nu is on Angelcynne friora monna* as "all the young freeborn men now among the English people", and *to hieran hade* as "to holy orders"; since Dorothy Whitelock, *to hieran hade* has been translated as "to holy orders," and interpretation which reserved Latin literacy was male ecclesiastics; but Malcolm Godden, "King Alfred's Preface and the Teaching of Latin in Anglo-Saxon England" *The English Historical Review* 117.472 (2002), 472, rejects the alignment between vernacular/Latin literacy and lay/clergy, which he sees as underwriting Whitelock's translation of the phrase.

²⁵³ Alfred makes no provision in this preface for the education of enslaved persons, though there is evidence in wills from one century later for literate male and female slaves, Whitelock, *The Will of Aethelgifu*.

²⁵⁴ Treharne, *Old and Middle English*, 13.

gender-inclusive term. Likewise, the word for “youth,” *sio gioguð*, is a gender-inclusive word. It refers to young people, regardless of gender; not to “young men” only.²⁵⁵ According to the preface, Alfred explicitly directs the translation program toward a gender-inclusive audience.²⁵⁶

The traditional opening address in Old English homilies, *menn þa leofestan* (most beloved people), demonstrates the gender-inclusiveness of the term *mann*.²⁵⁷ Preachers addressing mixed-gender audiences with the phrase *menn þa leofestan* made it clear that the term *menn* included both male and female audience members. As Kathryn Maud points out, for instance, Blickling Homily 10 “explicitly includes women in the group of *men* addressed in *men þa leofestan*.”²⁵⁸ Maud translates the homily’s opening phrases, “Men ða leofostan, hwæt nu anra manna gehwylcne ic myngie ond lære, ge weras ge wif, ge geonge ge ealde, ge snottre ge unwise, ge-þa welegan ge þa þearfan,” as “Listen, most beloved people/men, I now remind and urge everyone, men and women, young and old, wise and unwise, rich and poor.”²⁵⁹ Similarly,

²⁵⁵ Bosworth, “giógoð,” in *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online*; Cameron, et al., “Dictionary of Old English,” translates *geoguþ*, “in the singular in a collective sense: young persons, youth.”

²⁵⁶ While Latin writing by English monastic women in the seventh and eighth centuries attests to women’s widespread participation in formal Latin education, no Old English writing attributed to a named woman author survives; does the lack of attributed women’s writing in English mean that women’s access to English literacy schooling was restricted in a way that their access to Latin literacy was not? Alfred’s preface to the *Pastoral Care* suggests not; in addition, unnamed women writers in Latin and Old English are attested from the eleventh centuries in the Royal Psalter and Salisbury Psalter. Likewise, very few named male authors in Old English are known; the majority of extant Old English writing is anonymous.

²⁵⁷ On female address in Vercelli Homily VII, see Samantha Zacher, *Preaching the Converted: The Style and Rhetoric of the Vercelli Book Homilies* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 39-40, and “The Source of Vercelli VII: An Address to Women,” in *New Readings in the Vercelli Book*, eds. Samantha Zacher and Andy Orchard; see also Mary Dockray-Miller, “Female Devotion and the Vercelli Book” *Philological Quarterly* 22 (2004), 337-54; Celia Sisam, *The Vercelli Book*, 44n2, suggests the double monastery of Barking Abbey as a possible place of production of the Vercelli Book, which means the book may have been produced by women.

²⁵⁸ Kathryn Maud, *Addressing Women in Early Medieval Religious Texts* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2021), 43; see also: Brandon Hawk, *Preaching Apocrypha in Anglo-Saxon England* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018), 16, 30, 46–7, 170, 202.

²⁵⁹ Maud, *Addressing Women*, 42.

Maud translates the opening address of Homily M8 in Cambridge, Cambridge University Library MS li.l.33:

Mage we gyt her gehyran, men þa leofestan eowre sawle þearfe, gif ge me glystan wyllað 7 on eowre heortan þas halgan lare underniman, swa swa Sanctus Augustinus hit ærest on bocum awrat, 7 þus cwæþ: “Ic eow lære ealle, ægþer ge broðra ge swystra, ge weras ge wif, geonge men 7 ealde, þæt ge eow scyldan 7 wærnigan wið þam wyrrestan feonde.”

Here we may yet hear, most beloved people/men, for your soul’s need, if you will listen to me and accept this holy counsel in your hearts, just as St Augustine first wrote it in books. And he spoke thus: “I advise you all, both brothers and sisters, men and women, young [people/]men and old, to defend yourselves and be on guard against the worst enemy.”²⁶⁰

The homilists’ delineations of different groups of people among their addressees make clear the gender-inclusiveness of the term *menn* in these usages.²⁶¹ Unlike the Modern English singular “man” and plural “men,” Old English *mann* is a generic term that is properly inclusive of any human person, regardless of gender.

Some scholars have argued that the word *mann* had both gender-inclusive and gender-specific usages already in Old English. Anne Curzan gives an example from Ælfric’s Catholic Homilies, in which Ælfric warns against lust: “ælc man þe sceawað wifman mid luste,” which she translates, “each man who looks upon a woman with lust.”²⁶² This example is unsatisfactory, however, as there is no reason to suppose Ælfric thought that only males were likely to lust for women. Ælfric’s *Life of St. Eugenia* in the Catholic Homilies narrates the sinful lust of one woman, Melantia, for another woman, St. Eugenia. St. Eugenia is in disguise as a

²⁶⁰ Maud, *Addressing Women*, 43; I add the translation “people” to the second instance of *menn* in the passage, following Maud’s manner of translating the first instance of *menn*.

²⁶¹ Elsewhere in her chapter on homiletic address, Maud argues that generic homiletic addresses including *mann* but without specific references to women construct a male listening subject; her argument, which depends in part on assuming that heterosexual but not homosexual desire was of concern to homilists, does not convince me; c.f. Anne Curzan, *Gender shifts in the history of English*, 535.

²⁶² Curzan, *Gender shifts in the history of English*, citing ed. Peter Clemoes, *Ælfric’s Catholic Homilies: The first series* (EETS, 1997), 535.

monk at the time, but it is clear to the audience of the *Life* that Melantia lusts after another female.²⁶³ Ælfric uses feminine pronouns for Eugenia throughout the homily, even when she is disguised as a monk.²⁶⁴ Ælfric also clearly distinguishes between the gender specific term *wer* and the gender inclusive term *mann*. The bishop who discovers Eugenia's ruse demonstrates his knowledge by telling her "gewislice hwæt heo manne wæs and hwylcere mægþe" (truly what kind of a person she was and of what family).²⁶⁵ Afterward, Ælfric reports that Eugenia stayed in the monastery "mid wærlicum mode, þeah þe heo mæden wære" (with a manly mind, although she was a young woman).²⁶⁶ Ælfric uses the term *werlic* to contrast her "manly" mind with her identity as a woman, whereas the term *mann* does not carry gender specific implications in the homily.

Christine Rauer writes that, "Perhaps the most clearly gender-specific examples of *mann* in the Old English Martyrology occur in the three cases of female saints being approached by a *mann* for sex or marriage."²⁶⁷ Like Curzan's example from Ælfric, these instances in the Old

²⁶³ Clare Lees, "Engendering Religious Desire: Sex, Knowledge, and Christian Identity in Anglo-Saxon England" *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 27.1 (1997), 27, interprets the expression of sexual desire for a female body as evidence that the desiring subject (referred to by the Old English *mann*) is male, even though Lees notes that the desiring body is "not explicitly gendered": "Alfred's evocation of kissing and embracing naked bodies and of ungloved hands makes the desire for unmediated wisdom an explicit, and quite beautiful, act of sexual pleasure...These Alfredian bodies are not explicitly gendered, or necessarily male in spite of the use of *man* (in the following lines desire for wisdom becomes desire for woman or *wif*, 76/5). In the Judaeo-Christian tradition, knowledge and heterosexuality are frequently linked, so too in later medieval examples of Neoplatonism, but this early example is unique in Anglo-Saxon England." Alternatively, we can read this as an example in which the desire for knowledge is deliberately *not* gendered-male, via an image of sexuality that is deliberately *not* heterosexual. Though the term *wif* indicates a subject's female gender, the term *mann* does not specify a subject's gender.

²⁶⁴ Ælfric, "Life of Saint Eugenia," in *The Old English Lives of Saints*, ed. and trans. Mary Clayton and Juliet Mullins, 43-76 (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2019).

²⁶⁵ Ælfric, "Life of Saint Eugenia," 48-9.

²⁶⁶ Ælfric, "Life of Saint Eugenia," 50 (my own translation).

²⁶⁷ Christine Rauer, "Mann and Gender in Old English Prose: A Pilot Study" *Neophilologus* 101 (2017), 139-158, 147; I do not find Rauer's interpretation convincing: of course Old English *mann* can refer to a single male just as it can refer to a single female, because it is a

English *Martyrology* only support a gender-specific meaning of *mann* in an exclusively heterosexual context. However, too many examples—such as Ælfric’s St. Eugenia and representations of same-sex erotic acts in letters, poetry, and penitentials—make it clear that same-sex encounters were familiar in Old English literary culture and contemporary society.²⁶⁸ Although Rauer interprets several other instances of *mann* as a gender-specific term, she argues that these instances are “extremely rare” and “restricted to certain authors and very specific contexts,” while the gender-inclusive meaning is widespread.²⁶⁹

Casey Miller and Kate Swift discuss the difference between Old English *mann* and Modern English “man” used as generic terms for human individuals. They explain that, unlike in Old English, Modern English “man” is a false generic. Similarly, the so-called generic Modern English “he” (used to include males and females in generalizations) was an early modern invention codified in the nineteenth century to replace the properly generic singular “they.”²⁷⁰ (The singular “they” in Modern English descends from Middle and Old English singular usages of the common-gender plural.) In contrast, the Old English *he* (the masculine singular definite pronoun) was gender-specific, as it remains in Modern English. In Modern English, the replacement of the old generic, gender-common “they” with the false-generic “he,” Miller and Swift write, “fosters the misconception that the standard human being is male.”²⁷¹ Similarly, the

gender-inclusive term; the fact of its use to refer to an individual male does *not* indicate that the term *mann* signifies male gender in any way; instead, what the use of *mann* to refer to a male signifies is that the subject’s social gender is irrelevant to the narrative, as in the case of injunctions (addressed to *everyone*) against lusting after a woman.

²⁶⁸ On early English representation of same-sex relationships, see David Clark, *Between Medieval Men: Male Friendship and Desire in Early Medieval English Literature* (Oxford UP, 2009), and Watt, “A Fragmentary Archive.”

²⁶⁹ Rauer, “Mann and Gender,” 154; see further, Christine Fell, “Words and women in Anglo-Saxon England,” in *Lastworda betst: Essays in memory of Christine E. Fell*, eds. Carole Hough and Kahtryn A. Lowe, 198–215. (Donington: Shaun Tys, 2002).

²⁷⁰ Miller, Casey and Kate Swift. *The handbook of nonsexist writing*. New York: Lippincott & Crowell, 1980, 35-37.

²⁷¹ Miller and Swift, *The handbook of nonsexist writing*, 38.

specific sense of “man” as an “adult male person” “was firmly established as the predominant one” by the eighteenth century.²⁷² Miller and Swift argue that when Modern English writers attempt to use “man” in a generic sense, the writers “often slip unconsciously from the general meaning to the limited one,” with the result that the writers end up “equat[ing] the species with its male members.”²⁷³ By representing “man” as a generic term for “human being” but slipping into a gender-specific sense of the term, writers indicate that to be human *is* to be male. As in the case of the preface to the Old English *Pastoral Care*, when truly generic uses of Old English *mann* are translated through this slippery terminology into Modern English “man,” female persons who were properly included under the Old English term are wiped away in translation. In this case, we lose evidence of women’s Old English literacy by translating them out of Alfred’s educational plan.

Like *hic et haec homo* in Latin, however, Old English *mann* was often modified by grammatically masculine adjectives and pronouns. Does Old English *mann...he* retain the grammatical gender-commonality and social gender-inclusivity of the noun *mann*? The plural definite pronoun *hie* is gender-common (as it is also in the generic singular usage of *hie*), but the singular definite pronoun *he* is masculine. Would constructions such as singular *mann...he* have been understood to refer equally to men and women by contemporary Old English readers? One way to try to answer this is to see how women writers used *mann...he*. The eleventh-century Royal Psalter, produced by and for women religious, includes an Old English translation of a prayer by Alcuin, “Confessio et oratio,” with an instruction which begins (ff.197-198r): “man

²⁷² Miller and Swift, *The handbook of nonsexist writing*, 12.

²⁷³ Miller and Swift, *The handbook of nonsexist writing*, 15-16, offer the following example: “One author, ostensibly generalizing about all human beings, wrote: ‘As for man, he is no different from the rest. His back aches, he ruptures easily, his women have difficulties in childbirth....’ If *man* and *he* were truly generic, the parallel phrase would have been ‘he has difficulties in childbirth.’”

mot hine gebiddan swa he maeg,” meaning “a person must pray as he can,” or, with the gender-commonality extending to the pronoun, “a person must pray as they can.” The deliberate translation of Alcuin’s phrase in the psalter book might suggest that the women found the *mann...he* language relevant to themselves, and that therefore *mann...he* retained the gender-commonality of the unconnected noun *mann*.²⁷⁴

The exegetical introductory paragraphs to the Old English prose psalms offer another example of gender-inclusive *mann...he*, here with the demonstrative *he* in oblique cases. As I argued above, the psalms were pronounced by men and women and understood as relevant all Christians. Explaining the spiritual applicability of the psalms to every contemporary Christian supplicant, the Old English Paraphrast often uses the phrase “ælc mann...his” (every person...their). Like the nominative use of the demonstrative *mann...he*, the genitive use in *mann...his* has often been translated as masculinizing.²⁷⁵ Its use in explaining the relevance of the psalms, however, makes it clear that *mann...his* is *not* gender-exclusive. It can’t be, for the psalms to have any spiritual relevance for women supplicants. The introductory paragraph to Psalm 2 reads:

Ðæs æfteran sealmes capitul is gecweden *Psalmus David*, Pæt ys on Englisc, Dauides sealm, for þæm he is hys sealm gecweden for þi he seofode on þæm sealme and mænde to Drihtne be his feondum, ægðer ge inlendum ge utlendum, and be eallum his earfoðum; and swa deð ælc þæra þe þysne sealm sincgō be his sylfes feondum; and swa dyde Crist be Iudeum.

²⁷⁴ Hollis, *Women and the Church*, 59n53, notes that “masculine reference could, sometimes, imply universal application,” for example in Penitentials, and observes the importance of careful attention to gender designation in Penitentials which unfortunately had not been carried out by the editor: “Payer’s consistent foregrounding of the methodological rigour required in order to interpret the evidence of the penitentials makes all the more startling his failure to recognize that they also present a problem of interpretation in the area of gender specificity, a problem which, inasmuch as it has critical bearing for the development of the construct of individualism for Western Woman, is of not inconsiderable significance.”

²⁷⁵ O’Neill, *Old English Psalms*, sometimes translates *mann...he* as indicating a male subject, sometimes as gender-inclusive.

The second psalm's heading is entitled *Psalmus David*, that is in English, "David's psalm," and it is called his psalm because he lamented in the psalm and complained to God about his enemies, domestic and foreign, and about all his difficulties; and everyone who recites this psalm does likewise about his own enemies; and so did Christ about the Jews.²⁷⁶

The two Old English *his* pronouns modifying David are morphologically and grammatically masculine, as they apply to the male David ("his feondum...his earfoðum"). The one *his* pronoun modifying *ælc*, however, is grammatically gender-common (*ælc* is also common of three genders), although it is morphologically identical to the two grammatically masculine uses of *his* earlier in the paragraph. O'Neill's translation shows the tendency to translate the morphologically masculine and grammatically gender-common Old English language through the ill-fitting Modern English lens of grammatical gender-exclusivity in morphologically masculine words. A translation that more accurately reflects the early medieval grammar would be: "and everyone who recites this psalm does likewise about *their* own enemies." O'Neill translates the same phrase ("ælc mann...his") in the introduction to Psalm 7 in precisely this way:

Pysne sefoðon sealm David sang þa he seofode his ungelimp to Drihtne (þæt wæs þa Absalon his sunu hine adrifen hæfde of ðam rice); þa hine teonode and wyrde Chus Geminis sunu, þa seofode he þæt to Drihtne; and swa deð ælc mann þe þysne sealm singð, mænð his earfoðu to Drihtne; and swa dyde Crist, þa he on earðan wæs.

David sang this seventh psalm when he lamented his misfortunes to the Lord (that happened when his son Absalom had driven him from the kingdom); when Cush, the son of Jemini, abused and cursed him, he lamented that to the Lord; and everyone who sings this psalm does likewise, complaining of their difficulties to the Lord; and Christ did likewise when he lived on earth.²⁷⁷

²⁷⁶ O'Neill, *Old English Psalms*, 4-5.

²⁷⁷ O'Neill, *The Old English Psalms*, 16-17.

Here, O’Neill’s translation recognizes the gender-commonality of the genitive *his* in the gender-common phrase *ælc mann...he* in the singular.²⁷⁸

Grammatical Gender Diversity in the *Synonyma*

We can see women using the Latin equivalent to Old English *mann...he*—*homo...qui*—in the eighth-century copies of Isidore’s *Synonyma* produced in the mixed-gender literary networks of England and Francia.²⁷⁹ Isidore’s *Synonyma*, a devotional guide written as a dialogue between Homo (Human) and Ratio (Reason), was written originally for Isidore’s mixed-gender monastic community. Felice Lifshitz writes that Isidore’s use of the universalizing *homo* made the text applicable and welcome to readers across gender lines. Although the speaker Homo is treated grammatically as masculine throughout the text (with masculine-morphology markers in adjectives and periphrastic verbs), and may on that level seem exclusive of women readers, Lifshitz writes that Augustine’s discussion of the “image of God” in *On the Trinity*, which was also copied in the English missionary region in Francia along with the *Synonyma*, established that women were also *homines*.²⁸⁰

Nevertheless, several “highly gender-sensitive scribes” edited Isidore’s Latin in the *Synonyma* prologues “to avoid an unnecessarily emphatic masculinization of the text’s protagonist.”²⁸¹ These scribes removed certain masculine pronouns and, in one case, a reference

²⁷⁸ Compare O’Neill’s gender-inclusive translation of the plural Old English construction “and swa ylce þa rihtwisan þe hine singað, hi seofiað be heora feondum”: “and the just who sing it likewise complain about their enemies”; this translation cannot give us the same insight into the gender-inclusiveness of the Old English singular usages of *ælc...he*, because Old English plurals *hi(e)* (“they,” nominative pl.) and *heora* (“their,” genitive pl.) are morphologically gender-common, that is, the personal pronouns are identical for plural groups of feminine, masculine, neuter, or mixed-gender subjects.

²⁷⁹ Lifshitz, *Religious Women*, 55-56; on the *Synonyma* in early medieval England, see Claudia Di Sciacca, *Finding the Right Words: Isidore’s Synonyma in Anglo-Saxon England* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008).

²⁸⁰ Lifshitz, *Religious Women*, 152.

²⁸¹ Lifshitz, *Religious Women*, 152.

to Isidore himself, as a result “de-emphasizing the masculinity of both the author and the reader” to further universalize the applicability of the text.²⁸² In the first paragraph of the prologue, gender-common *homo* is modified by the masculine accusative pronoun “hunc” (I, i, 1.5). Two eighth-century manuscript witnesses eliminate the “hunc” from the first paragraph.²⁸³ One of these manuscripts was produced for a female patron.²⁸⁴ The second was copied by a female scribe.²⁸⁵ In the second paragraph of the prologue, the envisioned reader is described with the phrase *perfectus vir*, and then modified by the masculine singular demonstrative pronoun “is” (he) (I, 2, 1.9). The “is” is omitted by a third manuscript witness, which is closely related to another copy of the *Synonyma* produced by two female scribes.²⁸⁶

Isidore’s phrase, “in perfectum virum,” cites Ephesians 4:13, in which the *perfectus vir* is clearly universalizing and gender-inclusive, despite the normally gender-specific meaning of *vir*: “donec occurramus omnes in unitatem fidei et agnitionis Filii Dei in virum perfectum in mensuram aetatis plenitudinis Christi” (Eph. 4:13). The inclusive phrase, “let us all [*omnes*] run together into oneness,” pertains to the entire community, men and women, whom Paul addresses separately elsewhere in the epistle. Omitting the demonstrative pronoun “is” therefore deemphasizes the maleness of Isidore’s construction, and allows the gender-common persona of

²⁸² Lifshitz, *Religious Women*, 265n47.

²⁸³ J. Elfassi, ed. *Isidori Hispalensis episcopi Synonyma*, CCSL 111B (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009), 3; Di Sciacca, *Finding the Right Words*, explains that the *Synonyma* traveled with two different prologues.

²⁸⁴ Fulda, Hessische Landesbibliothek S. 8 (MS F), known as the “Codex Radygundrudis,” produced in southern England in the eighth century became St. Boniface’s personal copy of the *Synonyma*.

²⁸⁵ Würzburg, Würzburg Universitätsbibliothek, M. p. th. q. 28b (MS X), was copied from the Codex Radygundrudis by a single female scribe in the women’s monastery of Kitzingen in the eighth century.

²⁸⁶ Würzburg, Würzburg Universitätsbibliothek, M. p. th. f. 79, which was also copied in southern England in the eighth century and whose text is the same recension as a copy of the *Synonyma* (MS U) produced by two female scribes in the women’s monastery of Karlburg, Würzburg, Würzburg Universitätsbibliothek, M. p. th. q. 28a.

homo and the gender-inclusive biblical reference from Ephesians to stand unencumbered, connecting more directly to the mixed-gender audience of the *Synonyma* in the eighth century.

Throughout the main text of the *Synonyma*, both *Homo* and *Ratio* apply masculine grammatical markers to *Homo*, in adjectives and periphrastic verbal constructions. For example, *Homo*: “Circumdatus sum, enim malis” (I, 5, l.29). However, *Ratio* uses only *homo* as the vocative name, never *vir*. For example, *Ratio*: “Quid tantum diffidis animo, o homo” (AI, 22, l.198). *Homo*’s and *Ratio*’s manner of speaking in the *Synonyma* actually requires only infrequent gender inflection. This is usual for dialogue. As noted above, first and second person discourse involve less frequent gender-marking than does third-person discourse in Latin and in Old English. First and second person pronouns—Latin *ego* (I) and *tu* (you) and Old English *ic* (I) and *þu* (you)—are common of three genders in all cases. In the *Synonyma*, *Ratio*’s opening remarks to *Homo*, for example, do not gender *Homo* at all:

Quid tantum diffidis animo, o homo? Cur adeo mentem debilitaris? Cur animo tantum diffunderis? Cur spei fiduciam omnem amittis? Quare tanta pusillanimitate deiceris? Quare in aduersis adeo frangeris? Omitte tristitiam, desine tristis esse, tristitiam repelle a te. Maestitiae noli subcumbere, noli te multae dare maestitiae. Repelle a corde dolorem, ab animo exclude dolorem, inhibe impetum doloris, uince animi dolorem, supera mentis dolorem (AI, 22, ll.197-207).

Homo, why do you so distrust your mind? Why are you so weakened in your mind? Why are you so empty of mind? Why do you send away all trust in hope? Why are you thrown down by such faintheartedness? Why are you so broken in adversity? Abandon sadness, stop being sad, drive sadness away from you. Do not succumb to sadness, do not give yourself great sadness. Drive sadness from your heart, close sadness out of your mind, stop the assault of sadness, conquer your mind’s sadness, overcome your mind’s sadness.

Like women reading the psalms, women reading the *Synonyma* would be able to apply the significance of the philosophical and spiritual text to themselves, even though *Homo*’s student role in the dialogue (presumably the position that readers were meant to identify with) is sometimes made grammatically masculine in connected discourse.

In the Old English Psalms, the primary (and secondary and often tertiary) subject positions or voices were grammatically masculine and socially-gendered male (David, Hezekiah, Christ). The exegetical mode outlined by the Old English Paraphrast allowed contemporary female readers to apply the emotional and spiritual situations to themselves, or apply their own emotional and spiritual needs to the communicative model of the psalms. In the *Synonyma*, although female readers would have identified with Homo through the text's grammatically masculine voice, the gender-inclusive persona of Homo—unlike the male identities of David, Hezekiah, and Christ—removes a layer of gender mediation between the reader and the text. Although Homo is grammatically masculine, Homo is certainly not socially-gendered male. Female readers would have been able to identify more directly with Homo, without the demand of a male-gender performance in reading Homo's speeches.²⁸⁷ Furthermore, in the *Synonyma*, the more authoritative voice is Ratio's, and Ratio is grammatically gendered feminine. If the *Synonyma* represent spiritual achievement as socially gendered, it is gendered female, by Ratio as a personified teacher.²⁸⁸

The *Synonyma* manuscript family Mss B'UW witnesses a connected set of gender-attuned scribal changes to the text, including the de-masculinizing changes to the prologues described above and a feminizing treatment of the address to Ratio as *magistra virtutis*. U and three other manuscripts (including at least one produced by female scribes, Basel, Universitätsbibliothek F III156 (B')) preserve an alternate reading of the address to Ratio. The alternate reading replaces (some or all of) the three "qui" relatives modifying *magistra* with the specifically feminine form "quae":

²⁸⁷ Or, for male readers, without a female-gender performance like when male supplicants spoke in the voice of Mater Ecclesia in the psalms.

²⁸⁸ Lifshitz, *Religious Women*, 155, points out that readers would ultimately understand Ratio to stand for Christ, the wisdom of God; Ratio's identity as Christ is not made explicit in the text, however, so Ratio remains grammatically feminine and allegorically female.

Tu es enim dux uitae, tu magistra virtutis, tu es quae tamquam regula in directum ducis, tu es quae a recto numquam discedis, tu es quae a ueritate numquam auerteris (II, 102, ll.197-199).

Manuscripts B'W have "quae" in all three instances of the relative; U and three other manuscripts (VOE) show corrections from "quae" to "qui."²⁸⁹ Elfassi prints "qui" in all three places in the edition, thereby attributing the gender-common "qui" in the reading "tu magistra...qui" to the earliest instances of Isidore's text, produced for mixed-gender monastic communities.

The discrepancy between the earliest gender-common readings and the feminizing readings in the eighth-century mss witnesses highlights the complex ways in which women scribes and scribes in mixed-gender literary networks engaged with gender representation in spiritual texts. On the one hand, this group of eighth-century manuscripts demonstrates a careful attention to the dramatic femaleness of the authority figure, Ratio, by emphasizing the noun *ratio*'s feminine grammatical gender. Feminizing Ratio becomes an opportunity to emphasize female intellectual and spiritual authority through Ratio's personified character. This emphasis makes sense in communities where the authority of women as teachers, abbesses, and intellectual leaders was a daily constant. On the other hand, the formula "tu magistra uirtutis, tu es qui...tu es qui...tu es qui..." makes use of the gender-commonality of morphologically masculine relatives. Grammatical gender commonality in Christian literary texts matched the needs of communities and audiences in which the spiritual lives of men and women were valued. The formula *tu magistra...qui* offers a glimpse into the universalizing and gender-inclusive force of language which today appears to be masculinizing.

²⁸⁹ B'W have *quae* in place of all three *qui* relative pronouns; U has only the first as *quae* followed by two *qui*; V shows all three as *quae* corrected back to *qui*; O has second and third as *quae* corrected to *qui*, and E has only third as *quae* corrected to *qui*, Elfassi, ed. *Synonyma*, app. crit., 72-4.

Women scribes and readers used grammatical gender in different ways, as they negotiated their social gender, personal identities, and spiritual potential through literature. Female literary and intellectual authority, embodied in the classroom and represented in figures like Mater Ecclesia and Ratio, appear to have valorized new interpretations of grammatical doctrine which reflected women's inclusion in the spiritual community. Outside of the classroom, girls and women contended with cultural, legal, and physical subordination to men. We might interpret literary interventions through feminizing and markedly gender-inclusive language as small expressions of resistance to patriarchal influence in women's literary and spiritual lives.

Chapter Two

Teaching as Mothering: The Symbolic Gendering of Educational Authority

*Tu ne ille es, ait, qui nostro quondam lacte nutritus, nostris educatus alimentis in uirilis animi robur euaseras?... ubi in eam deduxi oculos intuitumque defixi, respicio nutricem meam, cuius ab adulescentia laribus obuersatus fueram, Philosophiam.*²⁹⁰

“Tell me,” she asked, “are you the man whom once I nurtured with my milk and reared on my solid food until your mind attained full maturity?”... as I eyed her with unblinking gaze, I recognized the one whose dwelling I had attended from my youthful years, my nurse Philosophy.”²⁹¹

Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy* I.2.2

Hu ne eart ðu se mon þe on minre scole wære afed and gelæred?... Adrigde þa mines modes eagen and hit fran bliðum wordum hit oncneowe his fostermodor. Mid þam þe ða þæt mod wið bewende, þa gecneow hit swiðe sweotele his agene modor, þæt wæs se wisdom ðe hit lange ær tyde and lærde.

“Are you not the person who was nourished and taught in my school?”... Then he dried my mind’s eyes, and asked it with gentle words whether it knew its foster mother. As soon as the Mind turned that way, it recognized very clearly its own mother; that was Wisdom who had trained and taught it.”²⁹²

The Old English Boethius, B3.4

Grammatically feminine and female-personified *Philosophia* (Philosophy) transforms into grammatically masculine but female-personified *Wisdom* (Wisdom) in the Old English translation of the Latin *Consolation of Philosophy*.²⁹³ The idealized teacher of philosophy retains

²⁹⁰ Boethius, *Philosophiae consolatio*, ed. Ludwig Bieler, CCSL 94 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1984), I prose 2.2.

²⁹¹ P. G. Walsh, trans., *Boethius: The Consolation of Philosophy* (Oxford UP, 1999; reiss. Oxford World Classics, 2008), 5-6.

²⁹² *The Old English Boethius: an edition of the Old English versions of Boethius’s De consolatione philosophiae*, eds. Malcolm Godden and Susan Irvine with Rohini Jayatilaka (Oxford UP, 2009), v.1, 245; trans, v.2, 5-6; two Old English adaptations of the *Consolation of Philosophy* were composed in the late ninth-mid tenth century: one prose, one prosimetrical; for an introduction to the Old English adaptations, see *The Old English Boethius with verse prologues and epilogues associated with King Alfred*, eds. Susan Irvine and Malcolm R. Godden (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2012), vii-xxiv.

²⁹³ Bosworth, “wisdom,” *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*; Susan Irvine, “Rewriting Women in the Old English Boethius” in *New Windows on a Woman’s World: Essays in Honour of Professor*

her female personification in the Old English text, even as she is renamed as a grammatically masculine concept, *se wisdom*.²⁹⁴ Based on Latin *Philosophia* as a model, we would expect the social gender of the Old English personification to match its grammatical gender. However, grammatically masculine Wisdom is not personified as male; rather, she is described as a mother and fostermother throughout the *Old English Boethius* (OEB).²⁹⁵

The translator could have chosen a grammatically feminine name instead of *wisdom*. Later, grammatically feminine *seo gesceadwisnes* (Reason) does appear alongside Wisdom, and the two speakers share the teacher role.²⁹⁶ It is unclear why Reason appears when she does, but Reason's appearance shows that the Old English translator already had in hand a useable feminine noun to personify as a replacement for feminine-female *Philosophia*. The translator's choice to begin with Wisdom as the female-personified primary replacement for *Philosophia* suggests that it was more important for the idealized teacher in the Old English adaptation to be female-personified than for the grammatical gender of the personification to match its social gender. In other words, the association between educational authority and the sexually mature female body may have been more deeply entrenched in early English literary culture than was

Jocelyn Harris, eds. C. Gibson and L. Marr, 488-501 (Dunedin: University of Otago, 2005), 489, interprets Old English Wisdom as a female personification, despite Wisdom's masculine grammatical gender: "Since *wisdom* is, in Old English, a noun of masculine rather than feminine gender, it is grammatically appropriate that it should be referred to by masculine pronouns, and it is usually assumed, therefore, that Wisdom in Alfred's version is male. Certainly, when Wisdom is introduced, there is no immediate indication that she is female...Alfred, however, does make the female nature of Wisdom equally clear, but he defines her femininity through her role as mother."

²⁹⁴ On allegories and personification, see James J. Paxson, *The Poetics of Personification* (Cambridge UP, 1994), who distinguishes between personification (*prosopopeia*) and allegory: personification is giving a human face or identity to something that is not human.

²⁹⁵ Irvine, "Rewriting Women."

²⁹⁶ Nicole Guenther Discenza, "The Old English *Boethius*," in *A Companion to Alfred the Great*, eds. Nicole G. Discenza and Paul E. Szarmach, 200-226 (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 208, notes that the translator substitutes Reason (*gesceadwisnes*) for Philosophy seven times, and Reason and Wisdom jointly six times.

the identification between grammatical and social gender.

The aim of the present chapter is to investigate how educational authority was symbolically gendered in early medieval literary culture. What did the ideal teacher or knowledge-holder “look like” in shared cultural terms? The OEB suggests that the ideal teacher “looked like” an adult woman, specifically a mother. In the OEB, female-personified Wisdom is both teacher and mother. When she first appears in the story, Wisdom has “afed” (nurtured) and “gelæred” (taught) the speaker’s personified Mind. “Afed” and “gelæred” translate the Latin’s “lacte nutritus” (nurtured with milk) and “educatus alimentis” (educated or reared with food). Like the Latin, the Old English uses a metaphor of feeding a small child for teaching, by alluding to breastfeeding and using a term (*educō*) which can mean “educating” or “raising” in this context. Although the Old English does not retain the explicit reference in the Latin to *lac* (milk), the speaker identifies Wisdom as both “fostermōdor” (literally, foster-mother) and “mōdor” (mother), translating the Latin *nutrix* who gives milk as a mother (breastfeeder) or surrogate mother.²⁹⁷ In a later passage, the translator alludes to a mother-child relationship between Wisdom and Boethius, this time independently of the Latin. Wisdom explains to Boethius that she made him her child and taught him in philosophical living: “forþam ic ðe geongne undergend untydne and unlæredne, and me to bearne genom, and to minum tyhtum getyde” (for I received you when young, untrained and untaught, and took you as my child, and educated you in my ways).²⁹⁸

²⁹⁷ The editors, OE Boethius commentary, Godden and Irvine, v.2, 262, suggest that the use of both *mōdor* and *fostermōdor* reflects the fact that the speaker is sometimes Mind, who would have a more direct spiritual kinship with Wisdom, and sometimes Boethius the person, whose relationship to the immaterial concept would be better represented with the metaphorical attenuation of surrogate kinship. Instead, I propose, it may be that the speaker calls Wisdom “mother” after calling her “fostermother” in order to emphasize the physicality of the mothering (breastfeeding) metaphor for teaching.

²⁹⁸ OEB, B 8.11, 256; see other instances in Irvine, “Rewriting women.”

While Wisdom is female personified, Wisdom's student in the OEB does not always have a clear social gender. The student-speaker starts out as male Boethius but changes to Boethius's personified Mind (*mod*).²⁹⁹ The Old English translator's decision to replace Boethius at times with Mind may be read as a symbolic way of making the student speaker position gender-inclusive. While the psalms taught students to identify with speaking subjects across grammatical and social genders, socially gender-undifferentiated speakers like Mind in the OEB and Homo in the *Synonyma* and the *Soliloquia* symbolically valorized girls' and women's inclusion in the spiritual and intellectual projects of Christian learning.³⁰⁰ Replacing male Boethius with gender-inclusive Mind brings attention to the expectation that students of Christian learning were as likely to be female as male, an expectation which is also reflected in the inclusive language of the Old English *Pastoral Care* preface.³⁰¹

The OEB offers a particularly rich case study in the cultural symbolism of educational authority in part because it can be located with some proximity to historical accounts of real women teachers, students, and proponents of literacy in the ninth century, in and around Alfred's West Saxon court. The metaphorical language of nurturing for teaching symbolically gendered educational authority as female and maternal at a time when positions of educational authority were held by men and women alike.

Symbolic gendering appears in everyday language, not only in extended literary personifications like the OEB. In the ninth century, some of the most common educational terms

²⁹⁹ Chapter 3 opens with Boethius as speaker: "When I had sung this song, lamenting, said Boethius, there came to me heavenly Wisdom" (trans. v.2, B3, 5; Old English in v.1, B3, 245); once Wisdom gets the attention of Boethius's mind, however, Mind takes over as the speaker: "Then the sorrowful Mind answered him and said..." (trans. v.2, B3, 6; Old English v.1, B3, 246).

³⁰⁰ Discenza, "The Old English *Boethius*", 200, "the *ic* or first-person narrator sometimes seems an everyman for audience identification, but at other points he seems to be the historical Boethius."

³⁰¹ See chapter one.

in Latin carried etymological and symbolic associations with mothering, breastfeeding, and childrearing: *nutrio* (to nurture, educate), *nutritor/nutrix* (teacher), *nutritus/a* (student), and *alumnus/a* (student).³⁰² These terms were used in ecclesiastical reform decrees, lives of saints, educational treatises, and letters between students and teachers. The terms associate educational authority with mothering through the concept of breastfeeding. The noun *alumnus/a*, which originally means “nursling,” derives from the verb *alere*, which originally means “to suckle, nourish.” Another derivative is *alimentum* (food).³⁰³ The feminine noun *nutrix* (originally meaning “child’s nurse”) is derived from the proto Indo-European term **sneu-tr-ih₂-* (female nurser). The verbs *nutrire* (to suckle, nourish; fourth principle part *nutritus*), *nutricare* (to suckle, nourish), and noun *nutricius* (foster-father, guardian) are co-derivatives. The Sanskrit cognate term *prá-snuta* means “releasing mother’s milk”.³⁰⁴ *Nutritor* is the masculine form of the feminine noun *nutrix*.³⁰⁵

The contention of the chapter is simple: the symbolic gendering of educational authority as female was meaningful in a social and historical context in which real women’s knowledge and teaching had an established place. Symbolic language and historical practices are mutually

³⁰² The terms are alternatives to *magister/magistra* and *discipulus/a*; the earliest copies of Eriugena’s ninth-century *Periphyseon* name the two speakers as *Nutritor* and *Alumnus*, and the designations are changed to *Magister* and *Discipulus* in later copies, John Contreni, “John Scottus, *Nutritor*, and the Liberal Arts,” in *A Companion to John Scottus Eriugena*, ed. Adrian Guuu, 31-63 (Leiden: Brill, 2019).

³⁰³ Michiel de Vaan, *Etymological Dictionary of Latin and other Italic Languages* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 35: “*Alere*”.

³⁰⁴ Vaan, *Etymological Dictionary*, 420, gives *nutrix* as the head entry (the most etymologically obscure of related terms); *nutrire* was derived from proto Indo-European **nour* before it acquired the -k suffix; the masculine form of the noun, *nutritor*, post-dates Cicero so is not old enough to be included by Vaan, cf. Priscian, *Institutiones grammaticae* IV, 140.14, and *Partitiones XII*, ad Aen. VII, 1, 494, and Alois Walde, *Lateinische etymologisches wörterbuch* (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1906), 424, on derivations of *nutrire*, *nutritor/nutrix*.

³⁰⁵ *Nutrix* first appears in Plautus in the second century BCE; *nutritor* is more recent and first appears in Statius and Suetonius in the first century CE.

illuminating.³⁰⁶ For one ninth-century commentator on the Latin *Consolation*, Philosophy is female personified because there is an understandable symbolic parallel between the work of a teacher and the work of a mother:³⁰⁷

Configurat sibi mulierem Philosophiam; ideoque in speciem mulieris Philosophiam configurat, quia et apud Graecos et apud Latinos feminino genere pronuntiatur et auditores suos quasi quibusdam rudimentis adducit ad perfectam scientiam ueluti mater teneros lactat et nutrit filios. Vel ideo quia mulieres allectrices sunt: sicut mulieres alliciunt uiros, ita Philosophia specie perfectionis suae allicit homines sapientes.³⁰⁸

[Boethius] represents Philosophy to himself as a woman; he shapes Philosophy in the appearance of a woman for the reason that among both Greeks and Latins [the word “philosophy”] is spoken in the feminine gender, and she leads her disciples as if by certain foundational teachings to perfect knowledge, just like a mother breastfeeds her young ones and nurtures her children. Or for the reason that women are allurers: just as women allure men, so Philosophy allures wise people with the appearance of her perfection.

The two principal reasons for Philosophy’s femaleness are, first, the grammatical feminine gender of the noun; second, a teacher educating her students is like a mother feeding her children. The second and third reasons given for Philosophy’s femaleness interpret the symbolic gendering through cultural ideas about gendered behavior; a woman is expected to be both motherly and alluring, just like Philosophy is to Boethius.

Previous scholars of gender in early English literary culture have taken a different view

³⁰⁶ Clifford Geertz, *The interpretation of cultures: selected essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 89, defines culture as “an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and their attitudes toward life.”

³⁰⁷ On the Latin commentary tradition, see Rosalind Love, “Latin Commentaries on Boethius’s *Consolation of Philosophy*,” in *A Companion to Alfred the Great*, eds. Nicole G. Discenza and Paul E. Szarmach, 82-110 (Leiden: Brill, 2015).

³⁰⁸ Helen Cooper, “Gender and Personification in *Piers Plowman*,” *Yearbook of Langland Studies* 5 (1991), 31-48, p. 31, citing E. T. Silk, ed., *Saeculi noni auctoris in Boetii consolationem philosophiae commentarius* (Papers and Monographs of the American Academy in Rome, 1935), 7); Dinah Wouters, “Woman Personified: A Theoretical Framework for the Female Gender of Personifications in Medieval Literature” *Medieval Feminist Forum* 53.2 (2018), 15-16, writes, “The personification’s function is compared to certain roles which women perform, in particular those of mother and seductress,” to which I add: the role of teacher.

than I do on the relationship between female personifications of educational authority and cultural expectations about real women in education. Authoritative female personifications have been read by some scholars as evidence of women's absence from literate culture, or as representations of the discursive process by which real women were kept separate from meaningful educational and intellectual authority. In *Double Agents*, Clare Lees and Gillian Overing intend to examine

the complex and often convoluted relationships between representation (how bodies as women are represented or metaphorized in discourse), and referentiality (how such discourse points to 'real' bodies and 'real' women outside the text).³⁰⁹

This is my project too, although I arrive at different conclusions than do Lees and Overing. They find that symbolic female authority depends on the absence of real women's "cultural agency:" "the living or 'real' female body is suppressed or eradicated within the cultural symbolic."³¹⁰ They argue that literary processes of representing women's bodies "define and create trajectories of absence...female bodies become static icons and the icon secures a cultural ideal of a Christian, universalized subject that is most often male."³¹¹ By contrast, I find that symbolic female educational authority was meaningful within a cultural context which valued the intellectual authority of real-life women teachers.

³⁰⁹ Lees and Overing, *Double Agents*, 9.

³¹⁰ C.f. Joan Ferrante, *Woman as image in medieval literature, from the twelfth century to Dante* (New York: Columbia UP, 1975), 63-64, who writes that female allegories are like the idealized woman of courtly lyric in their abstraction from real women, necessarily separated by idealization: "the allegorical tradition's tendency to idealize female figures balances the exegetical tradition's tendency to demonize them: in neither case are women represented as fully human. Like the lady of courtly lyric, the allegorical woman finally remains an abstraction rather than a person."

³¹¹ Lees and Overing, *Double Agents*, especially 40-54, 154-167; an important difference between our approaches is that Lees and Overing are looking for "cultural agency" (expressions of what I call social power) within literary culture, while I am looking only for normalized literate activity within literary culture; for Lees and Overing, cultural agency and literacy are closely related: one premise of *Double Agents* is that orality and femaleness are "twinned as paradigms of absence" (p. 44).

Dinah Wouters explains the “paradox” which Lees and Overing are trying to resolve: “why would a society that generally devalues the feminine in favor of the masculine represent its highest, most noble or most divine concepts as women?”³¹² She argues that although positive, highly valued concepts (like philosophy) were gendered female through personification, the personification participated in, depended on, and reinforced the social gender hierarchy between male and female. She argues that the process of allegorical personification is related to the hierarchical, binary associations between maleness and spirit (higher) and femaleness and materiality (lower). Therefore, it is not possible to separate the “immanence and materiality” of female personifications from real “women’s lower place in society”: “What is actually valued in abstract concepts such as materiality of motherhood is the celebration of the lower principle that upholds the higher principle, a celebration of the hierarchy itself.”³¹³

Although I am not fully convinced by Wouters’s argument that female personifications reinforced the binary gender hierarchy, it does not conflict with my argument that literacy and intellectual work were not sites of social power to be protected from women’s involvement. The power to embody and interpret knowledge did not (and unfortunately does not) equate to the power to self-determine beyond the limitations imposed by gender hierarchy, nor the power to remake hierarchical relations. The functional authority of women in literate culture as interpreters and handers-down of knowledge was not historically incompatible with women’s individual and institutional subjugation to men. Recognizing this can free historians to conscientiously ascribe meaningful educational authority to early medieval women.

In the following section, I trace the literary background of early medieval writers’ symbolic gendering of educational authority as female. Two related literary traditions personify

³¹² Wouters, “Woman Personified,” 9.

³¹³ Wouters, “Woman Personified,” 29-32.

collected knowledge as female: the patristic tradition describing the church as “mother,” and the late antique tradition representing philosophical and liberal arts disciplines in adult women’s bodies and clothing. In the second part of the chapter, I examine the metaphor of teaching as mothering as it appears in mundane educational discourse. In the final section of the chapter, I return briefly to the relationship between symbol and practice in West Saxon educational culture in the ninth century. The co-existence of symbolic female educational authority and real women’s educational authority which I demonstrate in this chapter challenges Lees’s and Overing’s argument that the use of maternal imagery for spiritual authority depends on the literary suppression of embodied femaleness and women’s “cultural agency.”³¹⁴

Mater Ecclesia and the Patristic Background

The symbolic association between teaching and mothering has roots in Old and New Testament Scripture. In the fifth book of Esdras, “Mater Sion” is addressed as *nutrix bona* and exhorted to protect and teach her children: “amplectere filios tuos, educa illos cum laetitia.... Nutrix bona, nutri filios tuos...”³¹⁵ (embrace your children, teach them with happiness.... Good nurse, nurture your children). Wisdom personified (*חכמה* in Hebrew, *Σοφία* in Greek, *Sapientia* in Latin) appears in Proverbs, Ecclesiasticus, and the Wisdom of Solomon. She first appears in Proverbs ch. 1-9, where she is a teacher of righteousness (8:1-21), inviting her listeners to “receive my teaching” (“accipite disciplinam meam,” 8:10). In Ecclesiasticus, Wisdom is called “the mother of fair love and of fear, of knowledge and of holy hope” (24:24),³¹⁶ joining mothering and instruction.

³¹⁴ See Lees and Overing, *Double Agents*, 15-39.

³¹⁵ Joseph Plumpe, *Mater ecclesia: an inquiry into the concept of the church as mother in early Christianity* (Washington: The Catholic University of American Press, 1943), 33-34.

³¹⁶ Barbara Newman, *God and the Goddesses: Vision, Poetry, and Belief in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 191.

Paul's epistles are another crucial source for early medieval representations of teaching as mothering. Paul uses paternal metaphors to characterize the one-time act of converting a congregation, but he uses maternal imagery to describe the apostolic office of ongoing spiritual care and instruction.³¹⁷ In his letter to the Galatians, Paul describes himself as a pregnant mother giving birth to the congregation: "Filioli mei, quos iterum parturio, donec formetur Christus in vobis" (Gal 4:19), (My children, with whom I am in labor again until Christ is formed in you).³¹⁸ In a letter to the Corinthians, Paul describes his spiritual instruction of the congregation in terms of a breastfeeding mother or surrogate mother providing milk to small children:

Et ego, fratres, non potui vobis loqui quasi spiritualibus, sed quasi carnalibus. Tamquam parvulis in Christo, lac vobis potum dedi, non escam: nondum enim poteratis: sed nec nunc quidem potestis: adhuc enim carnales estis (I Cor 3:1-2).

But I, siblings, could not speak to you as spiritual persons, but as fleshly persons. Like little children in Christ, I gave you milk as a drink, not food. For you were not yet strong enough. And indeed you are not strong enough, for you are yet fleshly.

The milk/meat metaphor in 1 Corinthians 3 makes Paul into the congregation's milk-provider (that is, teacher) throughout the congregation's spiritual maturation. In the beginning, Paul metaphorically breastfeeds the congregation according to the needs of their spiritual infancy; once their understanding has become more advanced, Paul as mother can provide solid food, that is, more advanced doctrine.³¹⁹ Though the congregation may not always be spiritually infantile, the relationship between the congregation and their teacher is cast in terms of the relationship between child and mother.

Paul's maternal imagery in the epistles is echoed in the depiction of Paul's martyrdom in

³¹⁷ Beverly Gaventa, *Our Mother Saint Paul* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007).

³¹⁸ Trans., Gaventa, *Our Mother Saint Paul*, 6.

³¹⁹ Hannah Matis, "Early-medieval exegesis of the Song of Songs and the maternal language of clerical authority" *Speculum* 89.2 (2014), 363n18, notes "scripture itself had established a precedent for describing new believers as infants not ready for solid food, only for the milk of the essentials of the faith," citing I Cor. 3.2, Heb. 5.12–13, and 1 Pet. 2.2.

the *Acts of Paul*, when Paul bleeds milk rather than blood:

When the executioner cut off his head milk splashed on the tunic of the soldier. And the soldier and all who stood near by were astonished at this sight and glorified God who had thus honoured Paul. And they went away and reported everything to Caesar.³²⁰

Depicting Paul's body as a vessel of milk insists on Paul's role as spiritual teacher to the Church.

Patristic writers also elaborate on the scriptural metaphors for spiritual instruction as mothering by describing the church as mother and those teachers and texts who transmit the church's doctrine as her lactating breasts.³²¹

Tertullian personifies the church as a mother whose reproductive body teaches. She has a uterus which "carries" and breasts which "educate."³²² Tertullian's catechetical writings offer the earliest use of "mother" as title for the church in Latin, and by the end of the second or beginning of the third century, the personification of the church as mother was already familiar.³²³

Augustine calls the church "the mother of us all"³²⁴ and Ambrose calls "holy church" the "bountiful" and "virgin mother" of Christians who "nurtures/instructs" (*nutrire*) her children with apostolic rather than bodily milk.³²⁵

³²⁰ Trans., J.K. Elliot, *The Apocryphal New Testament: A collection of Christian apocryphal literature in an English translation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 387.

³²¹ Plumpe, *Mater ecclesia*, traces the early development of the personification of Mother Church and the introduction of nursing and breastfeeding imagery as the language of spiritual instruction, beginning in Greek and Latin patristic writing from early in the second century; Matis, "Early-medieval exegesis," 362, summarizes: "In the Latin West, the image of the church as mother can be found in the writings of the apostle Paul and is scattered throughout patristic authorities such as Tertullian, Cyprian, Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine, with Augustine in particular frequently describing the church as a mother."

³²² Tertullian, *Aversus Marcionem*, ed. E. Kroyman. CCSL 1 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1954), 512, "uterum, qui illum portasset, et ubera, quae illum educassent."

³²³ Plumpe, *Mater ecclesia*, 45.

³²⁴ Augustine, *Confessionum libri tredecim*, ed. L. Verheijen, CCSL 27 (Turnhout: Brepols, 191), I.11.17: "Vidisti, Domine, cum adhuc puer essem et quodam die pressu stomachi repente aestuarem paene moriturus, vidisti...quo metu animi et qua fide baptismum Christi tui...flagitavi a pietate matris meae et *Matris omnium nostrum, Ecclesiae tuae.*"

³²⁵ Ambrose, *De uirginibus*, ed. Franco Gori, in *Sancti Ambrosii Episcopi Mediolanensis Opera* 14.1, 100-240 (Milan: Biblioteca Ambrosiana, 1989), 1.31: "Sancta Ecclesia immaculata coitu, fecunda partu, virgo est castitate, mater est prole. Parturit itaque nos virgo non viro plena, sed

In the fourth century, Ambrose ascribes the maternal breastfeeding function to scripture directly:

ubera uel duo testamenta dixit, quorum altero adnuntiatus est, altero demonstratus - et bene ubera, quoniam uelut quodam nos spiritali lacte nutritos educauit et optulit deo filius - uel Mariae dicit ubera, quae uere benedicta erant, quibus sancta uirgo populo domini potum lactis inmulsit.³²⁶

the breasts are the two testaments; in the first of them [the Son] was announced, in the second demonstrated - and the two testaments are rightly called breasts, because the Son, as it were, educated us with a certain kind spiritual milk and presented us to God - or the breasts are Mary's, which truly were blessed and with which the holy virgin milked the drink of the Lord's milk into the people.

The woman or personified female whose breasts are scripture may be Mother Church or the Virgin Mary; in either case, the Old and New Testaments are breasts filled with knowledge or doctrine to be handed down to the faithful. The knowledge is "spiritual milk," casting the relationship between reader and scripture as one between infant and maternal body.³²⁷

For Cassiodorus in the sixth century, the psalms bear the voice of the Church and the doctrine she teaches. In some instances, Cassiodorus describes the psalms themselves as the mother-teacher who nurtures the faithful.

Vere coruscus liber, sermo lampabilis, cura sauciati cordis, fauus interioris hominis, pinax spiritualium personarum, occultarum lingua uirtutum, quae inclinat superbos humiliatis, reges pauperibus subdit, affabilitate paruulos nutrit.³²⁸

This is the book that truly shines, the word that brightly gleams, the cure for the wounded heart, the honeycomb for the inner man, the record of spiritual persons, the tongue of

spiritu. Parit nos uirgo non cum dolore membrorum, sed cum gaudiis angelorum. Nutrit nos uirgo non corporis lacte, sed apostoli, quo infirmam adhuc crescentis populi lactavit aetatem. Que igitur nupta plures liberos habet quam sancta Ecclesia, quae uirgo est sacramentis, mater est populis, cuius fecunditatem etiam Scriptura testatur...?"

³²⁶ Ambrose, *De patriarchis*, ed. Carolus Schenkl, in *S. Ambrosii Opera*, 125-160, CSEL 32.2 (Prague: F. Tempsky, 1897), 11.51.14.

³²⁷ Matis, "Early-medieval exegesis," argues that the affective, bodily piety whose origin is usually located in the twelfth centuries is witnessed in early medieval exegesis; in fact patristic metaphors of breastfeeding for spiritual teaching locate a piety imaginatively connected to the maternal body even earlier, in late antiquity.

³²⁸ Cassiodorus, *Expositio psalmodum*, 97-98.

hidden powers, which makes the proud bow before the humbled, subjects kings to poor men, and nurtures little ones with kindly address.”³²⁹

Making the psalms the “nurturer” connects the breastfeeding-for-teaching metaphor to literacy and liberal arts instruction. As I discuss in chapter one, the psalms were a formative text which indoctrinated medieval students in written language and in Christian expression. Cassiodorus brings the metaphor of mother as spiritual teacher, developed in relation to personified Mother Church, into the practical realm of the classroom. In Cassiodorus’s discussion of Psalm 5, for instance, the Church is mother and teacher. She both forms her students’ language, like a grammar teacher giving students the words to use, and shapes their comportment, as a religious guide exhorting them to align their actions with divine commands:

Quam suavis oratio sanctae matris audita est, quae nos et fide generat et religiosa institutione conformat. Ignaros docet, paruulos fouet, afflictos releuat et illos ad propria ubera nutriendos colligit, quos sui dogmatis esse cognoscit. Supplicat enim, ut rogare discamus; malos refugit, ut pessimos exsecremur; confidit in domino, ut et nos de ipso praesumere debeamus. Sic tamquam ueneranda mater, uerba tradit paruulis ad loquendum, ut in nobis coalescens orationis affectus et psalmodiam praestet humanis actibus consolatricem et congruentem diuinis iussionibus actionem. Loquamur ergo quod admonet, sapiamus quod credit, amemus certe quod diligit, ut cum eius animum sequimur, tunc ipsius filii sine dubitatione reddamur.³³⁰

How sweet it is to hear the prayer of our holy mother [the church]! She both begets us in faith and fashions us by religious formation. She teaches the ignorant, cherishes little ones, relieves the afflicted, and gathers to her own breasts for nourishment those who she knows adhere to her doctrine. She supplicates so that we may learn to make entreaty; she shuns the wicked that we may curse those who are most evil. She trusts in the Lord that we too may feel an obligation to have confidence in Him. Like a revered mother she transmits to her little ones words for them to speak in such a way that when prayerful feeling grows strong in us, it may make both psalmody a consolation in our human actions and our actions accord with the divine commands. So let us speak what she urges, know what she believes, and at any rate love that for which she has affection, so that when we follow her intention we may undoubtedly become her children.³³¹

Cassiodorus explains that he begins his commentary on the psalms by interpreting the

³²⁹ Cassiodorus *Expositio psalmodiarum*, Praef. l.43.

³³⁰ Cassiodorus, *Expositio psalmodiarum*, Ps. 5, l.312.

³³¹ Thanks to Drew Hicks for extensive translation assistance here and throughout this dissertation.

titles: “I must speak of the wording of headings first; from them issues the meaning of the divine preaching like milk from breasts compressed.”³³² The titles of the psalms, insofar as they serve as exegetical apparatus, are the site of teaching or interpretation (in the metaphor, they are the milk-filled breasts). For Cassiodorus, the psalms are the breast-feeding teacher, and their milk is the spiritual instruction they convey.

Bede describes the exegete’s engagement with scripture as a baby’s suckling. Bede explains proverb 30:33, “Qui autem fortiter premit ubera ad eliciendum lac exprimit butyrum...” (Whoever presses breasts firmly to draw out milk presses out butter...), as,

ubera fortiter premimus cum uerba sacri eloquii subtili intellectu pensamus. Qua pressione dum lac quaerimus butyrum inuenimus quia dum nutriri uel tenui intellectu quaerimus ubertate internae pinguedinis unguimur.³³³

we “press the breasts firmly” when we ponder the words of sacred eloquence [scripture] with subtle understanding, and by this pressing we find butter when we seek milk, because when we seek with gentle understanding to be nourished we are smeared with fat by the breast of inner richness.

The exegete trying to understand the wisdom contained in scripture is like a nursing infant, and the sought milk—the desired knowledge—resides in the breasts of scripture itself. The richness of the knowledge conferred by scripture actually exceeds the exegete’s hopes. The student of scripture seeking milk finds butter. As a nurturer and teacher, scripture outdoes the symbolic mother whose milk provides the measure of spiritual care.

In Bede’s commentary on the Song of Songs, the wisdom-filled breasts belong to Mother Church. Bede systematized an interpretation of the Song of Songs which became popular with Carolingian exegetes and in which the Song’s maternal imagery was applied to the church and the church’s clergy. Hannah Matis argues that the adoption of Bede’s reading of the Song

³³² Cassiodorus, *Explanation of the Psalms*, 35.

³³³ Bede, *In proueria Salomonis libri III*, ed., D. Hurst, 23-163 CCSL 119B (Turnhout: Brepols, 1983), lib. 3 cap. 30.

resulted in an “articulation of a vocabulary to express clerical authority through the female body, specifically the maternal female body.”³³⁴ Bede writes,

Ibi dabo tibi ubera mea... Ubera autem ecclesiae doctores constat esse paruulorum illius. Quae nimirum ubera domino dat cum in eius obsequium praedicatorum suorum et facta exhibet et uerba ut sicut paruulos sedula intentione lactare solent nutrices ita illi taliter se agere studeant quatenus aspectu pariter et auditu hi qui rudes sunt adhuc in Christo proficere ualeant.³³⁵

“There I shall give you my breasts”... It is agreed that the breasts are the Church’s teachers for her little ones. And clearly she gives her breasts for the Lord when in his service she puts forward both the deeds and the words of her preachers so that, just as nurturers are accustomed to give milk to little ones with attentive care, so too they [the teachers] may strive to do the same so that by watching the teachers and listening to them equally, those who are as yet untaught in Christ may make progress.

Irina Dumitrescu notes Bede’s use of breastfeeding imagery in his Song commentary in relation to the idea of graded pedagogy.³³⁶ Bede connects the sexualized (reproductive) female body in the Song to Paul’s metaphor in 1 Corinthians 3:1-2, “But, brothers and sisters, I could not speak with you as spiritual persons but only as fleshly persons, as infants in Christ. I gave you milk to drink, not solid food, for you could not take solid food, and even now you cannot.” Bede interprets breasts in the Song as the Church’s teachers “who impart ‘*lac doctrinae lenioris*’ [the milk of softer doctrine] to those young in their faith.”³³⁷ Erik Wade explains that, for Bede, “The Church’s breasts symbolize her maturity as an institution of preaching and conversion. Bede represents a church’s ability to convert people as a sign of sexual maturity and metaphorical motherhood.”³³⁸

Bede interprets other parts of the female body in the Song as representations of the

³³⁴ Matis, “Early-medieval exegesis,” 359.

³³⁵ Bede, *In Cantica canticorum libri VI*, ed. D. Hurst, 167-475, CCSL 119B (Turnhout: Brepols, 1983), lib. 5, cap. 7.

³³⁶ Dumitrescu, *Experience of education*, 38-39.

³³⁷ Erik Wade, “The Birds and the Bedes: Race, gender, and sexuality in Bede’s *In Cantica Canticorum*” *Postmedieval* 11.4 (2020), 430.

³³⁸ Wade, “The Birds and the Bedes,” 431.

Church's "maternal" role as the source of doctrinal knowledge. For instance, her teachers are her teeth: "As with the throat of the Bride, her teeth were also responsible for the patient breaking down of difficult doctrines into—essentially—baby food."³³⁹ For Bede, the Bride's teeth become a mother's teeth (the teeth of Mother Church), which process the knowledge to be handed down to the faithful by exegetes. Like Bede, the anonymous author of the *Vox Ecclesie* calls teachers of church doctrine the church's teeth: "Dentes ecclesie predicatorum eius dicit, qui ea que suscipiunt salubriter comminuendo in corpus Christi traiciunt," (He calls preachers the church's teeth, because by salubriously chewing they ingest into the body of Christ the things they received).³⁴⁰

Alcuin follows Bede in comparing the church's teachers to breasts "for the sake of the consolation of the weak and the sustenance of the childish." He recasts the milk/meat binary of 1 Corinthians 3 as a milk/honey binary, with milk standing for elementary Christian doctrine, and honey for more advanced spiritual mysteries.³⁴¹ Haimo of Auxerre takes up Alcuin's milk/honey binary, but Mother Church remains the source of all spiritual nourishment:

Lac parvulis convenit, ideoque per lac designatur simplex doctrina, qua initium credentium imbuitur; mel vero, quod de rore coeli confici creditur, coelestem et spiritualem doctrinam significat, quae perfectis et instructis convenit. Sub lingua ergo Ecclesiae mel et lac est, quia aliquando coelestia mysteria perfectis, aliquando rudibus plana et simplicia annuntiant.³⁴²

Milk is appropriate for children, and so the simple doctrine which informs believers' initial stage [of instruction] is designated by milk; but honey, which is believed to be made by the dew of heaven, signifies spiritual doctrine, which is appropriate for those

³³⁹ Bede, *In Cantica*, 2.4.

³⁴⁰ The *Vox Ecclesie*, an anonymous commentary on the Song of Songs, cited in Matis, "Early-medieval exegesis," 367n38; trans. from Andrew Hicks; Matis, 367, writes, "It is worth pondering, in an era before processed baby food, how powerful and maternal the image of chewing a small child's food for him or her would have been, what a chord it would have struck—and have been meant to strike—in its readers, and how intimate and embodied this language would have seemed in speaking about a mandarin caste of male clergy, monks, and scriptural exegetes."

³⁴¹ Matis, "Early-medieval exegesis," 369.

³⁴² Haimo of Auxerre, *In Canticum expositio I in editionibus quibusdam cum Thomae de Aquino operibus impressa*, ed. Parmensis, 354-386 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1863), cap. 4, 368.

who are advanced and already instructed. Therefore milk and honey are under the tongue of the Church, because sometimes they announce heavenly mysteries to the advanced, other times they announce humble and simple things to the uneducated.

Carolingian uses of breastfeeding as a metaphor for the Church's spiritual instruction are inexhaustible. Eriugena's student, Heiric of Auxerre, casts the spiritual fraternity between Christians as a shared studentship under Mother Church:

Frater noster unusquisque est christianus eodem Christi sanguinis pretio redemptus, eodem baptisate regeneratus, eiusdem sanctae matris ecclesiae uberibus educatus, et ad eandem patriae caelestis hereditatem nobis cum uocatus.³⁴³

Our brother is any Christian redeemed by the same price of Christ's blood, reborn by the same baptism, educated by the breasts of the same holy Mother Church, and called to the same inheritance of the heavenly country as us.

Lupus of Ferrieres makes the same claim, calling all Christians, whether monastic or secular, *unius matris ecclesiae uberibus educati* (educated at the breasts of the one Mother Church).³⁴⁴

Sedulius Scottus makes the suckling metaphor for Christian indoctrination explicit in his description of Christian rulers:

Quis autem rector sub christiani nominis titulo insignitus atque ab infantia sub tutela matris ecclesiae, ubere, lacte, sinu educatus et in principali dignitatis apice diuina disponente gratia sublimatus non iugiter omnipotenti uictimas gratiarum offeret non illius uoluntati humiliter atque ardentem oboedire...³⁴⁵

But what ruler distinguished by the title of the name "Christian," reared from infancy under the tutorship of Mother Church by her breast, milk, and bosom, and elevated to the highest rank of dignity as arranged by divine grace does not constantly offer sacrifices of thanks to God and does not humbly and eagerly obey God's will?

Matis argues that early medieval exegetes applied maternal and reproductive female

³⁴³ Heiric of Auxerre, *Homiliae per circulum anni*, eds. R. Quadri and R. Demeulneaere, CCCM 116 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1992), hom. 25, l. 22.

³⁴⁴ Dümmler, Ernestus, ed. *Lupi abbatis Ferrariensis epistolae*, MGM Epp. VI, 1-126 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1925).

³⁴⁵ Sedulius Scottus, *Liber de rectoribus Christianis* (from LLT search: /10 uber* educ*) Scotus, Sedulius. *Liber de rectoribus christianis*, edited by S. Hellmann. In *Quellen und Untersuchungen zur lateinischen Philologie des Mittelalters*, I, 19-91. München: C. H. Beck, 1906.

imagery to male clerics in particular: “The commentary tradition on the Song refers to this spiritual elite as the *doctores* of the church, and sometimes her *praedicatores*, and they are not defined with much greater specificity than that.”³⁴⁶ As surrogate or mediating teachers for Mother Church’s doctrine, male clerics become symbolically feminized and maternalized.

Would early medieval thinkers have understood the metaphorical language of maternity as spiritual authority to be applicable to women teachers as well? Women monastics served as teachers within their communities, including as teachers to male and female students from outside their monasteries, and women’s communities served important pastoral functions in the secular communities around their monasteries.³⁴⁷ While the imposition of maternal symbolism for spiritual authority on male teachers may be more visible due to the symbolic/social gender incongruence, we should also consider how women teachers may have inhabited symbolic “motherhood” as spiritual authorities and teachers. Abbesses were called “mothers” of their communities, and many women’s saints’ lives describe them directly or metaphorically as mothers.

Monastic education combined literacy and liberal studies with Christian spiritual formation. Carolingian scholar Paschasius Radbertus’s description of his monastic women instructors as *nutrices* would have indicated his ascription of both spiritual and literate authority to those teachers.³⁴⁸ In the late eighth century, Paschasius Radbertus was taken as child into the

³⁴⁶ Matis, “Early-medieval exegetes,” 364; Drew Hicks points out that *traicere* also contains a metaphor of ingestion: the preachers are first students of scripture, ingesting (*traicere*) the wisdom, before they can hand down (*traicere*) the knowledge they have made easier to understand for their students by chewing it (breaking it down) for them.

³⁴⁷ Liftshitz, *Religious women*, 13-14; on pastoral duties, see Francesca Tinti, *Pastoral Care in Late Anglo-Saxon England* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2005); and John Blair and Richard Sharpe, eds., *Pastoral Care Before the Parish* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1992).

³⁴⁸ Hannah Matis, “The Seclusion of Eustochium: Paschasius Radbertus and the Nuns of Soissons” *Church History* 85.4 (2017), 674, notes that Paschasius refers to his teacher Imma as “optima nutrix” in his commentary on Psalm 44.

nunnery of Soissons for education, was tonsured there in the nuns' presence and wrote to abess Theodrada that he considered himself her "student from childhood," "a puero vester alumnus"; eventually he went to Corbie under abbots who were Theodrada's brothers. Matis writes that in his exegetical and hagiographical writing, Paschasius "expresses the relation between scripture, the *doctores*, and those they taught in the language of nursing, lactation, and maternal care" and argues that "Paschasius clearly envisioned himself as both a recipient and a provider of the milk of scripture from the breasts of the *doctores*."³⁴⁹ His comment shows that the metaphorical femaleness of spiritual and educational authority obtains, regardless of the teacher's real social gender. In Paschasius's writing, the authority conveyed by metaphorical maternity is reinforced by the literary and emotional proximity of real women's bodies.

Philosophy and the Liberal Arts Background

*Dic mihi, quaeso, quae est illa mulier, quae innumeris filiis ubera porrigit, quae quantum sucta fuerit, tantum inundat? Mulier ista est sapientia.*³⁵⁰

Tell me, please, who is the woman who offers her breasts to innumerable children, and who pours forth as much as she is sucked? This woman is wisdom.

Anonymous (pseudo-Bede), *Collectanea*

The tradition of interpreting the scriptures and human Christian teachers as the Church's maternal organs and surrogates was intertwined with another literary tradition, in which the secular branches of learning were female-personified. Like representations of Christian teachers as breastfeeders and the Church's maternal teeth, representations of secular knowledge as adult

³⁴⁹ Matis, "The Seclusion of Eustochium," 379-380.

³⁵⁰ *Collectanea pseudo-Bedae*, eds. Martha Bayless and Michael Lapidge (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1998), 122; Lees and Overing, *Double Agents*, 157-158, translate "filiis" as "sons" rather than "children," and confusingly insist on the maleness of "innumerable sons" [innumeris filiis]: "We are only too aware that few women have access to the kind of clerical training in rhetoric and knowledge in the early medieval period that the *Collectanea* appears to represent;" however, "filiis" is the identical dative plural form of *filius* (son) and *filia* (daughter) and cannot indicate the gender of the children; furthermore, no contemporary sources suggest that training in rhetoric and ecclesiastical or Christian knowledge was gendered.

women extended symbolic female authority into classroom subjects like grammar. Because all Christian literate education in the early middle ages was aimed toward Christian religious formation and (for ecclesiastics) the interpretation of scripture, there was no perfect division between secular and sacred educational authority. Liberal studies, including the grammatical and literary training necessary to read, compose, and interpret texts, would ultimately allow advanced students to access the “milk” of scripture’s “breasts.”

In a ninth century poem attributed to an Irish exile and written in Francia during Charlemagne’s reign, titled “Philosophy’s words to her followers”, the poet addresses the reader in the voice of Philosophy: “Quisquis alumne, velis varias cognoscere rerum/ Causas, nutricem me cole corde piam” (You, any student, who wishes to know the various causes of things, cherish me as pious teacher in your heart).³⁵¹ Personified Philosophy presents herself as the *nutrix* to would-be students of philosophy. This poem shows the language of teaching as nurturing applied symbolically to liberal arts instruction.

In the final years of the eighth century, Martianus Capella’s *Marriage of Mercury and Philology* and Boethius’s *Consolation of Philosophy* were read and shared among Carolingian thinkers.³⁵² Over the next decades, both texts received extensive commentary and glossing, and their representations of philosophy and the liberal arts influenced the iconography of biblical Wisdom personified.³⁵³ Martianus’s and Boethius’s allegories personify educational content as

³⁵¹ Duemmler, Ernestus, ed., *Poetae Latini Aevi Carolini* I (Berlin: Weidmann, 1881), carmen 8, 402.

³⁵² See Marenbon, *From the Circle of Alcuin*; and Mary Garrison, “Questions and Observations Based on Transcribing the Commentary on Books IV and V, Dialectic and Rhetoric” in *Carolingian Scholarship and Martianus Capella*, eds. Marken Teeuwen and Sinead O’Sullivan, 147-176 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011).

³⁵³ Andrew Hicks, “Martianus Capella and the Liberal Arts.” *The Oxford Handbook of Medieval Latin Literature*, edited by Ralph Hexter and David Townsend. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012; Newman, *God and the Goddesses*, 203, points out, “Alcuin and the other Carolingian humanists readily conflated the biblical Sapiientia not only with Christ and Mary, but also with allegorical figures such as Lady Philosophy. Boethius, an author newly discovered and avidly

powerful women teachers. In the *Consolation*, Philosophy appears as a teacher to Boethius' literary persona, within a relationship of maternal care and philosophical instruction. Philosophy arrives to re-instruct the speaker, her former student, toward an understanding of his situation according to philosophical reasoning. In the *Marriage*, Martianus represents the seven liberal arts as teachers lecturing to the assembly of Olympian gods, who are acting like unruly students. Embodied and attired as women, the Arts give extended lectures on their disciplinary content to the assembled gods. As some of the gods attempt to cut the Arts short, or redistribute their disciplinary content, some of the Arts speak back and disagree.³⁵⁴ The Arts' roles as the gods' teachers, and their ability to dispute gods' commands, demonstrates the immense authority of the personified Arts.³⁵⁵ Although they are not maternal, the Arts are figured as women: as a group, they are called *puellae* (girls) and *feminae* (women);³⁵⁶ individually, each Art appears as an adult woman dressed and acting in accordance with her subject matter.

In the seventh and eighth centuries, representations of Christian Wisdom assimilated representations of secular *philosophia* and sacred *sapientia* in the service of Christian literacy

glossed by the Carolingians, even supplied them with a sacred iconography for Sapientia. In ninth-century Bibles, the "O" initial of Ecclesiasticus...is often illuminated with an image of Wisdom enthroned as well, holding a scepter and an open book, just as Boethius had described her."

³⁵⁴ Willis, James, ed. *Martianus Capella* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1983), the gods and arts struggle for control of the "lesson," for example, in III.263 (Pallas argues with Grammar), IV.332-3 (Pallas argues with Dialectic), and IV.333-334 (Jupiter argues with Dialectic).

³⁵⁵ The tension between the student-gods and teacher-arts foreshadows Alcuin's subtle reversal of authority in his treatises on Rhetoric and Dialectic, in which Alcuin has the teacher role and the Emperor Charlemagne speaks in the student role.

³⁵⁶ *Martianus Capella*, II.138: "puellae quamplures, quarum Artes aliae, alterae dictae sunt Disciplinae" (very many girls, some of whom were called Arts, others Disciplines); and IV.326: "ac tunc aliam feminarum pari sponsalium munere conferendam Clarius intromisit" (Then the clarion introduced another of the women who would form part of the nuptial exchange of gifts), trans., William Stahl, *Martianus Capella and the Seven Liberal Arts Volume II: The Marriage of Philology and Mercury* (New York: Columbia UP, 1971), 105.

training.³⁵⁷ In the seventh century, Aldhelm describes his future student Heahfrith's earlier period of study in Ireland as "uber sofiae sugens" (suckling at the breast of wisdom),³⁵⁸ where he was "dudum incunabulis tirocinii editus rudibus" (nourished for a long time in the first cradles of learning).³⁵⁹ In Ireland, as Aldhelm seems to report, Heahfrith successfully studied grammar, geometry, physics, and biblical exegesis; now, Heahfrith will continue his studies under Aldhelm as he trains to be a teacher himself.³⁶⁰ Aldhelm's conception of personified Wisdom (*sofia*) is both female (specifically maternal and reproductive, because she breastfeeds) and related to the disciplinary branches of knowledge necessary for but not coterminous with the interpretation of Christian doctrine. Alcuin makes the same connection between Christian wisdom and secular learning in his personification of *sapientia* in the eighth century. He describes the liberal arts as the seven pillars of Sapientia's house,³⁶¹ and as seven graded steps of philosophy on the pathway toward understanding scripture:

grammatica, rhetorica [dialectica], arithmetica, geometrica, musica et astrologia... Per has vero, filii charissimi, semitas vestra quotidie currat adolescentia, donec perfectior aetas et animus sensu robustior ad culmina sanctarum Scripturarum perveniat.³⁶²

Grammar, rhetoric, dialectic, arithmetic, geometry, music and astronomy...but through these pathways, dearest children, let your youth run daily until your more mature age and stronger mind arrives at the heights of sacred scripture.

For Alcuin the liberal arts were not only bodies of knowledge, but a way of organizing the school curriculum. Donald Bullough characterizes Alcuin's discussion of the liberal arts in his poem

³⁵⁷ John Contreni, "The Pursuit of Knowledge in Carolingian Europe," in *The Gentle Voices of Teachers: Aspects of Learning in the Carolingian Age*, ed. Richard E. Sullivan, 106-141 (Columbus: Ohio State UP, 1995), 110, 116-127.

³⁵⁸ Aldhelm, Epistola 5, in Ehwald, *Aldhelmi Opera Omnia*, 489.

³⁵⁹ Lapidge and Herren, *Aldhelm: The Prose Works*, 161.

³⁶⁰ Lapidge and Herren, *Aldhelm: The Prose Works*, 161-162.

³⁶¹ Alcuin uses the image from Proverbs IX, 1: "Sapientia aedificavit sibi domum, excidit columnas septem" (Wisdom built herself a house, she hewed seven columns).

³⁶² Alcuin, *Disputatio de Vera Philosophia*, in Jacques-Paul Migne, *Patrologiae cursus completus, Series Latina* 101, (Paris, 1844-1864), col. 853B-854A.

about the York minster library as “the first medieval description of a programme of instruction based on that [i.e. liberal arts] scheme.”³⁶³

Symbolic Mothering in Educational Terminology

The metaphor of mothering for teaching operated in the mundane terminology of educational relationships as well as in the symbolism of extended literary metaphors. The same verb *nutrio* (to educate; literally, to suckle, nurture) and its derivative nouns, *nutrix* (fem.)/*nutritor* (masc.) (teacher; literally, nurturer) and *nutritus/a* (student; literally, suckled one), and the derivative nouns from *alo* (to suckle) were used in everyday language about education. Early medieval glosses demonstrate the current educational meanings of terms related to nurturing. For instance, the eighth/early-ninth century Latin-Old English glossary in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MS 144, includes the following glosses: *nutrix* glosses *altrix* and Old English *fostor faeder* glosses *altor* (the masculine form of *altrix*);³⁶⁴ *nutrio* glosses *educō*;³⁶⁵ and *alorius* glosses *nutritor*.³⁶⁶ This means that the same symbolic gendering was operating in the current language of practical educational authority as in idealized, literary representations of educational authority, whether or not writers were particularly attuned to the symbolic import of their words. The same is true for Old English educational terms: as in Latin, the Old English terms for “nurturer”, *fostermodor* (fem.) and *fosterfaeder* (masc.) were used in place of the word for schoolteacher: *lareow* (equivalent to Latin *magister/magistra*).

The prevalence of nurturing terms for education in monastic settings has been explained in relation to the role of monastic communities as the surrogate family for child oblates. In her

³⁶³ Donald Bullough, *Alcuin: achievement and reputation* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 53.

³⁶⁴ Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MS 411, f.8r.

³⁶⁵ CCCC 411, f. 24r: *eduducit* (perhaps for *educit*) is glossed by *nutrit*; *educat* is glossed by *nutriat* (perhaps for *nutrit* or *nutricat*, thanks to Drew Hicks for assistance).

³⁶⁶ CCCC 411, f.7v.

study of monastic child oblation, Mayke de Jong discusses the intimacy and long-term importance of educational relationships between teachers and the children who grew up and were educated in monasteries.³⁶⁷ She points out, “Former monastic *nutriti* spoke with great affection of the ones who had raised them; Alcuin wished to be buried among the *fratres* of York, who had brought him up with motherly affection.”³⁶⁸ Religious communities performed both roles of childrearing and formal education.

Jong offers an example from the eighth-century *Life of St. Ceolfrid*, which reports that a young boy (perhaps Bede) was “*nutritus et eruditus*” (nurtured and taught) by Ceolfrid.³⁶⁹ Such descriptions of intimate, family-like relationships between monastic teachers and young students resonate with the metaphorical language of spiritual authority as maternal. Ceolfrid’s authority as teacher is related to the symbolic female authority of Church as Mother and source of Christian wisdom. Jong compares the description of Ceolfrid’s teaching to the representation of “metaphorical motherhood” in the *Life of Alcuin*: “...qui cum matris ablactaretur carnalibus, ecclesiae traditur mysticis imbuendus uberibus” (who, when he was weaned from his mother’s carnal breasts, was handed over to be instructed by the mystical breasts of the church).³⁷⁰ Boniface also uses metaphorical mothering language to describe his own teaching in an epitaph for one Domberht, whom Boniface “*magno studio docuit, nutrit, amavit*” (taught, fostered, and

³⁶⁷ Jong, *In Samuel’s Image*, 216-218; she draws a distinction between *nutriti* (the religious raised and educated in monasteries from their childhoods) and *conversi* (adults who entered monastic life after childhood); those who were raised in the monastery (“*nutriti ab infantia*” in Hildemar’s phrasing), received a more in depth (because longer) education, whereas adult *conversi* might learn only the Creed, the Pater Noster, and the penitential psalms, p. 127.

³⁶⁸ Jong, *In Samuel’s Image*, 215.

³⁶⁹ Jong, *In Samuel’s Image*, 213, citing C. Plummer, ed., “*Historia abbatum auctore anonymo*,” in *Venerabilis Baedae opera historica* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1896), 388–404.

³⁷⁰ Jong, *In Samuel’s Image*, 215n95, citing W. Arndt, ed., *Vita Alcuini*, cap. 1, 185, MGH Ss 15,1.

loved with great zeal).³⁷¹

Jong explains that the prevalence of familial language in monastic educational relationships may stem from the role the secular fosterage system played as a model for the early development of Northern European monastic education:

There is a recurrent pattern of individual monks assuming personal responsibility for the care and education of children, serving as foster-parents while ‘bringing them up for God’. Along with *commendatio* [child oblation] and baptismal sponsorship, the practice of fosterage may also have influenced the way children were accepted into monastic life. Especially in Ireland it was customary for children at all social levels to be sent away from home to be fostered while still very young...Early medieval saints’ lives from Ireland and Brittany reveal that fosterage also had an ecclesiastical equivalent. Monks or nuns functioned as foster-parents, either for a limited period in which the child retained the law status, or forever, with the child becoming a *macclérech* (young cleric) or *maccaillech* (young nun) once it was handed over to its educator.³⁷²

The emotional intimacy between the monastic teachers and students means that it is not always possible to fully separate the idea of childrearing from childhood education in the monastic record. The same is true in secular education, as secular aristocratic and royal fosterage seems to have implied some training in literacy and access to book culture as well. By the ninth century, Jong explains, fosterage relationships in monastic education may have diminished: in trying to sever ties between oblates and their birth families, the Carolingian reformers interrupted the network of spiritual kinship and patronage that had used to be established through oblation.

Whereas pre-Carolingian uses of “nurturing” terms in monastic education likely implied some level of personal patronage along with education, in the Carolingian era those terms were more likely to indicate a strictly educational relationship. Emotional ties could still develop between long term students and teachers, but the teacher’s responsibility would not have extended beyond the student to the student’s family.³⁷³ The Carolingian replacement of fosterage

³⁷¹ Boniface reports in the poem that Domberht was skilled in grammar and metrics, presumably subjects taught to him by Boniface.

³⁷² Jong, *In Samuel’s Image*, 211-212.

³⁷³ Jong, *In Samuel’s Image*, 217.

with educational relationships also makes it more likely that an enslaved person designated as *nutrix/nutritor* or *fostermodor/fosterfaeder* would have been a teacher, rather than guardian or “nurse.” In the fosterage system, a fosterparent or guardian would be chosen to enrich the familial patronage network, something a slave would not be able to do. Only a fosterparent of high social class and/or spiritual status would benefit the child’s family in the way that secular fosterage seems to have worked.

There are innumerable examples of nurturing terms used for education between the seventh and ninth centuries in England and Francia. I present several examples below (arranged in chronological order) to demonstrate the ordinariness of this terminology. The majority of the examples come from monastic settings (especially saints’ *vitae* and ecclesiastical legislation), but some pertain to education in secular aristocratic settings (especially secular legislation).

In a letter to the former students of Bishop Wilfred of York, Aldhelm’s describes Wilfrid’s teaching with childrearing metaphors. Describing Wilfred’s care for his students’ learning in parental, embodied terms, he calls Wilfrid their *nutrix*, feminizing Wilfrid in his capacity as teacher:

Quis enim, quaeso, tam durus atroxve labor existens ab illo vos antistite separans arceat, qui vos ab ipso tirocinio rudimentorum et a primaeva tenerae aetatis infantia usque adultae pubertatis florem nutriendo, docendo, castigando paterna provexit pietate et quasi nutrix gerula dilectos alumnos extensis ulnarum sinibus refocilans sic caritatis gremio fotos clementer amplexus est?

What harsh or cruel burden in existence, I ask, would separate you and hold you apart from that bishop, who like a wet-nurse gently caressed you, his beloved fosterchildren, warming you in the folds of his arms and nourishing you in the bosom of charity, and who brought you forward in his paternal love by rearing, teaching, and castigating you from your very first exposure to the rudiments (of education) and from your early childhood and tender years up to the flower of your maturity?³⁷⁴

Aldhelm places *nutrio* alongside *doceo* (to teach), and calls his addressees Wilfrid’s *alumni*,

³⁷⁴ Aldhelm, Ep. 12 written c.677, trans., Lapidge and Herren, *Aldhelm: The Prose Works*, 169.

using the word for “students” derived from the verb *alere* (to suckle, nurture). Whether the years of instruction under Wilfrid are metaphorical—from the beginning of their education, whatever the students’ actual ages—or directly referring to years of education during the students’ childhoods, it is clear that the students’ educational relationships with Wilfrid were protracted and emotionally significant in Aldhelm’s view.

Women teachers were also called *nutrix*. The *Life of St. Balthild* celebrates Balthild as *optima nutrix* (best teacher, in version A) or *pia nutrix* (pious teacher, in version B) for “exhorting” the young people at Clovis II’s court “to religious studies.” The *Life* was written in the early 690s, soon after Balthild’s death, by a member of Chelles, likely a woman:

Set et ipsa, conlatam sibi a Deo prudentiae gratiam, vigilantissimo studio et regi obtemperabat ut domino et principibus se ostendebat ut mater, sacerdotibus ut filia, iuuenibus seu adolescentibus [186] ut optima nutrix, largasque elemosinas distribuens singulis, principum honorem conservans consiliaque eorum congrua retinens, iuvenes ad religiosa studia semper exortans, regi humiliter et assidue pro aecclesiis et pauperibus suggerens (A).³⁷⁵

But as she had the grace of prudence conferred upon her by God, with watchful eagerness she obeyed the king as her lord, and to the princes she showed herself a mother, to the priests as a daughter, and to the young and adolescents as the best possible teacher, and distributing generous alms to each, preserving the honour of the princes and keeping their fitting counsel, always exhorting the young to religious studies, and humbly and steadfastly petitioning the king for the churches and the poor.³⁷⁶

At ipsa, conlata sibi a Deo prudentiae gratia, vigilantissimo studio et regi obtemperabat ut domino et principibus se ostendebat ut matrem, sacerdotibus ut filiam, iuuenibus sive adolescentibus ut [186] piam nutricem, eratque amabilis omnibus, diligens sacerdotibus ut patres, monachos ut fratres, pauperes ut domesticos, peregrinos ut filios, quia et ipsa peregrina fuerat, amplexabatur (B).³⁷⁷

But as she had the grace of prudence conferred upon her by God, with watchful eagerness

³⁷⁵ *Vita Sanctae Balthildis*, in *Fredegarii et aliorum chronica vitae sanctorum*, ed. Bruno Krusch, 475-506, MGH Ss rer. Merov. II (Hannover: Hahnianus, 1888), 485-486.

³⁷⁶ Translation adapted from Paul Fouracre and Richard A. Gerberding, ed. and trans., *Late Merovingian France: History and Hagiography, 640-720* (Manchester UP, 1996), 121, which conflates A and B; they translate “nutrix” as “nurse” and “diligens...pauperes ut domesticos” as “loving...the poor as a faithful nurse does.”

³⁷⁷ *Vita Sanctae Balthildis*, MGH SRM II, 485-486.

she obeyed the king as her lord, and to the princes she showed herself a mother, to the priests as a daughter, and to the young and adolescents as a pious teacher, and she was friendly to all, lovingly embracing priests as fathers, monks as brothers, the poor as members of her own household, and foreigners as her own children, because she herself was also a foreigner.³⁷⁸

According to the *Life*, Balthild was an Englishwoman purchased as slave by Ercinwald, the “mayor of the palace” to the Merovingian court. Eventually Balthild marries Clovis II, and later acts as regent for her son Clothar III (657-663/4), before becoming abbess of the double monastery at Chelles. The description of Balthild as *nutrix* to the palace’s young people occurs within an assembly of metaphorical familial terms designating her importance in the social and spiritual life of the palace: she is like a mother to the princes, like a daughter to the priests, and like a *nutrix* to the young people. Her role as *nutrix adolescentibus* is elaborated in version A, making clear that this role entails supporting the young people’s religious studies in particular. Whether or not Balthild herself instructed the young people in the psalms and literacy necessary for prayer, she is credited with the responsibility for their religious education. Similarly, the *Life* of the Frankish saint Bertila, who lived 658/9-705, calls Bertila “*nutrix pia, mater optima*” (pious teacher, best mother) who “*nos...materno affectu nutriti*” (educated us with maternal affection).³⁷⁹ Bertila’s *Life* was written in the mid to late eighth century. The appellation *nutrix* for Bertila as abbess is clearly symbolic (meaning teacher) rather than literal (meaning child-rearer) and pertains to her role as educational and spiritual guide to her community.

Where there is less context, it can be harder to distinguish between educational authorities and caretakers. In Wessex, England, the law code of King Ine (688-726) includes the command, “*Gif gesiðcund mon fare, þonne mot he habban his gerefan mid him 7 his smið 7 his*

³⁷⁸ Fouracre and Gerberding do not include the end of the passage from version B, “*peregrinos...amplexabatur.*”

³⁷⁹ *Vita Bertilae*, MGH SRM 6, 108-9.

cildfestrān”.³⁸⁰ F. L. Attenborough translates this: “If a nobleman moves his residence he may take with him his reeve, his smith, and his children’s nurse.”³⁸¹ However, Attenborough notes that he follows the previous editor F. Liebermann and two of the twenty manuscript witnesses in taking *-festrān* as a feminine noun (nominative *-festre*), but that actually it could be a masculine noun (nominative *-festrā*) “meaning ‘fosterer.’”³⁸² Attenborough interprets *cildfestrān* as an oblique form of a feminine noun, *cildfestre*, indicating a role filled by a female person. For this reason, he translates what would literally be “child-carer” as “nurse.” Attenborough notes that it could be, however, that the noun is masculine, *cildfestrā*, since the oblique singular cases of weak masculine and feminine nouns in Old English are identical. In which case, Attenborough would not be comfortable translating the “child-carer” role filled by a male person as “nurse.” He would substitute “fosterer.” Attenborough’s translation choices tell us nothing about the gender of early medieval persons who filled the office of “child-carer,” except that it brings to our attention that the Old English word in the oblique does not clearly designate a grammatical or social gender. But they do tell us how deeply the cultural gender biases of twentieth-century scholars inform our interpretation of early medieval culture. In their 2021 edition and translation of the law code, Stefan Jurasinski and Lisi Oliver retain Attenborough’s translation “children’s nurse.”³⁸³ They also note that *cildfestrān* is a hapax legomenon.

The interpretation of *cildfestrān* as a feminine noun and female-filled role appears to have directed critics’ attention away from the possibility that the child-fosterer role might indicate a teacher rather than just a care-giver. If the term were taken as an equivalent for

³⁸⁰ Stefan Jurasinski and Lisi Oliver, *The Laws of King Alfred* (Cambridge UP, 2021), 426.

³⁸¹ Frederick Levi Attenborough, *The laws of the earliest English kings* (Cambridge UP, 1922), 56-57.

³⁸² Attenborough, *The laws of the earliest English kings*, 57n1; actually one witness is an Old English copy (Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 383) and the other is a Latin translation of the code (London, British Museum, Cotton Titus A xxvii).

³⁸³ Jurasinski and Oliver, *The Laws of King Alfred*, 427.

nutrix/nutritrix (as it is often glossed), Ine 63 might offer more evidence of the nature of aristocratic education. It might echo Balthild's near-contemporary status as a slave-turned-educator and foreshadow the tenth-century Englishwoman Æthelgifu's literate female slaves and literate enslaved priest, who are conscripted in Æthelgifu's will to sing psalms for her soul after her death.³⁸⁴ Or it may more closely parallel the ninth-century aristocratic teachers Hundrada (in Offa's Mercian court) and Gundrada (in Charlemagne's Frankish court), who likely received their own educations in monasteries, whether or not the two women had been consecrated to religious life.³⁸⁵

In the eighth century, Bede uses the term *nutrix* to describe two abbesses, one of whom he also celebrates indirectly for her promotion of learning. In the *Ecclesiastical History*, Bede calls Abbess Ethelburga “Deo devotarum mater et nutrix” (mother and teacher of women consecrated to God).³⁸⁶ This is the appellation translated in the ninth century into Old English as “lareow and festermodur.” In the ensuing chapters of the *Ecclesiastical History*, Bede refers to the literacy of women in Ethelburga's community when he discusses the community's liturgical observance and the “regular discipline” established by Ethelburg, which included “teaching” and “admonishing” the younger members.³⁸⁷ In *On the Reckoning of Time*, Bede calls Abbess

³⁸⁴ Whitelock, *The Will of Aethelgifu*.

³⁸⁵ Nelson, “Alcuin's Letters Sent from Francia.”

³⁸⁶ Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*, ed. and trans., Bertram Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford, 1969), IV.6.3: “sorori autem in Orientalium Saxonum prouincia in loco qui nuncupatur in Berecingum, in quo ipsa Deo deuotarum mater ac nutrix posset existere feminarum,” (The convent where his sister was to rule as mother and instructress of women devoted to God was at a place called In-Berecingum in the province of the East Saxons), trans. in Bede, *A History of the English Church*, 216.

³⁸⁷ Bede, *HE* IV.7.9: “Torctgyd, quae multis iam annis in eodem monasterio commorata et ipsa semper in omni humilitate ac sinceritate Deo seruire satagebat, et adiutrix disciplinae regularis eidem matri existere minores docendo uel castigando curabat” (Tortgyth...lived for many years in the convent, humbly and sincerely striving to serve God, and had helped the Mother to maintain the regular observances by instructing and correcting the younger sisters), trans. Sherley-Price, 219.

Aethelthryth of Ely “virginum mater et nutrix pia sanctarum” (mother and holy teacher of sacred virgins).³⁸⁸ Though he does not discuss her educational role, Bede celebrates Aethelthryth extensively in the *Ecclesiastical History* (IV.19-20), including a verse hymn praising her virginity along with the prose *Life*.

Closely following the chapters on Aethelthryth in the *Ecclesiastical History* are the chapters discussing Abbess Hild of Whitby, whom Bede reports was called “mater” (mother) by all her acquaintance. Bede writes that Hild “quickly set herself to establish a regular observance” at both the monastery in Hartlepool and her new foundation at Whitby (Streanaeshalch), where she was respected for her wisdom:

Tantae autem erat ipsa prudentiae, ut non solum mediocres quique in necessitatibus suis sed etiam reges ac principes nonnumquam ab ea consilium quaerent et inuenirent. Tantum lectioni diuinarum scripturarum suos uacare subditos, tantum operibus iustitiae se exercere faciebat, ut facillime uiderentur ibidem qui ecclesiasticum gradum, hoc est altaris officium, apte subirent plurimi posse repperiri. Denique quinque ex eodem monasterio postea episcopos uidimus.

not only ordinary folk, but kings and princes used to come and ask her advice in their difficulties and take it. Those under her direction were required to make a thorough study of the Scriptures and occupy themselves in good works, to such good effect that many were found fitted for Holy Orders and the service of God’s altar. Five men from this monastery later became bishops.³⁸⁹

Later, Bede credits Hild (though not by name) with the authorization of Caedmon’s divinely-inspired gift for poetry and with devising and organizing his instruction in scripture (IV.24). Bede’s representation of Hild as spiritual “mother” and successful educator can be understood in light of his interpretations of maternal imagery in the *Song of Songs* of the Church’s role as the teacher of Christian wisdom. By reporting Hild’s reputation as “mother,” Bede validates her as an authority on Christian doctrine and instruction.

³⁸⁸ Bede, *De temporum ratione liber*, ed. C. W. Jones, CCSL 123B (Turnhout: Brepols, 1977), cap. 6, l.1924, “Nec mora etiam virginum mater et nutrix pia sanctarum, accepto in construendum monasterium loco, quem eilge uocant.”

³⁸⁹ Bede, *HE* IV.21; trans. Sherley-Price, 244-5.

Writing a few decades after Bede, Hugeburc elaborates the maternal teaching metaphor when she describes Abbot Willibald's spiritual guidance of those in his monastery. In Hugeburc's description, he "feeds" or "nurses" them with the "milk of divine piety":

Quos ille quodammodo omnes ut gallina, que sub alis solet tegendo suos enutrire fetos, ita ille pater Willibaldus et mater aecclesia plures per aevum suae pietatis parma protegendo Domino deferebant adoptivos natos, et quemadmodum alumnus suos alere solet infantes, ita et ille enutriendo divinae pietatis lacte leniter lactando pascebat, usque dum illi confoti et de infantia eruditi, eliganter edocti, usque ad iuvenalem pulchre indolis pubertatem perventi sunt, et nunc secundum magistri precendentis exemplum sancta sectantes dogmatum eius dona, multis micant adminicula.³⁹⁰

He nurtured them all, like a hen, who is accustomed to nurturing her babies by sheltering them under her wings; in the same way, father Willibald and mother Church brought very many adoptive children to the Lord over time by (his) protecting them with the shield of his piety. And like a nourisher is accustomed to suckling his babies, so also by nurturing them through suckling them with the milk of divine piety he fed [his students] until they were well cared for and taught from infancy, finely instructed, until they reached the youthful maturity of beautiful virtue, and now according to the example of their teacher before them following the holy gifts of his teachings, they shine as supports for many people.

Hugeburc emphasizes the maternity inherent in the "nurturing" language by linking Willibald and Mother Church in the "henlike" protection of his students. The image of Willibald as a mother hen shows that for Hugeburc, a teacher's maternal care for those under their protection matters more than closely following the usual images or words in a trope. In addition to metaphorical breasts, Willibald has metaphorical wings. Hugeburc makes clear that Willibald's "mothering" of his students is specifically the instruction in liberal arts; it is not only a relationship of love or caretaking: "alios sub discipulare habitu sollertis litterarum studiis inherendo, docendo, ad meliora recti regiminis principatu erudiendo provexit"³⁹¹ (He carried others forward under the custom of learning, by holding firmly to diligent studies of literature, by teaching, and by instructing them toward better things with the rule of right living).

³⁹⁰ Hugeburc, *Vita willibaldi et wynebaldi*, 86.

³⁹¹ Hugeburc, *Vita willibaldi et wynebaldi*, 86.

In his ninth century *Life of St. Leoba*, Rudolf of Fulda reports that the *nutrix* of Leoba's mother Aebbe interpreted Aebbe's dream as a prophetic vision of Leoba's birth and career.³⁹² As a reward for such a welcome interpretation, Aebbe frees the *nutrix*: "nutricem vero suam, pro eo quod tanta ibi gaudia futura praedixerat, libertatis praemio remuneravit" (and she rewarded her *nutrix* with the prize of freedom, because she had predicted so joyful a future). It seems that Aebbe's *nutrix* was enslaved, but was nevertheless considered an authority worth consulting on dream interpretation. She is the same unnamed *nutrix* who tells Aebbe to give her daughter-to-be as a child to Abbess Tetta for instruction in "sacred letters" (*sacrae litterae*). Although we do not see the *nutrix* instructing Aebbe in literacy, the *nutrix*'s role as wise counselor and her interest in Leoba's literacy training show that she held some kind of authority regarding intellectual and educational matters. Leoba (d.782) was born to elderly parents, so Aebbe would have been under the care and/or instruction of her *nutrix* in the mid- to late-seventh century; Rudolf uses the term *nutrix* in the mid-ninth century.

In the late ninth century, Agius of Corbie remembers Hathumoda, abbess of Gandersheim, as "haec soror, haec mater, haec nutrix atque magistra, haec abbatissa, haec fuerat domina" (she was sister, she was mother, she was nurturer/educator and teacher, she was abbess, she was mistress).³⁹³ The mix of familial and educational terms shows that the familial terms are metaphorical. The terms describe the spiritual relationships between monastic community members, rather than blood ties. By pairing *nutrix* with *magistra*, Agius suggests that Hathumoda was like a family member in how carefully and attentively she fulfilled her role of spiritual teacher.

When male Carolingian reformers use "nurturing" terms to refer to general monastic

³⁹² Rudolf of Fulda, *Vita Leoba*, 126.

³⁹³ Agius of Corbie, *Epicedium Hathumodae*, ed. L. Traube, MGH PLMA 3 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1986), 372.

education, not only in connection to specific interpersonal relationships, they demonstrate how thoroughly the symbolism of mothering has settled into the language of teaching in the ninth century. For example, The capitula of the Council of Salzburg in 803/4 decreed: “Omnino prohibemus, ut nullatenus masculum filium aut nepotem vel parentem suum in monasterio puellarum aut nutriendum commendare praesumat, nec quisquam illum suscipere audeat” (We altogether prohibit anyone from presuming to commend a male son or a nephew or their parent to a monastery for girls even to be educated, and let no one dare to receive him).³⁹⁴ The educational context is clear from the immediately preceding stipulation that girls should not be sent to a monastery for the sake of education unless they intend to remain in the monastery.³⁹⁵ Similarly, the 817 *Institutio Sanctimonialum* commands that “puellae, quae in monasteriis erudiuntur, cum omni pietatis affectu et vigilantissimae curae studio nutriantur...” (girls who are taught in monasteries should be educated with all compassionate piety and concern for a most watchful attention).³⁹⁶ In the *Concordia Regularum*, Benedict of Aniane twice repeats the command to monastic youth to be “submissive to the invitation to the breasts [*ubera*] of the fosterer [*nutrix*]” taken from St. Basil’s fourth century Rule.³⁹⁷

³⁹⁴ MGH Capit.1, 119. Thanks to Paul Vinhage for help with translation here and elsewhere in this dissertation.

³⁹⁵ MGH Capit.1, 119, “Quicumque filiam suam aut neptam vel parentem Deo omnipotenti offerre voluerit, licentiam habeat; sin autem, domui infantes suos nutriat et non aliam infra monasteria mittere nutriendi gratia presumat, nisi quae in ipso loco firmiter in Dei servitio perseverare voluerit, vel secundum instituta sanctorum patrum seu canonicam auctoritatem” (Whoever wishes to offer their daughter or niece or relative to all-powerful God has permission to do so; however, if someone educates their children at home they should not presume to send another [daughter] into the monastery for the sake of being educated, unless she firmly wishes to stay in that place in service to God, either according to the institutes of the holy fathers or canonical authority.)

³⁹⁶ MGH Conc. 2,1, 455.

³⁹⁷ Benedict of Aniane, *Concordia regularum*, ed. Pierre Bonnerue, CCCM 168A (Turnhout: Brepols, 1999), cap.13, ll. 17-21, and cap. 76, ll. 124-128: “Eo affectu quo esuriens paruulus nutrici obtemperat ad ubera inuitanti, uel quo affectu omnis homo suscipit ab aliquo ea quae ad uitam pertinent,” cited and trans. in Matis, “Early-medieval exegesis,” 373n58.

The ruling from the 816 Council of Aachen pairs *nutrio* and *erudio* (to educate) when it seeks to establish separation between boys training to be monks and boys training to be secular clergy: “Ut erga pueros, qui nutriuntur vel erudiuntur in congregatione canonica, instantissima sit adhibenda custodia” (The closest watch must be applied to boys who are educated and taught in the canonical congregation).³⁹⁸ Agreements from episcopal councils in 822 and 869 also use *nutrio* specifically in connection with formal education, alongside other everyday educational terms such as *magister* (teacher), *educo* (to educate), and *erudio* (to educate):

Scholas autem...omnino studiosissime emendare cupimus, qualiter omnis homo sive maioris sive minoris aetatis, qui ad hoc nutritur ut in aliquo gradu ab ecclesia promoveatur, locum [denoninatum] et magistrum congruum habeat.

But we wish to most carefully amend schools completely, so that every person, whether older or younger, who is educated for the purpose of being promoted within the church may have a fitting place of appointment and teacher.³⁹⁹

Ut unusquisque presbiter suum habeat clericum, quem religiose educare procuret et, si possibilitas illi est, scholam in ecclesia sua habere non negligat sollerterque caveat, ut, quos ad erudiendum suscipit, caste sinceriterque nutriat.

Every priest should have his own cleric whom he is responsible for educating religiously and, if it is possible for him, he should not neglect to have a school in his church, and let him be assiduously careful to educate chastely and sincerely those whom he accepts for education.⁴⁰⁰

Ecclesiastical legislation demonstrates the currency of nurturing terms for education in the ninth century. Without explicitly invoking the maternal body, this mundane terminology nevertheless draws on the same, widely-known symbolic background. As a result, educational authority was symbolically tied to femaleness even amongst the sexist reform culture of the Carolingian church.

³⁹⁸ MGH Conc. 2, 1, 413.

³⁹⁹ “Capitula ab Episcopis Attiniati Data,” cap. 3, MGH Capit. 1, 357, cited in Contreni, “The Carolingian Renaissance,” 714n22.

⁴⁰⁰ “Capitula a Walterio reverendo pontifie compresibiteris promulgata in sinodo apud Bullensem fundum II,” cap. 6, *Capitula Episcoporum I*, ed. Peter Brommer, MGH (Hannover, 1984), 189, cited in Contreni, “The Carolingian Renaissance,” 715n24.

Old English glossing and translations also demonstrate the currency of nurturing terms for education. The terms *fostermodor/fosterfæder*, which literally indicate surrogate parent roles, were used for “teacher,” just as *nutrix/nutritor* were in Latin. The *Dictionary of Old English* (DOE) translates *fosterfæder* as “foster-father, guardian...by extension: teacher, tutor.”⁴⁰¹ The late ninth-century Old English translation of Gregory I’s *Dialogues* renders Gregory’s “pastor et nutritor noster, beatus Petrus apostolus” (our guide and nurturer/teacher the holy apostle Peter) as “ure hyrde & ure fosterfæder...ðe sanctus Petrus” (DOE: [our] guide and tutor...), a metaphorical description of the New Testament’s principal teacher of Christianity as surrogate parent.⁴⁰² In the *Old English Boethius*, the description of Seneca as Nero’s *familiaris praeceptorque suus* (his friend and teacher) is translated as: *his agen magister & fostorfæder* (DOE: [his own] teacher and tutor) in the *Old English Boethius*.⁴⁰³

Similarly, The Old English translation of Bede’s *Ecclesiastical History* from the late ninth/early tenth century renders the phrase describing Aethelburg, first abbess of Barking monastery, “Deo devotarum mater ac nutrix possit existere feminarum,” as “Gode willsumra wífmonna láreow and féstermódur gestandan”.⁴⁰⁴ The Old English substitutes “lareow and festermodur” for “mater ac nutrix”. This translation is especially helpful for understanding how both Latin *nutrix* and its equivalent Old English *fostermodor* mean within the matrix of language for childrearing and teacher-student relationships. Both terms carry associations with

⁴⁰¹ “Foster-faeder,” Cameron, Amos, and Healey, eds., *Dictionary of Old English*, offer the two examples from the Old English *Pastoral Care* and *OEB* for the extended meaning.

⁴⁰² Hecht, H., *Bischof Waerferths von Worcester Uebersetzung der Dialoge Gregors des Grossen*, Bib. ags. Prosa 5 (Leipzig and Hamburg) [repr. Darmstadt 1965], 25.228.22, cited in “foster-faeder,” DOE.

⁴⁰³ Sedgfield, W.J., *King Alfred's Old English Version of Boethius' De consolatione philosophiae* (Oxford) [repr. Darmstadt 1968], 29.66.23, cited in “foster-faeder,” DOE.

⁴⁰⁴ *The Old English Version of Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, IV.6, 574, cited in “fester-modor,” DOE.

childrearing and the functions of mothering (giving nourishment, giving care) even as they indicate an office in which teaching is principal. In the equation between “mater ac nutrix” and “lareow and festermodur,” *nutrix* could be straightforwardly replaced with *fostermodor*—as it is in Aelfric’s tenth-century Glossary: *altrix nutrix fostermoder; altor oðþe nutritor fosterfæder*⁴⁰⁵—but Old English *lareow* (teacher) would be unlikely to translate Latin *mater* (mother) on its own. With *mater* standing in as an appellation for abbess, it is not a stretch to understand spiritual instruction as one of the primary functions of “mother” of a religious community. But including *lareow* along with *fostermodor* in the substitute Old English phrase for *mater ac nutrix* emphasizes the importance of the teaching function within the mothering role of abbess. Alone, we might expect the Latin phrase “mater ac nutrix” to be translated as “modor and fostermodor” (mother and fostermother); instead, we have “teacher and fostermother,” suggesting that what a fostermother *is* is a teacher, in the same way that “mater ac nutrix” suggests that what a caretaker *is* is a mother.

The educational meaning of nurturing terms persists in the tenth and eleventh centuries. The late-tenth/early-eleventh century Latin-Old English “Harley glossary” glosses “educat” with “nutrit, foveat” and “educare” with “eligere, proferre, liberare, instituere”;⁴⁰⁶ “educatrix” with “nutrix” and “edifico” with “nutrio”.⁴⁰⁷ The late eleventh/early twelfth century alphabetic glossary in the grammatical compilation now divided between Antwerp, Plantin-Moretus M16.2 (previously Ms. 32) and London, British Museum Ms. Add. 32246, contains the gloss “Educo, -cas i[d est] nutrio” (I educate, that is, I nurture).⁴⁰⁸ The Old English-Latin glossary preserved in the 13th century Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 730 glosses “altor uel nutritor” with

⁴⁰⁵ Zupitza, *Ælfrics Grammatik und Glossar*, 297-322.

⁴⁰⁶ London, British Library, Harley Ms 3376, f.62r.

⁴⁰⁷ London, BL, Harley Ms 3376, f.62v.

⁴⁰⁸ L. Kindschi, 'The Latin-Old English Glossaries in Plantin-Moretus MS. 32 and British Museum MS. Additional 32246' (Stanford diss.), 38-42, 190.

“fosterfeder” and “altrix uel nutrix” with “fostermodor”⁴⁰⁹ Whether the author of the Bodley 730 glossary had in mind for these terms the role “teacher” or “caretaker who is also responsible for educating,” the glosses show that *nutritor* and *nutrix* were recognized as the masculine and feminine forms of one office, as they were presented in Aelfric’s tenth-century Glossary, noted above: “altrix nutrix fostermoder; altor oðþe nutritor fosterfæder.”

Re-assessing women’s teaching in Alfred’s court

The prevalence of nurturing terms for educational relationships and the real involvement of women in literate culture in and around Alfred’s court in Wessex are part of the cultural context in which the translator of the *OEB* replaced *Philosophia* with female-personified, masculine *Wisdom*. Alfred’s mother, Queen Osburg, is described as the instigator behind Alfred’s appreciation for education and for poetry.⁴¹⁰ Osburg gives Alfred a book of English poetry that she owns, as a prize for Alfred learning to read it. Confusingly, Seth Lerer interprets this episode as evidence that orality was associated with femaleness, and literacy with maleness. Lees and Overing explain Lerer’s position and accept the association:

⁴⁰⁹ Merrilees and Dictionary of Old English transcript, edited from Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Bodley 730, ff. 146r-164v. An unusual gloss on *alumnus* in the eleventh-century “Antwerp Glossary”—“Alumnus fosterfæder alumnus dicitur qui nutrit et qui nutritur” (an “alumnus” is one who teaches/nurtures or is taught/nurtured), in Kindschi, 201-52—may suggest that *alumnus* has become so thoroughly a formal educational term rather than a term designating a child’s role as nourishment-receiver (as counterpart to *altor*, nourisher), that *alumnus* can refer to one involved in education either as teacher or student; if so, this gloss would validate a translation of Hugeburc’s description of Willibald as “my teacher and the *alumnus* of you all” as “my teacher, and the teacher of you all” rather than (as I have it in chapter four), “my teacher and the student of you all”; in either case, the idea is of a community of persons connected through educational relationships.

⁴¹⁰ Asser’s *Life of King Alfred*, cap. 23, 75: notably in this episode Asser does not refer Alfred’s mother by name, instead drawing attention to her maternal authority; rather than Osburg, Asser might be referring Alfred’s stepmother Judith, but either woman stands as a representative of Old English literacy and book ownership, making Alfred’s experience of English literary culture one that included (perhaps was even dominated by) women’s participation.

[Lerer] has couched the movement from orality to literacy in the [Old English] period in gendered terms...In his discussion of King Alfred, Seth Lerer characterizes the onset and development of literacy in terms of the consolidation of modes of masculine authority and paternity ...[calling Alfred] “quite literally, the father of English education, placing his own son in a school devoted to teaching in vernacular and Latin.”⁴¹¹

I disagree with Lerer’s gendered reading of literacy and orality. A story about female book ownership, in which a mother promotes her child’s literary education, shows an association between women and literacy, rather than an association between women and orality. The episode recalls Abbess Hild’s management and promotion of the male Caedmon’s English literary education. Furthermore, the educational program described in the adult Alfred’s preface to the Old English *Pastoral Care* witnesses continuity in mixed-gender, multilingual education, rather than innovation.⁴¹² Well within living memory, monastic literacy training would have been available to women and men, perhaps in equal numbers.⁴¹³ The women teachers Gundrada and Hundrada active in the Mercian and Carolingian royal courts of the early ninth-century may themselves have been trained in monasteries at the tail end of the period for which we have documentation for mixed-gender foundations.

Even as women’s religious foundations became more precarious in the late eighth and ninth centuries, literacy did not become any less necessary for the liturgical operations of all-women communities. In fact, the reforming councils which sought to limit women’s ecclesiastical participation during the eighth and ninth centuries continued to affirm women’s

⁴¹¹ Lees and Overing, *Double Agents*, 45-46; mercifully, the authors point out that Alfred’s daughter Aelfthryth was also educated in school alongside her brother Edward, a fact which Lerer ignores in his determination to masculinize English literate culture. I reject the association between women and orality for this period.

⁴¹² Bullough, “The Educational Tradition,” 294, writes “The myth of Alfred the educational innovator is very powerful. Can we uncover the reality behind it? And if we can, what is the English king’s most distinctive contribution to the educational and intellectual tradition of early medieval Europe?”

⁴¹³ See introduction, “Evidence and Absence”; Footnote: Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women and the Church*, 273, writes that double monasteries were “allowed to perish” in the Viking invasions; when Alfred was restoring monasticism he only founded single-sex monasteries.

need for literacy. As late as 847, the Council of Mainz decreed “Sanctimoniales vero in monasterio constitutae habeant studium in legendo et in cantando, in psallorum celebratione sive oratione. Et horas canonicas...pariter celebrent” (religious women living in a monastery must study reading and singing, the celebration of the psalms and prayer. And equally they must celebrate the canonical hours).⁴¹⁴ To the extent that monastic culture was active in ninth-century Wessex, we can therefore expect that women religious participated in literate culture and literacy training at no lower rates than did male religious.

Alfred’s ideas about who belonged in school would also have been informed by secular aristocratic education. Throughout the eighth century in England and Francia, at least some women among the secular aristocracy were highly educated. The Carolingian noblewoman Dhuoda wrote her *Liber manualis* at the same time that the documentary evidence for religious women’s communities was diminishing.⁴¹⁵ Schneider identifies several uses of the term *nutrix* to indicate teachers and concludes that a number of women who had been educated in monasteries were employed as teachers in royal and aristocratic courts throughout early medieval England.⁴¹⁶ Among these teachers are some correspondents of Alcuin, who demonstrate the high level of Latin learning among English and Carolingian court women at the turn of the ninth century: “[Alcuin’s letters] show hubs of communication *with* and even *in* royal courts inhabited by women as well as men. Just occasionally, and probably part-time, a high-born and learned woman could come to exercise a teacherly hegemony in the palace.”⁴¹⁷ Hundrada, one of Alcuin’s correspondents, is a good comparison for the *nutrices* (women teachers) responsible for Alfred’s children’s education one century later. Alfred’s biographer tells us that Alfred’s daughter

⁴¹⁴ *MGH Capit.* 2, 180.

⁴¹⁵ Helene Scheck, *Reform and resistance: formations of female subjectivity in early medieval ecclesiastical culture* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2008), 54.

⁴¹⁶ Schneider, “Anglo-Saxon Women in the Religious Life,” 144.

⁴¹⁷ Nelson, “Alcuin’s Letters,” 370-1.

Ælfthryth was educated alongside her brother Edward at court, while their youngest sibling was educated at a school alongside other aristocratic and non-aristocratic children:

Æthelweard, omnibus iunior, ludis literariae disciplinae, divino consilio et admirabili regis providentia, cum omnibus pene totius regionis nobilibus infantibus et etiam multis ignobilibus, sub diligenti magistrorum cura traditus est. In qua schola utriusque linguae libri, Latinae scilicet et Saxonicae, assidue legebantur, scriptioni quoque vacabant, ita, ut antequam aptas humanis artibus vires haberet, venatoriae scilicet et ceteris artibus, quae nobilibus conveniunt, in liberalibus artibus studiosi et ingeniosi viderentur. Eadwerd et Ælfthryth semper in curto regio nutriti cum magna nutritorum et nutricum diligentia, immo cum magno omnium amore, et ad omnes indigenas et alienigenas humilitate, affabilitate et etiam lenitate, et cum magna patris subiectione huc usque perseverant. Nec etiam illi sine liberali disciplina inter cetera praesentis vitae studia, quae nobilibus conveniunt, otiose et incuriose <vivere> permittuntur, nam et psalmos et Saxonicos libros et maxime Saxonica carmina studiose didicere, et frequentissime libris utuntur.⁴¹⁸

Æthelweard, the youngest of all, as a result of divine wisdom and the remarkable foresight of the king, was given over to [the pastime of literacy] under the attentive care of teachers, in company with all the nobly born children of virtually the entire area, and a good many of lesser birth as well. In this school books in both languages - that is to say, in Latin and English - were carefully read; they also devoted themselves to writing, to such an extent that, even before they had the requisite strength for [adult]⁴¹⁹ skills (hunting, that is, and other skills appropriate to noblemen), they were seen to be devoted and intelligent students of the liberal arts. Edward and Ælfthryth were at all times [educated]⁴²⁰ at the royal court under the solicitous care of [male and female tutors],⁴²¹ and indeed with the great love of all; and to the present day they continue with humility, friendliness and gentleness to all compatriots and foreigners, and with great obedience to their father. Nor, amid the other pursuits of this present life which are appropriate to the nobility, are these two allowed to live idly and indifferently, with no liberal education, for they have attentively learned the Psalms, and books in English, and especially English poems, and they very frequently make use of books.

Æthelweard's instructors at the school, which is separate from the court, are called *magistri* (teachers), but Edward and Ælfthryth's instructors at court are called *nutritores et nutrices*. Asser

⁴¹⁸ Asser's *Life of King Alfred*, 57-59; compare the ninth-century description of Leoba's education, Rudolf of Fulda, *Vita Leoba*, 125, "...Nam, cum ab ipsis infantiae rudimentis grammatica et reliquis liberalium litterarum studiis esset instituta..."

⁴¹⁹ Translation adapted from Keynes and Lapidge, *Asser's Life of King Alfred*, 193-194; Keynes and Lapidge translate *artes humanae* as "manly skills," although the adjective *humanus* means "of human" as distinct from animals or from the divine, not "of man" as distinct from woman, Latham, Howlett, and Ashdown, eds., *Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources*.

⁴²⁰ Keynes and Lapidge translate "nutriti" as "fostered."

⁴²¹ Keynes and Lapidge translate "nutritorum et nutricum" as "tutors and nurses."

does not make clear why he uses different terms for the school teachers and the teachers at court, although the difference may be related to the level of attention the students receive from the teachers. Æthelweard shares the attention of his teachers with many other students in the school, whereas his brother and sister receive specialized instruction from their teachers at court.

The phrase *nutritores et nutrices* has usually been translated in Modern English as “tutors and nurses,” following Keynes’s and Lapidge’s translation, rather than as “male and female tutors.” But the translation “tutors and nurses” introduces a professional division based on gender that has no rhetorical or historical grounds in the text itself. Ninth-century readers of Alfred’s biography would have had no difficulty understanding the words *nutritor* and *nutrix* as the masculine and feminine forms of a single noun (and therefore a single office). In fact, the relationship between *nutrix* and *nutritor* is discussed as an example of derivative nouns in Priscian’s *Institutiones grammaticae*, where Priscian notes that the feminine noun *nutrix* is derived from the verb *nutrio* via the masculine form *nutritor*.⁴²² Recognizing the prevalence of nurturing terms for real educational relationships can help identify women (and men) teachers in the historical record where they have been misinterpreted as simply caretakers.

The masculinization of early medieval educational authority and the feminization of early medieval childcare effected by Keynes’s and Lapidge’s translation confirms present-day cultural biases, and has gone nearly unchallenged. Dagmar Schneider (in her unpublished dissertation) is the only scholar to print an English translation of the phrase that recognizes a single profession, rather than introducing a gendered division of professions:

It appears that the terms *nutrix* and *fostermeder* were not employed solely for women who looked after babies. Asser blamed his hero’s lack of proper education on “indigna suorum parentum et nutritorum incuria”. Alfred’s children were taught “cum magna nutritorum et nutricum diligentia”, i.e. by male and female teachers. We cannot be certain

⁴²² Priscian, *Institutiones grammaticae* IV, 140.14; see also Priscian, *Partitiones XII*, ad Aen. VII, 1, 494.

if these were monks and nuns, but it is not improbable that they were.⁴²³

Historian of medieval education Nicholas Orme acknowledges the possibility that early medieval women may have been employed as teachers:

[Alfred's] second strategy centred on developing education in the royal household. Alfred's sons Edward and Æthelweard went to school there, as did his daughter Ælfthryth, various boys gathered by the kind from among his nobility, and others of lesser birth. The pupils in the household learnt skills that included the reading of texts in Latin and English and the ability to write. Tutors were employed, perhaps both male and female, and Alfred himself took part in teaching reading.

According to an endnote, Orme's hesitant concession to the possibility of female teachers alongside male teachers is owed to a personal suggestion from Barbara Yorke that the "*nutricum*" in Asser's *Life* "might refer to governesses rather than nurses."⁴²⁴ More recently, Emily Thornbury's treatment of the same passage shows how twenty-first century binary-gendered assumptions about labor continue to influence interpretations of the past. While she does not shrink from the possibility of female teachers in the ninth century, she cannot escape the powerful influence of modern associations between women and early childcare. She adopts Keynes's and Lapidge's translation of the passage (including the phrase "tutors and nurses"), and comments,

Knowing many poems by heart, moreover, seems to have been a major step towards becoming cultured in this society. What is less clear, though, is the role of teachers. The *nutritores* and *nutrices* were obviously important, but we cannot tell if they were educators as well as caretakers.⁴²⁵

While Thornbury's discussion (though not translation) recognizes the likelihood that the phrase *nutritores et nutrices* represents a single profession with male and female practitioners, the very inclusion of the female *nutrices* leads Thornbury away from assuming that the *nutritores et*

⁴²³ Schneider, "Anglo-Saxon Women in the Religious Life," 143-144.

⁴²⁴ Nicholas Orme, *Medieval Schools: From Roman Britain to Renaissance England* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2006), 376n90.

⁴²⁵ Emily V. Thornbury, *Becoming a Poet in Anglo-Saxon England* (Cambridge UP, 2014), 64.

nutrices could have been principally teachers. She assumes they were principally caretakers who might have also taught, and this despite the fact that schooling is the clear topic of the passage.

What the passage tells us is that women were involved, as teachers as well as students, in literacy and liberal arts education in Alfred's court. At the same time, symbolic representations of educational authority associate teaching and mothering, suggesting a cultural familiarity with the idea of women as educational and intellectual authorities. Perhaps Wisdom in the OEB would not have been recognizable as the story's authoritative teacher of Christian philosophy if she were not female-personified, whatever the grammatical gender of her name. The familiarity with symbolic female educational authority is an important piece in the larger puzzle of gender in schooling and literary culture in the early middle ages. In the following chapters, I focus on individual gendered experiences of women writers in monastic literary culture and the ways in which modern gender paradigms have shaped the reception of early women's writing.

Chapter Three

Monastic Authorship and Gender before the Carolingian Reform

Chapters three and four work together to explore the performance of gender in early English monastic women's writing and the reception of early medieval women's authorship in recent scholarship. Challenging the hegemonic interpretation of early medieval women writers as marginalized and disadvantaged on account of their gender within presumed-male dominated literate culture, these chapters show that early medieval women's gender was not a singular, fixed identity and that women's access to and participation in literate culture remained widespread and ordinary, even as the new reform culture of the late-eighth century constricted monastic women's lives and resources. These chapters tease apart assumptions about early medieval women's social gender identities and assumptions about literacy and literary culture as gendered spaces.

Taking Leoba's letter to Boniface as a case study in the present chapter, I reassess pre-Carolingian monastic women's gender and literary practice in light of girls' and women's equal access to literacy training and what we know about contemporary curriculum, as described in the Introduction. In chapter four, I continue my investigation of monastic women's gender and literary activity after the onset of Carolingian reforms. Together these chapters argue that girls' and women's social gender identities were constricted by the Carolingian reform movement, but that they retained access to literate culture across the early medieval period, from the beginnings of monastic life in England and Francia until as late as the eleventh century.⁴²⁶

⁴²⁶ As I mention elsewhere, I hazard that girls' and women's access to literacy and public intellectual culture did not become restricted until the professionalization of teaching in the twelfth century, although I suspect that the cherished cultural association between women and vernacularity has obscured much of girls' and women's involvement in Latin literacy during the late middle ages.

Since the nineteenth century, many scholars have treated Latin literary culture and the grammatical education upon which it was grounded as predominantly male spaces. Women's writing and intellectual activities continue to be seen as marginal and hampered by limited access to schooling and literate culture in comparison to men's.⁴²⁷ Even some feminist scholars continue to interpret women's writing as marked by the women writers' awareness of their own femaleness as a disadvantage. For instance, feminist scholar Diane Watt interprets the use of humility rhetoric by the eighth-century English hagiographer Huneburc as an admission of gendered discomfort, rather than as standard rhetorical practice:

Huneburc is undoubtedly concerned that, as a text composed by a woman writer, her *Life* will not be judged to be authoritative. She is defensive about being seen as a teacher, and attempts to defuse potential criticism by alluding to her "weakness" and by emphasizing that she has relied on clerical testimony, and makes it absolutely clear that she draws on [male] Willibald's own first person account.⁴²⁸

Seeing literacy as normatively male has led to two different ways of interpreting women's authorship: either women writers are incompetent and inferior or, if they are judged to be competent, they are performing maleness. The latter interpretation has been favored by feminist scholars seeking to reconcile early medieval women's participation in literate culture with the entrenched notion that literacy belonged primarily to men. Both interpretations not only position women writers outside mainstream (presumed-male) literary culture, but also collapse all women writers' gender identities across the early middle ages to a single, timeless gender identity: "female." In other words, scholars use a present-day gender scheme to interpret early medieval women's gender identities as a unitary gender identity (female) and assume that this common femaleness determined women's literary marginalization.

⁴²⁷ The claim for qualitative gender parity in early medieval education is well established: Lendinara, "Worlds of Anglo-Saxon Learning."

⁴²⁸ Watt, *Women, Writing, and Religion*, 94.

Chapters three and four argue that the present-day hierarchical binary gender scheme is an insufficient model for assessing early medieval women writers' gender identities. Binary femaleness as a gender identity cannot adequately capture the differences in early women authors' gendered self-presentations, because social gender paradigms were not themselves fixed. I argue that within one generation during the eighth century, the gender paradigm in English and Frankish monastic culture changed from a three-gender model to a binary model. The writings of two early English monastic women, Leoba of Tauberbischofsheim (d.782) and Hugeburc of Heidenheim (fl. 760-780), demonstrate this shift in monastic women's gender options.⁴²⁹

At the same time, monastic authorship and literary culture were essentially ungendered spheres of activity across the seventh and eighth centuries (and as late as the eleventh century).

⁴³⁰ Within monastic life, mixed-gender education and intellectual exchange encouraged performances of authorship which were not gender-differentiated. Authorial performance was rooted in grammatical education, which was not gender-differentiated in early medieval monastic culture.⁴³¹ Schoolgirls studied *grammatica*, just like schoolboys; women religious wrote and published texts, just like male religious.

The two West Saxon writers Leoba and Hugeburc wrote from within mixed-gender intellectual and literary networks, in which women and men frequently shared teachers, books,

⁴²⁹ Leoba, short for Leofgyth, is known from four letters in the Bonifatian letter collection, *Die Briefe*, ed. Tangl, and from Rudolf of Fulda's *Vita Leoba* and *Miracula Sanctorum in Fuldenses Ecclesias Translatozum*, ed. Georg Waitz, MGH SS, 15.1, Epp. 29, 67, 96, 100 (Hannover, 1887); Hugeburc, is known from her *Vita Willibaldi et Wynnebalidi*; see also Eva Gottschaller, *Hugeburc of Heidenheim: philologische Untersuchungen zu den Heiligenbiographien einer Nonne des achten Jahrhunderts* (München, Arbo-Gesellschaft, 1973).

⁴³⁰ Presumably, this continued to be the case until the end of the eleventh century with the rise of European universities and professionalization of teaching.

⁴³¹ See chapter one.

letters, and friendship.⁴³² While access to literate culture remained unrelated to gender, the gender identities available to monastic women were constricted during the Carolingian church reforms. Carolingian reformers sought to remove women religious from sites of administrative and symbolic power, and this was accomplished in part by redefining monastic womanhood as “female” according to the secular, hierarchical binary scheme. In other words, reformers imposed a subordinate gender identity on women religious as a way to justify and codify women’s complete subordination within ecclesiastical culture. By the end of the eighth century, reforms had significantly limited the economic viability and historical visibility of religious women in England and Francia. Chapter four examines women’s authorship in response to these changes. The present chapter examines monastic authorship in the era before the Carolingian reforms.

Together, chapters three and four have two principal aims. First, the chapters reconsider women’s authorship in light of women’s “equal” access to literacy education in comparison with men’s.⁴³³ Second, the chapters challenge the notion of hegemonic and timeless femaleness, as it relates to women writers across the eighth century. I argue that early medieval gender paradigms were unfixed, and that women writers’ gender performances changed in response to shifting cultural pressures and available gender identities. Chapter three begins by examining the scholarly reception of Leoba’s writing in relation to the “exceptionalism” narrative. I then reconsider Leoba’s poem in light of eighth-century schoolgirl education. Finally, I discuss the three-gender paradigm in Leoba’s contemporary monastic culture.

⁴³² See Barbara Yorke, “The Bonifacian Mission and Female Religious in Wessex” *Early Medieval Europe* 7 (1998), 145–72; Hollis, *Women and the Church*; Lifshitz, *Religious Women in Early Carolingian Francia*.

⁴³³ See introduction for a discussion of “equal” access; in short, access to education had nothing to do with gender; it is impossible to know whether comparable numbers of men and women were literate, but it is clear that literacy was not considered something reserved for or more relevant to men than to women.

Leoba's Letter

Leoba introduces herself c.732 in a letter to Boniface, the West Saxon missionary saint and eventual founder of Fulda Abbey and archbishop of Mainz.⁴³⁴ Written while Leoba was still a resident at the double monastery of Wimbourne in Wessex under Abbess Tetta, the well-known letter is the only extant writing by the future abbess of Tauberbischofsheim. Leoba's letter is part of an eighth-century letter collection from the network of Boniface's associates, which is preserved in three ninth-century manuscripts. Twenty-five of the sixty-nine letters in the original collection were written to, from, or between women.⁴³⁵ Along with Leoba's letter to Boniface (Tangl 29), the collection includes one letter from Boniface to Leoba (Tangl 96), one letter addressed jointly to Leoba and two other women from Boniface (Tangl 67), and one letter addressed to Leoba from Lull (Tangl 100), Boniface's successor as archbishop of Mainz.⁴³⁶ In addition to these letters, Leoba is known from her mid-ninth century *Life* and from the *Miracles of Saints Buried in the Churches of Fulda*, both written in the ninth-century by Rudolf, a monk and scholar at Fulda. The *Life* was commissioned by Rhaban Maur, abbot of Fulda, at the time of the translation of Leoba's remains, c. 830s.⁴³⁷ Rudolf's *Life* incorporates some testimony from monastic women who had known Leoba in her lifetime. The text and translation of Leoba's letter to Boniface are printed in the appendix to the chapter. The following excerpt mentions her poetic training and includes the four hexameter lines at the end of the letter:

⁴³⁴ Michael Tangl, ed., *Die Briefe des Heiligen Bonifatius und Lullus*, MGH Epp. sel. 1 (Berlin: Weidmannsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1916), Ep. 29, 52-53.

⁴³⁵ Lifshitz, *Religious Women*, 4; the women's letters are translated in Joan Ferrante, et al., *Epistolae: Medieval Women's Latin Letters*, Columbia Center for Teaching and Learning, <http://epistolae.ctl.columbia.edu/>; see Garrison, "Send more Socks," on the lower instance of preservation of letters to and by women.

⁴³⁶ Tangl, *Die Briefe*, ep. 67, 139; ep. 96, 217; ep. 100, 233.

⁴³⁷ Yorke, "Rudolf of Fulda's Vita S. Leobae."

Istos autem subter scriptos versiculos componere nitebar secundum poeticae traditionis disciplinam, non audacia confidens, sed gracilis ingenioli rudimenta exercitare cupiens et tuo auxilio indigens. Istam artem ab Eadburge magisterio didici, quae indesinenter legem divinam rimare non cessat.

Arbiter omnipotens, solus qui cuncta creavit,
In regno patris semper qui lumine fulget,
Qua iugiter flagrans sic regnet gloria Christi,
Inlesum servet semper te iure perenni.

I have composed the following verses according to the rules of poetic art, not trusting to my own presumption, but trying only to exercise my little talents and needing your assistance. I have studied this art under the guidance of Eadburga, who still carries on without ceasing her investigation of the divine law.⁴³⁸

May the omnipotent Ruler who alone created everything,
Who shines in splendor forever in His Father's kingdom,
Where the glory of Christ reigns in perpetual fire,
preserve you forever unharmed in perennial right.

Leoba's letter follows the traditional structure for letter-writing.⁴³⁹ The content of the letter is her relationship with Boniface, whom she urges to remember her parents (his kin and friends). Throughout the letter, Leoba develops a chiasmic, textile metaphor of kinship interconnection.⁴⁴⁰ She mentions the "tiny little gift [*parvum munusculum*]" she is including for Boniface, by which she hopes he will "remember her insignificance [*parvitas*]" and not forget her "on account of their wide separation." Leoba's gift remains unspecified, but it may be the four-line hexameter poem. These four hexameter lines represent the earliest surviving Latin verse known to have been written by an English woman, and some of the earliest surviving verse by any named English author.⁴⁴¹ Leoba also asks Boniface to "correct the roughness [*rusticitas*]" of

⁴³⁸ Trans., Ephraim Emerton, *The Letters of Saint Boniface* (New York: Columbia UP, 2000), 60.

⁴³⁹ See Lanham, "Freshman composition."

⁴⁴⁰ Weston, "Conceiving the Word(s)," 164-5, observes that Boniface's epistolary relationship in the past with Leoba's teacher Eadburh is just as important in Leoba's "deploying" of a network of relationships to connect Boniface with herself as are the friendships and kinships between Boniface and Leoba's parents.

⁴⁴¹ Actually this is the earliest surviving medieval Latin poetry securely attributed to a woman; Jane Stevenson, *Women Latin Poets: Language, Gender, and Authority from Antiquity to the*

the letter, and to send his own news as an example—presumably an example of polished writing, or maybe more specifically of epistolary style. Leoba ends the main body of the letter by describing her poetic efforts.

The twentieth- and twenty-first century reception of Leoba's letter and short poem is symptomatic of scholars' marginalization of women's writing from "mainstream" literary history. In his 1976 translation of the letters to and from Boniface, Ephraim Emerton takes the trouble to dismiss Leoba's poetic skill in one of the very few editorial notes he includes in the monograph. The majority of letters have no notes; a few have one or two notes. The only note on Emerton's translation of Leoba's letter states: "These awkward verses, written by a beginning student of poetry, contain an invocation of the Trinity—the Father who created, the Son who shines in his Father's kingdom, and the Spirit *iugiter flagrans*."⁴⁴² Emerton does not explain what about Leoba's verse is awkward, or what indicates to him that she is a "beginning student." It seems to be that Emerton takes Leoba at her word when she calls herself unskilled as a poet and needing Boniface's guidance.

The dismissive attitude toward premodern women's writing, which Emerton's comment exemplifies, is rooted deeply enough in scholarship that even feminist scholars are likely to perpetuate sexist interpretations, especially in cases where they must rely on others' expertise. For example, the *Epistolae* database of letters collected by Professor Joan Ferrante—a feminist project which gathers all the medieval Latin letters written by women—reproduces Emerton's note on Leoba's letter with no further explanation.⁴⁴³ The database, which offers English translations of every letter, increases access to women's writing for non-specialists. How many

Eighteenth Century (Oxford UP, 2005), 87, notes that two earlier poems ("De excidio Thoringiae" and "Ad Artachin") likely by Radegund are still claimed by some scholars for Venantius Fortunatus.

⁴⁴² Emerton, *The Letters of St. Boniface*, 60n1.

⁴⁴³ Ferrante, et al., *Epistolae: Medieval Women's Letters*, <https://epistolae.cml.columbia.edu>.

scholars encountering Leoba's poem in this database have taken on Emerton's prejudiced and unexplained view of Leoba's skill, trusting in the double authority of Ferrante and Emerton?

Gendered Reception of Humility Tropes

Emerton appears to have interpreted Leoba's expressions of humility—a standard rhetorical practice among accomplished writers in antiquity and the middle ages—as an admission of a real lack of skill. Scholars have often interpreted authors' humility rhetoric differently, based on the perceived gender of the author: standard expressions of humility are taken as transparent admissions of lack of ability when used by women writers, but as formal rhetorical expressions when used by male writers. The reception of the philosopher and abbess Hildegard of Bingen's humility rhetoric by nineteenth- and twentieth-century male scholars demonstrates this trend. Among nineteenth-century scholars who denied Hildegard's authorship of her works altogether, one J. P. Schmelzeis “maintained that Hildegard transcribed her Latin writings directly from heaven without understanding a word of them.”⁴⁴⁴ In an influential early twentieth-century essay on Hildegard's (male) collaborators, Hildfons Herwegen writes,

Saint Hildegard did not receive any literary training: “Indocta mulier me docuit” [an untaught woman taught me], she said. Jutta or Judith, her teacher and the sister of Count Meginhard of Spanheim had kept her work of instructing her young student [Hildegard] the psalms of David. Probably she learned the psalms by heart, in order to be able to sing them in the Office. What is certain, is that she didn't understand their meaning except in a general sense, and that the meaning of each word escaped her, just as how in her revelations God revealed the meaning of sacred scripture to her.⁴⁴⁵

⁴⁴⁴ J. P. Schmelzeis, *Das Leben und Wirken der hl. Hildegardis* (Freiburg im Breisgau, 1879), cited in Rebecca Walker, “Unadorned by Silence: Rereading Obedience in the Writing of Perpetua, Dhuoda, and Hildegard of Bingen,” Ph.D. dissertation (Portland State University, 1993), 14.

⁴⁴⁵ Hildfons Herwegen, “Les collaborateurs de Ste Hildegard” *Revue Benedictine* 21 (1904), 192-203, “Saint Hildegard ne reçut aucune formation littéraire: ‘Indocta mulier me docuit’, dit-elle. Jutta ou Judith, sa maîtresse et sœur du comte Meginhard de Spanheim, avait restreint son œuvre à enseigner à sa jeune élève les psaumes de David. Probablement apprit-elle les

Taking Hildegard's expression of humility at face value, Herwegen argues that Hildegard was incapable of committing her visions to writing without the help of male collaborators, such as her friend, the monk Volmar. Although she received revelation, she didn't understand Latin words.

In response to Herwegen's deprecation of Hildegard's literary education and ability, Barbara Newman notes that more recent research "has indicated that Volmar's role was limited to copy editor and scribe; he did no significant stylistic revision."⁴⁴⁶ Hildegard's learning was much wider than Herwegen's assessment allows. It included biblical commentaries, liturgy, the Benedictine Rule, moral and exegetical writings of Augustine, Jerome, Gregory I, and Bede, and likely some apocryphal texts. Newman, Peter Dronke, and other scholars who have argued for Hildegard's literary skill demonstrate the need to defend women's capability as authors against "long-held suppositions about women's intellectual activities."⁴⁴⁷ As the example of Hugeburc in Chapter 4 shows, scholars often credit a male collaborator with authorial responsibility, even when the roles of "dictator" and "copyist" are reversed. A woman author may just as easily lose her authorial status when she is composing a text based on a male subject's narrative, as when she is dictating to a scribe.

Such "long-held suppositions" are reinforced by scholars' unacknowledged biases. The gendered reception of women's humility rhetoric exemplifies these biases in action. Both Leoba and Hugeburc use forms of humility rhetoric as one way of signaling their facility with contemporary literary style. However, scholars continue to interpret both writers' uses of

psaumes par cœur, afin de les pouvoir chanter à l'office. Ce qui est certain, c'est qu'elle n'en comprenait le sens que d'une façon générale, et que le sens de chaque parole lui échappait alors même que dans ses révélations, Dieu lui dévoilait le sens de la Sainte Écriture."

⁴⁴⁶ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, trans. Mother Columba Hart and Jane Bishop, introduced by Barbara J. Newman, preface by Caroline Walker Bynum (New York: Paulist Press, 1990), 44.

⁴⁴⁷ Beach, "Listening for the Voices of Admont's Twelfth-Century Nuns," 187.

humility rhetoric as evidence of a lack of skill or confidence, due to presumed gender-based disadvantage in literary training.⁴⁴⁸

Usually, scholars couch their gendered interpretations of women's writing in otherwise sound scholarship. Patrick Sims-Williams's treatment of the English missionary women in his widely-read study, *Religion and Literature in Western England, 600-800* (1990), is one example. To his credit, Sims-Williams gives an extended discussion to letters written by three women, Leoba, Berhtgyth (whom he calls Burginda), and Ecburg, alongside his discussion of letters by two men. Sims-Williams explores some of the women's literary background—from Aldhelm's poems to Vergil, Juvenecus, and Arator—and attempts to present women as capable of high learning. But he falters in his efforts. Sims-Williams is most able to give women praise for intellectual and literary achievement when there is no extant evidence of such achievement to be interpreted. When it comes to interpreting extant writing, as in the case of the three letters by Leoba, Berhtgyth, and Ecburg, he consistently judges women's writing as "less than" whatever measure will justify a negative assessment.

In regards to Leoba, for example, he writes that "we see a pupil labouring over letter-writing and versification while her teacher is deep in more abstruse biblical studies."⁴⁴⁹ Sims-Williams offsets his assessment of Leoba as a struggling student by his willingness to attribute "more abstruse" intellectual activity by her woman teacher Eadburg, none of whose writing survives. By crediting Eadburg with advanced intellectual work, he appears to be willing to credit women with intellectual achievement. This makes his relatively low assessment of

⁴⁴⁸ Nelson, Janet. "Gender and Genre in Women Historians of the Early Middle Ages," in *L'Historiographie médiévale en Europe: actes du colloque organisé par la Fondation européenne de la science au Centre de recherches historiques et juridiques de l'Université Paris I du 29 mars au 1er avril 1989*, ed. Jean-Philippe Genet, 149-163 (Paris: Presses du CNRS, 1991), 163.

⁴⁴⁹ Patrick Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England, 600-800* (Cambridge UP, 1990), 212.

Leoba's actual writing seem objective, or seem not to be influenced by the fact of Leoba being a woman. But a clear pattern emerges in Sims-Williams's treatment of the three women letter-writers.

More explicitly than Leoba's translator Emerton, Sims-Williams takes Leoba's humility trope at face value: Leoba "concludes by asking Boniface to correct her rustic style and to send one of his own letters as a model (*exempli gratia*); she then adds four lines of halting verse (in formulae culled from Aldhelm)."⁴⁵⁰ Declining to analyze Leoba's style or explain the characterisation of her verse as "halting," Sims-Williams takes Leoba at her word that her prose style is "rustic." By contrast, he does not comment on the nearly identical use of the *rusticitas* humility trope in his discussion of male Lull's, Denehard's and Burghard's joint letter to Cyneburg, preserved in the same collection as Leoba's letter, although he prints the full letter to Cyneburg, including the line in question: "We also ask you to correct the rusticity of this little letter and not to refuse to send us some words of your own sweet self, which we will be satisfied to hear eagerly and joyfully."⁴⁵¹ Whereas Leoba's request for Boniface to "correct" the "rusticity" of her letter is interpreted by Sims-Williams as an indication of Leoba's little skill, the men's use of the same phrase occasions no comment.

His treatment of Berhtgyth's letter demonstrates the same determination to judge women's extant literary work as inadequate. His exertions in maintaining Berhtgyth's literary inferiority in light of the extensive intertextual references he discovers in her letter show his commitment to the assumption that women received inferior literary education to men:

The composition's scarcely fulfilled ambition and imperfections reflect Burginda's education. She has been taught grammar, but not thoroughly, as the confusions of tense, mood and voice show; these errors cannot be blamed solely on the copyist, for they occur

⁴⁵⁰ Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature*, 211-12.

⁴⁵¹ Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature*, 240.

most noticeably when Burginda is not following a model (so far as I have discovered) or is adapting the syntax of one to her own purposes.⁴⁵²

Following this comment, Sims-Williams demonstrates Berhtgyth's adaptation of Vergilian and Juvencan lines, and of imagery from the *Carmen ad Flauium Felicem* and Arator's *Acts*. This line-up actually shows extensive literary training comparable to that of well-known male contemporaries.⁴⁵³ Berhtgyth's adaptation of source material demonstrates the rhetorical skill of paraphrase, in which the writer reworks verse material into prose.⁴⁵⁴ Sims-Williams remains unimpressed by her assimilation of Latin literature, and sums up his assessment:

Burginda's line of thought is not very clearly expressed, and any literary merits in her letter are entirely due to her use of Vergil, Arator and the *Carmen ad Flauium Felicem*. She is clearly less learned than many of Boniface's female correspondents, and her composition would hardly have been preserved had it not formed part of the Apponius codex. Yet for us it is an illuminating indication of the education one woman received.⁴⁵⁵

Sims-Williams devalues Berhtgyth's achievement by comparing her writing unfavorably to writing we cannot see. As in the comparison between Leoba's extant letter and Eadburgh's unknowable work, comparing Berhtgyth's writing to the unspecified, unknowable work of "many of Boniface's female correspondents" masks the gender-bias governing Sims-Williams's assessments. At the same time, the comparison to other *women* tacitly suggests that Berhtgyth is not even worthy of comparison with men. In effect, the comparison claims that Berhtgyth's writing is the least accomplished of a less accomplished set. Otherwise, why not simply call Berhtgyth "less learned than many of Boniface's correspondents"? Contemporary critics of

⁴⁵² Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature*, 215.

⁴⁵³ Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Library*, "Catalogue of classical and patristic authors," notes that Arator and Juvenecus were cited by Aldhelm and Bede (and later authors, Alcuin, Lantfred, Wulfstan, and Byrhtferth); Vergil was cited by Aldhelm, Bede, (and later authors, Asser, Lantfred, Abbo, Wulfstan, and Byrhtferth).

⁴⁵⁴ Danuta Shanzer, "Gregory of Tours and Poetry: Prose Into Verse and Verse Into Prose" *Proceedings of the British Academy* 129 (2005), 303-319, analyses Gregory's skill as a verse paraphrast.

⁴⁵⁵ Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature*, 219.

Berhtgyth's writing would likely have taken a different view than Sims-Williams. In his ninth-century *Life of St Boniface*, Otloh notes that Berhtgyth was a renowned teacher, famous for her learning.

Sims-Williams's assessment of Ecgburg's writing is more favorable than his assessment of Berhtgyth's, but not free from gender bias. He criticizes Ecgburg for overdependence on sources, while he interprets the male writer Milred's no less extensive use of quotations as "apt" or needing no comment. For example, Ecgburg adapts a line from Jerome's letter to Rufinus, "Credas mihi uelim, frater, non sic tempestate iactatus portum nauta prospectat, non sic sitientia imbres arua desiderant, non sic curuo adsidens litori anxia filium mater expectat," in her letter to Boniface: "Quapropter, crede mihi, non sic tempestate iactatus portum nauta desiderat, non sic sitientia imbres arua desiderant, non sic curuo litore anxia filium mater expectat, quam ut ego uisibus uestris frui [...] cupio."⁴⁵⁶ About this use of Jerome, Sims-Williams writes, "Undoubtedly she carries the legitimate practice of literary allusion too far, using Jerome as a prop for her own Latin."⁴⁵⁷ In contrast, Sims-Williams interprets Milred's quotations and allusions as signs of literary skill rather than of limitation: "Milred's reference to his journey home from Germany 'per uarios casus et multa discrimina rerum' is an apt allusion to the waters of Aeneas in *Aeneid* I.204-6: 'per uarios casus, per tot discrimina rerum tendimus in Latium...'; and without any accusations of overuse or over-dependence notes that "Milred quotes the *Aeneid* again near the end of his letter: 'unde fateor et fida promissione spondeo...quamdiu *spiritus hos regit artus uitalisque flatus his moribundis inhabitat membris.*'" The italics are quoted words.⁴⁵⁸

Sims-Williams concludes that "Milred does not seem to depend on verbal borrowings to the same extent as Burginda and Ecgburg" and "alludes effectively to Latin poetry, as we would

⁴⁵⁶ Cited in Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature*, 221.

⁴⁵⁷ Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature*, 221.

⁴⁵⁸ Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature*, 235.

expect, judging from his postscript on Porphyrius's poetry and from other evidence for his interest in Latin verse."⁴⁵⁹ Sims-Williams's gender bias causes him to interpret the same stylistic features in men's and women's writing differently, according to the perceived gender of the writer: Leoba's request for corrections to her "rustic" Latin demonstrates her lack of skill, while Lull's identical request does not demonstrate a lack of skill. Ecburg's intertextual allusions show overdependence; Milred's intertextual allusions show his interest in Latin verse.

Confirmation bias is another effect of gender bias on scholars' interpretation of women's writing. "Confirmation bias, broadly defined, is the selective gathering and weighting of evidence to support a specific hypothesis, and the failure to gather or recognize evidence that counts against that hypothesis."⁴⁶⁰ In psychological terms, confirmation bias "connotes the seeking or interpreting of evidence in ways that are partial to existing beliefs, expectations, or a hypothesis in hand."⁴⁶¹ "In other words, we see what we expect to see, and we don't see what we don't expect to see."⁴⁶² Confirmation bias has been shown to affect readers' evaluation of writing skills, based on the perceived race of the writer.⁴⁶³ The same confirmation bias occurs in

⁴⁵⁹ Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature*, 237.

⁴⁶⁰ David Lagnado, *Explaining the Evidence: How the Mind Investigates the World* (Cambridge UP, 2021), 172.

⁴⁶¹ R. S. Nickerson, "Confirmation bias: A ubiquitous phenomenon in many guises" *Review of General Psychology* 2.2 (1998), 175.

⁴⁶² Kathleen Nalty, *Going All-In On Diversity and Inclusion: The Law Firm Leader's Playbook*, 2nd ed. 2019, 41-42.

⁴⁶³ Arin Reeves, "Written in Black and White: Exploring Confirmation Bias in Racialized Perceptions of Writing Skills," *Nextions Yellow Paper Series*, April 4, 2014, cited in Nalty, *Going All-In*, 42: "In a 2014 study of confirmation bias in law firms, the investigator asked 60 attorneys in 22 law firms to evaluate the writing in a research memo ostensibly written by a young attorney named Thomas Meyer. Half the participants were told the writer was African American; half were told the writer was Caucasian; "The results indicated strong confirmation bias on the part of the evaluators. On average, the evaluators gave African American Thomas Meyer's memo an overall rating of 3.2 out of 5.0, while the exact same memo garnered an average rating of 4.1 out of 5.0 for Caucasian Thomas Meyer. The evaluators found twice as many spelling/grammatical errors for African American Thomas Meyer (5.8 out of 7.0) compared to Caucasian Thomas Meyer (2.9 out of 7.0). They also found more technical and factual errors and made more critical comments with respect to African American Thomas

medieval scholarship with respect to gender: scholars expecting early medieval women writers to have been less well educated than male writers seek out women's grammatical errors and judge women's writing more critically. By contrast, the same scholars do not notice men's grammatical errors, because they are not looking for them. As a result, the men's writing is evaluated more highly.

Andy Orchard's assessment of Leoba's Latinity offers an example of gender-related confirmation bias at work. Orchard's criticisms of the grammatical errors in Leoba's letter are factually correct, but in failing to scrutinize contemporary letters written by men to the same degree, Orchard misinterprets the grammatical errors in Leoba's letter as a sign of her relative lack of skill. Expecting to see weaker Latin in a woman writer, Orchard like so many others does not feel compelled to evaluate the Latinity of Leoba's contemporary male correspondents for comparison. He calls Leoba's grasp of Latin grammar "shaky":

Leofgyth, then, has simply echoed passages from her textbooks; in other words, this is a sort of undergraduate essay, albeit a rather superior one, a supposition strengthened by her somewhat shaky grasp of Latin grammar: she has particular problems with deponent verbs, and we must remember that, after all, she did send this letter to Boniface for correction.⁴⁶⁴

Orchard lists several grammatical mistakes in Leoba's letter, which have been corrected by an eleventh-century hand:

There are a number of ways in which the grammar of the letter transgresses strict classical standards of correctness. For example, *ut...renuues* (lines 6-7) should probably read (ignoring the dittography) *ut rennuas*; *ut...retines* (lines 12-13) should probably read *ut...retineas*; *rimare* (line 21) should probably read *rimari*; *regnet* (line 25) should

Meyer's Memo. Even more significantly, Dr. Reeves found that the female and racially/ethnically diverse partners who participated in the study were just as likely as while male participants to be more rigorous in examining African American Thomas Meyer's memo (and finding more mistakes) while basically giving Caucasian Thomas Meyer a pass." Thanks to Eva D'Ignazio for pointing me toward "confirmation bias" as a useful model.

⁴⁶⁴ Andy Orchard, "Finding the Right Formula for Boniface" *Anglo-Saxon England* 30 (2002), 32.

probably read *regnat*. It is perhaps amusing to note that in the manuscripts Tangl 29 [Leoba's letter] has been repeatedly corrected by later hands.⁴⁶⁵

While Orchard's comments suggest that Leoba's letter is notable for its grammatical errors, in fact the letter's grammatical errors are standard for the entire collection of correspondence, both in type and quantity. The indefatigable corrector of the Karlsruhe codex has plenty of work to do throughout the collection, including in letters by Boniface and Lull.⁴⁶⁶

For instance, Lull's joint letter to Cyneburg (Tangl 49) contains an identical error to the error in Leoba's letter in the use of future indicative "rennues" for present subjunctive "rennuas." In the same letter, the corrector has corrected "vellet" (imperfect subjunctive of *volo*) to "velit" (present subjunctive of *volo*), although the better correction would be to present indicative "vult." The uses of "rennues" and "vellet" in Tangl 49 demonstrate the same type of grammatical error—mistaking subjunctive and indicative forms—as appears in "rennues" for "rennuas" and "retines" for "retineas" in Leoba's letter. Likewise, in a letter from Boniface to Nothelm, the corrector has corrected subjunctive "praecipiant" to indicative "praecipiant" —another mistake in verb mood.⁴⁶⁷ It is interesting that the editor Michael Tangl prints "praecipiant" along with the corrector, noting the (mistaken) original reading in the critical apparatus, whereas Tangl consistently prints original readings in Leoba's letter and notes the corrector's changes in the critical apparatus. This difference gives an initial impression of greater accuracy in Boniface's letter than in Leoba's and may also be an effect of confirmation bias.

⁴⁶⁵ Orchard, "Finding the Right Formula for Boniface," 32; in fact, there are only corrections on one of the three mss copies of Leoba's letter (Tangl 29), which appears in all three ninth-century mss of the letter collection: Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Codex latinus monacensis 8112, f. 106 (no corrections); Karlsruhe, Badische Landesbibliothek, Codex Rastatt 22, f.85v (with extensive corrections throughout the ms); and Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Cod. Lat. Vindobonensis 751, f. 21 (no corrections).

⁴⁶⁶ Michael Aaij, "The Boniface Correspondence," in *A Companion to Boniface*, eds. Michael Aaij and Shannon Godlove (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 124-129, describes the mss.

⁴⁶⁷ Tangl 33, p. 57.

In Leoba's letter, Orchard interprets the corrector's "rimari" for the original "rimare" as a sign that Leoba struggles with deponent verbs. However, the *Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources* accepts both forms in medieval Latin. It may not be appropriate to trust the corrector too quickly, as the corrector sometimes hypercorrects. An example in Lull et al.'s letter to Cyneburg (Tangl 49) is the mis-correction of dative plural pronoun "eis" to accusative plural "eos."⁴⁶⁸ While the reading "rimare" may or may not represent a difficulty with deponent infinitives in Leoba's letter, Boniface's letter to Pope Zacharius certainly demonstrates some trouble confusing finite verb forms for infinitives. Here the corrector is helpful: "cepere" is corrected to "inciperem" and "vellet" is corrected to "velle."⁴⁶⁹ Boniface or a later scribe must have intended *coepere* as the present infinitive, but *coepi/coepisse* is a defective verb without a present system. Furthermore, the subject is first person single, and should take the appropriate finite verb. In this case, the corrector is right to replace "cepere" with "inciperem." The confusion of "cepere" for "inciperem" is a particularly bad error. Should we then conclude that Boniface's grasp of grammar was shaky?

Women writers receive lower estimations than male authors because the women receive more scrutiny, not because their writing ability was lower. Of course, any mistakes in any of the letters might be attributed to an early copyist rather than to the authors. The three earliest manuscripts containing the Bonifatian letter collection postdate Leoba's and her contemporaries' writing by decades. Certain mistakes in the collection, such as the intervocalic dropout in "protere" for "protegere" in Tangl 49 may point toward aural mistakes in the dictation process

⁴⁶⁸ Tangl 49, p. 80; Codex Rastatt 22, f.105v: "et si aliquis eis [corr. eos] prohibere vellet [corr. velit]", where *prohibere* appropriately takes a dative object, and (as in Tangl 29) "vellet" is incorrectly changed to "velit" instead of "vult".

⁴⁶⁹ Tangl 50, p. 82.

rather than grammatical ignorance. Perhaps we can see the Karlsruhe corrector's work as fixing audio problems visually.⁴⁷⁰

Leoba's request for "corrections" is not an admission of female inadequacy, but a skillful performance of authorship. According to Tore Janson, expressions of humility characterize authorial self-presentation in Latin prefaces.⁴⁷¹ Leoba's use of humility rhetoric supports her self-presentation as an authoritative participant in monastic literary culture. Jane Stevenson writes that "prefatory protestations of incapacity were entirely normal in the early Middle Ages, and do not necessarily indicate uncertainty or diffidence," and that an author might "protest her inadequacy as a writer with considerable rhetorical dexterity."⁴⁷² In *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, Ernst Curtius includes "affected modesty" as a common rhetorical trope.⁴⁷³ Present in Cicero's *De inventione* (I, 16, 22) and Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria* (IV, 1, 8), humility tropes (in Curtius, "modesty formulas") are widespread in late antique and medieval literatures in Latin and vernacular languages, Curtius writes:

Now the author protests his inadequacy in general, now bemoans his uneducated and rude speech (*rusticitas*). Even such a refined stylist as Tacitus would have us believe that his *Agricola* is composed "in artless and unschooled language." Aulus Gellius puts such excuses at the beginning of his *Attic Nights* (*praef.*, 10). Ennodius is "dismayed by his poverty of mind" (*Ep.*, I, 8)... Walafrid writes "with slight talent" ("tenui ingenio"). There are apologies for uncultivated language, for metrical errors, for simplicity and lack of art, etc.⁴⁷⁴

Jerome, in his preface to Samuel and Kings, excuses his own "lowliness" and "poor efforts" at translating. Leoba's use of the term *parvitas* to describe her literary accomplishment is an

⁴⁷⁰ My thanks to Paul Vinhage for this suggestion and assistance with the Karlsruhe corrections.

⁴⁷¹ Tore Janson, *Latin Prose Preface: Studies in Literary Conventions* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1964).

⁴⁷² Stevenson, *Women Latin Poets*, 87.

⁴⁷³ Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton UP, 1953), 83-85.

⁴⁷⁴ Curtius, *European Literature*, 83.

example of this sort of rhetorical expression of “incompetence”.⁴⁷⁵ Carolingian self-disparagements such as “‘my littleness, pettiness, smallness’ (‘*mea exiguitas, pusillitas, parvitas*’)” are examples of the affected modesty trope.⁴⁷⁶ Similarly, Leoba’s, Lull’s, and Boniface’s uses of the term *rusticitas* to denigrate their stylistic achievements are standard rhetorical expressions of unskilled style (*sermo rusticus*). Expressing a “low evaluation of one’s own literary ability” was “enormously common and must be counted as more or less obligatory in prefaces from the fourth century onwards.”⁴⁷⁷

Who is the audience of the corrections themselves? Should we imagine that Boniface and Cyneburg sent back “marked up” copies of the letters to Leoba and Lull respectively, like present-day Latin homework with teacher’s notes?⁴⁷⁸ That is how Emily Thornbury interprets Leoba’s request for Boniface’s corrections.⁴⁷⁹ Thornbury assumes that Leoba is asking Boniface to help her improve her Latin grammar and style.⁴⁸⁰ I disagree. It seems to me that Leoba, Lull, and others use the trope to position their letters as literature which will be read and copied

⁴⁷⁵ Janson, *Latin Prose Preface*, 124.

⁴⁷⁶ Curtius, *European Literature*, 85.

⁴⁷⁷ Janson, *Latin Prose Preface*, 139-140.

⁴⁷⁸ If corrections were in fact made, then the correctors (Boniface and Cyneburg, for instance) would be responsible for any remaining errors in the letters, whether because they introduced errors themselves through hypercorrection or because they missed those errors made by the author; alternatively, the errors might have been introduced by later copyists.

⁴⁷⁹ Emily Victory Thornbury, “Boniface as Poet and Teacher,” in *A Companion to Boniface*, eds. Michel Aaij and Shannon Godlove, (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 112.

⁴⁸⁰ Nor do I agree with Watt’s interpretation of Leoba’s desire to correspond or study with Boniface as a “wish[]to advance from the convent instruction she received from Eadburg to a higher level, which she believes can only be achieved with male patronage” (Watt, *Women, Writing, and Religion*, 75); Leoba was already famous for her learning when Boniface invited her to join the mission, according to Rudolf’s *Life* (which surely wouldn’t have missed an opportunity to attribute Leoba’s intellectual achievements to Boniface’s tutorship); I see no reason to suspect that education at Wimbourne was any less advanced than any instruction she might receive from or under the care of Boniface; Boniface himself corresponds with Eadburg, whom he addresses in terms of utmost respect.

beyond the immediate exchange. The “corrections” trope specifically points to the afterlife Leoba imagines for her letter as a formal literary work.

In the early middle ages, letters were a formal literary genre with public circulation, rather than simply private communications. In Lull’s letter to two unnamed women (Tangl 98) he pointedly begs the two addressees not to show anyone the “little verses” he includes in the letter. His request for corrections is preserved as a part of his published letter in the collection, but the verses themselves have not been preserved.⁴⁸¹ This may suggest that the “corrections” trope signaled an intent to have one’s writing circulated beyond the initial recipients unless otherwise stated. It has been suggested that the collection including Leoba’s letter was gathered as a set of examples of epistolary style. Whatever the purpose behind their collection, the letters were stored, copied, and read by others besides the addressees.⁴⁸² In carefully crafting her letter to Boniface, Leoba would have expected a readership for her letter beyond Boniface’s initial reception.

While Leoba participates in the tradition of authorial humility rhetoric, she does not simply copy earlier writers’ formulations. Leoba’s own formula for the request (c.732)—“peto, ut rusticitatem huius epistolae digneris emendare”—is actually borrowed later by male writers in letters in the same collection. Lull, Denehard, and Burghard (c.739-741) apparently adapt Leoba’s formula, when they ask Cyneburg for corrections to their “rustic” Latin: “petimus, ut rusticitatem huius epistiunculae emendas.” In his c.747 letter to Archbishop Cuthbert of Canterbury (Tangl 78), Boniface also uses Leoba’s *corrigere-rusticitas* pairing: “non quia vestra

⁴⁸¹ Lull’s peculiar request that his readers keep the verses private stands out from the more usual gift of verses accompanying literary letters in the collection, such as in Leoba’s letter (Tangl 29), Lul to anonyma (Tangl 140), Berhtgyth to Balthard (Tangl 148, 147), Boniface (Tangl 103, 9, 10, 50), and Koena to Lul (Tangl 124).

⁴⁸² On letter writing and collection, see Garrison, “Send More Socks”; and Jordan Zweck, *Epistolary Acts: Anglo-Saxon letters and early English media* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018).

prudentialia opus sit rusticitatis nostrae statuta audire vel legere...vobis emendanda et corrigenda distinamus.” In two other letters, Lull asks for corrections using different formulae: In his c.738 letter to two women (unnamed in the manuscripts) whom he addresses with notable love and respect, Lull asks that they read his *versiculi* (“little verses,” the same term used by Leoba) sympathetically, but asks them to hunt down and scrape away the defects in his language “according to the grammarian’s practice.”⁴⁸³ Likewise, in a c.739-741 letter to Boniface, Lull asks Boniface to “correct” some “little verses”:

Hos tibi versiculos, pater amande, subter scriptos correctionis causa direxi cupiens industriae vestrae scripta promereri, quatenus erroris mei anfractus ex ipsis certus cognoscam.

These little verses below I send to you, my dear father, for correction, hoping that you will be kind enough to send me your comments, that I may clearly understand my own errors.⁴⁸⁴

These examples show that Leoba’s request for corrections should not be interpreted as female inadequacy. Men and women writers requested corrections for their so-called unskilled Latin from men and women addressees, and Leoba’s formula was judged by contemporary male writers as worthy of replication.

Leoba’s Literacy in Context

The work of normalizing women’s authorship within literary history must be grounded in a recognition of women’s normal involvement in literacy education and grammatical culture.

This has been the project of Chapters 1 and 2 in my dissertation. Without redressing the

⁴⁸³ Tangl 98, p. 221, “ideo vobis dirigere versiculos metricae ratione compositos diu fixum mente tenui, corde simul dulce habui, quia nullos legentium novi, quibus libentius mitterem, ubi pro certo scio nullam dirae fraudis suspitione mentem distinantis mordere nec dictantem hostili vituperatione lacerare, licet vitiosa pagina scabraque scedula repperiatur...Si quid autem huic operi minime congruum tortumque et contra regulam grammaticae artis insertum invenietis, hoc polire runcinando sumpta lima ex officina grammaticorum reminiscemini.”

⁴⁸⁴ Tangl 103, p. 227. ; trans. in Emerton, *The Letters of Saint Boniface*, 175.

long-held assumptions that women's education was inferior to and/or less usual than men's education in the early middle ages, attempts by scholars to incorporate women authors in literary history rely on variations of the "exceptionalism" narrative, and such narratives reinforce the underlying false assumption that women's literary involvement was limited by women's gender. The most recent treatment of Leoba, by Lisa Weston, follows this pattern. Though Weston seeks to recuperate Leoba's literary and intellectual status, her study fails to question the underlying gendered assumptions which have shaped the reception of Leoba and other early women authors. As a result, Weston's study actually reinforces the perceived marginalization of women authors from mainstream literary, educational, and intellectual life.

In Weston's view, literary authority was necessarily male; therefore, women's public writing performed maleness. In Leoba's case, Weston argues that Leoba performs maleness by incorporating Aldhelmian phrases into her poem:

Leoba appropriates for herself a place in male literary authority. Appropriating images and vocabulary from Aldhelm, Leoba's poem locates her new, purely textual body within Latin literacy rather than existing social ties. In this way, Leoba boldly interposes herself within a realm of literate sociality, claiming a space in the bonds of influence and reception that link Boniface to Aldhelm. By doing so, moreover, she clothes herself in their textual authority to "speak" as it were in public, to write and to exchange texts and textual bodies in the synthetic kinship of literacy and monasticism...Nor is Leoba the only woman in the Boniface Circle whose textual body is to some extent or other transgendered by literacy.⁴⁸⁵

Weston takes for granted that Leoba understood the literary and social network she was entering through her poetry and her correspondence with Boniface to be male spaces. To participate with any authority, Weston argues, Leoba had to assume the male voice of literacy and become "transgendered by literacy." Women's use of Latin literacy transforms them into men. Although Weston's goal is to uncover women's literary authority, her argument actually reinforces the mistaken narrative that education and literary culture were fundamentally male spaces.

⁴⁸⁵ Weston, "Where Textual Bodies Meet," 236.

Without first challenging the assumed maleness of Latin literacy and literary culture, Weston and other scholars interested in women's authorship have had to read women writers as self-consciously "female" participants operating within essentially male practice. Sylvia Parsons's and David Townsend's essay "Gender" in the *Oxford Handbook of Medieval Latin Literature* shows the currency in Medieval Latin studies of the assumptions that literary culture was male by default and that women writers were marginal actors who might appropriate authority by performing or manipulating normative expectations of maleness.⁴⁸⁶ Parsons and Townsend write that masculinity was encoded into the rhetorical expectations of all Latin genres:

The pervasively male authorship and audience of medieval Latin literary culture powerfully naturalizes an ideology that allows the relativity of the tradition's gendered constructions to masquerade as given and unexceptional. That ideology, moreover, has often just as profoundly constrained modern studies of how gender matters in the primary texts. Yet like all ideological formations, medieval Latinity's self-understanding as the tongue of the fathers *par excellence* depends upon continued discursive performances that carry the seeds of their own undoing. A literary tradition that represents itself as a celebration of disembodied yet normatively male authority, it risks with surprising frequency the unmaning of its own gendered identifications.⁴⁸⁷

They write that the performance of Latin generic expectations constituted an author's performance of different constructions of masculine authority.⁴⁸⁸ While Parsons and Townsend are focused on authors' subversive maneuvers that challenge what they see as the otherwise hegemonic maleness of Latin literature, their argument depends on and reifies the notion of literary authority as normatively male.

⁴⁸⁶ Parsons and Townsend, "Gender," in *The Oxford Handbook of Medieval Latin Literature*, eds. Ralph Hexter and David Townsend, (Oxford UP, 2012), 428, write that Hrotsvit thinks of herself as a marginalized author because of her gender: "Fully conscious of the potential destabilizations inherent in speaking from a marginal position, she declares in the *Praefatio* to the dramas of Book 2 that she exults particularly in imposing the plots of female martyrdom on the Terentian model."

⁴⁸⁷ Parsons and Townsend, "Gender," 423.

⁴⁸⁸ Parsons and Townsend, "Gender," 429.

“Latinity’s self-understanding” as a site of male authority or male expression is *not clear*, however. Even though the extant record of medieval Latinity available to present-day scholars may be dominated by representations of male authors and audiences, early medieval writers would not have experienced Latinity as dominated by male authority and male audience. Before the ninth century, many male writers would have studied under women teachers and alongside schoolgirl classmates. Girls and women would have had women teachers and schoolgirl classmates before and after the Carolingian reforms.⁴⁸⁹ The in-person experience of female authority shaped Leoba’s and her contemporaries’ encounters with Latin literacy from the elementary classroom to their advanced literary studies, where they would have also encountered personifications of wisdom, church, and the liberal arts as female.

Viewed in the context of early-eighth century curriculum and educational practices, Leoba’s writing appears not as an imitation of male literary practice, but as an example of contemporary monastic literary practice. Like her monastic contemporaries, Leoba’s poetry was heavily influenced by Aldhelm’s metrical compositions. Aldhelm’s stylistic influence is characteristic of the eighth-century writing by men and women in Boniface’s circle of colleagues, and Aldhelm’s work was likely to have been especially influential in Wessex (the location of Wimbourne), where he was abbot of Malmesbury at the end of the seventh century.⁴⁹⁰ For example, Leoba’s borrowing of certain metrical word pairs and scansion patterns from Aldhelm’s poetry demonstrates her familiarity with Aldhelm’s approach to modular versification. Carin Ruff describes Aldhelm’s approach to versification as a “puzzle”:

For Aldhelm, the verse line is composed of six feet mutually arranged, or abstractly patterned, according to possibilities that can be calculated mathematically. The

⁴⁸⁹ See Chapters 1 and 2.

⁴⁹⁰ See on Aldhelmian influence among Boniface and his colleagues, see Fell, “Some implications.”

mathematical potential of the verse both allows and limits variation, which is conceived of as feet “running freely” through all the possible positions in the line.

According to Ruff, the audience of Aldhelm’s *De metris* was assumed to have basic grammatical competence but no experience with Latin quantitative metrics. Ruff explains that the *De metris* picks up where Donatus’ discussion of letters and syllable quantities leave off. The *De metris* consists of three parts: “first, a reminder of the importance of syllables and a short lesson on elision; second, an exhaustive account of the possible arrangements of metrical feet within the line; and third, a two-part treatment of the caesura, that is, the relationship of foot-boundaries and word-boundaries within the line.”⁴⁹¹ Leoba and her contemporaries would have learned such metrical formulas to be used in a process of modular verse composition. Lapidge writes of Leoba’s process:

We may reasonably assume that she had committed to memory a number of Aldhelmian formulas, and that composition for her simply involved stringing these formulas together. The study of curriculum authors in Anglo-Saxon schools, then, apparently involved the memorization of metrically-fixed formulas in order to use them when the pupil was called upon to compose poetry of his own. This is also manifest from the verses which former pupils of Alcuin at York sent to him (for correction?) during his continental sojourn.⁴⁹²

Ruff demonstrates that an education in metrics was more complicated than this description suggests, however. Leoba’s composition of meaningful verses with continuous syntax across lines shows that she was taught to write continuous, intelligible Latin. The four lines form one period. This shows that she mastered both prosody and the relationship between metrical and syntactical units. It would have been Eadburh, or a separate grammar instructor at Wimbourne, who filled in the pedagogical gaps between the prescriptive doctrine of Aldhelm’s and Bede’s treatises and the actual practice of composing continuous Latin for Leoba and her peers.

⁴⁹¹ Carin Ruff, “The Place of Metrics in Anglo-Saxon Latin Education: Aldhelm and Bede” *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 104.2 (2005), 149-70.

⁴⁹² Michael Lapidge, “Aldhelm’s Latin Poetry and Old English Verse” *Comparative Literature* 31.3 (Summer, 1979), 231.

Leoba mastered verse syllable quantities, something which would have been challenging for English speakers.⁴⁹³ The four lines she sent to Boniface scan correctly:

Arbiter omnipotens, // solus qui cuncta creavit,	Lss Lss L//L LL Lss Lx
In regno patris // semper qui lumine fulget,	LL LL L//L LL Lss Lx
Qua iugiter flagrans // sic regnet gloria Christi,	Lss LL L//L LL Lss Lx
Inlesum servet // semper te iure perenni.	LL LL L//L LL Lss Lx

Hexameter verse lines end with a metrical foot composed of a dactyl + spondee/trochee. Lapidge notes that Aldhelm consistently ends his hexameter verses with either a two-syllable + three-syllable word pairing or a three-syllable + two-syllable word pairing, creating “detachable units.” Leoba follows Aldhelmian practice in using two- and three-syllable word pairings at the end of hexameter lines. Leoba’s lines one and four end with a 2-syllable word + 3-syllable word; lines two and three end with a 3-syllable word + 2-syllable word. These detachable end units allow for the standard placement of the ictus (accented beat) of the fifth and sixth feet in the hexameter line to coincide with the natural stress of the words.⁴⁹⁴

Leoba may have taken the opening metrical pairing “arbiter omnipotens” from Aldhelm’s *Epistola ad Acircium* or from another of his poems. Aldhelm employs “arbiter omnipotens” at the beginning of hexameter lines in three different poems:⁴⁹⁵ In *Carmen IV:23*, “Arbiter omnipotens ad caeli culmina vexit”; in *De metris et enigmatibus ac pedum regulis*, “Arbiter omnipotens mundi dempsit peccata”; and in the *Carmen de virginitate*, verse 2016, “Arbiter omnipotens impendat praemia vitae.” Because “arbiter omnipotens” takes up two and a half of the six feet of a hexameter line, it necessarily determines the scansion of the first three feet: dactyl-dactyl-spondee. Aldhelm actually maintains the same scansion pattern for the full line in all three of the uses: dactyl-dactyl-spondee-spondee-dactyl-trochee. Leoba’s line, “Arbiter

⁴⁹³ Lapidge and Rosier, *Aldhelm: The Poetic Works*, 19.

⁴⁹⁴ Lapidge and Rosier, *Aldhelm: The Poetic Works*, 227n8.

⁴⁹⁵ Drew Hicks pointed out to me another, similar formula, in Aldhelm, *aenigmata* 91.1: “Omnipotens auctor, nutu qui cuncta creavit”; Leoba’s line one echoes this line.

omnipotens solus qui cuncta creavit,” follows the same scansion pattern which Aldhelm establishes for lines beginning with this pairing.⁴⁹⁶ “Arbiter omnipotens” also appears in Eugene of Toledo, “arbiter omnipotens, ut possis fortiter hostes,”⁴⁹⁷ following the same scansion pattern. Leoba also shares the end unit of her second line with Eugene, “lumine fulget.”⁴⁹⁸ This unit does not appear in Aldhelm’s work. The end unit of Leoba’s line one, “cuncta creavit,” also appears twice in Eugene and once in Aldhelm, Riddle 91, “Omnipotens auctor, nutu qui cuncta creavit”.⁴⁹⁹

Whether Leoba derived the unit from Eugene or Aldhelm, it is clear she was following Aldhelm’s own practice of using earlier poets’ detachable metrical units in his modular composition.⁵⁰⁰ This is the same practice used by Hraban Maur, abbot of Fulda in the ninth century. Hraban uses the opening unit “arbiter omnipotens” in two separate hexametrical poems, but in identical lines which he repeats between the poems, and separately in an elegiac verse composition. His hexameter line, “Arbiter omnipotens, qui solus regnat in arce” (Carmen 4, verse 20, and repeated identically in the *Expositio in librum Iudith*) has the same scansion pattern as the “arbiter omnipotens” lines in Aldhelm’s three uses and Leoba’s first line. Like Aldhelm and Leoba, Hraban borrowed this metrical pairing from earlier poems. Unlike Leoba, however, Hraban’s Aldhelmian method of composition has not been imputed against his learning and

⁴⁹⁶ Paul Vinhage pointed out to me that the first line also shares the metrical pattern of the first line of the Aeneid.

⁴⁹⁷ Eugenius Toletanus, *Carmina dubia et spuria*, ed. Fridericus Vollmer, MGH Auctores antiquissimi 14 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1905), Carmen xx, p. 275.

⁴⁹⁸ Eugenius Toletanus, *Libellus carminum, Draconii librorum recognitio, epistulae*, ed. P. F. Alberto CCSL 114 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005).

⁴⁹⁹ Eugene’s uses are “qui mare tellurem caelum qui cuncta creavit” (Carm. xx) and “credamus virtute Dei qua cuncta creavit” (Hexaameron); Eugene’s “cuncta creavit” may have served as Aldhelm’s source.

⁵⁰⁰ Lull also employs the “cuncta creavit” ending in hexameters he sends to Boniface: “Spesque favente Deo pariter, qui cuncta creavit” (Tangl 103, p. 227), dated 7-10 years later than Leoba’s.

achievement. If he had been a woman, the manner of his reception as a poet might have followed Leoba's more closely.

Interestingly, the "qui solus" of Hraban's line echoes in reverse the "solus qui" of Leoba's line, but none of the three of Aldhelm's lines. Perhaps Hraban adapted his line from Leoba, rather than from Aldhelm. He may also have borrowed his "gloria Christi" from her verse in his *Carmen* 17, "Sancta beata potens vitae laus gloria Christi."⁵⁰¹ Leoba's line begins "arbiter omnipotens" and Hraban's line begins "sancta beata potens," sharing their sixth and seventh syllables in "potens." Hraban also uses the end unit, "iure perenni," in his *Carmen dedicatorium ad Ludocivum Pium*, which is the end unit in line four of Leoba's verse. As with the "gloria Christi," Leoba's verse remains a near and possible source. He likely had access to Leoba's letter and poem, as well as to any other documents related to her life and work, since it was he who commissioned Rudolf's *Life of Leoba* at the time of the translation of Leoba's remains.

In her four-line poem, Leoba uses three different scansion patterns, repeating the pattern of the second line in the fourth line. This demonstrates her ability to introduce metrical variation even in a very short poem.⁵⁰² The two lines which match metrically also echo each other in meaning and are the only two lines in which a word is repeated (*semper*). By repeating the meter and the reference to eternity in lines two and four, Leoba creates a structure in which the stability of heaven weaves through changeability (represented in the metrically varying lines one and three)—temporal variation supported by eternal consistency. Although four lines of poetry is too little to indicate Leoba's wider composition practice, these lines suggest that Leoba paid attention

⁵⁰¹ It does not appear in any earlier work than Leoba's in the seventh or eighth centuries; Alcuin (another likely source for Hraban) has a single use of "gloria Christi" in his *Carmen* 91, "In qua cultus honor laudes et gloria Christi."

⁵⁰² That the variation is limited to the first two feet, like Aldhelm, due to the placement of spondees in the third and fourth feet. This limits most of the variation occurred only in the first two feet. Lapidge, *Aldhelm: The Poetic Works*, 21.

to the semiotic possibilities of metrical variety. Matching style and content or circumstance was a tenet of Christian rhetorical composition, following Augustine's discussion in *De doctrina christiana* IV and Gregory I's *Pastoral Care*; perhaps Leoba carried that principle into her poetry. Perhaps at the level of metrical feet, some students were taught to consider resonance between form and content.

Leoba and her contemporaries would have learned to classify hexameter lines by the amount of potential metrical variety. Aldhelm classifies different possible scansion patterns into three categories, according to the amount of potential metrical variation, which is determined by the number of dactyls in a given line. Because every hexameter line contains six feet in total and ends in a two-syllable final foot, there may be up to five dactyls in a line. Ruff explains

Aldhelm's system helpfully:

there are 32 possible arrangements--schemata--of dactyls and spondees in the five free positions. These schemata can, in turn, be classed in five groups, depending on how many dactyls they contain: lines with no dactyls, with one, with two, with three, with four, and with five. These five classes are then grouped into three categories according to how many schemata they admit: an all-dactyl line and an all-spondee line have only one possible arrangement each, and so are called monoscemi. A one-dactyl line and a four-dactyl line admit five schemata each and are called pentascemi. The two-dactyl and [three]-dactyl lines admit ten combinations each, and so are called decascemi.⁵⁰³

Leoba's first and third lines, with two and two dactyls respectively, are both decascemi. Her second and fourth lines, which are metrically identical and have one dactyl each, are pentascemi. The alternation between decascemi and pentascemi is another layer of patterning that shows Leoba's careful attention to Aldhelmian metrical composition. In order, Leoba's lines have 15, 13, 14, and 13 syllables. The number of dactyls in a line has an audible effect on the line, since the addition of each dactyl adds one syllable to the line.⁵⁰⁴ In theory, each line of hexameter will occupy the same length of time in pronunciation, as one long syllable takes twice as long to

⁵⁰³ Ruff, "The Hidden Curriculum," 88.

⁵⁰⁴ Ruff, "The Place of Metrics," 20.

pronounce as two short syllables. The variation in syllabic number and arrangement, however, creates different audible patterns.

Reconsidered in relation to contemporary literary curricula and rhetorical and poetic practices, Leoba's writing appears competent rather than "halting" or "shaky." Her use of humility rhetoric demonstrates confidence and creativity, rather than discomfort or overdependence. Her verse composition demonstrates familiarity with current metrical theory and facility with Latin prosody and syntax. Leoba's writing, like that of her women contemporaries, has often been interpreted through a gendered lens, which incorrectly reads women as having been disadvantaged in their literary training. A part of this reception has been the assumption equating premodern women with "female" gender, conceived of as a singular and fixed social gender identity. In the remainder of this chapter, I challenge the hegemony of binary "femaleness" as the relevant gender identity for early monastic women before the Carolingian reform. I argue that monastic girls' and women's social gender identities were not singular or fixed before the Carolingian reform. In the following chapter, I detail the invention and imposition of "female" gender on monastic girls and women as a tool of Carolingian ecclesiastical reform.

Re-reading monastic women's gender

There is not Jew or Greek; there is not slave or free person; there is not male or female; for you are all one in Jesus Christ.⁵⁰⁵

Galatians 3:28

The subject of the tale was a woman—if indeed she was a "woman", for I know not whether it is fitting to designate her of that nature who so surpassed nature.⁵⁰⁶

Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of St. Macrina*

⁵⁰⁵ "Non est Iudaeus, neque Graecus non est servus neque liber non est masculus neque femina omnes enim vos unum estis in Christo Iesu" (Galatians 3:28).

⁵⁰⁶ Anna Silvas, *Macrina the Younger: Philosopher of God* (Turnhout: Brepos, 2008), 110.

The common assumption that early medieval literate culture and education were predominantly male and that, by extension, the default literate subject was male demands a narrative of “exceptionalism” to account for the extant writing of early medieval women. Such a narrative casts all women’s writing as marginal to normative (understood as male) literate culture in the early middle ages. This narrative depends on an assumed binary social gender scheme in which all non-male writers are identifiable as “female”, taken as a fixed gender identity which determined girls’ and women’s marginalization from normative literate culture. Scholars seeking to justify early medieval women’s writing within this limiting framework have therefore judged women’s writing as incompetent, thanks to the women’s assumed inferior training and limited access to literary culture, and explained competent writing by women as male-performing. The latter interpretation has been favored by feminist scholars seeking to account for the apparently successful literate activities of a few named women authors, such as Leoba of Tauberbischofsheim, within the taken-for-granted context of male literary hegemony. By contrast, the following reassessment of Leoba’s writing challenges both underlying assumptions of male literary hegemony and a stable, binary social gender scheme in the early middle ages.

English monastic culture in the seventh- and early eighth-centuries was shaped by the prevalence of double monasteries. Communal monasticism such as that practiced in double monasteries developed out of the ascetic practices of men and women living alone and in groups in Egypt and Palestine, ostensibly removed from secular society in the third and fourth centuries.⁵⁰⁷ Early Christians emphasized bodily abstinence, especially with respect to food and

⁵⁰⁷ Alison I. Beach and Isabelle Cochelin, eds., *The Cambridge History of Medieval Monasticism in the Latin West* (Cambridge UP, 2020); on city dwelling ascetics, see William Harmless, *Desert Christians: an introduction to the literature of early monasticism* (New York: Oxford UP, 2004), 24, 442-3.

sex, along with material poverty, as a way to embody Christian faith.⁵⁰⁸ As early Christianity permeated more of elite society, sexual chastity overtook real poverty as a proxy for asceticism.

The early Christian culture of chastity shifted the current social gender paradigm, creating a new identity for monastics who lived outside the boundaries of secular maleness and femaleness. Chastity could be understood in terms of the physical and psychological struggle of asceticism—overcoming bodily wants like sex, food, and sleep. In this vein, Susanna Elm explains, “For the perfect ascetic the question of male or female no longer exists, because he or she has risen above the limits determined by the body; asceticism means annihilation of sexual distinction.”⁵⁰⁹ Gregory of Nyssa comments that his sister Macrina might not properly be called a woman, because being a man or a woman was determined “by nature,” and she had “surpassed nature.”

For Jerome, Christian faith created a new evaluative system which superseded male-female gender hierarchy. Jerome’s commentary on Galatians 3:28 explains that hierarchical distinctions inherent in social bodies, such as race, status, and gender, lose their evaluative significance in the context of Christian faith:

When someone has once and for all put on Christ..., all diversity of race, condition, and body is taken away by such a garment.... However much “male” and “female” may be separated by the strength and weakness of their bodies, faith is assessed in view of the devotion of one’s mind, and it often happens that the woman becomes the cause of salvation of the man, and the man excels the woman in religious devotion.⁵¹⁰

⁵⁰⁸ Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (London: Faber, 1990).

⁵⁰⁹ Susanna Elm, *Virgins of God: The Making of Asceticism in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 267.

⁵¹⁰ Trans., Rhonda McDaniel, *The Third Gender and Aelfric’s Lives of Saints* (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2018), 9.

According to Jerome, faith or lack of faith determined one's identity in a more meaningful way than did gender.

The Greek term *ascesis* (asceticism) actually meant “exercise regimen.”⁵¹¹ Metaphors for athletics and warfare were adopted by ascetic theorists and practitioners to describe the physical and psychological efforts required by the ascetic lifestyle. Fourth-century monastic writer Evagrius Ponticus claims,

Wrestlers are not the only ones whose occupation is to throw others down and to be thrown in turn; the demons too wrestle—with us. Sometimes they throw us and at other times it is we who throw them,

and he advises ascetics to “Train yourself like a skilled athlete.”⁵¹² Similarly, the “monk as Olympic athlete” is the “controlling metaphor” of Cassian's *Institutes*.⁵¹³ Although athletic and warfare terminology was originally related to male gender, its adoption in early Christian ascetic literature made the terms equally pertinent to men and women committed to Christian living. Early Christian writings first included women in the masculine realms of physical struggle: in the *Lausiac History*, Palladius writes, “the manly women to whom God granted the capacity struggles equal to those of men.”⁵¹⁴ As ascetic literature flourished, athleticism and fighting became well established metaphors for the ascetic living practiced by both men and women: The *Sayings of the Desert Fathers* report Amma (“Mother”) Syncletia's saying, “Those who are great

⁵¹¹ Harmless, *Desert Christians*, 61, cites James Goehring, “Asceticism,” *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, ed. Everett Ferguson, 2nd ed. (New York: Garland 1997), I:127.

⁵¹² Evagrius, *Antirrhethikos*, praef., cited in Harmless, *Desert Christians*, 329; Harmless, 442, writes that Evagrius's writings were known to ascetic women, such as the fourth-century desert monastic Syncletia.

⁵¹³ Harmless, *Desert Christians*, 348; Cassian's metaphor was based in part on Corinthians 9:26-7, “I do not fight as one beating against the air. But I chastise my body and subject it to servitude.”

⁵¹⁴ Harmless, *Desert Christians*, 444, writes that “The athletic strengths that his [Palladius's] culture associated only with men were now, through asceticism, open to women.”

athletes must contend against stronger enemies.”⁵¹⁵ Likewise Abba (“Father”) Mark is called a “noble athlete of Christ.”⁵¹⁶ Of Amma Sarah, “it was related...that for thirteen years she waged warfare against the demon of fornication. She never prayed that the warfare should cease but she said, ‘O God, give me strength.’”⁵¹⁷ Abba Agathon is said to have claimed, “prayer is warfare to the last breath.”⁵¹⁸ The popular *Life of St Antony* also characterizes Antony’s ascetic practice in the desert in terms of brutal physical battles against demons.⁵¹⁹

By the time the early ascetic literature was circulating in northern Europe, the athletic and fighting metaphors were deeply linked to nonbinary monastic living, rather than to male secular activities. Albrecht Diem notes that Frankish and Irish monastic theorists in the sixth century address military metaphors to men and women monastics:

one remarkable transgression of gender boundaries present in both Caesarius’ and Jonas’ works [is] the use of military metaphors in texts addressing both genders. Both monks and nuns are soldiers and monasteries can turn into war zones regardless of the gender of their inhabitants.⁵²⁰

Chastity also meant the refusal of or a reorientation toward cultural gender expectations, such as marriage and domination/subjugation within the Roman hierarchical household. Jo Ann McNamara explains,

⁵¹⁵ Benedicta Ward, *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1975), 233.

⁵¹⁶ Ward, *The Sayings*, 151.

⁵¹⁷ Ward, *The Sayings*, 229.

⁵¹⁸ Ward, *The Sayings*, 22.

⁵¹⁹ Athanasius of Alexandria, *The Life of Antony: The Coptic Life and the Greek Life*, trans. Tim Vivian and Apostolos N. Athanassakis (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 2003), 51-95, 209-227, 251-259.

⁵²⁰ Diem, *The Pursuit of Salvation*, 31.

The virginity movement freed women from the subordination of marriage and unexpectedly put them in the ranks of the self-controlled, a quality once virtually synonymous with manliness.⁵²¹

Choosing to be chaste meant choosing to opt out of marriage and gendered social convention. As both “victory” over sex and refusal of social convention, chastity elevated men and women practitioners beyond the gender binary, creating a third gender identity.⁵²²

Several lives of saints recount the saints’ transformation beyond binary gender identity through the renunciation of sex. St Pelagia (whose story was included in the ninth century Old English *Martyrology*) had been a sex worker, but when she renounced sexual activity (and her income) and became a hermit, no one could tell if she was a man or woman. Committing to chastity allowed Pelagia to overcome binary gender distinction.⁵²³ A story from Abba Bessarion in the *Sayings of the Desert Fathers* recounts how ascetic living masked the gender of a monastic

⁵²¹ Jo Ann McNamara, “Chastity as a third gender in the History and Hagiography of Gregory of Tours,” in *The World of Gregory of Tours*, eds. Kathleen Mitchell and Ian Wood (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 204.

⁵²² Isabelle Réal, “Nuns and Monks at Work: Equality or Distinction between the Sexes? A Study of Frankish Monasteries from the Sixth to the Tenth Century,” trans. Lochin Brouillard, in *The Cambridge History of Medieval Monasticism in the Latin West*, eds. Alison I. Beach and Isabelle Cochelin, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 258, writes “Historians today agree that monastic life was conceived of at its inception as nongendered. The men and women who chose such a life all aspired toward the same ideal: living as perfect Christians”; see also Musciol, *Famula Dei*, and “Men, Women, and Liturgical Practice”; Jacqueline Murray, “One Flesh, Two Sexes, Three Genders?” in *Gender and Christianity in Medieval Europe: New Perspectives*, eds. Lisa M. Bitel and Felice Lifshitz, 34-51 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008); Juliette Vuille, *Holy Harlots in Medieval English Religious Literature* (Cambridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2021); Sarah Salih, *Versions of Virginity in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2001); Karma Lochrie, *Heterosyncracies: Female Sexuality When Normal Wasn’t* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005); and Devun, *The Shape of Sex*.

⁵²³ Christine Rauer, *The Old English Martyrology: edition, translation and commentary* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2013), 157.

woman from Bessarion and his student, when they met her in the desert. It is only when they return to her dwelling and find her deceased that they learn she was a woman.⁵²⁴

when we had entered, we found him dead. The old man [Bessarion] said to me, “Come, brother, let us take the body; it is for this reason God has sent us here.” When we took the body to bury it we perceived that it was a woman. Filled with astonishment, the old man said, “See how the women triumph over Satan, while we still behave badly in the towns.”⁵²⁵

In the first to third centuries, to be Christian was already to be socially transgressive.

Once Christianity had become a “religion of empire” and spread to northern Europe, simply to be Christian was no longer socially transgressive; but living chastely remained so.⁵²⁶ One witness to this is Bede’s story in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* (IV.19) of Saint Æthelthryth, who persevered in her chastity against the wishes of her male secular relatives. By the seventh century, Christianity was firmly established in many parts of Europe, and the network of episcopal power intersected with networks of secular rulership. Despite the close integration between secular and

⁵²⁴ Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Library*, gathers some of the evidence knowledge of the *Sayings of the Desert Fathers* (Verba seniorum/Adhortationes sanctorum patrum) in seventh- and eighth-century England; the *Sayings* were cited by Bede and Alcuin and are extant in several seventh/eighth-century manuscripts of English provenance.

⁵²⁵ Ward, *The Sayings*, 41.

⁵²⁶ Brown, *The Body and Society*, 343-5, explains the economic and cultural impact of Roman noblewomen’s commitment to virginity as part of their Christian conversion in late imperial Rome; noblewomen’s refusal to marry wreaked havoc on networks of aristocratic wealth: “We should not underestimate the impact on Italian society of an ascetic movement whose principal exponents and patrons were noble women...fourth-century Romans parted with their daughters with extreme reluctance...What made such incidents [i.e. girls claiming the consecration of virginity and refusing marriage] a matter of grave public concern was the fact that the majority of such young women were the daughters of widows. They had acted as they did after their father had died, at a time when male control over the women of the family had been withdrawn. At such a moment in her life, a mature woman would have found herself with considerable wealth at her disposal, and was free to do with it as she pleased. Ascetic women were women of substantial private means...As distributors of wealth and patrons of individual writers, aristocratic Latin women acted as arbiters of intellectual life to a degree unparalleled in the Greek East. Throughout the Empire, the governing classes were alarmed by this new development.”

ecclesiastical power, monastic culture retained its emphasis on sexual chastity. Monastic chastity perpetuated the third gender identity in early medieval Europe, alongside the secular binary gender scheme.⁵²⁷

In early medieval Europe, double monasteries linked communities of men and women monastics usually under the rule of an abbess. In theory, the structure of the double monastery put into practice the promise of unity beyond social gender division in Galatians 3:28. The special appeal of double monasteries to women lies in the institutionalization of the gender-egalitarian promise. As Stephanie Hollis writes,

the double monastery, to some degree, serves as a limitation on the alterizing identification of women religious with particular frailties, and functions as a pressure towards the perception of frailty as a shared human condition.⁵²⁸

Rhonda McDaniel explains that secular gender in Roman late antiquity and medieval Europe was a hierarchical construct, which means that women's status increased through rejecting secular gender expectations and committing to chastity, while men theoretically lost their position of dominance by commitment to sexual chastity.⁵²⁹ The potential increase in women's status attached to chastity helps explain the appeal of monasticism in the sixth through eighth centuries to women, and in particular to aristocratic women, who were more likely to have wealth and status to lose through marriage. However, chastity (or virginity) was not principally associated

⁵²⁷ As I discuss further below, the binary scheme continued to determine the organization of even monastic bodies in space—for example, the double monastery brought together individuals from the two secular social genders. *Aldhelm: The Poetic Works*, trans. Lapidge and Rosier, 47-49: Aldhelm depicts the choir at Bugga's double monastery as "twin choirs": "Brothers, let us praise God in harmonious voice, and let the throng of nuns also burst forth in continual psalmody!" Monastic men and women, even as they inhabited the nonbinary gender identity of "chaste" or "ascetic", would not be ignorant of or unaffected by the binary gender classification which would determine their social identities outside of the very specific spheres of monastic spiritual and intellectual life.

⁵²⁸ Hollis, *Women and the Church*, 105.

⁵²⁹ McDaniel, *The Third Gender*, 6.

with women at this time. Both men and women were celebrated for their chastity by hagiographers and historians; chastity was not associated particularly with women until the ninth century.

Gender in Aldhelm's *De virginitate* and women's writing in the seventh and early-eighth centuries

For seventh-century monastic writer and abbot Aldhelm of Malmesbury, the ideal of chastity exceeded binary gender. Stephanie Hollis points to Aldhelm's enigma about Christ giving Mary into John's care: "Christ, having suffered on the cross / And the hiding places of death, / Himself a virgin commended a virgin / To a virgin for safe-keeping." The enigma makes clear that virginity pertains equally to male and female bodies for Aldhelm. His treatise on chastity also celebrates the gender-egalitarianism of early Christian asceticism and contemporary monastic culture. Aldhelm addresses the prose treatise to Hildelith, abbess of the double monastery of Barking, and nine other women, Justina, Cuthburg, Osburg, Aldgith, Scholastica, Hidburg, Berngith, Eulalia, and Thecla. (Aldhelm later wrote a hexametrical version of the treatise at the request of his women patrons.) Before Aldhelm, Tertullian, Cyprian, Jerome, Ambrose, and Augustine also wrote prose treatises on virginity, and Alcimius, Avitus, and Venantius Fortunatus composed verse treatises on the subject.⁵³⁰ Aldhelm innovates on the patristic models by introducing "chastity" into the scheme of marriage versus virginity. The addition of chastity allows Aldhelm to praise the commitment to sexual continence elected by those who had been married previously. Following the structure of Ambrose's treatise, *De virginibus at Marcellinam*, Aldhelm begins with a discussion of virginity followed by a catalog

⁵³⁰ Lapidge and Herren, *Aldhelm: The Prose Works*, 52.

of exemplary saints. Whereas Ambrose includes only female saints in his catalog, Aldhelm's treatise includes 34 chaste male saints and 24 chaste female saints.⁵³¹

In his address to the ten women dedicatees, Aldhelm metaphorically shifts the site of ascetic exertion (and thus, the qualification for identifying with the third gender) from sexual chastity onto intellectual labor:

And, truly, that most celebrated proponent of the name of Christ suggested the contest of athletes as an example for the Christian army, saying: "And they indeed that they may receive a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible one" [I Cor. IX. 25], and elsewhere, "(I so fight), not as one beating the air" [I Cor. IX. 26]. And however much the examples of athletes, who with (their) bodily agility win popular honours in the theatre and the applause of the circus, might properly pertain to a comparison of those who, traversing the spacious racecourses of the Scriptures, are known to exercise the most subtle industry of their minds and the quality of (their) lively intelligence through assiduous perseverance in reading.⁵³²

In extending the struggle and triumph of asceticism from chastity to the literary and intellectual practices of his women addressees, Aldhelm extends the grounds for the third-gender into learning and literacy. It is their efforts of mind, not only of body (through renunciation of sex) which characterize their asceticism. In this way, monastic literacy is figured as a sphere beyond binary gendered power, and Aldhelm's readers can participate in the third gender through their intellectual activities.

My reading differs from previous readings by feminist scholars who interpret Aldhelm's athletic and militarized characterizations of his women readers as "wrestlers," "athletes," and "fighters" as masculinizing. For example, Aldhelm writes,

The catholic maidservants of Christ—or rather the adoptive daughters of regenerative grace brought forth from the fecund womb of ecclesiastical conception through the seed of the spiritual Word—growing learned in divine doctrine through (the Church's) maternal care, and like talented athletes under some experienced instructor training in the gymnasium through wrestling routines and gymnastic exercises, who eagerly win the crown of the laborious contest and the prize of the Olympic struggle by the strenuous

⁵³¹ Lapidge and Herren, *Aldhelm: The Prose Works*, 56-57.

⁵³² Aldhelm, *Prosa de virginitate*, 61.

energies of their own exertions; so that, let's say, one (athlete), smeared with the ointment of (some) slippery liquid, strives dexterously with [their] partner to work out the strenuous routines of wrestlers, sweating with the sinuous writhings of their flanks in the burning centre of the wrestling-pit; another, taking the missiles of javelins and the shafts of arrows from the hidden recesses of [the] quiver...⁵³³

Lees and Overing argue that Hildelith and the other addressees “are encouraged by Aldhelm to think of their minds as male, and to think of the acquisition of scriptural learning as a wrestling routine...The ‘daughters of regenerative grace’ are-equally symbolically-male athletes.”⁵³⁴ But Aldhelm is not borrowing athletic terms and metaphors directly from classical antiquity, where such terms had decidedly masculine meanings. Aldhelm borrows the discourse of *ascesis* from early Christian literature, in which the *ascesis* had been reoriented toward the lifestyles of monastic men and women whose sexual renunciation elevated them beyond the secular gender binary.⁵³⁵

Diane Watt also interprets Aldhelm's athletic metaphors as masculinizing: “Indeed Aldhelm's portrayals of the spiritual endeavors of the Barking nuns repeatedly draw upon masculine metaphors of warfare and sport.”⁵³⁶ Watt interprets the inclusion of male saints in a treatise addressed to women readers as Aldhelm's rhetorical efforts to manage his discomfort acknowledging the intellectual authority of women. She writes that Aldhelm “struggles to

⁵³³ Lapidge and Herren, *Aldhelm: The Prose Works*, 59-60; “cum taliter catholicas Christi bernaculas, immo adoptiuas regenerantis gratiae filias ex fecundo ecclesiasticae conceptionis utero spiritalis uerbi semine progenitas per maternam uiderit sollicitudinem diuinis dogmatibus erudiri ac uelut sagaces gimnosofistas sub peritissimo quodam agonitheta palestricis disciplinis et gimnicis artibus in gimnasio exerceri, qui laboriosi certaminis coronam et olimpiaci agonis triumphum difficillimis propriae exercitationis uiribus nauiter nanciscuntur, ita dumtaxat, ut alius strenua anthletarum luctamina cum aemulo sinuosis laterum flexibus desudans in meditullio scammatis flagrante delibutus lubrici liquoris nardo solerter exercere studeat; alius iaculorum catapultas et sagittarum spicula de obstruis faretrae latibulis depromens” (CCSL 124A, 31, 37).

⁵³⁴ Lees and Overing, *Double Agents*, 156.

⁵³⁵ Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Library*, 179-190: Aldhelm's reading included early Christian ascetic literature such as the *Life of St Antony*, Cassian's *Institutes*, Jerome's letters and *vita* of the desert hermit St. Paul, and Sulpicius Severus's *Life of St Martin*.

⁵³⁶ Diane Watt, “Lost Books: Abbess Hildelith and the Literary Culture of Barking Abbey” *Philological Quarterly* 91.1 (2012), 12.

accommodate the masculine authority of the Barking nuns within his text about virginity. More specifically he struggles to contain the active roles that these nuns play” as scholars and critics.⁵³⁷ In Watt’s view, Aldhelm conceives of monastic intellectual authority as male and can only validate the women’s role in intellectual literary culture through an uneasy masculinization. Here again, Watt articulates the position of feminist scholars seeking to address women’s involvement in literary culture without challenging the underlying assumption that literary culture was normatively male. Watt and other feminist scholars are unwilling to simply disbelieve Aldhelm’s praise of the women’s intellectual achievement. Seeking an interpretation of women’s literary involvement which does not assume that women were relatively incompetent in comparison with men, they use a particular form of the “exceptionalism” narrative, in which to participate successfully in literary culture means to perform maleness.

In contrast, feminist scholar Stephanie Hollis lays the groundwork for a radically different interpretation of Aldhelm’s views on his women readers. Hollis writes,

Aldhelm cannot be said to regard male monasticism as normative.... His casting of the nuns of Barking as soldiers of Christ can also be regarded as reflecting a conception of female religious as partners in a joint enterprise.⁵³⁸

For Hollis, Aldhelm presents his women addressees as neither inferior nor unusual participants in monastic literary culture. I agree with Hollis’s interpretation. Likewise, Rhonda McDaniel argues that Aldhelm understands sexual asceticism as elevating the individual beyond secular (binary) gender:

The idea implicit behind his [Aldhelm’s] teachings on virginity is the same idea stated more explicitly by Jerome: when men and women commit themselves to chaste living, they become living proof that they are no longer either male or female—they are neither masculine nor feminine but metagendered—for all are one in Christ. This idea, however, remains only implicit in *De virginitate*, for Aldhelm leaves it unspoken.⁵³⁹

⁵³⁷ Watt, “Lost Books,” 10.

⁵³⁸ Hollis, *Women and the Church*, 91.

⁵³⁹ McDaniel, *The Third Gender*, 75.

Aldhelm's treatise shows that the third gender in monasticism continued to be relevant in the seventh century. Up until the Carolingian reforms of the ninth century, monastic life offered an alternative gender identity for monastic men and women.

While chastity remained the ostensible dividing line between monastic and secular culture, for Aldhelm and his readers, monastic literary culture—and the intellectual life built upon it—were also “arenas” for nonbinary-gender participation. As I discuss in chapter one, monastic literary culture was rooted in gender-egalitarian education. Isabelle Réal concludes her chapter on monastic labor gender division by asking about education's role in monastic gender identity:

This equality regarding knowledge is certainly the most significant innovation introduced by monasticism. Did the “third gender,” common to both nuns and monks, in fact comprise the learned—the masters of Latin grammar and the sacred letters—of both sexes?⁵⁴⁰

Co-education and/or common curricula made it so that literacy was not associated more closely with maleness than with femaleness. Although in practice certain aspects of monastic life remained segregated by binary gender—for example, living quarters were separate for adult men and women monastics in mixed-gender communities like Barking—the ideals of sanctity, and intellectual and literary cultures, were shared in common.

Martha Jones's discussion of Black American citizenship in antebellum Baltimore offers a useful model for understanding the tension between two contemporaneous identity paradigms.⁵⁴¹ In *Birthright Citizens: A History of Race and Rights in Antebellum America*, Jones writes that although citizenship was legally reserved for Whites, some free Black Baltimoreans participated in citizenship status in limited ways, through their enacting of particular rights

⁵⁴⁰ Réal, “Nuns and Monks at Work,” 277.

⁵⁴¹ Martha S. Jones, *Birthright Citizens: A History of Race and Rights in Antebellum America*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018.

reserved to citizenship—namely, the ownership of gun permits, interstate travel, and suing or being sued in court. They became rights holders when they acted *as if* they had those rights.⁵⁴² In this way, some Black Americans occupied two simultaneous (and theoretically mutually exclusive) legal statuses. Jones’s model helps us understand how monastic women could simultaneously identify with the third gender in their spiritual and intellectual lives, while still living the experience of femaleness in other parts of their lives.

Scholars who have read women’s writing as writing by “female” authors within a normatively “male” literary culture have had to interpret women’s writing as either inferior or male-performing. The reception of Leoba’s writing offers a case study for both interpretations. In her writing, however, Leoba neither apologizes for her femaleness nor pretends at maleness. Nor can her writing be interpreted appropriately as an imitation of men’s discourse. While Leoba does borrow some material from Aldhelm, many male contemporaries (including Boniface, Lull, and later, Rhaban Maur) do the same. Leoba’s use of Aldhelm actually demonstrates her competence in up-to-date metrical education, which formed part of the monastic education common to monastic schoolboys and schoolgirls. Furthermore, Leoba’s own writing is imitated by Boniface and Lull in their later letters, while Leoba cannot be shown to have imitated Boniface or Lull. The epistolary and poetic language used in Leoba’s letter does not belong to “male” literary culture; if anything, Boniface’s and Lull’s imitations of Leoba would represent a performance of women’s discourse. But I do not believe so. What seems clear is that Leoba’s writing belongs to a thoroughly mixed-gender monastic literary culture.

The binary, hierarchical male-female gender paradigm through which Leoba’s writing and other early women’s writing have been interpreted is insufficient for assessing the gendered

⁵⁴² Jones, *Birthright Citizens*, 12, “African Americans became rights holders when they managed to exercise those privileges that rights holders exercised...the rights they inhabited became the rights they held. Sometimes they even appeared to be like citizens.”

experience of English monastic literary culture in the seventh and early-eighth centuries. Rather, a three-gender paradigm better describes the experience of monastic literary and intellectual culture during the time Leoba was writing. As a monastic writer, Leoba has no need to perform femaleness or maleness. She, Boniface, Lull, and their contemporary monastics participate in a literary culture which operates outside of the male>female gender binary, separated by the monastic commitment to chastity and realized in monastic literary culture. Not until a century after Aldhelm's publication of *De Virginitate* does chastity transform from a liberating, nonbinary identity to a limiting, subordinating identity for women religious specifically. This is the subject of the next chapter.

Appendix to Chapter 3

Leoba's letter to Boniface⁵⁴³

Domino reverentissimo et summe dignitatis infula predito Bonifatio atque in Christo carissimo et mihi adfinitatis propinquitate conexo Leobgyda ultima leve iugum Christi portantium famula perennum sospitatis salutem.

Rogo tuam celementiam, ut memorare digneris prioris amicitiae, quam iam dudum cum patre meo copulasti, cuius vocabulum est Dynne, in occiduis regionibus, qui nunc ante VIII annorum curriculum ab hac luce subtractus est, ut pro anima illius preces offerre Deo non rennues. Necnon et matris meae memoriam commendo tibi, quae cognominatur Aebbe, quae tibi, ut melius nosti, consanguinitatis nexibus copulatur et adhuc laboriose vivit et diu valide ab infirmitate obpressa est. Ergo unica filia sum abobus parentibus meis; et utinam, licet sim indigna, ut merear te in fratris locum accipere, quia in nullo hominum generis mei tanta fiducia spei posita est mihi quanta in te. Hoc parvum munusculum mittere curavi, non ut dignum esset tuae almitatis aspectui, sed ut memoriam parvitatatis meae retines, ne longa locorum intercapidine oblivione tradas, quin immo vere dilectionis ligatura reliquum nodetur in aevum. Hoc, frater amande, enixius efflagito, ut tuarum orationum pelta muniar contra hostis occulti venenata iacula. Illud etiam peto, ut rusticitatem huius epistolae digneris emendare et mihi aliqua verba tuae affabilitatis exempli gratia transmittere non recusses, quae inhianter audire satago.

Istos autem subter scriptos versiculos componere nitebar secundum poeticae traditionis disciplinam, non audacia confidens, sed gracilis ingenioli rudimenta exercitare cupiens et tuo auxilio indigens. Istam artem ab Eadburge magisterio didici, quae indesinenter legem divinam rimare non cessat.

Vale, vivens aevo longiore, vita feligiore, interpellans pro me.

Arbiter omnipotens, solus qui cuncta creavit,
In regno patris Semper qui lumine fulget,
Qua iugiter flagrans sic regnet gloria Christi,
Inlesum servet semper te iure perenni.

To my revered master Boniface, bearing the insignia of the highest office, most dear to me in Christ and bound to me by ties of kinship, I, Lioba, least of the servants of those who bear the easy yoke of Christ, wish enduring health and prosperity.

I beg you graciously to bear in mind your ancient friendship for my father, Dynne, formed long ago in the West country. It is now eight years since he was called away from this world, and I ask your prayers for his soul. I recall to your memory also my mother, Aebbe, who, as you know, is bound to you by ties of blood. She lives a life of suffering, bowed down by grievous illness. I am the only daughter of my parents, and, unworthy though I be, I wish that I might regard you as a brother; for there is no other man in my kinship in whom I have such

⁵⁴³ Tangl 29, *Die Briefe*, 52-53; trans., Emerton, *The Letters of Saint Boniface*, 59-60.

confidence as in you. I have ventured to send you this little gift, not as if it deserved even a kindly glance from you but that you may have a reminder of my insignificance and not let me be forgotten on account of our wide separation. May the bond of our true affection be knit ever more closely for all time. I eagerly pray, my dear brother, that I may be protected by the shield of your prayers from the poisoned darts of the hidden enemy. I beg you also to be so kind as to correct the unskilled style of this letter and to send me, by way of example, a few kind words which I greatly long to hear.

I have composed the following verses according to the rules of poetic art, not trusting to my own presumption, but trying only to exercise my little talents and needing your assistance. I have studied this art under the guidance of Eadburga, who still carries on without ceasing her investigation of the divine law.

Farewell, and may you live long and happily, making intercession for me.

The omnipotent Ruler who alone created everything,
He who shines in splendor forever in His Father's kingdom,
The perpetual fire by which the glory of Christ reigns,
May preserve you forever in perennial right.

Chapter Four

The Carolingian Gender Reform and the Reception of Women's Authorship

This chapter examines the change in monastic women's gender status over the course of the eighth and ninth centuries, through the lens of two hagiographical texts written fifty years apart: Hugeburc of Heidenheim's twinned *Vitae* of the brother saints Willibald and Wynnebald, written c.778-780, and Rudolf of Fulda's *Vita* of St. Leoba, written around the 830s.⁵⁴⁴ I contend that the two texts together portray the reformulation of monastic women as "female" over the course of the late eighth and early ninth centuries, as part of the reformers' project to define and protect male ecclesiastical power. Before the second half of the eighth century, monastic spirituality had elevated a culture of chastity shared by men and women religious.⁵⁴⁵ Within the monastic culture of chastity, women were understood to be spiritual equals with men and were not, in theory, subject to differential regulation. As Suzanne Wemple writes,

In the seventh century, when the ascetic spirit prevailed, women fared better. Instead of propagating misogynistic sentiments in order to strengthen episcopal domination and to enhance the authority of the male hierarchy, the monastic reformers recognized the spiritual equality of women.⁵⁴⁶

The ascetic egalitarianism present in parts of seventh- and early eighth-century monastic culture is visible in the collection of correspondence between the English missionary St. Boniface and

⁵⁴⁴ For effects of the Carolingian reforms on women, see Scheck, *Reform and resistance*; Foot, *Veiled Women I, II*; Hollis, *Women and the Church*; John Contreni, "The Carolingian Renaissance"; Suzanne Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society: Marriage and the Cloister, 500-900* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981).

⁵⁴⁵ On gender egalitarianism in early medieval monasticism, see McDaniel, *The Third Gender*; Lifshitz, *Religious Women in Early Carolingian Francia*; Jo Ann McNamara, "Chastity as a third gender"; Hollis, "Aldhelm's De Virginitate: Soldiers of Christ and Brides of the Lamb," in *Women and the Church*, 75-112; on nonbinary gender in early Christianity, see Devun, *The Shape of Sex*.

⁵⁴⁶ Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society*, 147; Réal, "Nuns and Monks at Work," 258, opens with the question: "Was there equality between the sexes in Frankish monasticism? Historians today agree that monastic life was conceived of at its inception as nongendered. The men and women who chose such a life all aspired toward the same ideal: living as perfect Christians."

his colleagues.⁵⁴⁷ These men and women correspondents worked together and supported one another in ministry, education, intellectual pursuit, literary exchange, and prayer. Boniface's relationship with his colleague and friend Leoba illustrates the syneisactic culture of contemporary English-Frankish monasticism.⁵⁴⁸ Their friendship was so close that Boniface more than once requested that Leoba be buried in the same grave as himself. The successive removal of Leoba's remains away from Boniface's during the eighth and ninth centuries attests equally to the segregation and removal of women from ecclesiastical authority during those decades.⁵⁴⁹

In the earlier period, influential models of monastic life and sanctity were not differentiated by binary gender.⁵⁵⁰ Aldhelm of Malmesbury's seventh-century treatise on virginity celebrates the ascetic ideal of chastity, elevating men and women practitioners beyond the social gendered constraints of secular society.⁵⁵¹ The ideal of asceticism elevating the practitioner beyond the secular gender binary was also illustrated in Old English accounts of the "holy harlot" saints Pelagia, Afra, Mary Magdalene, and Mary of Egypt into the ninth and tenth centuries. Juliette Vuille writes that the hagiographers of the "holy harlots" represent the saints' conversion to a life of faith and chastity as a conversion from binary gender identity (female) to

⁵⁴⁷ The correspondence is edited in Michael Tangl, *Die Briefe des Heiligen Bonifatius und Lullus* (Berlin: Weidmannsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1916); the women's letters from the correspondence are translated in Joan Ferrante, et al., *Epistolae: Medieval Women's Latin Letters*, <http://epistolae.ctl.columbia.edu/>.

⁵⁴⁸ Lifshitz, *Religious Women*, 4, defines syneisactism as a "form of religious life that encouraged sexually chaste contact between men and women."

⁵⁴⁹ Hollis, *Women and the Church*, 288.

⁵⁵⁰ Felice Lifshitz, "Priestly Women, Virginal Men: Litanies and their Discontents" in *Gender and Christianity in Medieval Europe: New Perspectives*, eds. Lisa M. Bitel and Felice Lifshitz (Philadelphia: Univ. Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 87-102.

⁵⁵¹ Aldhelm of Malmesbury, *Prosa de virginitate*, CCSL 124/124A; see McDaniel, *The Third Gender*, 75.

queer gender identity exceeding the male/female binary.⁵⁵² These saints' *vitae* preserve the early model of committed chaste living, which allowed real women monastics (at least theoretically) to inhabit asceticism as a non-binary—and therefore not *subordinate*—gender identity. The sense of spiritual equality between men and women institutionalized in syneisactic monasticism invalidated the very definitional grounds for gender hierarchy.

During the sixth and seventh centuries, women in England and Francia ruled mixed-gender monastic communities, and influential abbesses were celebrated as teachers and advisors to bishops and kings (though they were still subject to the authority of bishops).⁵⁵³ Beginning in the eighth century, however, efforts to consolidate male ecclesiastical power necessitated the re-definition of religious women as distinct and subordinate.⁵⁵⁴ I argue that

⁵⁵² Vuille, *Holy Harlots in Medieval English Religious Literature*, 20, “the hagiographers of the lives of holy harlots do not depict their saints’ rejection of their pre-conversion femininity – which is equated with sin – as an adoption of masculinity, but rather as an indeterminacy which frees them from such societally dictated gendered roles. In other words, the human female becomes the queer saint, in the same way female heroes are not inverted males or women performing a female-inflected version of heroism: rather, their heroism queers their gender, so that they transcend straight conceptions to enact a queer form of heroism. Sanctity, in the same way as heroism, is therefore shown to lead individuals to transcend their gender.”

⁵⁵³ For example, in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, Bede reports that Hild of Whitby trained five bishops and was often consulted by secular and religious leaders (IV.23); she presided over the Synod determining the Easter calendar for the English Church (III.25); see also Barbara Yorke, *Nunneries and the Anglo-Saxon Royal Houses* (London: Continuum, 2003).

⁵⁵⁴ The reason behind the reformers’ renewed zeal for consolidating ecclesiastical power within a male-only hierarchy is outside the scope of this project; however, the likely answer may be found in the influx and establishment of material wealth in the Carolingian church thanks to strengthening ties between the the Church and royal family in the eighth century, as the royal family took over control of local churches from aristocratic families; and where there was material wealth to control, women would be excluded from positions of power; see further Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society*, who argues that women’s status and access to symbolic and administrative power in the Latin Church waxed and waned with periods of missionary expansion and institutional consolidation: during periods of expansion, women were given more freedom and encouraged to reap the spiritual rewards of physical hardship in the missionary field, but once the new churches and congregations were established and became more securely connected to local networks of secular wealth and power, women were ousted from ecclesiastical leadership roles.

reformers accomplished the ideological segregation and subordination of monastic women by re-imposing binary female gender on those who previously would have been able to identify socially as “ascetic” rather than as “female.” The forced imposition of femaleness represented a foreclosing of gendered possibility and the loss of the potential gender identity which granted monastic women equal dignity and spiritual authority to monastic men.

Hugeburc’s and Rudolf’s texts portray contrasting attitudes toward Carolingian reformers’ efforts to segregate monastic culture by gender and restrict the lives of women religious along the lines of binary gender. In her preface to the *Vitae* of Willibald and Wynnebald, Hugeburc reflects the artificiality of gender segregation within traditionally mixed-gender monastic spaces. For Hugeburc, gender segregation threatens monastic communal integrity. In contrast, Rudolf of Fulda celebrates gender segregation as a means of maintaining spiritual order.

The memory of religious women like Leoba whose political activity had been enabled by the gender-egalitarian culture of chastity posed a problem to the establishment of an “all-male ecclesiastical hierarchy.”⁵⁵⁵ Throughout the eighth and ninth centuries, new regulations kept religious women away from priestly offices, spaces, and male bodies. The *Admonitio Generalis* promulgated by Charlemagne’s court in 789 prohibited abbesses from exercising spiritual authority over males through the “laying on of hands” and even from consecrating female members of their own communities, as a priest would.⁵⁵⁶ The *capitula* of the Council of Salzburg

⁵⁵⁵ Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society*, 170, explains that the first wave of reform legislation forced uncloistered women religious into monasteries, limiting women’s options for pursuing religious vocation; the foundation of new monasteries was discouraged, and small monasteries, most of which were women’s monasteries, were consolidated, further limiting women’s options; on England, see Foot, *Veiled Women I*, especially 61-84, 85-110.

⁵⁵⁶ “Auditum est aliquas abbatissas contra morem sanctae Dei ecclesiae benedictionis com manus impositione et signaculo sanctae crucis super capita virorum dare, necnon et velare virgines cum

from 803/4 prohibited the entry of any male person within a women's monastery, even for the purposes of education, which had been common practice.⁵⁵⁷ The regulations emphasized gender as the fundamental principle of hierarchy, to the extent that even secular men were understood as having higher spiritual standing than monastic women officeholders.⁵⁵⁸

Eighth-century measures also vehemently restricted monastic women's movement. For example, the Council of Verneuil (755) and Charlemagne's General Capitulary (789) forbade even abbesses from leaving their monasteries unless summoned by the king, while the Council of Friuli in 796/7 forbade women from going on pilgrimage.⁵⁵⁹ In addition to prohibiting religious

benedictione sacerdotali. Quod omnino vobis [episcopis et abbatibus], sanctissimi patres, in vestris parrochiis interdicendum esse scitote" (*Adm. Gen.*, MGH Capit. I, 60), "It has been heard that some abbesses, against the custom of the holy Church of God, give blessings on the heads of men with laying on of the hand and with the sign of the holy cross, and veil virgins with a priestly blessing. Know this, O you bishops and abbots, that this is totally forbidden in your dioceses," trans., Nelson, "Alcuin's Letters," 357.

⁵⁵⁷ "Omnino prohibemus, ut nullatenus masculum filium aut nepotem vel parentem suum in monasterio puellarum aut nutriendum commendare praesumat, nec quisquam illum suscipere audeat" (*Capit. Eccl. ad Salz.*, cap. 7, MGH Capit. 1, 119), "We entirely forbid that anyone presume to place their male son or nephew or parent in a girls' monastery, even for education; and let no one dare to accept him"; Lifshitz, *Religious Women*, 20-25, offers an overview of the educational centers in the English missionary region in Francia in the eighth century.

⁵⁵⁸ The Council of Paris (829) decreed: "It is against divine law and canonical instruction for women to intrude on the other side of holy altars, to touch impudently the consecrated vessels, administer for priests sacerdotal vestments, and, what is even worse, more indecent and more inappropriate, to distribute the body and blood of the Lord to the people...It is certainly amazing that women, whose sex by no means makes them competent, despite the laws, were able to gain license to do things that are prohibited even to secular men," trans., Hollis, *Women and the Church*, 145n134; "contra legem divinam canonicamque institutionem feminas sanctis altaribus se ultra ingerere sacrataque vasa impudenter contingere et indumenta sacerdotalia praesbyteris administrare et, quod his maius, indecentius ineptiusque est, corpus et sanguinem Domini populis porrigere et alia quaeque, quae ipso dictu turpia sunt, exercere. Miranda sane res est, unde hisdem illicitus in Christiana religione inreperit usus, ut quod viris saecularibus illicitum est, feminae, quarum sexui nullatenus competit aliquando contra fas sibi licitum facere potuerint" (*Conc. quat.* MGH Conc. 2, 2, 639-40).

⁵⁵⁹ "Constituimus ut nulla abbatissa dua monasteria non praesumat habere, nec extra monasterium licentiam exire, nisi hostilitate cogente" (*Conc. Vernense* cap. 6, MGH Capit. 1, 34); "ut nulla abbatissa foras monasterio exire non praesumat sine nostra iussione, nec sibi subditas facere permittat" (*Capit. Generale* item 19, MGH LL 1, 63); "Et nulla ullo umquam tempore licentia sit abbatissae vel cuilibet monachae...Romam adire vel alia loca venerabilia

women's proximity to men,⁵⁶⁰ women's ministerial activities, and their freedom of movement, reformers sought to enforce women's female gender by regulating clothing. The statutes from the Council of Reisbach and Freising in 799 decree that "women must not dress in manly clothing, such as trousers or tunics, but only in womanly clothing."⁵⁶¹ Again in 816, the Council of Aachen concluded that "it is disgusting for a man to wear womanly clothing and for a woman to wear masculine clothing."⁵⁶² What these decrees show is that the gender binary needed reinforcing. In order to protect against female impurity, reformers sought to remake monastic women as reliably and identifiably female. That meant preventing religious women from approaching male ecclesiastical symbolic power through dress as well as place.

Hugeburc's and Rudolf's writing show the influence of the reformers' efforts to divide monastic culture according to binary gender. Gender division frames both writers' presentations

circuire" (*Conc. Foroiul.* cap. 12, MGH 2, 1 p. 194); Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society*, 168, suggests that the frequent reiteration of measures restricting women's movement shows that the regulations were not strictly followed; see also Jane T. Schulenburg, "Strict Active Enclosure and Its Effects on the Female Monastic Experience, 500– 1100," in *Distant Echoes: Medieval Religious Women*, vol. 1, eds. John A. Nichols and Lillian Thomas Shank, 51– 86 (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1984).

⁵⁶⁰ The cohabitation of male ecclesiastics and women was forbidden by the 743 *Concilia Romanum* cap. I-II (MGH Conc. 2, 1, 12) and the 744 Council of Soissons, cap. VIII (MGH Conc. 2, 1, 35); on the discourse of ritual purity, see Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society*, 125-148; and Scheck, *Reform and Resistance*, 77-80.

⁵⁶¹ "Ut sanctimoniales non induantur virilia indumenta, id est rocho vel fanones, nisi tantum feminea vestimenta" (*Stat. Rhisp. Frising. Salisburg.* cap. 6, MGH Capit. 1, 227); Jane Schulenburg, *Forgetful of their Sex: Female Sanctity and Society ca. 500-1100* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 163, translates "rocho vel fanones" as "male tunic or trousers"; within 30 years, another pronouncement forbade women from even *touching* the priestly garments: "contra legem divinam canonicamque institutionem feminas sanctis altaribus se ultro ingerere sacrataque vasa inprudenter contingere et indumenta sacerdotalia praesbyteris administrare et, quod his maius, indecentius ineptiusque est, corpus et sanguinem Domini populis porrigere et alia quaeque...exercere. Miranda sane res est, unde hisdem illicitus in Christiana religione inreperit usus, ut quod viris saecularibus illicitum est, feminae, quarum sexui nullatenus competit, aliquando contra fas sibi licitum facere potuerint" (*Conc. quat.* cap. 45, MGH Conc. 2, 2, 639).

⁵⁶² "sicut enim turpe est virum vestem muliebrem et mulierem vestem virilem induere" (*Conc. Aquis.* MGH Conc. 2, 1, 405)

of monastic life, although their texts reflect different stages in the redefinition of women's femaleness as a tool of institutional subordination. Hugeburc's *Vitae* witness the period of transition during which monastic life was not yet fully segregated by gender. Although many of the reform measures came after Hugeburc's writing, reformers were already targeting the institutional grounds of syneisacticism in the eighth century. Royal predation of aristocratic lands and increasing episcopal control over monasteries led to the disproportionate impoverishment and closure of women's communities.⁵⁶³ The introduction of the Benedictine Rule in Francia slowly eroded the authority of abbesses in mixed communities, and in 787, the second Council of Nicaea forbade the new foundation of double monasteries.⁵⁶⁴ Stephanie Hollis argues the decline in double monasteries was connected to monastic women's loss of status during the eighth and ninth centuries. For Hollis, that the double monasteries had played an important role in "submerging gender distinctness" between monastic men and women: "the double monastery was a potential *locus* for the development of a common identity, and its passing marks a stage in the constitution of female alterity."⁵⁶⁵ Although the documented presence of double monasteries in England and Francia was already in decline by the middle of the eighth century, a number of double monasteries, such as Heidenheim, were still operational at the time of Hugeburc's

⁵⁶³ Lifshitz, *Religious Women*, 7-28, especially 13-14 on the Fulda takeover; Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society*, 165, 170.

⁵⁶⁴ Hollis, *Women and the Church*, 102n143, writes that "existing [double] foundations were permitted to continue under rigorously segregated conditions."

⁵⁶⁵ Hollis, *Women and the Church*, 95-6.

writing.⁵⁶⁶ Only fifty years later, however, Rudolf fully embraces gender segregation as the underlying framework of his “blueprint for the future of monasticism.”⁵⁶⁷

Hugeburc of Heidenheim’s *Vita Sancti Willibaldi* and *Vita Sancti Wynnebaldi*

Hugeburc wrote the *Vitae* of the English missionary brothers Willibald and Wynnebald between 778 and 780,⁵⁶⁸ while living in the double monastery of Heidenheim. Heidenheim had been founded by Wynnebald in 752. At the time of Hugeburc’s writing, control of the monastery had passed from Wynnebald to his sister Walburg. Hugeburc notes that she herself is also a relative of the abbess and her brothers. It was Abbess Walburg who narrated the life and miracles of the deceased Wynnebald to Hugeburc, while Willibald recounted his own life and travels in an interview with Hugeburc and two witnesses.⁵⁶⁹

In the preface, Hugeburc humbles herself according to the standard rhetorical practice of Latin authors, but she couches her expressions of humility in gendered terms.⁵⁷⁰ Scholars often interpret Hugeburc’s gendered humility rhetoric as evidence that Hugeburc was self-conscious and wary of being a woman writing in a “male genre” or for a male audience. My approach to

⁵⁶⁶ Nelson, “Alcuin’s Letters,” 355-372, writes that double houses disappeared from England by the end of the eighth century; the last evidence for a double monastery’s continued operation comes from the community of Abbess Aethelthryth, in a letter written to Aethelthryth by Alcuin in 796, and that there is no evidence for any sort of mixed congregation in England beyond the very beginning of the tenth century; Nelson relates the decline of double monasteries in England to Carolingian reform efforts, and specifically to reformers’ attitudes toward women.

⁵⁶⁷ Hollis, *Women and the Church*, 273.

⁵⁶⁸ Hugeburc, *Vita willibaldi et wynnebaldi auctore sanctimoniali heidenheimensi*, ed. O. Holder-Egger, MGH SS 15,1, 80-117; trans. in C. H. Talbot, “The hodoeporicon of St. Willibald,” in Noble and Head, *Soldiers of Christ*; Bernhard Bischoff identified the author’s name (Huneberc) encoded in a cryptogram in Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, MS Clm 1086, copied at the very end of the eighth century or beginning of the ninth; on Hugeburc, see Gottschaller, *Hugeburc of Heidenheim*.

⁵⁶⁹ “Sicut illo ipso vidente et nobis referente de ori sui dictatione audire et nihilominus scribere destinavimus, duobus diaconibus testibus mecumque audientibus, 9. Kal. Iulii, pridie ante solstitia, Martii die” (*V. Willibaldi* MGH SS 15, 1, 87).

⁵⁷⁰ On humility rhetoric as a Latin preface convention, see Janson, *Latin Prose Preface*.

Hugeburc's gendered language differs. I argue that Hugeburc constructs an artificially gender-divided literary setting in her preface, in which the female authorial persona contrasts with the maleness of the constructed audience. The stark gender division stands out against the background of local syneisacticism in the mixed monastery of Heidenheim, and more broadly in the English mission region in Francia. Hugeburc writes in her preface:

Venerandis immoque in Christo carissimis omnibus sacerdotalis infule honore ditatis presbiteris preclareque indolis diaconibus et nihilominus abba sive omnibus popularie condicionis proceribus, quos pastoralis cure privilegio pius procerum pontifex, alios agio ordine presbiteros, alios sobriae pudicitie eliganter diaconos, alios cenobiali militie monachos, alios sub discipulare habitu sollertis ... provexit ... ego indigna Saxonica de gente istic venientium novissima et non solum annis, set et etiam moribus, et de illorum comparatione contribulum meorum quasi omuncula, ego quidem vobis religiosis ac catholicis viris, caelestis bibliothicae ministris, ob utilitate memoriae pauca perstringendo paulatim de primordiale vitae eius venerandi viri Willibaldi prochemio disputare decreveram. Sed tamen precipue ego feminea fragilique sexus inbecillitate corruptibilia, nulla prerogativa sapientiae suffultus aut magnarum virium industria elata, sed spontaneo voluntatis meae violentia coacta, velut quadam ignara parva de pectoris prudentia pauca decerpens et ex multis frondosum frugiferumque arborum florum varietate honustorum exiguo qualibet arte saltim extremis in ramis vestrae memoriae coaptos pauca excerptare, conpagare, edissereque me libet. Et nunc reciproco sermone iterando dico, non propriae presumptionis primordio, non temeritatis audacia instanter fretus, hoc incipere nisi ut vix audeo.

To all the venerable and, I should rather say, most dear ones in Christ endowed with the honor of the priestly garb and nature, priests, deacons, no less abbots and all office holders generally whom our holy bishop, with solicitous care and noble duty, has appointed throughout his diocese to be priests, deacons, monks and novices, to all these who live under religious observance...I who am unworthy, of Saxon race, I the last of those coming here, not only in years but in behaviour too, I who am as it were a puny female creature compared with my fellow-Christians, I indeed had decided to expound to you, religious and catholic men, ministers of the heavenly word, a little by way of prelude concerning the beginnings of the life of that venerable man Willibald, compressing a few things to allow them to be effectively remembered. And yet I especially, corruptible through the womanly frail foolishness of my sex,⁵⁷¹ not supported by any prerogative of

⁵⁷¹ Hugeburc's phrase, "feminea fragilique sexus inbecillitate corruptibilia" (an exaggeration of Jerome's "feminea fragilis", *Comm. in Isaiam* 8, 26, 14; *Comm. in Osee*, 1, 1; and *Comm. in Ecclesiasten* 2, 8) perhaps incorporating the phrase "sexus infirmioris inbecillitatis" from Willibald's recent *Life of Boniface*, likely written between 763-768 (in a section describing how Boniface's teaching inspired monastic men and women alike and pointing out the women's tireless study when they weren't able to attend Boniface's lectures in person), appears to introduce the usage "feminea sexus" into Carolingian and later ecclesiastical decrees: e.g., the

wisdom or exalted by the diligence of great strength, but impelled spontaneously by the ardour of my will, as a little ignorant female one culling a few thoughts from the sagacity of the heart, from the many leafy, fruit-bearing trees laden with a variety of flowers, it pleases me to pluck, assemble and display some few, gathered - with whatever feeble art, at least from the lowest branches - for you to hold in memory. And now with renewed speech I say, repeating, not relying on the awakening of my own presumption, nor relying insistently on the audacity of my temerity, that I do not - except as it were scarcely - dare to begin.⁵⁷²

Hugeburc's gendered expressions of humility cannot be separated from the standard rhetorical practice of authorial humility ubiquitous in Latin writing. Her expressions of humility fit squarely within Tore Janson's taxonomy of humility rhetoric in Latin prefaces, which display a consistent emphasis on an author's modesty, temerity, deferral of authority, and methodological "assurances."⁵⁷³ In this light, Hugeburc's humility rhetoric constitutes a legible claim to authorial standing, not an admission of inadequacy. She adopts the rhetorical posture of authorial humility by calling herself "unworthy," "small," and "ignorant," and by disparaging her own intelligence and strength.⁵⁷⁴ Crediting her male audience's "authority and kindness" (and God's grace) with the impetus for her writing project fulfills the rhetorical posture of dependence on external authority.

Precepts of the Priests of his Diocese (797) echoes Hugeburc's construction: "Memores enim esse debent feminae infirmitatis suae at sexus imbecillitatis" (*PL* 105 col.193), and is repeated in Radulphus Bituricensis, Capit. I, Capit. episc. 1,10, 240, and Theodulph of Orleans, Capit. II, Capit. episc. 1, 6, 107, both ninth century, and Atto Vercellensis, Capit. episc. 3, 11, 269 (tenth century); although many of the misogynist pronouncements of the Carolingian reforms are based on pre-Carolingian church decrees, the use of "feminea sexus" in its various configurations in church decrees does not appear until the turn of the ninth century, suggesting that the Carolingian reformers felt the need to insist on women's female gender in a way the earlier councils did not. Did later male ecclesiastics misinterpret Hugeburc's feminist polemical usage, seeing instead an attractive turn of phrase for female-gender subordination?

⁵⁷² Hugeburc, *V. Willibaldi*, MGH SS 15, 1, 86-87; translation adapted from Talbot, "The hodoeporicon of St. Willibald," 153-177, with help from Professor Andrew Hicks.

⁵⁷³ Janson, *Latin Prose Prefaces*, 159, "There is stressed in every conceivable way what little faith the author has in his own capacity and particularly in his capacity to write....Closely related to this is the tendency to renounce responsibility, as manifested in the request for revision and correction and the transfer of responsibility to the dedicatee."

⁵⁷⁴ *Indigna, ignara, parva*; trans., Talbot, "The hodoeporicon of St. Willibald," 153.

Aldhelm uses similar formulas in his letter to Heahfrith in the late seventh century. He describes himself as inadequate and afraid of writing: “Sed haec misellus homuncio dictando volvens scrupulo ancipiti extemplo quatiens angebar” (I, a wretched, puny little male creature, meditating upon these matters as I wrote, was forthwith troubled and trembled with a twofold anxiety).⁵⁷⁵ Hugeburc uses the term *homuncula* to describe herself as “puny.” It is the diminutive form of the same word used by Aldhelm (*humuncio*) to describe himself as “puny.” Aldhelm’s expressions of humility have rightly been understood as rhetorical, rather than as evidence of real concern about inadequacy. (In the same letter, Aldhelm presents himself as a literary and educational authority, addressing Heahfrith as “student” and passing judgment on Heahfrith’s former studies.) Lapidge and Herren call the letter a “tour de force,” in which “the convoluted sentences and bombastic vocabulary...are clearly intended to show that the English are not second-best to the Irish in *copia verborum*.”⁵⁷⁶ Aldhelm is preening, not apologizing. In contrast, Hugeburc’s use of the same tropes, and even the same word, in the context of convoluted Aldhelmian sentences have been taken as sincere self-doubt.

It is difficult to trace precisely the impact of Hugeburc’s femaleness on the assessments of her writing by critics; nevertheless, differential treatment based on Hugeburc’s gender is apparent. Editor Oswald Holder-Egger includes an assessment of Hugeburc’s person, not only of her writing, calling her “parum docta” (little educated) and “simplicissima” (extremely unskilled).⁵⁷⁷ His surprise at Hugeburc’s presumption in writing in the Latin language and, more

⁵⁷⁵ Auct. ant. MGH SS 15, ep. 5 ad Ehfridum, 492; trans. adapted from Lapidge and Herren, *Aldhelm: The Prose Works*, 163.

⁵⁷⁶ Lapidge and Herren, *Aldhelm: The Prose Works*, 146.

⁵⁷⁷ Holder-Egger, ed., *Vitae willibaldi et wynnebalidi*, MGH SS 15, 1, 82, “Monialis enim sermone Latino quidem usa est, quin etiam nonnunquam pompam quandam et speciem dicendi tumidam et inflatam orationem adhibere conata est, sed ne rudimenta quidem linguae Latinae deposuerat artis grammaticae neque elementa didicit, contra cuius prima praecepta verbo ferre quoque peccavit. Voces permultas inauditas ac monstruosas usurpavit, alias, Graecas praesertim, mutilavit vel corrupit.”

telling, the virulence of his assessment of Hugeburc's incompetence—using words such as “sin,” “monstrous,” “usurp,” “mutilate,” and “corrupt”—betray an enthusiasm for disparaging the *monialis* that stands apart from his more measured assessments of other (male and presumed-male anonymous) authors in the same collection.⁵⁷⁸

Hugeburc's Aldhelmian prose is challenging to read and often at odds with classical grammar.⁵⁷⁹ As noted, Holder-Egger does not flatter in his editorial assessment. He one-ups the anonymous eleventh-century commentator, who writes that the *Vitae* of Willibald and Wynnebald were composed “simpliciter quidem, sed pleniter et veracissime” (with little skill, but comprehensively and most truthfully): Holder-Egger claims that it would be more accurate to call the writing “simplicissime” (extremely unskilled) rather than “simpliciter.” Although Hugeburc's literary status has since been partially recuperated in studies by Eva Gottschaller and Peter Dronke,⁵⁸⁰ some critics' unwillingness to attribute authorial responsibility to Hugeburc extends the long tradition of gendered criticism. While Hugeburc is now widely accepted as a successful student of Aldhelmian style, alongside Boniface and other male contemporaries in the eighth century and innumerable Anglo-Latin writers in the tenth century,⁵⁸¹ scholars continue to

⁵⁷⁸ In comparison, Holder-Egger, ed., *Vita et miracula sancti Pirminii*, MGH SS 15, 1, 18, judges the writing of the anonymous author of Pirminius's *vita* to be “unpolished, uneducated, and simple, bordering on inept,” without introducing the same violence as he does in his assessment of Hugeburc's writing: “Sermo enim tam rudis inconditusque, narratio tam simplex, ne dicam inepta, est, ut constare mihi videatur, libellum eo tempore scriptum esse, cum studium litterarum nuper renovatum parum diffusum et radicatum erat.”

⁵⁷⁹ Michael Lapidge, “The Hermeneutic Style,” in *Anglo-Latin Literature 900-1066* (London: Hambledon Press, 1993), 111-112.

⁵⁸⁰ Gottschaller, *Hugeburc of Heidenheim*, 30-35; Peter Dronke, *Women Writers of the Middle Ages: A Critical Study of Texts from Perpetua (203) to Marguerite Porete (1310)* (Cambridge UP, 1984), 33-35; see also recent assessments of Hugeburc's writing in Blanton and Scheck, “Leoba and the Iconography of Learning, 22; and Watt, *Women, Writing, and Religion*, 93.

⁵⁸¹ Lapidge, “The Hermeneutic Style,” 111-12, “Already in the eighth century Aldhelm's prose writings were diligently studied by his fellow-countrymen, and the influence of his style is clearly discernible in the writings of his disciples and followers: in the poetry of Æthelwald, in Felix's *Vita S. Guthlaci*, in some of Boniface's prose, and especially in the *Vita Germanuum Willibaldi et Wynnebalidi* by the English nun Hygeburg.”

interpret Hugeburc's femaleness as an aberration in early medieval hagiographical culture and therefore as grounds for differential scrutiny.

Attending to Hugeburc's femaleness while ignoring the constructed maleness of her imaginary audience has, perhaps unsurprisingly, led some scholars to read Hugeburc's rhetorical expressions of humility as genuine expressions of self-doubt, rather than as adept performances of authorship. Diane Watt argues that Hugeburc attempts to deflect criticism for her presumption as a woman writing hagiography by crediting her male audience as the authorizing force behind her writing: "even as Hugeburc apologizes for her apparent boldness, which she recognizes might seem inappropriate in a woman, she asserts that it is the very male clerical authority that might otherwise oppose her undertaking that encourages it."⁵⁸² Although Watt recognizes some of Hugeburc's humility rhetoric as conventional, she reads other parts as Hugeburc's clear-eyed admission that, as a woman, she is an unqualified hagiographer, in her own estimation as well as that of her audience.

Why do scholars continue to interpret Hugeburc's gendered language as evidence of gendered discomfort, rather than as rhetorical exaggeration? One answer is that interpreting Hugeburc's humility rhetoric as a confession of discomfort (her own and/or her audience's) at the novelty of her position as a woman publicly writing hagiography accords with the general expectation among scholars that early medieval women's writing necessarily demonstrates inferior literary training.⁵⁸³ Henri Marrou's argument for widespread male monastic literacy based on the evidence of female monastic literacy exemplifies the widely held expectation: "Si

⁵⁸² Watt, *Women, Writing, and Religion*, 94.

⁵⁸³ Hugeburc's twinned *Lives* represent the earliest extant Latin hagiographical writing attributed securely to a woman author, with the exception of Baudonivia's *Life of St. Radegund*, composed c.600; scholars have posited female authorship for the anonymous eighth-century Whitby *Life of St. Gregory* and presume the circulation of now-lost texts by women commemorating the founding abbesses of English and Frankish monasteries, see Watt, *Women, Writing, and Religion* on "male overwriting" of women's hagiographical texts.

l'étude des lettres est si recommandée chez les femmes (où comme on peut bien le supposer la culture était moins répandue), elle l'est *a fortiori* tout autant pour les moines."⁵⁸⁴ Patrick Sims-Williams follows Marrou's prejudice through differential treatment of contemporary men and women authors in his classic study, *Religion and Literature in Western England, 600-800*. In one example, Sims-Williams interprets Leoba's request to Boniface to "correct" the "rusticity" of her letter-writing as an indication of her little skill, while an identical request by male writers occasions no comment from Sims-Williams.⁵⁸⁵

That Hugeburc's femaleness, rather than her writing ability, is at stake is evident in scholars' tendency to attribute authorship of the difficult and audacious (or "overreaching" and "overblown")⁵⁸⁶ parts of the *Vitae* to Hugeburc, and the clearer, more streamlined prose to Willibald. The mixture of styles noted by Lina Eckenstein already in 1896 is an interesting feature of Hugeburc's *Vitae*. The alliterative Aldhelmian style, used throughout the preface, differs from the less difficult style of some of the narrative portions of the *Vitae*. Gottschaller explains this difference by suggesting that Hugeburc is not responsible for the clearer prose.⁵⁸⁷ Some scholars have taken up Gottschaller's theory of divided authorship in the *Vita* of Willibald, especially, with enthusiasm. For example, Rodney Aist ascribes the parts of the text which

⁵⁸⁴ Marrou, *Histoire de l'éducation*, 440.

⁵⁸⁵ See chapter three; Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature*, 211-12, 240, does not comment on the nearly identical use of the "rusticitas" humility trope in his discussion of (male) Lull, Denehard and Burghard's letter to (female) Cyneburg, preserved in the same mss as Leoba's letter, although he prints the full letter to Cyneburg; cf. (male) Boniface to (female) Cuthberg, "Propterea, carissimi, non quia vestrae prudentiae opus sit rusticitatis nostrae statuta audire vel legere, sed propter bonam et humilem et sanctam voluntatem vestram putamus vos libentius scire velle quam nescire, quae hic sacerdotes nobiscum servanda decreverunt, vobis emendanda et corrigenda destinamus" (Tangl 78), and Leoba to Boniface, "Illud etiam peto, ut rusticitatem huius epistolae digneris emendare et mihi aliqua verba tuae affabilitatis exempli gratia transmitters non recuses, quae inhiante audire satago" (Tangle 29).

⁵⁸⁶ Holder-Egger, ed. *Vitae willibaldi et wynnebaldi*, MGH SS 15, 1, 82, "pompam quandam et speciem dicendi tumidam et inflatam orationem adhibere conata est."

⁵⁸⁷ Gottschaller, *Hugeburc of Heidenheim*, 82.

historically have been attacked as too-difficult and “monstrous” to Hugeburc, and reserves the tasteful prose for the male Willibald.⁵⁸⁸ Aist also ascribes responsibility to Willibald for the form of the narrative, the theological concepts, and the presentation of images. Aist mentions Hugeburc only twice in his entire essay on the *vita*, and only in her capacity as the “copyist” (not “author”) of Willibald’s dictated memories and vision for the narrative.

Aist’s readiness to discount Hugeburc in his analysis of the “religious imagination” presented in the *Vita* of Willibald is in line with the tradition of dismissing women authors’ responsibility for their texts. As in the cases of Hildegard, Hrotsvit, Angela da Foligno, and Margery Kempe, the presence of a male collaborator in the writing process immediately justifies calling the woman’s authority and capability into question.⁵⁸⁹ Whether the woman author employs an amanuensis or incorporates an account from a male interviewee, her responsibility

⁵⁸⁸ Rodney Aist, “Images of Jerusalem: The Religious Imagination of Willibald of Eichstätt,” in *Anglo-Saxon England and the Continent*, eds. Joanna Story and Hans Sauer, 179-198, (Tempe: ACMRS, 2011), “The respective contributions of Willibald and Hugeburc are self-evident owing to the divergent styles of their Latin. Whereas the recorded dictations of Willibald are simple and straightforward, Hugeburc’s Latin is in the flamboyant style of Aldhelm of Malmesbury, which is characterized by a creative vocabulary and lengthy sentences full of alliteration. Notwithstanding Hugeburc’s essential role in the composition, the text encapsulates the authentic voice of Willibald from the perspective of an elderly bishop looking back upon his adventures as a young man.”

⁵⁸⁹ See for example, Catherine M. Mooney, “The Authorial Role of Brother A. in the Composition of Angela of Foligno’s Revelations,” in *Creative Women in Medieval and Early Modern Italy: A Religious and Artistic Renaissance*, eds. E. Ann Matter and John Coakley (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), 49; Lynn Staley Johnson, “The Trope of the Scribe and the Question of Literary Authority in the Works of Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe,” *Speculum* 66 (1991), 820-838; Nicholas Watson, “The Making of The Book of Margery Kempe,” in *Voices in Dialogue: Reading Women in the Middle Ages*, eds. Linda Olson and Kathryn Kerby-Fulton (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 396–98; Sebastian Sobiecki, “The writyng of this tretys’: Margery Kempe’s Son and the Authorship of Her Book” *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 37 (2015), 257-283; Barbara Newman, “Sibyl of the Rhine,” in *Voice of the Living Light* (Berkeley, Univ. California Press, 1998), 1-29; Larissa Bonfante, trans., *The Plays of Hrotswitha of Gandersheim* (New York UP, 1986), x.

for any literary or intellectual achievement must be doubted. On the other hand, any flaws and weaknesses in the language or content are likely to be attributed to her.⁵⁹⁰

Aiming to carve out a unique place for Huneburg's writing within male-centered histories of literacy and authorship, feminist scholars too have interpreted Huneburg's self-presentation as a transparent, if courageous, confession of a humble female writer addressing an authoritative male audience.⁵⁹¹ Diane Watt articulates the position of sympathetic critics who aim to recuperate Huneburg's status as an author in spite of the femaleness which (they believe) marks and undermines her authority in the eyes of her early medieval audience.

Huneburg is undoubtedly concerned that, as a text composed by a woman writer, her *Life* will not be judged to be authoritative. She is defensive about being seen as a teacher, and attempts to defuse potential criticism by alluding to her "weakness" and by emphasizing that she has relied on clerical testimony, and makes it absolutely clear that she draws on Willibald's own first person account.⁵⁹²

Watt reads Huneburg's protestation of "womanly frail foolishness" as a sign of Huneburg's anxiety about being taken seriously as a hagiographer. This reading goes back as far as Lina Eckenstein's *Woman Under Monasticism* (1896). Eckenstein writes that "experiences of an unpleasant nature led her [Huneburg] to expect that her writings would not pass without

⁵⁹⁰ On the reception of these women authors, see Beach, "Listening for the Voices," 195-196; In the editor's introduction, Linda Olsen, *Voices in Dialogue*, 5, draws attention to the unevenness of scholars' interrogation of literacy and authorship of women and men: "Men, too, generally had slaves and professionals execute the physical acts of literacy—the reading and writing of texts. So even the literacy and authorship of someone like Augustine himself could be re-evaluated...What if, for instance, we imagine him enjoying the benefits of an extremely accomplished *notarius* over a long period of time? We might easily attribute stylistic devices, rhetorical flourishes, even larger matters of structure and content to the one who physically wrote as readily as to the one who dictated—indeed, all too many of us would do it far more readily were it a woman's dictation we were discussing and a male scribe's record of that speech."

⁵⁹¹ Watt, *Women, Writing, and Religion*, 96; Lisa M. Weston, "Saintly Lives: Friendship, Kinship, Gender and Sexuality," in *The Cambridge History of Early Medieval English Literature*, ed. Clare Lees (Cambridge UP, 2013), 385, takes a different approach, arguing that it is Huneburg's identity as a kinswoman, rather than as a woman per se, that matters in Huneburg's self-presentation; nevertheless, Weston's focus remains on the significance of Huneburg's own gendered positionality rather than on the gender of the addressed audience.

⁵⁹² Watt, *Women, Writing, and Religion*, 94.

criticism.”⁵⁹³ What sort of experiences does Eckenstein infer from Hugeburc’s rhetoric? Neither the *Vitae* nor any other extant sources narrate Hugeburc’s own experiences beyond the process of composing the *Vitae*; Eckenstein’s comment makes one wonder whether Eckenstein’s own “experiences of an unpleasant nature” as a woman scholar in the nineteenth century lie behind her interpretation of Hugeburc’s preface.

Like Eckenstein and Watt, Peter Dronke interprets Hugeburc’s humility rhetoric as a sign of her self-consciousness and insecurity as a woman author:

Was Hugeburc saying absolutely ‘straight’ that men are superior by virtue of their sex, and that God has given a sign of this by allowing only men the dignity of priesthood? Or was the elaborate deprecation of herself and her sex a subtle means of self-assertion?... The to and fro in Hugeburc’s Prologue suggests both her determination to write and her playing - half fearful, half defiant - upon what the male world will think of a woman trying her hand at things that are normally done by men.⁵⁹⁴

As Dronke’s comment shows, the characterization of Hugeburc as “half fearful, half defiant” depends upon seeing literary authority as normatively male. But why should Hugeburc have considered authorship, hagiographical authorship specifically, to be a male pursuit? Even Hugeburc’s portrayal of an all-male audience should draw us up short. In the context of syneisactic monasticism in Wessex (Hugeburc’s country of origin) and in the English mission region in Francia which included Heidenheim, literary education and exchange were often mixed-gender experiences. In fact, the best attested monastic schools for both schoolboys and schoolgirls in Francia throughout the eighth century were located inside women’s monasteries.⁵⁹⁵ In these schools, students learned the rules of Latin literary analysis and composition from

⁵⁹³ Eckenstein, *Woman Under Monasticism*, 136-137.

⁵⁹⁴ Dronke, *Women Writers*, 34-35.

⁵⁹⁵ Lifshitz, *Religious Women*, 20-28.

women teachers, whose immanent authority in the classroom would have outweighed or at least tempered the distant maleness of Vergil, Donatus, and Aldhelm.⁵⁹⁶

Men and women students also studied together under male teachers like Boniface and Willibald. At the abbey of Nursling in Wessex, only 28 miles from Leoba's Wimbourne, Boniface gave lectures (likely on grammar) which were attended by men and women monastics from nearby monasteries.⁵⁹⁷ Writing to Boniface c.716-18, the woman Egburg humbly calls herself "the lowliest of your male students and female students."⁵⁹⁸ Mixed gender education characterized English monasticism from the earliest period: Bede reports that Aiden taught Hild alongside other women and men ("religiosi quique uiri ac feminae"),⁵⁹⁹ and women reportedly "hastened to Canterbury, roused by Archbishop Theodore's teaching."⁶⁰⁰ Hugeburc herself identifies Willibald as her teacher within a mixed-gender educational community, writing, "What shall I say now about Willibald, my teacher and the student of you all?"⁶⁰¹

Reading Hugeburc's preface in the context of local mixed-gender monastic culture and literary networks highlights the oddity of Hugeburc representing her audience as all-male. In a mixed-gender monastery under the rule of an abbess, a hagiographical text celebrating the monastery's founding abbot and his bishop brother is unlikely to have had exclusively male readership. The *Vitae* would have been of interest to the entire community, including men and women, and likely including other former students of Willibald. At the very least, Abbess

⁵⁹⁶ Copeland, *Criticism and Dissent*, 9, writes that grammatical doctrine was "embodied in the living presence and authority of teachers."

⁵⁹⁷ Willibald of Eichstätt, *Vita sancti Bonifatii*, MGH SS 2, 331-353.

⁵⁹⁸ "Egburg ultima discipulorum seu discipularum tuarum" (Tangl 13), MGH Epp. sel. 1, 716-18.

⁵⁹⁹ Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, IV.23, III.5.

⁶⁰⁰ "Multi quoque non solum uiri, sed etiam feminae de his ab eo inextinguibili feruore accensi sitim hanc ad sedendam ardentem cum desiderio frequentari huius nostri nimirum saeculi singularis scientiae hominem festinabant," *Poenitentiale Theodori*, praef., cited in Schneider, "Anglo-Saxon Women in the Religious Life," 144-145.

⁶⁰¹ Hugeburc, *Vitae willibaldi et wynnebaldi*, 106, "Quid dicam nunc de Willibaldo, meo magistro et vestro alumno?"

Walburg would have been interested to read the *Vitae* celebrating her two brothers, to which she had contributed time, information, and the resources for Hugeburc's writing process.

The emphasis on mixed-gender spiritual friendship and family kinship linking the men and women across the English mission region in Francia (and with their family members still in England) has been widely recognized.⁶⁰² Hugeburc herself emphasizes her kinship ties with Walburg, Willibald, and Wynnebald. The collected correspondence of Boniface and Lull similarly attests to ongoing mixed-gender literary relationships between men and women religious in Francia through the eighth century. Hugeburc's all-male audience then cannot be a transparent reflection of her expected readership. Rather, the exclusive maleness draws critical attention to the growing emphasis on ecclesiastical gender segregation. As noted, the second council of Nicaea forbade the new foundation of double monasteries no more than a few years before Hugeburc's writing. Although the council did not require the closure of existing double monasteries, the pronouncement would have been keenly felt in those mixed communities which were also undergoing increasing oversight and financial pressure.⁶⁰³ In addressing the preface to an imaginary all-male audience then, Hugeburc highlights her discomfort, not with her own femaleness, but with the binary gender division characterizing the Carolingian reform effort.⁶⁰⁴

Boniface's letter to the English Church (Tangl 46) written c.738 offers an interesting comparandum for Hugeburc's address to the purportedly all-male audience fifty years later. In his letter, Boniface addresses himself to all the men and women officeholders in the Church:

⁶⁰² Weston, "Conceiving the Word(s)," 158n34, summarizes scholarship on mixed-gender friendships in the English mission.

⁶⁰³ Nelson, "Alcuin's Letters," 357-359, shows that capitularies from Charlemagne's reign treated both abbots and abbesses as "institutional elite" with responsibilities to the king, including military service and financial accounting.

⁶⁰⁴ Pauline Head, "Who is the Nun from Heidenheim? A Study of Hugeburc's Vita Willibaldi," *Medium Ævum* 71.1 (2002), 29-46, calls Hugeburc's time a period of transition.

To all his reverend fellow bishops, to all those clothed with the grace of priesthood, deacons, canons, clerks, abbots, and abbesses set over the true flock of Christ, monks living in humble submission to God, virgins consecrated by vows to God, and all consecrated handmaids of Christ—and, in general, to all God-fearing catholics of the stock and race of the Angles, Boniface...sends greetings of humble communion and unfeigned love in Christ.⁶⁰⁵

The structure and lexis of Boniface's address is echoed in Hugeburc's address:

To all the venerable and, I should rather say, most dear ones in Christ endowed with the honor of the priestly garb and nature, priests, deacons, no less abbots and all office holders generally whom our holy bishop, with solicitous care and noble duty, has appointed throughout his diocese to be priests, deacons, monks and novices, to all these who live under religious observance.⁶⁰⁶

Like Boniface, Hugeburc names individual offices, including priest, deacon, abbot, and monk, and closes with a general address to all named. But unlike Boniface, Hugeburc leaves out the women's offices. Boniface includes abbesses along with abbots, consecrated female virgins and handmaids of Christ along with monks. Hugeburc's omission of women ecclesiastics is all the more startling because she is writing under the rule of an abbess in a double monastery. As one of the two principal informants for Hugeburc's twin *Vitae* and the abbess ruling the monastic community founded by Wynnebald, it is likely that Walburg would have been intended as one of the first and most important audience members for the *Vitae*.

⁶⁰⁵ Trans., Emerton, *The Letters of Saint Boniface*, 74; "Universis reverentissimis coepiscopis, venerabilibus presbiteratus candidatis gratia, diaconibus, canonicis, clericis, vero gregi Christi prelati abbatibus seu abbatissis, humillimis et pro Deo subditis monachis, consecratis et Deo devotis virginibus et cunctis consecratis ancillis Christi, immo generaliter omnibus catholicis deum timentibus, de stirpe et prosapia anglorum procreatis, eiusdem generis vernaculus, universalis ecclesiae legatus germanicus et servus sedis apostolice Bonifacius, qui et Wingrethus, sine praerogativa meritorum nominatus archiepiscopus, humillimae communionis et sincerissimae in Christo caritatis salutem" (Tangl 46, MGH Epp. sel. 1, 74-75).

⁶⁰⁶ "Venerandis immoque in Christo carissimis omnibus sacerdotalis infule honore ditatis presbiteris preclareque indolis diaconibus et nihilominus abba sive omnibus popularie condicionis proceribus, quos pastoralis cure privilegio pius procerum pontifex, alios agio ordine presbiteros, alios sobriae pudicite eliganter diaconos, alios cenobiali militie monachos, alios sub discipulare habitu sollertis litterarum studiis inherendo, docendo, ad meliora recti regiminis principatu erudiendo provexit" (MGH SS 15, 1, 86).

Hugeburc's artificial division of literary roles by binary gender relegates maleness to the passive, listening side of literary exchange, and positions femaleness on the active, teaching side. The collection of terms Hugeburc uses to describe her writing process animates the role of author and ensures that Hugeburc's protestations of insignificance would have been understood as purely rhetorical by her contemporary audience. Hugeburc describes her writing process with the terms: *decerpere* (to pluck, select), *excerpere* (to pick out), *conpagare* (to assemble), *edissere* (to unfold, explain), *ordinare* (to arrange), *scribere* (to write, compose), *glomerare* (to gather up, collect), *ordiri* (to begin to speak), *decernere* (to determine), *texere* (to weave). Pauline Head reads this lively collection of terms as part of Hugeburc's claim to authorial responsibility for her text. Accordingly, she attributes full authorship to Hugeburc, in contrast to the approach by scholars such as Gottschaller and Aist. Head argues that it is not possible to "separate definitively their [Hugeburc's and Willibald's] two voices and distinguish their ideas," since Hugeburc claims to have selected, organized, and "woven" the narrative she received from Willibald's dictation.⁶⁰⁷ Head attributes the style, structure, and meaning of the entire text to Hugeburc.

Hugeburc's lip service to the ideology of male gender superiority through the artificially gender-divided preface has a biting quality. Her exaggerated deference to the virtue and authority of her male addressees can be read as pointed criticism of a gender hierarchy which denies the spiritual and intellectual equality of all persons dedicated to Christian living. The incongruity between the honors and virtues heaped upon her male addressees on the one hand and their relegation to the silent audience on the other warns against the disintegration of monastic intellectual exchange and male ecclesiastical learning in light of movements toward gender segregation in monastic life. Similarly, the incongruity between Hugeburc's gendered rhetoric of

⁶⁰⁷ Head, "Who is the nun," 38.

self-denigration and her forceful representation of her compositional process through the collection of terms noted by Head suggests an almost satirical critique of reformers' insistence on female gender inferiority as a grounds for monastic women's subordination in the Church.

By the Christian logic of humility, the abasement of women based on gender could not rightfully justify the spiritual superiority of the male group imposing hierarchy. Christian writers had long associated personal humility with spiritual advancement. Boniface's enigma describing humility illustrates the paradox: "Ima solo quantum, tantum fio proxima caelo. Terras indutus me Christus sanguine salvat; Ardua caelorum conscendet culmina nullus, Si me forte caret" (I am both lowest on earth and closest to the heaven. Clothed in me, Christ saves the world with his blood; no one may ascend the difficult heights of heaven if they happen to lack me).⁶⁰⁸

Hugeburc's term *disputare* (to dispute, argue; debate) suggests that her writing is making a case for something, that she is stepping into a debate: "De primordiale vitae eius venerandi viri Willibaldi prochemio disputare decreveram" (I decided to *make a case* regarding the first beginning of the venerable man Willibald's life).⁶⁰⁹ The choice of *disputare* here could be explained by alliteration with *decernere*, but the second instance of *disputare*, in the opening chapter of the *Vita* of Wynnebald, owes nothing to alliteration: "non audaciter proprium confidens virium, quod de istis tanti viri virtutum sublimitatibus disputare aliquid inciperem" (not brashly trusting my own strength, I began to *make a case* regarding something concerning those heights of virtues of so great a man).⁶¹⁰ On one level, the argument that Hugeburc makes, like every hagiographer, is an argument for her subjects' sanctity. But on a second level, Hugeburc is taking aim at the new culture of hierarchical gender segregation in monasticism.

⁶⁰⁸ Boniface, *Aenigmata siue De uirtutibus et uitiiis*, ed. F. Glorie, 279-343, CCSL 133 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1968), aenigma 9:7.

⁶⁰⁹ MGH SS 15, 1, 86.

⁶¹⁰ MGH SS 15, 1, 106.

Making Leoba Female in the Ninth Century

In contrast to Hugeburc's writing, Rudolf of Fulda's *Life of St. Leoba* celebrates the gendered segregation of monastic women.⁶¹¹ Written to coincide with the second translation of Leoba's remains c.822-38 to a location outside of the all-male monastery of Fulda, the *Life of St. Leoba* reveals the enormous change in the importance of binary gender to monastic identity that had occurred in the century between Leoba's lifetime and Rudolf's writing. Stephanie Hollis describes how the successive removal of Leoba's remains from proximity to Boniface's remains (culminating in Leoba's translation out of the monastic premises) parallels the gradual constriction of women's movement and exclusion from ecclesiastical power.⁶¹² This exclusion coincided with the redefinition of monastic women as female-gendered and subordinate.

In the *Life*, Rudolf emphasizes gender segregation by presenting Leoba and her communities in Wessex and Francia as inescapably female. Although Leoba's own extant writing demonstrates the importance of her mixed-gender network (both within and beyond the monastery),⁶¹³ the literary frame of reference in Rudolf's *Life* is exclusively female. He

⁶¹¹ Yorke "Rudolf of Fulda's *Vita S. Leobae*, 199-216; Blanton and Scheck, "Leoba and the Iconography of Learning," 3-26; Rudolf of Fulda, *Vitae Leobae*, ed. Oswald Holder-Egger, MGH SS 15,1, 122-131 (Hannover, 1887); trans. by Talbot, in *Soldiers of Christ*, 255-278.

⁶¹² Hollis, *Women and the Church*, 28, details the distancing of Leoba's remains from Boniface's: upon Leoba's death, Abbot Sturm of Fulda had Leoba buried nearby to Boniface, but not in the same grave (although Boniface had requested to share a grave with Leoba), at the altar consecrated by Boniface close to Boniface's grave; under Eigil, the next abbot, Leoba's remains were moved further from Boniface's, into the "least hallowed end of the church"; under Eigil's successor Hraban Maur, Leoba's remains were removed from Fulda's precincts entirely and placed in a reliquary in the crypt of a church built by Hraban Maur, "signal[ing] the imminent fulfilment of Hrabanus's intention to decree monastic segregation absolute."

⁶¹³ Leoba's only extant writing, a letter to Boniface written c.732 while she was still a resident at the double monastery of Wimbourne uses a textile metaphor to depict the closely interwoven social network between herself and Boniface, a network which included Leoba's mother and father (friends and relatives of Boniface) and her poetry teacher Eadburg (another of Boniface's correspondents); she presents herself as deeply embedded within a matrix of mixed-gender monastic and familial relationships.

constructs Leoba's sanctity as a virtuous femaleness in opposition to sinful femaleness; maleness is barely admitted into Rudolf's narrative at all. He leaves no room for representing the mixed-gender relationships which shaped Leoba's experience and which had supported the shared, nonbinary culture of chastity. Rudolf depicts Wimbourne as two separate monasteries—one for men, one for women—separated by high walls. He infuses the narrative with female-body symbolism and elides nearly all male personages from Leoba's history.⁶¹⁴

Rudolf's careful selection and arrangement of narrative material relating to Leoba is evident from the balanced structure of the *Life*, which is organized around four of Leoba's miracles in thematically contrasting pairs. In the preface, Rudolf notes that his material is largely taken from the notes of a priest Mago, who recorded the personal memories of four women who had lived under Leoba's rule.⁶¹⁵ Diane Watt argues that either Mago or Rudolf were likely also to have had access to literary accounts of Leoba's life and miracles written by women in her monastery. Whether oral or written, the material available to Rudolf certainly contains first hand experiences of Leoba, either reported directly or passed down in the monastic community's memorial tradition. Small details betray the closeness of personal experience, such as the report that Leoba's small cup was called "dilectae parvus" (the Beloved's little one) by the sisters, because Leoba always carried the cup with her.⁶¹⁶ This and other instances of an etymological pun on Leoba's name (deriving from the Old English word "leof" meaning "beloved") also seem to capture personal memories and an Old English oral tradition surrounding the saint.

⁶¹⁴ Boniface is the only male person named in the four miracle stories in the *Life*; toward the end of the *Life*, Rudolf notes that the Carolingian rulers and bishops welcome Leoba's counsel at court, but that Leoba shunned court life.

⁶¹⁵ Rudolf calls the four women, named Agatha, Tecla, Nana, and Eoleoba, Leoba's "students": "quattuor discipularum eius" (MGH SS 15, 1, 122).

⁶¹⁶ MGH, SS 15,1, 126.

Rudolf's primary aim in the *Life* is not to represent Leoba as she was remembered by her contemporaries but, in Hollis's words, to "[refashion] her life in order that it may serve as an exemplar for monastic women in an age of segregated enclosure."⁶¹⁷ Scholars have noted Rudolf's efforts to portray the communities at Wimbourne under Abbess Tetta and Tauberbischofsheim under Leoba in line with his own contemporary culture of monastic gender segregation and the rule of female claustration. Hollis points to Rudolf's "polemical dedication to [ninth-century] monastic segregation and orthodox claustration" in his depiction of the eighth-century double monastery at Wimbourne.⁶¹⁸

Because the case for monastic gender segregation and strict female claustration was made through ritual purity laws, maintaining female subordination relied on controlling female chastity on the one hand, and separating women from the symbolic power of the priestly offices on the other hand. Rudolf takes up the project of regulating the symbolic boundaries around femaleness through his literary construction of sanctity as virtuous femaleness in the *Life of St. Leoba*. Three of the four miracles in Rudolf's *Life* recount the danger of contamination and unstable boundaries, representing the ideological danger (in Rudolf's reformist view) of unconstrained female authority. As I show, Rudolf strives to contain Leoba's spiritual authority within a strictly controlled symbolic and narrative structure.⁶¹⁹

⁶¹⁷ Hollis, *Women and the Church*, 273.

⁶¹⁸ Hollis, *Women and the Church*, 272, "In light of the overall didactic intent of Rudolph's work, his account of Wimbourne can be regarded as certain evidence only of the movement towards strict enclosure of religious, particularly female religious, at the time he was writing."

⁶¹⁹ Despite Rudolf's efforts, the force of Leoba's memory seems to have continued to exert influence into the twentieth century, in the editorial rearrangement of the Bonifatian correspondence: while 19 of the 25 letters including female correspondences were moved to later positions in the collection by the editor than they held in the ninth-century manuscripts, Leoba's letter is actually moved to an earlier position in the collection.

In the following close reading of the *Life*, I build on Hollis's understanding of Rudolf's primary commitment to the reform ideology of monastic gender segregation, rather than to historical accuracy in his portrayal of Leoba's social world. More than simply reflecting contemporary gender segregation back onto Leoba's mixed-gender world, I contend that Rudolf crafts Leoba's story in such a way as to write female gender back into the social and spiritual identity of early eighth-century women's monasticism. This allows Rudolf to invent historical precedent for the (recently re-gendered) "female" monastic womanhood of the ninth century.

Rudolf opens the account of Leoba's life with a portrait of Wimbourne Abbey under Tetta's rule. He describes two miracles effected by Tetta—one in which the vandalized grave of a hated teacher is restored by communal (all-female) prayer, and one in which the keys to the church are recovered after they had been stolen by the devil disguised as a fox. Rudolf claims that he begins with the episodes at Wimbourne in order to deepen the portrayal of Leoba's sanctity, by rooting it in the sanctity of her former abbess.⁶²⁰ In fact, the opening stories serve to root Leoba's sanctity in a background of femaleness. Although Wimbourne was a double monastery from the time of its establishment, Rudolf does not depict a single "male" character in the narrative, apart from the fox. The abbess, the hated teacher, the angry (and later repentant) students, and all other community members mentioned in the Wimbourne miracle stories are women.

⁶²⁰ "Sed priusquam ad narranda vitae morumque eius insignia veniam, non absurdam videtur, si de magistra illius et spiritali matre, quae eam in Christo genuerat et caelestis vitae studiis inbuerat, ex multis referam pauca quae didici; quatinus lector, agnitis tantae feminae virtutibus, eo facilius discipulae gestis fidem accomodet, quo eam a tam nobili magisterio disciplinae spiritalis primordia sumpsisse cognoverit" (MGH SS 15, 1, 122), "But before I begin the narration of her remarkable life and virtues, it may not be out of place if I mention a few of the many things that I have heard about her spiritual mistress and mother...the reader who is made aware of the qualities of this great woman may give credence to the achievement of the disciple more easily the more clearly he sees that she learned the elements of the spiritual life from so noble a mistress," trans., Talbot, 206-207.

Following the opening Wimbourne episodes, Rudolf organizes Leoba's story proper around four of Leoba's miracles. The four miracles are arranged into two contrasting thematic pairs (fire/water, and movement outward/movement inward) creating a cruciform structure for the narrative. The cruciform structure is echoed visually in the first and longest miracle story, when Leoba leads the women of her community in a procession around the church with their arms held out, like walking crosses.⁶²¹ Rudolf also uses female reproductive symbolism in the first and fourth miracles, circumscribing the narrative construction of Leoba's sanctity within a symbolic frame of embodied femaleness. The first miracle revolves around conception and childbirth; the fourth miracle dramatizes menstruation and breastfeeding.

In the first miracle story, Leoba successfully identifies the perpetrator of an infanticide to save the reputation of her community of women. When a laywoman resident of the neighboring town finds the body of an infant drowned in the stream shared between the town and the monastery, she and the townsfolk accuse the women of Leoba's community of breaking their vows of chastity and of committing infanticide. Leoba leads her community in prayer and purification rituals (walking around like crosses), which result in the identification of the guilty woman who is struck suddenly by divine fire and forced to confess.⁶²² The woman in question was *not* a consecrated member of the community but rather a beggar for whom the community provided charity.

⁶²¹ "Quo audito, mater venerabilis de eius puritate iam secure, praecepit omnibus oratorium ingredi, et extensis in crucis modum brachiis stare, quoadusque singulae psalterium totum ex ordine psallendo complerent" (MGH SS 15, 1, 127).

⁶²² "mox miserrima pauperula illa, antiqui hostis et captiva pariter et ministra, demonio repletur, et quasi flammis circumdata, nomen invocat abbatissae, crimen quod commiserat confitetur" (MGH SS 15, 1, 127).

Rudolf orients the entire miracle around femaleness. There are no men in this story, despite the fact of an illicit conception, and the language and symbolism emphasize the female body. Leoba's piety and irreproachable conduct are constructed in opposition to two models of inappropriate female comportment: on the one hand, the laywoman who finds the dead infant and slanders the women of Leoba's community; on the other hand, the beggar who attempted to hide her sexual misconduct through infanticide. Throughout the story, the laywoman gives voice to Rudolf's anxieties over gender deviance. She accuses Leoba's community of behaving "as mothers and priests," by fornicating and then "baptizing" (that is, drowning) the illegitimate infant:

"O quam casta congregatio, quam gloriosa conversatio virginum, quae sub velo positae filios pariunt, et matrum pariter ac presbiterorum fungentes officio, eosdem quo genuerint inpsae baptizant!"

"Oh, what a chaste community! How admirable is the life of nuns, who beneath their veils give birth to children and exercise at one and the same time the function of mothers and priests, baptizing those to whom they have given birth."⁶²³

The crime, in the laywoman's words, is in deviating from the gendered expectations of consecrated women, who are prohibited both from fulfilling their female sexual potential as "mothers" and from acting in a male role as "priests." With the accusations of fornicating and "baptizing," Leoba's community members are accused of betraying both chastity and the constraints of binary femaleness. Ordained males reserved the right of baptizing, and as the decrees from the Council of Paris (829) make clear, religious women were prohibited from performing any priestly offices that were prohibited to laymen.⁶²⁴

⁶²³ MGH SS 15, 1, 127.

⁶²⁴ "contra legem divinam canonicamque institutionem feminas sanctis altaribus se ultra ingerere sacrataque vasa inprudenter contingere et indumenta sacerdotalia praesbyteris administrare et, quod his maius, indecentius ineptiusque est, corpus et sanguinem Domini populis porrigere et alia quaeque, quae ipso dictu turpia sunt, exercere. Miranda sane res est, unde hisdem illicitus in Christiana religione inreperit usus, ut quod viris saecularibus illicitum est, feminae, quarum

Rudolf's baptism metaphor in the laywoman's mouth does not condemn the act of murder but the act of gender transgression. Nor does Rudolf have the laywoman simply accuse the women of Leoba's community of lust and fornication, as these sins would be equally relevant to the temptations of holy men, as for example in the *Life of St Antony*.⁶²⁵ The accusation is pointed specifically at the female reproductive body: the beggar's illicit conception contrasts with the virtuous lifestyle of Leoba's consecrated community members. Rudolf represents the community's virtue as an intact, virginal body. The devil is not able to "pierce" (*frangere* and *violare*) the *integritas* of the community's virtue by incessant temptation. In contrast, Rudolf focuses on the beggar's "swelling womb," locating her sin in the reproductive female body rather than the (not visibly gendered) mind or will: "When, with her uterus swelling up, she was not able to hide the conceived fetus, she covered up the crime of perpetrated sin with pretended sickness."⁶²⁶

Rudolf emphasizes the reproductive female body through symbolic association with the river (water, fluid). Typically, the adult cis-female body (before menopause) carries either menstrual fluid or amniotic fluid, as in the beggar's "swelling womb."⁶²⁷ Immediately before the

sexui nullatenus competit aliquando contra fas sibi licitum facere potuerint" (*Conc. quat.* MGH Conc. 2,2, 639-40).

⁶²⁵ E.g., Athanasius of Alexandria, *The Life of Antony*, 67, "The Devil whispered foul thoughts, but Antony rebuffed them with his prayers; the Devil titillated him, but Antony, as though he were blushing, fortified his body through faith and fasting. But the Devil stood his ground, the wretch, and now dared to take on the form of a woman at night and imitated all of a woman's ways, solely for the purpose of deceiving Antony."

⁶²⁶ "Sed cum conatus suos orationibus atque ieiuniis caste viventium frangi conspiceret, ad alia se callidus insidiator argumenta convertit, ut saltem vel bonam earum famama vitiando corrumperet, qui integritatem perversa suggerendo violare non poterat...Cumque intumescente utero conceptum foetum celare non posset, crimen admissi sceleris simulata infirmitate contexti" (MGH SS, 15, 1, 127).

⁶²⁷ Rudolf's construction of femaleness does not address transfemininity; the governing misogyny of reform gender segregation was predicated upon a limited, binary scheme, despite a rich history of trans and genderqueer Christian identities, including within hagiographical traditions; on medieval trans and genderqueer identities see Spencer-Hall and Gutt, eds., *Trans and*

first miracle episode, Rudolf describes Leoba washing the hands and feet of visitors to her monastery:

She was extremely hospitable. [The mother] kept open house for all without exception, and even when she was fasting gave banquets and washed the feet of the guests with her own hands, at once the guardian and the minister of the practice instituted by our Lord.⁶²⁸

Calling Leoba a spiritual mother (*mater*), Rudolf feminizes the imitation of Christ through Leoba's ministration of water. In the miracle episode, Leoba's spiritual motherhood contrasts with the beggar woman's carnal motherhood. Water symbolizes female bodily virtue, which (like water) can be polluted. In the metaphor, a virgin body will continue to menstruate unless prevented (polluted) by pregnancy. In this episode, the infant is found dead in the well, making *water* the site of crime and corruption. The crime of female sexual activity pollutes the water of the town stream, when the beggar drowns her infant.⁶²⁹

The water in the stream also acts as a connecting border between monastery and town that must be maintained appropriately. The water's contamination is the ultimate concern for the laywoman, standing in for Rudolf's ultimate concern with regulating monastic women's gender.

For, fellow citizens, you have drawn off this water to make a pool, not merely for the purpose of grinding corn, but unwittingly for a new and unheard of kind of Baptism. Now

Genderqueer Subjects in Medieval Hagiography (Amsterdam UP, 2021) and LaFleur, Raskolnikov, and Kłosowska, eds., *Trans Historical: Gender Plurality Before the Modern* (Cornell UP, 2021).

⁶²⁸ Trans., Talbot, 216; "Hospitalitatem autem peculiari observatione tenuit; omnibus enim sine ulla exceptione personae domum praebuit et convivium ieiuna mater exhibuit, pedes omnibus manibus suis lavit, dominicae institutionis custos et ministra" (MGH SS 15, 1, 127).

⁶²⁹ It is notable that only the young woman, and no male person, is accused of the fornication; apparently, in yielding to the devil's temptation, the young woman manages to become the sole responsible one for conception and she will be the sole sufferer in punishment—through unwanted pregnancy, through the trauma of infanticide, through divine conflagration, and finally through being denied absolution: "But the wretched woman did not deserve to escape scotfree and for the rest of her life she remained in the power of the devil," trans. Talbot, 218.

go and ask those women, whom you compliment by calling them virgins, to remove this corpse from the river and make it fit for us to use again.⁶³⁰

The laywoman demands a physical cleanup, mirroring the spiritual purification of the community through Leoba's rituals and prayers. In the episode, contaminated water symbolizes the contaminated female virginity of Leoba's community. Contamination poses a threat to community order, as the polluted stream endangers both the town and monastery. Rudolf uses the shared borderspace of the stream to represent the too-fragile border around religious femaleness in the eyes of ninth-century male ecclesiastical culture.

As an agent of reform ideology, Rudolf cannot allow Leoba and her community to be remembered as straying from the narrow lifestyle of enclosed, chaste femaleness. If not properly restrained through purity laws and claustration, monastic women might pose a threat to male control over the spiritual and material economies of the Carolingian church. The anxiety about disorder suffusing the first miracle episode hints at the great effort required from Rudolf to sufficiently constrain the memory of Leoba's sanctity to fit the misogynist ideology of cloistered female subordination. Rudolf's *Life* betrays this anxiety about maintaining control over monastic women's authority and influence, especially in light of the deeply rooted traditions of monastic women's political, canonical, and local pastoral involvement in the Frankish and English churches.⁶³¹

It is no coincidence that fire counteracts the pollutive danger of too much water, that is, too much femaleness. After establishing the precarity and corruptibility of femaleness through

⁶³⁰ Trans., Talbot, 217; "Non enim, o cives, molendi tantum usibus hanc stagnastis aquam, sed novo huic et inaudito baptismati nescientes praeparastis. Nunc ergo rogate eas, quas virginum appellatione sublimare soletis, ut tollentes cadaver de flumine nobis aquam reddant usibilem" (MGH SS 15, 1, 127).

⁶³¹ John Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society* (Oxford UP, 2005), 3-5, 155-158; Blair and Sharpe, *Pastoral care before the parish*; Foot, "Anglo-Saxon Minsters: A Review of Terminology," 212-25.

the symbol of the stream, Rudolf must separate the enactment of divine power from the femaleness of water. Leoba's virtue may not be allowed to exceed the limiting bounds of femaleness, so the medium of miraculous power is kept symbolically distant from the medium of reproductive femaleness. Rudolf reinforces the separation between divine power (fire) and femaleness (water) by depicting Leoba weeping at the foot of the cross during the community's final procession around the church in the purification ritual—"the blessed Leoba went straight to the altar and, standing before the cross...stretched out her hands toward heaven, and with tears and groans prayed"—and the entire female community joining her in weeping after the beggar had confessed—"the vast crowd was astounded at the miracle, the nuns began to weep with joy."⁶³² It is Christ, not the limited Leoba, who effects the miracle through fire. The weeping recalls the women weeping as Christ carried his cross (Luke 23:27-8):

And there followed him a great multitude of the people, and of women who bewailed and lamented him. But Jesus turning unto them, said, Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children.⁶³³

The allusion to Luke 23:27-8 reminds the reader that even Leoba's powerful invocation of Christ cannot move her beyond the constraints of female comportment. In his narration of this episode in the *Life*, Rudolf himself accomplishes the near miracle of turning the source material commemorating Leoba's outstanding spiritual authority into a story circumscribing Leoba's power within the confines of subordinate femaleness.

⁶³² "beata virgo Leoba perrexit ad altare, et stans ante crucem...extendit manus in caelum et cum genitu ac lacrimis precabatur...plebs omnis obstupuit miraculo, ancillae Dei flevere prae gaudio" (MGH SS 15, 1, 127).

⁶³³ Trans., A. T. Robertson, *A Harmony of the Gospels* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1950), 227; "Sequebatur autem illum multa turba populi et mulierum quae plangebant et lamentabant eum; conversus autem ad illas Iesus dixit filiae Hierusalem nolite flere super me sed super vos ipsas flete et super filios vestros" (Luke 23:27-8).

The second miracle in the pair reverses the elements of water and fire. In this story, a dangerous fire begins in the town and approaches the monastery. This time, it is fire which threatens the shared border between monastery and town and stands in for the dangers of disordered and unconstrained gender. Rudolf reports that the fire touched every home in the town, whether it was roofed with thatch or grass, and was racing toward the monastery, threatening people as well as animals.⁶³⁴ When the townspeople approach Leoba for help, she organizes them to draw water from the river to put out the fire. Leoba contains the threat of the promiscuous flames by turning to water, the symbol of femaleness in the previous story. Here, Leoba's use of water does not cause Rudolf (or the townspeople) such anxiety, perhaps because Leoba subordinates the female symbol of water to the male power of her mentor, Boniface, when she sprinkles some salt blessed by Boniface into the river to strengthen its quenching force.⁶³⁵

The two final miracles depict Leoba's power interceding first in the external world and then in the internal world. When a raging storm threatens the monastery in the third miracle story, Leoba throws open the doors of the church and calms the storm through prayer.⁶³⁶ In the fourth miracle story, Leoba travels into a domestic space to tend a sick woman from her community who is suffering from a disease of the bowels. After the outward movement of the third miracle, the imagery in this story moves successively inward: into a home, into the bedroom, onto the visibly suffering body, and finally into the internal viscera: "When Leoba came she approached the bed...and ordered the covering to be removed...she blessed milk and poured it drop by drop down the throat of the sick nun. At its touch, her throat and vitals

⁶³⁴ "verum etiam iumentis atque hominibus ipsis interitum minabatur" (MGH SS 15, 1, 127).

⁶³⁵ MGH SS 15, 1, 128.

⁶³⁶ "cappam qua erat induta abiciens, fores aecclesiae confidenter aperuit, atque in limine consistens, signo sanctae crucis edito, furenti tempestati nomen Summae Maiestatis opposuit, extensisque manibus in caelum, terno clamore Christi clementiam invocavit et per intercessionem ac merita sanctae Mariae virginis propitium eum populo suo velociter adesse precabatur" (MGH SS 15, 1, 128).

recovered; she moved her tongue to speak and began to look around.”⁶³⁷ In a spiritual reenactment of breastfeeding, Leoba heals the sick woman by feeding her milk from Leoba’s own spoon. Once again, Leoba’s miracle is to restore boundaries, in this case, unchecked bleeding through breached internal tissue. The sick woman’s hemorrhoids (perhaps standing in for disordered menstruation) are cured by the ministration of milk from Leoba’s spoon. The blood of embodied reproductive femaleness is treated with the milk of spiritual motherhood.

Even in memory, the influence of powerful monastic women like Leoba may have been felt to threaten male ecclesiastical dominance. Characterizing Leoba’s sanctity as an expression of spiritual motherhood, Rudolf’s accomplishment is to write Leoba into a model of chaste femaleness which strips her of authority over men and vilifies real reproductive female force, making her into a symbol of Benedictine patriarchal orthodoxy rather than a symbol of pre-reform, ecclesiastical women’s authority. Like *Mater Ecclesia*, Leoba becomes a conduit for orthodoxy through teaching (*nutrire*, “nurturing” and “educating”) her spiritual children.

It has been remarked by critics that Rudolf downplays Leoba’s actual activities as a teacher and scholar. Hollis reads Rudolf’s silence on Leoba’s teaching activities and any tradition of scholarship carried out by her many students-turned-abbesses as a sign of the “diminished usefulness of learned monastic women in the eyes of the post-missionary church.”⁶³⁸ While Rudolf does describe Leoba as an influential teacher,⁶³⁹ and refers to Abbess Tetta as Leoba’s

⁶³⁷ Trans., Talbot, 220-221; “Quae cume venisset, accedens ad lectum...iussit auferri velamen...et allatum sibi lac benedixit atque in os iacentis guttatim cum cocleare stillavit. Cuius tactu intrinsecus guttur et vitalia ita convaluerunt, ut statim et linguam ad loquendum et oculos ad videndum moveret” (MGH S 15, 1, 128).

⁶³⁸ Hollis, *Women and the Church*, 279.

⁶³⁹ Her students were so well trained that many of them became abbesses: “quae ad exemplum beatae magistrae caelestis disciplinae studiis institutebatur et in tantum doctrina eius proficiebant, ut plures ex illis posmodum magistrae fierent aliarum, ita ut aut nulla aut etiam rara in illis regionibus essent monasteria feminarum, quae non discipularum eius magisteria desiderarent” (MGH SS 15, 1, 126).

magistra and *mater spiritalis*, it is true that Leoba's own scholarship plays no part in the *Life*, beyond attracting Boniface's attention, nor do we see Leoba engaged in extensive formal instruction.⁶⁴⁰ I am not convinced, however, that Rudolf's lack of interest in Leoba's scholarship and teaching reflects any sort of decline in monastic women's scholarship and teaching by the time of Rudolf's writing. More likely, education and intellectual production remained sites of mixed-gender activity, and for that reason could not fit into Rudolf's doggedly binary scheme. The *Life* itself is dedicated to Abbess Hadamout of Gandersheim, which suggests an ongoing tradition of literary interaction between men and women religious in the mid-ninth century.

Women's learning, separate from mixed-gender interaction, does not appear to be problematic for Rudolf, who describes Leoba as "trained from infancy in the rudiments of grammar and the study of the other liberal arts" and reports that she

tried by constant reflection to attain a perfect knowledge of divine things so that through the combination of her reading with her quick intelligence, by natural gifts and hard work, she became extremely learned. She read with attention all the books of the Old and New Testaments and learned by heart all the commandments of God. To these she added by way of completion the writings of the church Fathers, the decrees of the Councils and the whole of ecclesiastical law.⁶⁴¹

Whether this portrait reflects Leoba's early-eighth-century education or Rudolf's idea of a learned woman's education in the ninth century, Rudolf has no problem lauding scholarly accomplishment in his "blueprint" for the new female monastic woman.

From Hugeburc's construction of an all-male audience during the early part of the Carolingian reform to Rudolf's construction of a female-gendered past for monastic women half

⁶⁴⁰ Boniface is drawn to Leoba not only on account of their *affinitas* (kinship) but also on account of Leoba's *sanctitas vitae* and *doctrina sapientiae*; Leoba is described as being assiduous in correcting her students' pronunciation when they read aloud from scripture, even when Leoba seemed to be sleeping (MGH SS 15, 1, 126).

⁶⁴¹ "ab ipsis infantiae rudimentis grammatica et reliquis liberalium litterarum studiis esset instituta, tanta meditationis instantia spiritalis scientiae perfectionem conabatur assquei, ut consentiente cum ingenio lectione, duplicato naturae et industriae bono eruditissima redderetur..." (MGH SS 15, 1, 126).

a century later, we see the gradual consolidation of monastic identity around hierarchical binary gender. Whereas Leoba could identify with the shared culture of chastity in the early-eighth century—occupying the “metagender” in McDaniel’s term—by the time Rudolf re-writes Leoba’s life in the ninth century, monastic women have been re-defined as exclusively female-gendered, and as always separate from and subordinate to men.

What does not change, however, is women’s access to learning and intellectual culture, even as reformers separated monastic women from sites of administrative and symbolic power. Hugeburc’s and Rudolf’s literary treatments of monastic gender bear out the continued emphasis on women’s involvement in literacy. This emphasis is witnessed by ninth-century reform legislation requiring psalmody and reading in women’s communities.⁶⁴² The persistence of women’s learnedness through the consolidation of monastic “female” womanhood suggests that literacy, learning, and intellectual achievement *per se* were not considered as sites of public or spiritual authority to be protected from women’s involvement. Education was not associated with male gender or male power. Leoba’s, Hugeburc’s, and Rudolf’s writing shows us that early medieval women were not outsiders in contemporary literary culture; they wielded the practical literary authority of authors, contributors, and teachers across the eighth and ninth centuries. Such a conclusion brings into question the widely accepted marginalization of early medieval women in literary history. It also invites further investigation of the political motivations behind differential archival preservation, the historical development of gender exclusion in education

⁶⁴² In 847, the Council of Mainz required universal monastic women’s literacy education and underlined the importance of psalms in the women’s communities: “Sanctimoniales vero in monasterio constitutae habeant studium in legendo et in cantando, in psallimorum celebratione sive oratione. Et horas canonicas...pariter celebrent” (MGH Capit. 2, 180), “Religious women living in a monastery must study reading and singing, the celebration of the psalms and prayer. And equally they must celebrate the canonical hours”; this legislation continued the tradition of monastic girls’ and women’s universal or widespread literacy as required in fifth- and seventh-century monastic Rules, see Introduction.

after the early middle ages, and the ways in which early medieval women forged their intellectual and spiritual lives within and beyond the shifting constraints of available gender identities.

Conclusion

“Schoolgirl Grammar: Gender and Literacy in the Early Middle Ages” offers a new examination of the role of gender in early medieval literacy. Challenging long-held assumptions that men had greater access to literacy training and literate culture than did women, I demonstrate that girls and women were understood to be ordinary and equal participants in literate culture. The default literate Christian subject was not gendered male, as has recently been assumed, but was constructed as a gender-inclusive subject in Latin and Old English. Gender-inclusive lexical and grammatical usages were based on Christian literacy pedagogies, which taught students to recognize dynamic relationships of accord between grammatical gender, the social gender of textual subjects, and students’ own social genders in the psalms. Christian literacy training valorized the inclusion of girls and women in the spiritual—and thereby literate—community. Language which has previously been interpreted as masculinizing and exclusive of women subjects was actually unmarked in relation to social gender and inclusive of women subjects. At the same time, real women were seen as viable educational authorities in monastic schools and courts.

This dissertation begins, rather than ends, with the argument for women’s equal access to schooling. Scholars accept that women’s and men’s education was equal in terms of quality. In

terms of the number of literate men and women in the early middle ages, the best available evidence tells us that it is possible that as many or more women than men were literate, thanks to the emphasis on literacy in monastic culture. It is also likely that, within monastic culture, a higher percentage of women than men were literate. The evidence for secular aristocratic and royal literacy suggests no distinction between men and women.

In addition to this institutional level of participation, I argue that symbolically, ideas about educational and intellectual authority were closely associated with femaleness. While the anonymous Christian literate subject was understood by early medieval readers and writers to be equally inclusive of girls and women as of boys and men, literary representations of educational authority symbolically privileged femaleness over maleness in relation to the transmission of knowledge. Long-standing traditions of representing the Church as the mother of the Christian community and personifications of wisdom as a breastfeeding woman were echoed in the metaphorical terms which became standard for schooling and educational relationships, such as *nutrio* (to nurture; teach), *nutritor/nutrix* and *fosterfæder/fostormodor* (surrogate parent; teacher), and *alumnus/a* (suckling infant; student).

My examination of gender at the institutional, symbolic, and personal levels of literary culture aims to shift the perspective away from twenty-first century assumptions that correlate binary gender, literacy, and social power. Such assumptions have previously led scholars to underinterpret women's importance and prevalence in literary culture and intellectual exchange by treating women's literacy as unusual, or by justifying it as male identity performance. Disentangling intellectual authority and social power in the early middle ages permits historians to reinvest early women writers with their considerable importance in shaping educational and

literary culture, while remaining clear-eyed about the reality of women's social subordination in the patriarchal societies of early medieval England and Francia.

I argue that the Carolingian reforms constricted the potential gender identities as well as the material lives of women in monastic culture. In certain spheres of Christian life before the Carolingian reforms, monastic women in England and Francia could identify with the nonbinary and egalitarian gender identity "chaste," instead of the binary identity "female," which enforced women's subordinate position in secular culture. I describe how chastity as a third gender developed out of early Christian ascetic renunciation of secular social practices including marriage. Through the refusal of marriage, chastity represented the refusal of secular, binary gender, which for women (but not men) was a subordinating condition. I show that in the seventh century, Aldhelm articulated another phase of the development of spiritually egalitarian Christian identity, wherein the grounds of identification had shifted from physical chastity to the intellectual formation characteristic of monastic culture. For Aldhelm's monastic contemporaries, textual and educational culture afforded a space undivided by binary gender.

I argue that the Carolingian reforms curtailed monastic women's ability to identify with the egalitarian status afforded by intellectual and spiritual pursuit. Reformers enforced monastic women's gender identity as "female" (and therefore as subordinate) as a mechanism of control. The foreclosing of monastic women's gendered possibilities beginning in the late-eighth century did not accompany a foreclosing of access to literate culture, however. The newly "female" monastic women of the Carolingian era continued to be expected to learn and use literacy; the consolidation of ecclesiastical power in an all-male hierarchy did not entail a new association between literacy and symbolic or material power, which would have forged an association

between literacy and maleness. Such an association cannot be found in the evidence from the seventh to eleventh centuries in England and Francia.

In short, girls and women lost access to the egalitarian gender-identity which they could experience within pre-reform monastic literate culture, but they did not simultaneously lose access to that literate culture. It is important to note, however, that the Carolingian reforms do not represent the closing of a “golden age” for monastic women. In fact, the material circumstances of women’s social position may have improved over the course of the pre-Conquest period in England.⁶⁴³ As I explain, the “chaste” gender identity available to monastic women (and men) before the Carolingian reforms was limited in its applicability to intellectual and spiritual life. It did not erase the women’s concurrent subordinate position as “female” in many other practical spheres of their lives, nor would it have erased the women’s awareness of the legal and cultural subordination of their bodies.

The uncoupling of gender and literacy in my analysis of early medieval literary and educational culture is part of the project of understanding the political uses and implications of literacy as historically specific. In the early middle ages, literacy offered one tool for political expression without conferring social power. The distinction between political expression and power is dramatized in the eleventh-century text the *Old English Apollonius*. In the story, literacy training enables princess Arcestrate to contribute by written letter to the selection of her future husband in a conversation among men that occurs in public, where she would not otherwise be able to participate. Literacy does not change her place in the gendered, hierarchical power structure; though she can extend her voice by writing, her physical person remains cloistered in the private space of her residence, and her views on marriage remain subject to her father’s consent. Her father, the king and the ultimate authority in the story, is *not* literate. He transacts

⁶⁴³ See Klinck, “Anglo-Saxon women and the law.”

power orally and in-person. Arcestrate's literacy is not a proxy for her father's male social power, it is only an extension of her still-subject voice.

Interrogating the relationship between education and social power matters in efforts today to use higher education to expand access to social power and justice in the twenty-first century. Recognizing the relationship's constructedness and historicity can help us ask *how* to leverage higher education in the project of social justice. It encourages us to ask: what are the limits? What can education do, and what can't it do? How can we change what we do in order to have a greater impact? We risk perpetuating assumptions that overinterpret the power of education to enact social justice, when we fail to address the structural history of inequity.

My dissertation attends to the complexity of gendered experience over time and the creativity of early medieval writers, as they used language to reflect their lives and ideas, including their negotiations of the social constructions of gender. Recognizing girls' and women's ordinary participation in literate culture allows us to reinterpret grammatical doctrine, to reassess Christian spiritual anthropology, and to recover early medieval school practices. Importantly, it illuminates change over time in women's gender identities, and helps us to better understand the cultural ramifications of the Carolingian reform. The ordinariness of girls' and women's participation in literary culture confronts the narrative of progress over time in women's access to education and intellectual authority.

Disrupting a false narrative of progress is important for a number of reasons. One of which is that, in reimagining the past, we open new possibilities for assessing the present and the future. If the historical narrative is one of "progress" and continual movement toward gender equity, then the gender gap in women's intellectual authority (weighed in academic wages, public gravitas, seats on the Supreme Court and headships in business) will be judged in terms of

improvement over the recent past, rather than in terms of equity. If girls and women today can only compare their opportunities to those of their mothers and grandmothers, then they will be thankful for the improvement, rather than comparing their own opportunities to those of their male peers, and being mad as hell.

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