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# THE "IMAGINATIVE THEOLOGY" OF MARY IN MEDIEVAL FRENCH LITERATURE

## Sermons in Song and Story

*Judith M. Davis, Ph.D.\**

Medieval Marian works of almost every genre—songs, miracle tales, *dits*, narratives and dramas—may be subsumed under Barbara Newman's rubric of "imaginative theology."<sup>1</sup> Newman cites John Scotus Eriugena, describing the theologian's task: "Just as the poetic art presents moral or scientific teaching, using fictional stories and allegorical images to exercise human minds, . . . so the art of theology, like a kind of poetry, uses imaginative fictions to shape holy Scripture for our mind's consideration." Newman believes that

... it seems fair to describe texts as 'theological,' regardless of their form, if they engage deeply and seriously with such issues as the nature and knowledge of God, salvation, sin and grace, creation, incarnation, and so forth. But the hallmark of imaginative theology is that it 'thinks with' images, rather than propositions or scriptural texts or rarefied inner experiences—although none of these need be excluded. The devices of

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<sup>1</sup> *God and the Goddesses: Vision, Poetry and Belief in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 294-300, here 297-98.

literature—metaphor, symbolism, prosopopoeia, allegory, dialogue, and narrative—are its working tools.<sup>2</sup>

David Tracy describes theologians who “understand that good theology must be informed by both a religious and aesthetic sensibility.” These thinkers, Tracy argues, “understand the rich ‘tradition’ of the faith not as *tradita* (a reified, dogmatic, unquestioned, inherited system) but as *traditio* (the living, liberating, imaginative and intellectual retrieval of the faith’s major narratives, rituals and symbols . . .)”<sup>3</sup> for the faithful in the historical context in which they find themselves as times and customs change.

Examples of Marian *tradita* may be found in some thirteenth-century *Mariales* or collections of materials in praise of the Virgin. Works such as the *Mariale, sive CCXXX quaestiones super Evangelium missus est*, attributed to St. Albert the Great; the *De Laudibus Beatae Mariae Virginis* of Richard of St. Laurent; and the *Speculum Beatae Mariae Virginis* of Conrad of Saxony,<sup>4</sup> contain doctrinal statements, Scriptural quotations and explications, and attributions to Mary of all virtue and knowledge. They describe her intellectual gifts, list her privileges and titles, and cite scores of patristic authorities in support of their statements. Dogmatically correct if occasionally hyperbolic,<sup>5</sup> these works can be classified as encyclopedias or *summae* of Marian lore.

Works of *traditio*, on the other hand, are more difficult to classify. The contents of legendaries—collections in this instance

<sup>2</sup> Newman, *God and the Goddesses*, 298.

<sup>3</sup> David Tracy, “Theology and the Symbolic Imagination: A Tribute to Andrew Greeley,” in *The Incarnate Imagination: Essays in Theology, the Arts and Social Sciences in Honor of Andrew Greeley*, ed. Ingrid H. Shafer (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1988), 235-247, here 236-237.

<sup>4</sup> The first two works are contained in Albert the Great, *Opera Omnia*, ed. August and Emil Borgnet, vols. 37 and 36 respectively (Paris: Ludovicus Vivès, 1898). See also Conradus de Saxonia, O.F.M., *Speculum seu salutation Beatae Mariae Virginis ac sermonis Mariani*, ed. Petrus de Alcantara Martinez (Rome: Collegii S. Bonaventurae ad Claras Aquas, 1975).

<sup>5</sup> Richard of St. Laurent’s observations are the subject of a critique by Hilda Graef, *Mary: A History of Doctrine and Devotion* (2 vols.; London: Sheed & Ward, 1990), 1:273ff.

of Mary-stories—cannot be classified as fiction, although individual stories may contain fictive elements. Nor are they history, although they may contain verifiable facts. Tales of Mary's miracles are not folk tales, although some of them may incorporate folk motifs.<sup>6</sup> They differ from *exempla* in their abundance of detail and rhetorical sophistication. Nor are they parables, strictly speaking: parables are fictitious and their significance is usually not stated; in contrast, a clerical author such as Gautier de Coinci adds a *queue* or "tail" to his miracle stories explaining their meaning and significance for his audience. Paul Ricoeur's comment on the "extravagant nature" of parables, however, may be applied to medieval Marian stories in that "these forms of discourse point beyond their immediate significance toward the Wholly Other"<sup>7</sup>

Following the example of St. Gregory of Tours (538/39–593/94) who included several Mary-stories in his *Gloria Martyrum*, as well as others from the seventh through the tenth centuries,<sup>8</sup> clerical writers began early in the twelfth century to assemble collections of Marian miracle tales. In France, Hérیمان, a canon of the cathedral of Laon, compiled a series of miracles associated with her shrine there before 1120.<sup>9</sup> Hugh Farsit made a similar compilation for Soissons about 1143.<sup>10</sup> A larger collection, centered on Rocamadour, appeared about 1172.<sup>11</sup> In the vernacular, two large collections of Old French

<sup>6</sup> See, e.g., Stith Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk Literature*, rev. and enl. ed. (6 vols.; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1955–1958), 5:465–476 and 6:463. Vol. 5 lists 90 legends and miracle stories; Vol. 6 contains an additional 19.

<sup>7</sup> Cited in Dan R. Stiver, *Theology after Ricoeur* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 119.

<sup>8</sup> Sister Mary Alice Gripkey, "The Blessed Virgin Mary as Mediatrix in the Latin and Old French Legend prior to the Fourteenth Century" (Ph.d. diss., Catholic University of America, 1938), lists a number of authors prior to the time of Gautier (461).

<sup>9</sup> Hérیمان de Tournai, *Les Miracles de Sainte Marie de Laon*, ed. Alain Saint-Denis (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2008).

<sup>10</sup> Hugh Farsit, *Libellus de miraculis B. Mariae Virginis in urbe Suessionensi*, PL 179:1777–1800.

<sup>11</sup> See *Les Miracles de Notre-Dame de Rocamadour au XII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, ed. and trans. E[dmund] Albe, rev. intro. and notes J. Rocacher (Toulouse: Le Pérégrinateur, 1996) and Marcus Bull, *The Miracles of Our Lady of Rocamadour: Analysis and Translation* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1999).

verse miracles appeared at the end of the twelfth century and during the first half of the thirteenth, roughly contemporaneous with Gautier de Coinci. Jean le Marchant produced a collection of verse miracles associated with Chartres about 1262; his version was based on an earlier Latin record related to a fund-raising effort to rebuild the cathedral there after a disastrous fire in 1194.<sup>12</sup> Some collections were for liturgical use. Others, in the vernacular, address lay as well as clerical audiences, presenting detailed and vivid portraits of Mary, echoing or paraphrasing apocrypha, reflecting facets of learned treatises as well as popular legends. Some stress her virginity; some, her influence with Jesus, her Son, to save sinners from the consequences of their regrettable choices; others, her mercy and kindness. All emphasize her unique status as Mother of God and Queen of Heaven, which enables her to intervene in human affairs. The miraculous event in each story interrupts lived time with an interpolation of cosmic time or eternity as Mary, the human carrier of divinity, enters the world of human transgression and works to redeem and transfigure it.

In this paper I discuss two major examples of "imaginative theology" as it pertains to Mary, drawing upon selections from Gautier de Coinci's *Chansons et Miracles de la Vierge*<sup>13</sup> and a later Norman cleric's work, "L'Advocacie Nostre Dame."<sup>14</sup> Both authors stress Mary's role as the advocate addressed in the *Salve Regina*; they also depict her as the woman who is the perpetual enemy of the serpent rebuked by God in Genesis 3:14-15, emphasizing her power over Satan and her determination to win for her divine Son the souls of as many sinners as possible.

<sup>12</sup> Jean le Marchant, *Miracles de Notre-Dame de Chartres*, ed. Pierre Kunstmann (Ottawa: Éditions de l'Université d'Ottawa, 1973). See also Benedicta Ward, *Miracles and the Medieval Mind* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987), 134-53.

<sup>13</sup> *Les Miracles de Notre Dame par Gautier de Coincy*, ed. V. Frederic Koenig (4 vols.; Geneva: Droz, 1955-1970). References to individual miracles are from this edition. Roman numerals refer to Books I or II of the miracles; Arabic numerals refer to the number of the miraculous tale within that book.

<sup>14</sup> Judith M. Davis and F. R. P. Akehurst, trans., *Our Lady's Lawsuits: The Advocacie Nostre Dame and the Chapelerie Nostre Dame de Bayeux*, based on the text by Gérard Gros (Tempe, Ariz.: ACMRS, 2011).

Gautier de Coinci (1177/8-1236) has been characterized as "one of the most remarkable writers of medieval France, indeed of the whole Middle Ages who, despite his exceptional talents and pronounced personal traits, has been woefully neglected."<sup>15</sup> Prior of a Benedictine monastery in Vic-sur-Aisne, a village near Soissons, Gautier wrote two books of Marian miracles that include 58 narratives in octosyllabic couplets and 18 songs in a variety of verse forms. His work totals more than 35,000 lines preserved "in part or whole, in 114 manuscripts," a prodigious accomplishment in honor of Mary: "Part of Gautier's project was to provide a literary celebration of the love of Our Lady as a superior alternative to the celebration of the *dompna* (Lady) of secular courtly culture."<sup>16</sup> His stories as well as his stylistics—especially his wordplay—influenced both lyric and narrative in France for more than 200 years, and his poetics were echoed in the sixteenth-century *grands rhétoriqueurs*.

Gautier translated many if not most of his miracle stories from the Latin: "because not everyone understands it very well, I wish here to put it into the vernacular" (2 Mir 30: 10-14).<sup>17</sup> The sources of his tales included a Latin manuscript in the abbey library at St. Médard; miracle collections associated with the Marian shrines at Laon and Soissons<sup>18</sup>; and tales and legends contained in the three compendia of the *Vies des Pères* (collections of edifying stories) as well as compilations of Marian stories and *Mariales*.<sup>19</sup> His tropes reflect images taken from

<sup>15</sup> Tony Hunt, *Miraculous Rhymes: The Writing of Gautier de Coinci* (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 2007), 3.

<sup>16</sup> Hunt, *Miraculous Rhymes*, 4 and 18.

<sup>17</sup> Koenig, *Les Miracles*, 4:378, in II Mir 30, 10-14. Gautier wrote two books of songs and miracles; II Mir 30 refers to miracle number 30 of the second book, followed by line numbers. These lines read: "En latin est en mout de leuz./Et en latin est bialz et genz,/Mais pour ce que toutes les genz/N'entendent pas tres bien la lettre,/Ici le veil en romans mettre." Gautier also speaks of translating from Latin in II Mir 9:21-2.

<sup>18</sup> Koenig, *Les Miracles*, 1:xxxix.

<sup>19</sup> "The title 'Mariale' is defined in the thirteenth century as a collection of materials in praise of the Virgin, a sort of anthology or summa of Mary lore" (Evelyn Faye Wilson, ed., *The Stella Maris of John of Garland* [Cambridge, Mass.: Medieval Academy of America, 1946], 30). After the twelfth century, *Mariale* becomes a generic term which can be applied to a single work (the *Mariale* of Saint-Évroul), to a collection of

liturgy, psalms, and patristic commentaries on the Virgin as well as secular courtly literature, particularly the lyric. One of his favorite metaphors involves describing Mary as a chess queen, extending the role of the medieval *fierce* (which eventually became the powerful queen of modern chess).<sup>20</sup> Steven Taylor observes,

Gautier devotes more than one hundred verses of the Prologue of Book I of his *Miracles* to an exegesis of the shared attributes of the chess queen and the Queen of Heaven. Initially, Gautier stresses Mary's instrumentality. Like a passive chess piece, the humble Mary allowed herself to be moved by God's will rather than her own impulses, thus becoming a virtuous counterpart to Eve, who, by implication, can be considered the piece by which Satan launched his gambit against God in Eden (vv. 232-235). . . . [In contrast to the medieval *fierce*, the *vierge*] can mate the devil in any direction. . . . God's Queen is an acting subject, as well as the passive object of the Divine Will [as Gautier emphasizes] by making the chess piece into a chess master. . . . Given the popularity of chess at the time and the importance of the stake for which men were playing against the devil, namely their souls, Gautier could have hardly found a more effective unifying image for the Prologue of his first collection of miracles.<sup>21</sup>

Phrased another way in the words of Moshe Lazar, " . . . in the divine chess game *the white Queen inevitably checkmates the black King*."<sup>22</sup>

In her magisterial study of thirteenth-century Marian miracle collections in northern and southern France, Spain, and Portugal, Paule Bétérou specifies six roles which Mary takes in

miracles (the *Mariale magnum*), or to disparate writings. "In brief, a *Mariale* is a *De laudibus beatae Mariae virginis*, of which there are so many, or a collection of miracles" (Henri Barré, "L'Énigme du *Mariale magnum*," *Ephemerides mariologicae* 16 [1966]:269).

<sup>20</sup> See Steven M. Taylor, "God's Queen: Chess Imagery in the Poetry of Gautier de Coinci," *Fifteenth-Century Studies* 17 (1990): 403-419, here 405-407; and Marilyn Yalom, "Chess and the Cult of the Virgin Mary," in *Birth of the Chess Queen*, Chap. 7 (New York: Harper Collins, 2004), 107-121.

<sup>21</sup> Taylor, "God's Queen," 405-407.

<sup>22</sup> "Satan and Notre Dame: Characters in a Popular Scenario," in *A Medieval French Miscellany*, ed. Norris J. Lacy (Lawrence, Kans.: University of Kansas Publications, 1972), 1-14, here 6. Emphasis in the original. See also Tony Hunt's keen analysis in *Miraculous Rhymes*, 53-57.

exercising her miraculous power: restoration (*réparateur*), command (*mandatif*), reward or punishment (*rétributeur*), protection (*protecteur*), intercession (*intercesseur*) and assistance (*auxiliauteur*).<sup>23</sup> For the purposes of my survey, I have subdivided or combined some of these categories in order to be more precise in my descriptions of the outcomes of Mary's interventions in Gautier's tales. In particular, Mary's role as intercessor is secondary in Gautier, and the instances in which she assists her servants are largely subsumed into protection and deliverance. To fill these roles, she acts as midwife, doctor, nurse, deathbed companion, preacher, and protector as well as restorer and preserver of life, both temporal and eternal, thwarting the Devil and his minions in a significant number of his stories.

In Gautier's miracles Mary's roles are active and redemptive. In her role of restoration, like Jesus, she cures the gravely ill, giving one cleric a drop of milk from her breast in one of the tales (I Mir 17). She cures cases of *mal des ardents* (ergotism) in two others, II Mirs 22 and 27. She also brings the dead back to life: in one case, a monk is revived so that he may improve on his lifestyle and thus win salvation (I Mir 24). In another, she reverses a suicide wrought by the deceptions of the devil (I Mir 25). Mary's restorative powers appear to be almost as wide-ranging as those of her Son. She gives back his sight to a blind goldsmith who had fashioned a reliquary for her so that he might view his artistry once more (II Mir 14); she performs miracles of recovery for a woman whose nose has been eaten away by disease (II Mir 24) and a man who has lost his foot to a most repugnant case of gangrene (II Mir 25). She also restores a soul to community by resurrecting the priest who excommunicated him (I Mir 37) and returns the stolen relics of Saint Leocadia to her monastery (I Mir 44).

Mary's mandatory role seems to be focused, in Gautier, on conversion; she recalls and stresses her Son's admonitory calls to pay attention to the word of God. In this role, she appears to nuns, monks and lay people, commanding or influencing

<sup>23</sup> See *Les Collections de Miracles de la Vierge en Gallo et Ibéro-Roman au XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, *Marian Library Studies* n.s. 15-16 (1983-84).



them to change their lives. Among the Christians called to repent and return to a virtuous life are Theophilus the cleric (I Mir 10), a lazy nun who cut short her greetings to Our Lady (I Mir 29) and a nun who left her abbey (I Mir 43). Mary shows a young sister the eternal punishment that she would merit if she were to sin as she had planned in I Mir 26. One story of a Saracen conversion displays a tolerance for the non-Christian that is highly unusual in the xenophobic and anti-Semitic Gautier (I Mir 13). Another story tells of a knight who prays for her assistance to gain the love of a mortal woman but whose earthly love is converted into a heavenly one after saying, at the suggestion of a pious abbot, 150 Hail Marys every day for a year (I Mir 41). Related stories (I Mir 21 and II Mir 29) feature Mary's courtly admonitions to two young men that result in their abandonment of the world for her service. Secondary effects of her appearances may be to cure (II Mir 23) or to restore to a state of grace (I Mir 10, I Mir 29, I Mir 43, I Mir 26).

It is significant that Gautier's Mary, otherwise well known from the Litany of Loreto and the *Salve Regina* as the Mother of Mercy, acts in her retributory role five times more often to reward than to punish. She affirms a priest who knows only one Mass (I Mir 14) and the poor soul who could scarcely say the hours of her praise (I Mir 17). For the jongleur whose songs please her, she sends down a candle from her sanctuary to illumine his dinner (II Mir 21). In one miracle she wipes the forehead of a dying widow who has been devoted to her while a wealthy usurer's soul is carried off by demons (I Mir 19).

By way of contrast, tales of Mary's active deliverance or rescue and preservation abound in Gautier's collection. Women are saved from potential seducers in two tales (I Mir 18 and II Mir 9). The pregnant abbess of I Mir 20 is literally delivered of her illegitimate child by Mary, who acts as midwife to the sinner, but who also rescues the abbess from the jealousy of her nuns by restoring her virginity (I Mir 20).

One of the more amusing and moving tales in this category is the miracle of the hanged robber (I Mir 30). The devotion of Eble (or Ebbo, as he is known in later versions that change the nobler name to one more befitting his chosen vocation) to Mary is such that he commends himself to her care each time

he rides out to rob. Aside from his love of Our Lady, Eble's only redeeming characteristic is that he spares the poor and treats them well. One day he is caught in the act and hanged by the sheriff and his men. To his aid comes "she who forgets none of her own," "Cele qui nul des siens n'oblie." Gautier observes that "[s]he held her white hands beneath his feet/and for two whole days she sustained him/so that he never suffered hurt or pain." When those who hanged him pass by, they are astonished to see him safe and sound, and decide to cut his throat. Their swords will not leave their scabbards, nor can they lay hands on him, for Eble cries, "Nothing will do you any good./You may as well know/that my lady holy Mary/helps and succors me./The sweet lady upholds me and places her hand over my throat./The gentle courtly lady allows nothing to harm me."<sup>24</sup> Giving thanks to God and Mary on hearing his words, his would-be tormentors and Eble himself enter an abbey and become monks, serving Mary for the rest of their lives. A version of this tale was turned into a song, "La Vierge et le Larron," by Patrice Martineau<sup>25</sup> in the early 1980s—evidence of its staying power.

The predominant images of Mary in Gautier's *oeuvre* are beauty, power, and compassion. Every miracle features a paean of praise to her mercy and her saving grace, asking its listeners to call upon "Nostre Dame Sainte Marie." Although it is very clear that Gautier intends to convert his audience to her devotion, he does not present her as a static, monochrome, unvaryingly regal figure. Mary can be winsome and familiar; severe and demanding; fierce and jealous; haughty and imperious; tender and forgiving, as the case requires, or perhaps as her human nature dictates. Gautier emphasizes her humanity—at times his Mary uses colorful language—while he suggests, often simultaneously, her near-divinity. Always, however, she is persistent—and triumphant.

<sup>24</sup> Koenig, *Les Miracles* 2:285-90, here verses 35-37: "Ses blanches mains soz ses piez tint/Et deus jors entiers le soustint/Qu'ainc n'i souffri dolor ne painne" and verses 56-64: ". . . Ne vaut nient./Bien sachiez tuit a escient/Que ma dame sainte Marie/En secors m'est et en aie./La douce dame me maintient/Et sor ma gorge sa main tient./La douce dame debonair/Ne me consent nul mal affaire."

<sup>25</sup> Patrice and Roger Martineau, "Cantigas" (Paris: Kiosque d'Orfée, n.d.), Side A, No. 2.

In no miracle is her persistence more evident than in the miracle of the nun who left her convent, 1 Mir 43. Devoted to the Virgin, this nun (nameless in Gautier's version, although others give her the name of Beatrice) never passes the image of Mary without saluting it. The nephew of the abbess, a young man noble, valiant and handsome, falls in love with her "as if the devil put him up to it," "Si com dyables l'enflamma." He so courts her that she agrees to leave the convent; but when she passes Our Lady's altar she greets Mary and decides that she cannot keep her tryst with her suitor. Twice she resists temptation; the third time, she hurries past the altar, avoiding the sight of Mary. She leaves with her knight; they marry and have two children. But Mary "did not wish to lose her nun,/For many times she had served her." More than thirty years later Mary appears to the woman in a dream and chides her: "Get up! Get up! Too long have you lain there!/If you do not give me my recompense and my due,/and go back to the salutations [that you gave me] once again,/I will nail the gates of heaven shut against you./On your feet! Get up! Put on your veil once more./Your lamp is out, there is no more oil./Arise! Get up! Remain no longer here,/for the hour of your end is near."<sup>26</sup> Frightened and in tears, and no doubt remembering the parable of the wise and foolish virgins in Matthew 25: 1-13, the woman tells her husband of the vision. He assures her that he would not have her lose her soul for him; he will enter a cloister and she will return to hers, their children having reached the age of majority. They do so, and Gautier ends the story with a tail, or *queue*: whoever endures the difficulties of the cloister will be blessed as long as God endures.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Koenig, *Les Miracles* 3:191-213, lines 256-58: "La douce dame, par sa grace,/Sa nonain perdre ne volt mie,/Car maintes fois l'avoit servie" and lines 269-276: "Or sus! or sus! trop as gëu!/Se mon païage et mon trëu/Et mes salus ne me raportes,/Je te clorai dou ciel les portes./Or sus! or sus! plus n'i demeure,/Car de ta fin aproche l'eure."

<sup>27</sup> The version that has circulated in modern times may be an adaptation of nineteenth-century retellings such as that of [Pierre Jean-Baptiste] Le Grand D'Aussy, "De la Sacristine," *Contes dévots, fables et romans anciens* (Paris: chez l'auteur, maison de M. Juliot [Renouard], 1781), 54-61; or Dominique Méon, "De la Sougreteine, ou . . . de la Soucraïne qui lesa s'abaie, que Nostre Dame la remist," in *Nouveau Recueil de fabliaux et contes*, 2:154-172.

Mary appears in this miracle as a no-nonsense noblewoman who demands her feudal rights from those who have sworn themselves to her. Once she receives her due homage, she is reconciled with the sinner. There is no doubt, however, about her ability or her willingness to deny salvation to those who do not keep faith with her.

Mary does battle with the denizens of hell, checkmating Satan and his minions in approximately 20 percent of these stories. Her role as Satan's nemesis is nowhere stronger than in the Miracle of Theophilus. Based on the fifth-century Greek legend first translated into Latin during the eighth century,<sup>28</sup> Gautier's narrative comprises a leisurely 2,092 lines. Gautier establishes at the outset that the cleric Théophile is a virtuous man: he gives to the poor, lives a holy life, and honors the gracious Virgin, serving her well. He hesitates to accept his superior's offer of a bishopric for fear of succumbing to pride; but the bishop named in his stead promptly relieves the holy man of his office, thus beginning Théophile's trials. After blaming himself, Théophile is visited by a Jew who calls the devil for

In Gautier's telling of the tale, Our Lady does not take the place of the wayward nun. In his study of *La Légende de la Sacristine* (Paris: Champion, 1927), Robert Guiette describes some 200 versions of the story in Latin, Dutch, French, German and English. In *La Deuxième collection anglo-normande des miracles de la Sainte Vierge* (Paris: Champion, 1922), Hilding Kjellman lists six versions of the story in French (xlii-xliv). Of these, the only one prior to Gautier's would seem to be that of Adgar, or Guillaume le Trouvère, who was active at the end of the twelfth century (Bétérus, *Les Collections*, 102). In Adgar's version, Our Lady replaces the nun for the seven years she spends outside the convent.

The nun is known by the name of Beatrice in the two versions found in the *Dialogus Miraculorum* of Caesarius of Heisterbach (d. 1240), a contemporary of Gautier. Hilding Kjellman cites Chapter 34 of the "distinction septima" of the *Dialogus* as the source for the version in which Mary replaces Beatrice: "Le Miracle de la Sacristine," in *Mélanges de philology offerts à M. Johan Melander* (Uppsala: Lundequistska Bokhandeln, 1943), 47-81, here 50. In the other Caesarius tale cited by Guiette (*La Légende*, 18-19) she is not a sacristan, only a *custos*, and her seducer is a simple *clericus*, not a noble. This version and many others depict the nun as abandoned by her lover and leading a life of prostitution and misery before deciding to return to her convent. Gautier's version of the tale is both more compassionate and more dramatic than those of his contemporaries and later adapters.

<sup>28</sup> Hilda Graef, *Mary: A History of Doctrine and Devotion* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1985), 1:171.

him and supervises their pact, afterwards giving hearty worldly advice to the man who has just sold his soul but has had little practice in evil behavior. It is Mary who takes the initiative to save her servant's soul; observing his headlong dash to hell, she persuades God to give him the grace he needs to restore his good sense and his conscience. (This is one of the few instances in which Mary acts as an intermediary; usually she intervenes directly herself.) Gautier observes, "Théophile is in a bad situation./His horse is headed straight for hell/without rein or bridle." Thanks to God's help, he brings his horse under the control of good conscience. He repents, fasting and praying for 40 days in a church of Our Lady. She hears his prayer and comes to him in a midnight vision, looking as if "fire and flame would shoot from her bright face," not deigning to look at him, and berating him for his faithlessness: "[How is] your stinking, dirty, sticky mouth/Presumptuous enough to call on me or my Son?/. . . You have your nerve/When you've paid homage to the devil/If you think that I ought to help you." She continues to scold him, claiming that he has angered her and her son for a trifling worldly honor. He pleads his case, using the lyric imagery of her titles (high virgin maid, high queen, bright emerald, door of paradise, lady of heaven and earth, lady and queen of the archangels) and examples of repentant sinners who were saved. Our Lady is persuaded. She requires him to make an act of faith, in the course of which he declares, "Well do I believe and know, bright star/That [God] willed to make you his mother/. . . That your will is his/And his [will] is yours." On hearing his profession, she forgives him, saying joyously that she will make his peace with her Son. After he has spent six days in prayer, she returns to him as he sleeps and places on his breast the pact which she has redeemed from hell. The following day he confesses his sin to the entire congregation of the diocese; he dies three days later, saying, "Lady, into your hands I commend my spirit."<sup>29</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Koenig, *Les Miracles* 1:50-175. "Theophilus est en mal point./Vers enfer droit son cheval point/Ne se n'a ne frain ne bride," verses 621-623; Mary appears "... que feu et flame/Doie saillir de son cler vis," verses 934-935; she addresses him, "Ta puantz bouche orde et glueuse,/Comment est si presumptueuse/Que moi ne lui apeler ose?/"

Mary's role as conqueror of evil in the person of the devil is attested not only in Gautier de Coinci but in every *Mariale* of the Middle Ages. One well-known but seldom studied treatise is the *Mariale, sive CCXXX Quaestiones super Evangelium, Missus est*, reputed to be the work of Saint Albert the Great (c. 1206-c. 1280),<sup>30</sup> which proclaims that Mary excelled in wisdom and intellectual gifts: she knew the liberal arts, medicine, law, and theology, among other subjects, by virtue of her status as the Mother of God. This *Mariale* presents carefully crafted scholastic arguments for Mary's intellectual accomplishments, giving rise to an impressive demonstration of her prowess in the battle against evil. In Quaestio CI, the author affirms that Mary "knew civil law and canon law and decretals to the highest degree. The wisdom of the [A]dvocate is manifest in three ways: First, that she achieves complete victory before a just and wise judge. Second, because [she prevails] against an astute and sagacious adversary. Third, because [she does so] in a hopeless case. [T]he most blessed Virgin, before the most wise judge, the Lord, against the most clever adversary, the Devil, obtained a favorable verdict in our desperate case."<sup>31</sup>

In all likelihood inspired by the putative words of St. Albert in Quaestio CI, an anonymous fourteenth-century jurist and theologian fashioned perhaps the most extensive account of Mary's defeat of the Evil One in "L'Advocacie Nostre Dame," a

Di moi, comment serai tant ose/Que men doz fil depri por toi/Quant as guerpi et lui et moi?/Trop as presumptueus corage,/Quant au dyable as fait homage./Se tu cuides qu'aidier te doie," verses 949-957. Théophile's address to Mary at the end of his life: "Dame, en tes mains et en ta garde/Commant, fait il, mon esperite," verses 1772-1773.

<sup>30</sup>The *Mariale*, which appears in Volume 37 of the *Opera Omnia* edited by Auguste and Émile Borgnet (Paris: Ludovicum Vivès, 1898), is now credited to an anonymous author by Graef, *Mary*, 1:270-71. It had been ascribed to Richard de St. Laurent, a thirteenth-century Cistercian dean of the Rouen cathedral, but Graef's analysis is convincing.

<sup>31</sup>*Quaestio CI*. Utrum sciverit [Beatissime Maria] in summon jura civilian, leges et decreta? ITEM, quod jura civilian leges et decreta scivit in summon, patet hoc modo: 1. Sapientia advocata manifestatur in tribus. Unum, quod obtineat omnia contra judicem justum et sapientem. Secundo, quod contra adversarium astutum et sagacem. Tertio, quod in causa desperata. Sed beatissima Virgo contra judicem sapientissimum Dominum, contra adversarium callidissimum diabolum, in causa nostra desperata sententiam optatam obtinuit: ergo sapientissima advocata fuit" *Opera Omnia* 37, 160-161.

narrative poem of 2,498 octosyllabic lines written in Anglo-Norman French.<sup>32</sup> Transforming the *tradita* of the *Mariale* into a dramatic rendering of *traditio*, the poem describes Satan's lawsuit to reclaim the souls of humankind alleged to have been lost when Jesus descended into hell after His death.<sup>33</sup> In God's heavenly court, Mary serves as a highly capable defense counsel, insulting Satan, thwarting his legal maneuvers, and eventually defeating him.

Although we still do not know the author's name, we can discern the extent of his learning from his allusions to canon and civil law, Marian legends, the work of Gautier de Coinci, books of the Old and New Testaments and theological commentaries ranging from the early Church fathers to the great thinkers of the thirteenth century. The work combines characteristics of a courtroom drama and a homiletic exegesis on the Redemption with an account of Our Lady's miraculous mediation.

The "Advocacie" offers the first French vernacular interpretation of an ancient theme: Satan making his claim to human souls before a heavenly court. In this tribunal, Jesus is judge; Satan appears on behalf of the plaintiffs, denizens of Hell; and Mary acts as advocate for the defense. Satan seeks justice from the court for having been deprived of the right to his share of souls, won by Hell—and lost to God—as he claims, through the sin of Adam and Eve. After Jesus rebuffs his attempt to bring a criminal suit against the human race, Satan presents a power of attorney from hell authorizing him to proceed in a civil suit; Jesus accepts it and sets the court date for Good Friday. In a council of heaven parallel to the council of hell that gave Satan his credentials as prosecutor, Mary accepts the role of advocate in defense of humankind.

<sup>32</sup> The most recent edition is that of Gérard Gros, "L'Advocacie Nostre Dame et la Chapellerie Nostre Dame de Bayeux par l'anonyme de Bayeux" (Ph.D. diss., Paris IV, 1979-80).

<sup>33</sup> The so-called "harrowing of hell," an apocryphal event, was widely accepted in the middle ages: see Richard O'Gorman, "The Gospel of Nicodemus in the Vernacular Literature of Medieval France," in *The Medieval Gospel of Nicodemus: Texts, Intertexts and Contexts in Western Europe*, ed. Zbigniew Izydorczyk (Tempe, Ariz.: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1997).

The Virgin asks God to deny the Devil's claim, and although Satan is expert in canon and civil law, Mary proves to be an effective defense counsel. To make her case during her juridical battle with Satan, Mary cites customary law and Roman law as well as canon law and papal decretals. For more than half the proceedings, she conducts herself in the character of a highly capable advocate, although this competence includes *ad hominem* (or, rather, *ad diabolum*) attacks on her opponent. She vilifies Satan, frustrates his legal maneuverings, and presents her case eloquently and forcefully. When her adversary persists, however, she throws herself down before Jesus, appealing to him in a dramatically emotional pleading. With the encouragement of her divine Son, she resumes her previous mode of refuting Satan's arguments, stating that Christ's death on the cross outweighed the world's sin, and that when humans repent, God shows mercy. She makes a final tearful appeal to Jesus, after which there is no doubt of the outcome. Jesus delivers the verdict that all humans who have repented and confessed will be admitted to Paradise. God the Father and the Holy Spirit concur. The Devil is vanquished; the court spectators rejoice and the affair ends with a resounding *Salve Regina*.

Reverberations of cosmic time echo throughout the "Advocacie," situated in an eternal present that reaches back to the era of Genesis and deals with the salvation of souls long after the Crucifixion. Satan's claim to the souls of humankind is based first of all upon the story of Adam and Eve's Fall. According to the apocryphal, fourth-century *Gospel of Nicodemus*, the Devil held captive in Hell all who had died since the Fall. After his death and before his resurrection, however, Christ descended into Hell and delivered the souls held in captivity there, depriving Satan of what the Devil viewed as his.<sup>34</sup> The

<sup>34</sup>The *Gospel of Nicodemus* dates from about the mid-fourth century, although the idea dates back to the second century, according to Montague James, trans., *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 95. Zbigniew Izydorczyk places the Latin translation which is the origin of "[a]ll West European versions" in the fifth century: *The Medieval Gospel of Nicodemus: Texts, Intertexts, and Contexts in Western Europe*, 43-101, while in the same volume Richard O'Gorman describes it in the "Vernacular Literature of Medieval France," 103-31. O'Gorman cites three Norman



Church fathers couched Satan's claim to human souls in terms of "the devil's rights,"<sup>35</sup> and throughout the Middle Ages theologians debated the existence and nature of those alleged rights as well as whether Adam's fall incurred a debt to Satan or to God. Related debates concerned the satisfaction of that debt and the continuing "rights of Satan" to the souls of humankind. St. Augustine (354-430) and others held that the fall of Adam and Eve incurred a debt to the Devil, recorded in a decree attested in Colossians 2, that was destroyed by Christ's death on the cross. Although the debt was wiped out, Satan still could claim rights to—and exercise power over—human souls due to their sinful state. St. Anselm (1040-1109) and his followers, on the other hand, maintained that the Fall incurred a debt to God rather than Satan and that Christ's death had paid that debt in full. They dismissed the idea that the Devil had any rights to humankind because everything and everyone ultimately belonged to God.<sup>36</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) upheld Anselm's position, stating that "the Devil's power was dependent only upon humanity's state of sin; therefore, the forgiveness of sins and the reconciliation to God [through Christ's passion and death] meant the end of the Devil's power."<sup>37</sup> The "Advocacie" presents a brief for the more merciful Anselmian and Thomistic interpretations of the Fall and Redemption in a format which renders doctrine accessible to audiences of clerics and lay folk alike. The author assigned Augustinian arguments to the figure of Satan; Anselm's he gave to Mary.

versions of the work dating from the thirteenth century, 104-105. Jacobus de Voragine (c. 1230-1298) cited the *Gospel of Nicodemus* in his commemoration of Christ's resurrection: *The Golden Legend*, trans. William Granger Ryan (2 vols.; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 1:222-224. The Dijon manuscript containing the "Advocacie" also features the *Évangile de Nicodème*.

<sup>35</sup> Kevin J. Ruth, "Toward a Vision of the Devil's Rights in the Theatre of Late Medieval Europe" (Ph.D. diss., Rutgers, 2004), presents a complete history of the concept of the Devil's rights, 10-75.

<sup>36</sup> For an extensive analysis of the two positions, see C.W. Marx, *The Devil's Rights and the Redemption in the Literature of Medieval England* (Cambridge, UK: D. S. Brewer, 1995). Emily Steiner discusses the implications of Colossians in *Documentary Culture and the Making of Medieval English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 100-103.

<sup>37</sup> Marx, *The Devil's Rights*, 43; Ruth, Diss., 53-57.

Descriptions of Mary as advocate appeared in countless medieval works of piety.<sup>38</sup> Litanies invoked her as the refuge of sinners and comforter of the afflicted; and the *Salve Regina*, cited in full at the end of the "Advocacie," undergirds the work: Mary is shown to be the "mother of mercy," literally "our life, our sweetness and our hope."<sup>39</sup> As Queen of Heaven, she hears from her court about Satan's lawsuit and the lack of a defense attorney. She reassures them that they need "... have no fear ... You will see me quite prepared/to be an advocate ... and to defeat the Devil ... I will do whatever it takes."<sup>40</sup> Mary is described as she "who is so wise and learned/that she fears nothing and is afraid of nothing,/neither the Devil nor his train," "qui est si sage et si apprise/que rien ne creint, ne rien ne doute,/ne le Déable, ne sa route," lines 674-76. When Satan arrives in court, he claims not to see a defendant; Mary declares herself for the Human Race and demands his credentials. She refutes Satan's claim that she should not be admitted as advocate because she is a woman and the Judge's mother, saying that she "can defend/all three orders which make up the entire Human Race [virgins, the married and the celibate]," "Donc di jeu que je puis effendre/touz les .III. estatez de damage," lines 958-60, and should therefore be allowed to do so.

After Jesus rebuffs Satan's request for judgment, the devil demands to be put back in "peaceful possession" of the souls, after which they both can argue further, to which Mary responds with invective, calling her opponent "dishonest, a son of iniquity, ... evil one, stinking of smoke ... this villainous, filthy

<sup>38</sup> See, e.g., Johannes Jacobus Bourassé, *Summa aurea de laudibus Beatissime Virginis Mariae*, vol. 9 (Paris: J.-P. Migne, 1862), cols. 869-875.

<sup>39</sup> According to Hilda Graef (*Mary*, 1:229), the *Salve Regina* is perhaps the best-known and loved of the "so-called Marian antiphons." It was probably composed "towards the end of the eleventh century or the beginning of the twelfth. ... [It] expresses her power as [humans'] advocate with God and her mediation between themselves and Christ." The *Salve Regina* has been attributed to Adhemar, bishop of LePuy (d.1098).

<sup>40</sup> "Or n'aiez doute à la journée./Me verrez vous tout attournée/d'estre advocate pour eulz respondre/et pour le Déable confondre; bien vous povez asseürer/jamès ne pourroie endure/l'Umain Lignage à desconfire:/tant ferey qu'il devra souffire" (Davis and Akehurst, trans., *Our Lady's Lawsuits*, ll. 661-68).

advocate," "le fel desloial perjure . . . filz de Deable, / filz d'iniquité . . . le fel enfumé . . . le fel advocat ort," lines 1024-35. She also points out a flaw in his reasoning. To the Devil's assertion of adverse possession, she reminds Jesus, "You possess man and possessed him, / For you made him and created him," "tu possis home et posseis, / quer tu le creias et feïs," lines 1061-61; and she reminds Satan that he could not "in good faith/own something belonging to another," "Comment de bonne foy peüs/chose estrange bien porseer?" lines 1110-1111. The Devil has difficulty remaining polite, but objects that "[i]f anyone wanted to believe this lady, / no soul would ever enter Hell," "Qui voudroit croire ceste dame, / jamès en enfer n'yroit ame," lines 1117-18, and pulls a sulphurous Bible out of his belly-pouch. Quoting Genesis, he points out Adam and Eve's mortal sin of disobedience and challenges Jesus: "Are you not justice and truth? / Make your words effective then, . . . / and place in condemnation / Adam and his seed," "N'es tu justice et vérité? / Fey donc tes paroles estables . . . et met à condemnation / Adam et sa succession," lines 1174-78. But Mary observes that Satan deceived the pair and holds that he cannot profit from his fraud; when the Devil tries another legal approach, she says that he has already made what is called in law an election of remedies and cannot keep changing tack.

Mary becomes so concerned about Satan's persistence, and so fearful for the fate of the Human Race, that she weeps and tears her clothes, kneeling before her Son and reminding Jesus of the role Satan played in having Him crucified, reminding him of how her heart was pierced at His death, and ending with an impassioned plea: "If you listen to the Devil / rather than Your mother, or her party, / then remove me from the Book of Life!" "S'au Déable plus obéis / qu'à ta mere n'à sa partie, / oste moy du livre de vie!," lines 1502-04. Jesus rejects Satan's argument, but the accuser continues to press on, saying that as "Prince of this world" (John 13:30) he should at least have the souls of sinners as his share. Mary responds that shares of good and evil were apportioned on Good Friday, when Christ's sacrifice outweighed the world's sin; Satan did not appeal that verdict, and now it should be considered as already judged, *res adjudicata*.

Satan is not finished. If he and his rebel angels were condemned for their disobedience, why not the Human Race? Mary replies that angels sinned against their nature and acted out of malice, envy and desire. It was the human body, continually warring with the soul, that proved to be Adam's fatal weakness: "Man," she states, "was wounded by fragility;/but, when the Devil sinned,/it was out of his pure evil,/acting against his nature," "Fragilité home blècha;/mès, quant le Déable pécha,/ce fut de sa mauvestié pure,/en venant contre sa nature," lines 1823-26. Satan counters that Adam sinned beyond measure against God, who is "true goodness without end," "bonté/sans fin," lines 2100-2101, and therefore in strict justice should be condemned eternally for coveting Godhead. Mary responds that Christ's suffering "countered the offense which Adam in his folly committed against infinite goodness," "que ceste peine respondi/au forfèt qu'Adam par folie/fist contre bonté infenie," lines 2120-2122. Jesus clarifies her response: "If the fault was infinite, and no man can give satisfaction/forever, because he must come to an end,/I, who am man and God together/and without end, can very well, I think,/provide the satisfaction/and suffer death and passion." Mary continues: "... if any poor sinner sins,/if he makes amends/as soon as he repents/and makes moan because of his sin,/then God immediately forgets the sin ... When man does not remain always/in sin, but turns towards God/and asks for His mercy,/God promises and gives [it] to him."<sup>41</sup> After further argument, Jesus announces his verdict: "all those of the Human Race/who have repented and confessed/in devotion/and died in contrition/will remain with Us forever," "toutz ceulz de l'Umain Lignage/qui auront par dévotion/repentance et confession,/et en contrition mourront,/devers nous sans fin demouront" (lines 2416-2420). The Devil is defeated;

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. "Se la coupe fut infinie/et nul home ne puisse mie/sans fin satisfacion rendre/pour ceu que fin le convient prendre,/jeu, qui suy Dieu et home ensemble/et sans fin, voil bien, ce me semble,/fêr'en la satisfacion/et souffrir mort et passion," lines 2157-64; "s'aucun péchéur chétif pèche,/se de cel péchié se redrèche,/dès ce qu'il se repentira/et pour son péchié gémira,/Dieu tantost le péchié oublie; ... Quant home touzjors ne sejourne/u péchié, mès vers Dieu se tourne/et requiert sa miséricorde,/Dieu luy pramet et luy acorde," lines 2201-5, 2210-12.

the court rejoices with a *Salve Regina* to which the lines are added, "Ah, our gentle lady advocate,/you cannot ever be checkmated,/but you do indeed checkmate the devils," "Ah, nostre douce Advocate,/tu n'es ne ne peus ester mate,/mès tu mates bien les déables," lines 2471-73, perhaps a subtle homage to Gautier.

Early in this trial Jesus states that there are three standards by which a case can be judged: justice (giving to each what is due), strict justice or rigor (which may impose penalties or punishments for transgressions) and equity (which shows consideration for the circumstances of the alleged transgression). "Natural law and 'pure justice' tend toward equity, and canonical equity, like civil equity, tempers the rigid application of the law with mercy."<sup>42</sup> Jesus announces clearly that he intends to judge this case with equity, and so he does. Mary's role in this cosmic tribunal is to persuade her Son—with logic, with eloquence, and with tears, if necessary—to abide by that intention, to be the God of justice and equity invoked in Psalm 99. While the Devil argues for a rigorous, legalistic interpretation of human transgression of the law by insisting that he be restored to ownership of all human souls, Mary argues for fulfillment of the law in her Son's redemption of humankind.

"L'Advocacie Nostre Dame" is a masterpiece of imaginative theology, a dramatization of St. Thomas's disquisition on justice and mercy in the *Summa*, Part 1, Question 21, Articles 1-4: "... a work of divine justice invariably presupposes a work of divine mercy as its foundation. . . . mercy is present from the very beginning of every work of God."<sup>43</sup> The author incorporates St. Augustine's metaphor of the mousetrap, in which God trapped the Devil by the Devil's own device of deception,

<sup>42</sup> Gabriel LeBras, et al., *Histoire du droit et des institutions de l'Église in occident*, Vol. VII, *L'Âge classique* (Paris: Sirey, 1965), 360. See Judith M. Davis, "Giving the Devil His Due: Justice and Equity in *L'Advocacie Nostre Dame*," in *Courtly Arts and the Art of Courtliness: Proceedings of the 11th Triennial Congress of the International Courtly Literature Society*, ed. Keith Busby and Christopher Kleinheinz (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2006), 373-84, here 381.

<sup>43</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 5: *God's Will and Providence*, Latin Text, English Translation, trans. Thomas Gilby (Cambridge: Blackfriars, 1967), 72-85.

using Christ as bait; he also takes the idea that the Devil suffers pain wherever he may be from Saints Bonaventure and Thomas. He cites Peter Chrysologus and Justin Martyr; proclaims Mary's perpetual virginity, emphasized in the second-century *Protevangelium of James* and promulgated by Saints Ambrose, Epiphanius and Jerome; and alludes to Caesarius of Arles and the "Vexilla Regis" in Mary's assertion that good and evil had been weighed during the course of Christ's passion and death. St. Thomas is the author's source for the reasons why the sin of the angels was more deserving of lasting punishment than that of Adam and Eve. At one point, Mary cites principles of logic taken from Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics*.<sup>44</sup> All of this erudition—besides that displayed in references to Roman law, canon law and papal decretals—is subsumed in the author's narrative as well as in the arguments put forth by Mary and Satan.

Orthodox theology is reflected in the portraits of Mary and her adversaries that emerge from the "Advocacie" and also from Gautier's stories, although the authors highlight different aspects of their personalities. The monastic Gautier appeals to the emotions and encourages the devotions of his audience; his devils may appear either singly or in groups; they are generically dark, described in terms of their ability to seduce and deceive. They are called cold, envious, felonious, doers of damage, who trap humans in a snare of *barat*, a term meaning fraud, disorder, guile, confusion, din (I Mir 10:1217-22). They are known as "the enemy"; they hate goodness, pilgrimages, almsgiving, chastity. They appear in different forms—one as St. James, on the way to Compostella, persuades a tipsy monk to commit suicide (I Mir 25), another as a raging bull stopped by the sight of Our Lady. They appear at the bedside of the usurer like huge black mastiffs with sharp claws and pointed teeth, harassing the dying man (I Mir 19:300-317). They complain bitterly about her relationship with God and the undue influence she wields as His mother.

<sup>44</sup> See Judith M. Davis and F. R. P. Akehurst, trans., *Our Lady's Lawsuits*, notes to the "Advocacie," 130 (ll. 1920-1925).

In contrast to the Father of Lies, Mary is called *la mere au haut roi qui ne ment*, the mother of the high king who does not lie; she snatches souls "by force" from the devils' grasp. She is described as *debonaire*, a word that encompasses the meanings of good, gentle, of noble spirit, bountiful, beautiful, elegant. Théophile calls her "high virgin, high maiden, /high queen whom God deigned to make his mother/to draw sinners to Himself. . . . Bright emerald, bright jewel," "Haute virge, haute pucele, /Haute roine, en iez tu cele/Dont Diex daigna sa mere faire/por pecheurs a lui retraire . . . Clere esmeraude, clere gemme" (I Mir 10:1003-1006, 1010). In his lyrics, Gautier sings lovingly of Mary: drops of honey fall from her name, she leads everyone to safe harbor. No one makes a bad match who allies himself with Mary; no one can marry higher, for she is the gate, bridge and window of heaven (I Ch 4:14, 28-31, 39). Nevertheless, her language in delivering her servants to her Son is brisk and straightforward; this mother does not tolerate *fainéants*, nor is she *debonaire* to her enemies.

In contrast to the monastic Gautier, the author of the "Advocacie," a canon lawyer attached to an episcopal court, depicts Satan as a master of chicanery and Mary as the honest, procedurally skilled advocate who wins her case on the merits, even though the merits are those of her Son. At the outset, Mary is described as a "high and great Lady/[who] gives comfort to all her friends,/and is ready for all their needs," "... grant dame et haute/a touz ses amis confort preste/et à tous lour besoings est preste," lines 12-14. The devil, on the other hand, "has deadly hatred for us,/and is killing himself to accuse us;/but if he accuses, she comes to plead our case,/ready to help her friends," "Le Déable nous het à mort/et à nous accuser s'amort;/mès, s'il acuse, el vient plèdier,/preste pour ses amis édier," lines 89-92. In this celestial court, Satan—who appears in his court robes—"can speak French and Latin/and knows how to give answers and raise defenses/and gloss the whole of Scripture,/and he has more than a hundred false premises," "qui bien sceit franchois et latin/et sceit responder et oppose/et toute Escripture gloser,/et fallaces plus de cent a," lines 447-451. When things do not go his way, he complains and shouts and yells, whines and cringes, blusters and boasts. His

true evil, however, is apparent from the author's attribution to him of bad faith, malice, and treason, as well as from Mary's almost constant insults and her depiction of his perjury and fraud. She is the truth-teller, constantly drawing attention to his procedural maneuverings and errors. Her work in this narrative, as it is in the economy of salvation, is to "show us Jesus, [her] glorious Son,/after the exile of this false world," "et Jhésu, ton filz glorieus,/. . . nous monstre, douce Virge monde,/après l'essil de cest faus monde," lines 2476-2480.

Recalling Paul Ricoeur, Dan Stiver speaks of "narrative's indispensability in understanding the biblical narrative and faith," emphasizing "its capacity to convey truth in an original way that is not fully translatable into philosophical or theological prose, thereby transforming the nature of theological reflection."<sup>45</sup> The best medieval writers of religious narrative turned theological abstractions into living persons, breathing beings, malice personified and love embodied, enabling their listeners and readers to absorb eternal truths about themselves, their Creator and the world around them.

One of the most moving images of Mary in the medieval world shows her sheltering all classes of people—lay folk, clergy, nobles, bourgeois and poor—beneath the ample folds of her mantle. Gautier de Coinci and the anonymous Norman lawyer animate that image in the *Miracles de Nostre Dame* and the "Advocacie Nostre Dame," showing Mary as the mother who never ceases to work on our behalf, admonishing, counseling, rescuing, restoring, and defending the fallen. In these works, we see evidence of a divine preferential option for the sinner, a theology of grace and available salvation, mediated through Mary. Medieval theologians might have been surprised or amazed or disconcerted by the *narratives* of Gautier and his later colleague, but they could not have failed to be impressed—nor can we—by the *theology* in those narratives that covers, like Mary's mantle, creation, sin, repentance, salvation and grace.

<sup>45</sup> Stiver, *Theology after Ricoeur*, 171.