

## SUSANNA AND ENGLISH COMMUNITIES

BY LYNN STALEY

The story of Susanna and the Elders, found in the apocryphal thirteenth chapter of Daniel, part of the Greek version of the Book of Daniel, is richly suggestive of its likely appeal to poets and artists. It is set during the Babylonian Captivity and recounts events concerning the Jewish community within Babylon. Susanna is the beautiful and chaste wife of a wealthy man, Joachim, whose home serves as a seat of justice for his fellow Jews. While bathing in their garden, Susanna is spied upon and accosted by two judges of Israel who frequent her husband's house. They invite her to satisfy both of them or suffer the penalty for a charge of adultery, which they will bring against her. She refuses, saying that she would rather fall into their hands than sin in the sight of God. She is tried unveiled before the people. Led off to execution, Susanna calls out to God, who stirs up the spirit of the young Daniel. Daniel's skill in separating the elders before asking for details of their evidence against Susanna reveals their perjury, and they are put to death by the crowd. The tale is certainly courtroom drama, but it is also a narrative of transgressions — of female chastity and modesty, of the household and property, of justice itself.

Throughout the Middle Ages, the narrative was used to illustrate many types of lessons. The very early church put Susanna in the *Commendatio animae*, where she is invoked in a petition asking salvation from false witnesses. She was also used "as a locus around which exegetes formulated positions regarding marital chastity." Images of Susanna circulated among upper class Romans.<sup>1</sup> Tertullian, Ambrose, Augustine, and Abelard, who addresses his treatment of Susanna to the nuns of the Paraclete, all use her as an example of chastity, and sometimes her story can be found in manuscripts associated with nuns.<sup>2</sup> Daniel 13 is the epistle for the Saturday before

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<sup>1</sup> Kathryn A. Smith, "Inventing Marital Chastity: Iconography of Susanna," *Oxford Art Journal* 16 (1993): 3–24, at 3.

My thanks to audiences at Fordham University and the University of Illinois for their comments about earlier versions of this essay. I also thank David Lyle Jeffrey for his astute reading for *Traditio*, Ralph Hanna for his comments regarding manuscripts and provenance, and Martin Chase for his encouragement.

<sup>2</sup> See Tertullian, "De corona," ed. A. Kroymann, in *Tertulliani opera*, vol. 2, CL 2 (Turnholt, 1954; repr., 1996); Ambrose, "De Joseph," ed. Carolus Schenkl, in *Ambrosii opera*, CSEL 32, 2 (Prague, 1897), 73–112; "De Tobia," *ibid.*, 519–73; "De uiduis," *Verginità e vedovanza*, ed. Frank Gori, Biblioteca Ambrosiana 14, 1 (Milan, 1989), 244–318; Augustine, "Sermo CCCXLIII: De Susanna et Joseph," *Revue bénédictine*, 66 (1956): 28–38; Abelard,

the third Sunday in Lent, where Susanna is linked with the woman taken in adultery, both illustrations of God's just and humane judgment. These same two examples are also linked to the Annunciation and questions about Mary's virginity.<sup>3</sup> Following Saint Ambrose (see n. 2), some commentators associate her with Joseph, also falsely accused of and unjustly persecuted for sexual crimes. Ambrose and others praise Susanna for her silence and thus her faith and trust in heavenly justice (here, she can become a type of Christ), and some praise her for calling out in a loud voice, first in horror at the elders' demands, then, later in court, to God. Susanna also appears as the subject of several Latin poems and in poems to the Virgin.<sup>4</sup>

One of these Latin poems, a narrative account by the early thirteenth-century Cistercian Alan of Melsa, is particularly arresting.<sup>5</sup> Alan of Melsa is clearly aware of traditional ways of using the story of Susanna, but he focuses his account, first, through a conversion narrative that serves as a preface, which can be linked to the Cistercian language of conversion during the order's early period, and, second, through a profound emphasis upon law that seems germane to conditions in England during the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. Alan's urgent focus upon law, as well as his elaborate descriptions of Susanna's garden and home, I believe, provided the anonymous fourteenth-century author of *A Pistel of Susan* with a way of creating his own urgent narrative, this one securely located in English gen-

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"Sermo XXIX: De Sancta Susanna, ad hortationem virginum," PL 178:555–64. BL MS Additional 10596, a fifteenth-century English manuscript owned by Matilde Hoyle, a nun of Barking, contains a separate recension of the later Wycliffite version entitled "A Pistle of Holy Susanna, danyell xiii c." For discussion of this manuscript, see Mary C. Erler, *Women, Reading, and Piety in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge, 2002), 4. For another poem about Susanna, possibly of English provenance, see Jane Stevenson, *Latin Poets: Language, Gender, and Authority from Antiquity to the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, 2005), 130–37. This poem was written by an "abbess Wiltrudis," possibly either an eleventh-century German nun or a twelfth-century English nun from Wilton. For important uses of Susanna in thirteenth-century manuscript culture, see Claire Donovan, *The de Brailes Hours: Shaping the Book of Hours in Thirteenth-Century Oxford* (Toronto, 1991), 24, 25, 116–21. See also Marie-Louise Fabre, *Susanne ou les avatars d'un motif biblique* (Paris, 2000).

<sup>3</sup> See Saint Bernard, *Sermones in adnuntiatione dominica*, Sermo 3, "de Susanna," in *Sancti Bernardi opera*, ed. Jean Leclercq and Henri Rochais, Ediciones Cistercienses 5 (Rome, 1968), 13–42.

<sup>4</sup> For Susanna as a type of Christ, see Ambrose, "In Psalmum XXXVII Enarratio," *Ambrosii opera*, ed. Michael Petschenig, CSEL 64, 6 (Vienna, 1919), 136–83 at 174. Also, Catherine Brown Tkacz's informative essay, "Susanna as a Type of Christ," *Studies in Iconography* 20 (1999): 101–53. For Susanna as the subject of Latin poetry, see J. H. Mozley, "Susanna and the Elders: Three Medieval Poems," *Studi Medievali*, n. s. 3 (1930): 27–52; Stevenson, *Latin Poets*, 130–38; F. J. E. Raby, ed., *Poems of John of Hoveden*, Surtees Society 154 (London, 1939), xlvii, 241.

<sup>5</sup> Mozley, "Susanna and the Elders," 41–50.

try space. Here, I would like to look at both accounts of Susanna as each author constructs a story that asks particular questions about the conditions of English justice and to suggest that both poems belong to a Cistercian textual community that cannot be isolated from the greater English community.

Alan of Melsa's poem exists in one manuscript in the British Library, Harley MS 2851, written about 1300, where it is in the fifth item in the first group in a large collection of Latin prose tales and poems, some of which concern Cistercian monks.<sup>6</sup> It is labeled "Tractatus metricus de Susanna per fratrem Alanum monachum de Melsa de Beverlaco." According to A. F. Leach, an Alan, who was a clerk of Geoffrey, Archbishop of York, was Provost of Beverley ca. 1204–ca. 1212. The provost of the college of canons at Beverley was the officer in whom the temporalities of the church were vested, and who saw to the distribution of tithes coming from the parishes in the East Riding of Yorkshire and to the division of the annual proceeds among the canons.<sup>7</sup> The collegiate church of Beverley was not far from Melsa, a daughter house of Fountains Abbey.<sup>8</sup> Fountains Abbey was founded by thirteen monks of St. Mary's in York in 1132, who, in keeping with the Cistercian ideals promulgated by Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, rejected the perceived laxities of their house in favor of a simpler, more rigorous rule, described as a return to Saint Benedict's original ideal for the common life.<sup>9</sup> Despite early years of great hardship, by 1138, Fountains had

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<sup>6</sup> H. L. D. Ward, ed., *Catalogue of Romances in the Department of Manuscripts in the British Museum*, vol. 2 (London, 1893), 401–2, 669–71, 748; J. A. Herbert, ed., *Catalogue of Romances*, vol. 3 (London, 1910), 503–9. My thanks to Elaine Pordes of the British Library for her helpfulness.

<sup>7</sup> Arthur Francis Leach, ed., *Memorials of Beverley Minster: The Chapter Act Book of the Collegiate Church of St. John of Beverley, A.D. 1286–1347*, Surtees Society 98 (Durham, 1898); William Page, *Victoria County History of Yorkshire*, vol. 3., (London, 1913), 354. Mozeley ("Susanna and the Elders," [28]) accepts this identification.

<sup>8</sup> On the provostship, see Richard T. W. McDermid, *Beverley Minster Fasti, Yorkshire Archaeological Society Record Series*, 149 (1993 for 1990), 1–5. The Provost of Beverley received revenues from the Abbey of Melsa. For the history of Melsa, see Edward A. Bond, ed., *Chronica Monasterii de Melsa a fundatione usque ad annum 1396*, 3 vols. (London, 1866).

<sup>9</sup> For the history of Fountains, see William Dugdale, *Monasticon Anglicanum*, vol. 5 (London: 1825; repr., Westmead, 1970), 286–314; Hugh of Kirkstall, "Narratio de fundatione Fontanis Monasterii," in *Memorials of the Abbey of St. Mary of Fountains*, vol. 1, ed. John Richard Walbran, Surtees Society 42 (Durham, 1863), 1–129. For documents recording early Cistercian ideals, see M.-Anselme Dimier, "Un Témoin tardif peu connu du conflit entre Cisterciens et Clunisiens," in *Petrus Venerabilis, 1156–1956: Studies and Texts Commemorating the Eighth Centenary of His Death*, ed. Giles Constable and James Kritzeck, *Studia Anselmiana* 40 (Rome, 1956), 81–90; David Knowles, *Great Historical Enterprises: Problems in Monastic History* (London, 1964), 199–224.

founded one daughter house (Newminster), and by 1150, she had founded seven, the last being Meaux or Melsa.<sup>10</sup>

The early history of the English Cistercian movement, particularly of the Yorkshire Cistercians, cannot be separated from the history of England itself. Following its founding in 1098 in Burgundy, the Cistercian order grew rapidly in the twelfth century, largely because of the promotion and influence of Saint Bernard, Abbot of Clairvaux. The White Monks arrived in England in 1128, founding their first house at Waverley in Surrey.<sup>11</sup> However, the founding that resonates in English accounts of Cistercian foundations is that moment in 1131, when “oon Walter Espek brouzt þat ordre of white monkes into Engelond, and made at Ryval an abbay of the ordre of Cisterciens.”<sup>12</sup> The monks who walked out of St. Mary’s, York, were inspired by the new Cistercian fervor in Yorkshire that emanated from Rievaulx. Though the rapid growth of the Cistercian order certainly owed a good deal to the rigor of its ideals and to the tightness of its international organization, in England, the order’s growth was also linked to conditions directly related to the political and demographic chaos of England itself and the efforts of the feudal nobility to establish their own networks of power.<sup>13</sup> From 1135–54, throughout the civil war of Stephen’s reign, the number of Cistercian houses in England grew from five to forty. Several of these were founded in Yorkshire, which had been left a wasteland after the Conquest. The Cistercians sought out deserted places to pursue the severity of their rule, but because of their skills in farming, land acquisition, and engineering, they turned waste into plenty, inevitably altering and civilizing the landscape around them.<sup>14</sup> Bennett D. Hill suggests that the English baronage

<sup>10</sup> Page, *Victoria County History of Yorkshire*, 135.

<sup>11</sup> Dugdale, *Monasticon*, 219.

<sup>12</sup> Joseph Rawson Lumby, ed., *Polychronicon Ranulphi Higden Monachi Cestrensis together with the English translations of John Trevisa and of an Unknown riter of the Fifteenth Century*, vol. 7, *Rerum Britannicarum medii aevi scriptores* (Rolls Series) 41 (London, 1879; repr., Nendeln, 1964), 400–401. Higden misdates the founding to 1135.

<sup>13</sup> For this account, I am indebted to Bennett D. Hill, *English Cistercian Monasteries and Their Patrons in the Twelfth Century* (Urbana, 1968), 15–64. See also R. H. C. Davis, *King Stephen, 1135–1154* (Berkeley, 1967), 98–106, who notes the importance of the Cistercians for the anti-Canterbury leanings of the northern church, as well as for its anti-royalist sentiments. See also Pierre-André Burton, “Aux origines de l’expansion anglaise de Cîteaux: La fondation de Rievaulx et la conversion d’Aelred: 1128–1134,” *Collectanea cisterciensia* 61 (1999): 186–214, who argues that Bernard of Clairvaux persuaded Henry I to bring the Cistercians to England as part of an effort to pacify and Normanize the realm.

<sup>14</sup> See Richard Howlett, *Chronicles of the Reigns of Stephen, Henry II, and Richard I*, vol. 1, *Rerum Britannicarum medii aevi scriptores* (Rolls Series) 82 (1884). This contains the first four books of the *Historia Rerum Anglicarum* of the Augustinian William of Newburgh. For discussions of Cistercian farming, see Martha G. Newman, *The Boundaries of Charity: Cistercian Culture and Ecclesiastical Reform 1098–1180* (Stanford, 1996), 70–72.

found Cistercian houses attractive investments because they were relatively inexpensive to endow, posed no threat to baronial ambitions while extending their own feudal networks, and offered the added bonus of instruction in new agricultural methods. After the accession of Henry II in 1154, Cistercian patrons tended to be knights involved in the work of the government.<sup>15</sup>

Owing both to too rapid expansion (particularly in the case of Melsa) and the difficulties of King John's reign (1199–1216), English Cistercians fell upon hard times in the early thirteenth century.<sup>16</sup> John, faced with a debt of 30,000 marks to Philip Augustus of France, empty coffers, and a papal interdict (1208–14) for his having refused to acknowledge Stephen Langton archbishop of Canterbury, took the opportunity to mulct the clergy, especially the Cistercians. Those who tried to oppose him, like the abbot of Melsa, found themselves in even worse conditions, their lands seized and their abbeys temporarily dispersed.<sup>17</sup> During much of this time (1191–1212), John's half-brother, Geoffrey Plantagenet, was Archbishop of York. Quarrelsome and extravagant, he did little to stabilize the situation in Yorkshire though he did resist John's incursions upon the clergy.<sup>18</sup> If Alan of Melsa was his clerk while attached to Beverley, he would have been in the thick of conflicts concerning ecclesiastical rights, property rights, taxation, and the administration of justice.<sup>19</sup> He would also have been aware of the events and struggles that led to the signing of Magna Carta in 1215, which succeeded John's raising the Interdict by signing over as feudal fiefs Ireland and England to Pope Innocent III. After 1214, when the Interdict

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<sup>15</sup> Bennett D. Hill, *English Cistercian Monasteries and Their Patrons in the Twelfth Century* (Urbana, 1968), 40, 62.

<sup>16</sup> For Melsa and its financial problems, see Bond, *Chronica Monasterii*, 289, 328, 342–43, 344–46; Joan Wardrop, *Fountains Abbey and Its Benefactors*, Cistercian Studies Series 91 (Kalamazoo, 1987), 18–20.

<sup>17</sup> See C. R. Cheney, "King John and the Papal Interdict," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 31 (1948): 295–317; and idem, "King John's Reaction to the Interdict on England," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 4th series, 31 (1949), 129–50; J. C. Holt, *The Northerners: A Study in the Reign of King John* (Oxford, 1961), 147, 166–70; Sidney Painter, *The Reign of King John* (Baltimore, 1949), 155–202; Ralph V. Turner, *The English Judiciary in the Age of Glanvill and Bracton, c. 1176–1239* (Cambridge, 1985), 158–62, and idem, *Magna Carta through the Ages* (London, 2003), 39–49; W. L. Warren, *King John* (Berkeley, 1961), 173. For a contemporary account, see the *Historia Rerum Anglicarum of William of Newburgh* in Richard Howlett, ed., *Chronicles of the Reigns of Stephen, Henry II, and Richard I*, vol. 1, *Rerum Britannicarum medii aevi scriptores* (Rolls Series) 82 (London, 1884), 509, 511.

<sup>18</sup> Holt, *Northerners*, 204.

<sup>19</sup> Under John, justice was firmly tied to the king, who could behave unspeakably when opposed. Greedy and ruthless, he gouged both the clergy and the nobility, turning in 1213 to the Jews in Yorkshire and Lincolnshire as possible sources of added income (Turner, *Magna Carta*, 43, 47; Holt, *Northerners*, 169).

was lifted, John employed his newly-made Roman alliance as leverage against baronial power.<sup>20</sup> Baronial liberties underwrite the Magna Carta, which set limits to regal power in guaranteeing their rights, as well as those of the church, English knights, merchants, freemen, and peasants.<sup>21</sup>

Rather than providing a simple solution to Alan of Melsa's *Tractatus . . . de Susanna*, the above suggests the sorts of questions Alan's poem might ask, and possibly allows us to make guesses about conflicts germane to it. The poem owes its urgency to its irresolutions, which attach themselves tenuously to the biblical story of Susanna but seem to belong within the likely concerns of an early thirteenth-century Yorkshire author with ties both to the secular clergy and to the Cistercian order. Though Susanna was used at least twice in the thirteenth century in texts associated with female devotion, Alan of Melsa does not seem to be writing for nuns.<sup>22</sup> His initial testimony of conversion resonates with Cistercian language, as, possibly, does his focus upon space in his long description of the garden belonging to Joachim and Susanna. His overriding concern with legality and with judicial corruption might reflect similar concerns to be found in northern circles during Angevin rule. Both the garden and the focus upon equity were, I believe, sources of inspiration for the fourteenth-century author of the *Pistel of Susan*, who might have read the Latin poem in a Cistercian library.

#### CONVERSION

The originary language of the Cistercian order is the language of conversion, and it serves as the rhetorical backbone for its early documents. These primitive Cistercian documents, which provide accounts of the foundation of Cîteaux, of the constitution of the Cistercian order, and of the record of disciplinary decrees in the annual Great Chapter of the order served to authorize the Cistercians, especially in light of the charges of apostasy brought against them by the Cluniacs. The documents themselves have occasioned much critical scrutiny, since to some they suggest careful editorial arrangement by the early members of the order, including St. Bernard, designed to create an unimpeachable textual record of the earliest Cistercian intentions and origins.<sup>23</sup> Those origins are encapsulated in the conversion moments of Robert Molesme, who first abandoned Cluny for Cîteaux and a stricter rule,

<sup>20</sup> See Warren, *King John*, 207–16 for an analysis of the situation.

<sup>21</sup> Peasants are mentioned, but it is, of course, a baronial document. See Warren, *King John*, 232–40; F. M. Powicke, *Stephen Langton: The Ford Lectures Delivered in the University of Oxford in Hilary Term 1927* (Oxford, 1928), 102–27; and Turner, *Magna Carta*.

<sup>22</sup> See Stevenson, *Latin Poets*, and Donovan, *The de Brailes Hours* (both n. 2 above).

<sup>23</sup> See Knowles, *Great Historical Enterprises* (n. 9 above), who explains the issues very well.

though he was later pressured to return, and of the Englishman Stephen Harding, who came and stayed, providing the order with its true founding figure. Stephen Harding's experience, like the later experience of Bernard and of Aelred in Yorkshire, was one of radical conversion. These conversions were radical in the sense that the order described itself as returning to the roots of the cenobitic movement, to the original simplicity of Benedict, thus as a type of reformation. In part, as Martha G. Newman has pointed out, since the Cistercians accepted only adults into the order (they did not take oblates, nor did they have schools for boys), they were interested in the process of conversion, in the psychological transformation that propelled one into the novitiate.<sup>24</sup>

Evidence for this interest comes, of course, from the language the Cistercians used about themselves. One collection of poems and letters by Matthew of Rievaulx, written ca. 1216 and copied by a scribe of St. Victor, contains three such letters of vocation. The collection, which certainly demonstrates the erudition and literary polish of Matthew, forms the second part of a manuscript that begins with the Tobit of Matthew of Vendôme.<sup>25</sup> In addition to these letters of vocation, there are poems whose topicality (on the Interdict, on King John, on England, on Fountains Abbey, on Aelred) demonstrates Matthew's deep involvement in the realities of early thirteenth-century Yorkshire. Considered as belonging to a set of conversations among Yorkshire Cistercians, Alan of Melsa's poem and the anthology of Matthew of Rievaulx help us understand some of the complicated concerns of those who had removed themselves from the world but could not deny its claims upon them.

The letters, which succeed one another in the manuscript, are all addressed to a "brother" at Beverley, whom Matthew urges to convert to the Cistercian way.<sup>26</sup> He begins by employing the intense language of

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<sup>24</sup> Martha G. Newman, *The Boundaries of Charity: Cistercian Culture and Ecclesiastical Reform 1098–1180* (Stanford, 1996), 16–23. For contemporary accounts describing the intensity of the Cistercian vocation, see Jean LeClercq, "Lettres de vocation à la vie monastique," *Analecta Monastica*, 3rd series, *Studia Anselmiana* 37 (1955): 172–89, and idem, "La collection des lettres d'Yves de Chartres," *Revue Bénédictine* 56 (1945–46): 123–25; C. H. Talbot, "A Letter of Roger, Abbot of Byland," *Analecta sacri Ordinis Cisterciensis* 7 (1951): 218–31.

<sup>25</sup> See A. Wilmart, "Les mélanges de Matthieu Prêchantre de Rievaulx au début du XIIIe siècle," *Revue Bénédictine* 52 (1940): 15–84; Jean LeClercq, "Lettres de vocation," 173–79. The manuscript is BNF MS Lat. no. 15157. Wilmart ("Les mélanges," 15 n. 1) describes the letters of Matthew of Rievaulx as copied by one hand and corrected by two contemporary revisers, probably against an original English archetype. Wilmart notes his belief that these revisers were English, since they added a supplement (fols. 130–35), now mutilated, that contains some poems concerning Rievaulx. For these see Wilmart, *ibid.*, 48–51.

monastic friendship, language inscribed in the Cistercian experience by both Bernard of Clairvaux and Aelred of Rievaulx.<sup>27</sup> He uses the first paragraph to assure his love for and delight in his brother and to assert their brotherhood and oneness in charity (“Sumus duo ex carne una: quinimmo non duo iam, sed idem, identitate caritatis, non carnis”). He then urges his brother not to linger in Egypt among the cucumbers and flesh pots, but to seek true plenty, the manna that God sends down from the sky, going on to urge him not to tarry, “Ne tardas conuerti ad Dominum” — not to defer conversion, for in the world there is no true justice. He offers his hesitant brother the example of Abraham, who left Ur at God’s command for a land flowing with milk and honey. The milk and honey are spiritual, for he extols the stringency of the way of John the Baptist, the abstinence of Daniel and his friends, the simplicity of Elijah. He uses the crow, who chose to eat flesh rather than return to Noah, as a negative example. The end of the letter is a paean to Melsa, which is a short way from Beverley (“Est uia compendiosa de Beuerlaco ad Melsam; uade ad domum istam, quia uere Dominus est in loca isto . . .”), parsing the name Melsa by reference to the honey of the promised land, “A melle enim dicitur Melsa,” where abounds true spiritual delight and sweetness.

In the next two letters, Matthew enlarges upon the nature of the Cistercian paradise. In the second, he asserts that the Cistercian order provides a true home in Christ, a singular refuge, a gate for the destitute and orphaned, a true mother and nurse (“nutrix”). The eye is blind, the foot is lame; the pilgrim should not stay behind out of doors (“Oculus est ceco, pes claudo . . . foris non remanet peregrinus”).<sup>28</sup> The refuge he offers to his dearest brother (“amantissimo fratri”) is one of holy poverty and work, where Leah and Rachel, Mary and Martha are reconciled, for he who does not work, does not eat. In the third, Matthew focuses upon spiritual benefits, telling his brother that wisdom is not found in the world, but that the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom, urging him to be converted from the vain conversation of the world to God.<sup>29</sup> He mentions the vanity of the world and the certainty of death only to heighten the security, the quiet, the light, and the spiritual delight of the Cistercian way. He tells him to hasten to the gate of

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<sup>26</sup> See Wilmart, “Les mélanges,” 40–41, who notes that they take up fols. 89v–97. In his numbering of the items in the manuscript, the letters are nos. 63–65. Megan Cassidy-Welch (*Monastic Spaces and Their Meanings. Thirteenth-Century English Cistercian Monasteries* [Turnholt, 2001], 65–66) discusses Matthew of Rievaulx’s letters as capturing the Cistercian language of paradisaical space.

<sup>27</sup> For this letter, see LeClercq, “Lettres de vocation,” 175–77. This first letter is no. 63 in Wilmart’s numbering.

<sup>28</sup> The second letter is edited in Wilmart, “Les mélanges,” 72–74.

<sup>29</sup> LeClercq, “Lettres de vocation,” 177–79.



paradise, to the “hortus deliciarum,” where the woman does not seduce, nor the serpent deceive. In this garden, whose prototype is that in Canticum 4:12–15, are to be found roses and lilies of the valley, cyprus, nard, crocus, cinnamon, balsam, myrrh, and aloe, with all their oils. By coming into the reclaimed garden, his brother will be protected by angels as Joseph was in Egypt, Daniel in the lions’ den, and the three children in the fiery furnace. Matthew employs this same pastoral imagery, which characterizes many early Cistercian accounts of their houses, in a poem in the same manuscript describing Fountains Abbey as a font of living water, healing, nourishing, sealed, sister to Rievaulx.<sup>30</sup> Matthew also stresses the security of living in God in another letter in the manuscript, which stresses God’s saving care in the examples of Moses in the Red Sea, in the journey of Tobit, in Daniel, in Susanna falsely accused, in Peter in chains, Paul in dangers, Lawrence in fire, and Catherine in prison.<sup>31</sup> Matthew of Rievaulx’s subject, language, and exemplary method can likewise be found in Alan of Melsa’s *Tractatus . . . de Susanna*, but, where Matthew sees a clear line dividing the spirit and the flesh, the closed garden and the world, the lives of the just and the unjust, Alan provides a more complicated narrative, one whose parts do not exactly cohere.

The first twenty-four lines of the *Tractatus . . . de Susanna* are a conversion narrative, which testify to the speaker’s self-awareness and to his radical Pauline experience of change. He begins with the arresting, “Cum mea mens loquitur mecum, fantasma uidetur / Que prius addidici, que scio nulla scio . . . sum reor alter ego” (When my mind speaks with me, what I previously learned seems a ghost, and I know I know nothing . . . I am, I suppose, another self [lines 1–2, 4]). He continues to play on this sense of his own doubleness, describing what he was previously taught to honor (indulgence, impiety, the things and values of the world), comparing himself to a drunken follower of Dionysus (14). He then uses language similar to that which Matthew employs, describing himself as not knowing he was naked, blind, and needy, and his conversion as an act of grace: “Gracia sola Dei squamas detersit ocellis” (Only the grace of God removed the scales from my eyes [19]). He goes on, “Cecus eram, uideo: nudus, modo uestior; eger, / Conualui (I was blind, I see, naked, now clothed, ill, healthy [21–22]). The scene is as familiar as the dark room in Damascus, where the scales come away from Paul’s eyes, and he goes out to preach the very Christ he formerly persecuted (Acts 9). After this staging of the psychology of conversion where the mind sees itself dimly as it formerly was and testifies to its own

<sup>30</sup> See Wilmart, “Les mélanges,” 69–70.

<sup>31</sup> Wilmart, *ibid.*, 38, notes that this letter, whose addressee is unknown, was probably another monk in some sort of difficulty.

reformation, the narrator says that, considering the treacheries of the flesh, the story of Susanna occurred to him as an important lesson and warning.

Alan of Melsa's preface to the story of Susanna and the Elders frames the narrative in ways other medieval renderings of it do not. Exegetical treatments of Daniel 13 do not link it to the theme of conversion. Though conversion was a common theme in early Cistercian writings, and Cistercian authors sometimes employ Susanna as an example of chastity, virtue, or faith, as does Matthew of Rievaulx, the two were not brought together in a single work.<sup>32</sup> There are two noteworthy Latin poetic treatments of Susanna and the Elders, by Peter Riga (d. 1209) and by a Willetrudis (possibly either the German abbess of Hohenvart, fl. 1090, or the Anglo-Norman abbess of Wilton, d. ca. 1122).<sup>33</sup> These three poems are sufficiently different to point out some of the possible ways in which Susanna's story appealed to monastic communities.<sup>34</sup> Peter Riga's description of Susanna heightens the implicit sensuality of the narrative.<sup>35</sup> The heat of summer and the playful stream in the garden invite Susanna to bathe ("Illic inuitant Susannam bal-

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<sup>32</sup> Bernard (see n. 3 above) discusses Susanna. See also Thomas the Cistercian in his commentary on the Canticle (PL 206:15–20) and Gunther the Cistercian in *De oratione jejunio et elemosyna* (PL 212:97–221, at 169).

<sup>33</sup> For Willetrudis, see Stevenson, *Latin Poets* (n. 2 above), 130–37. Stevenson also mentions Peter Riga and Alan of Melsa. Her suggestion that Willetrudis might have been an Anglo-Norman nun from the Benedictine house of Wilton in Wiltshire is intriguing, particularly considering Jocelyn Wogan-Browne's work on the textual communities of Anglo-Norman nuns. See Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, *Saints' Lives and Women's Literary Culture c. 1150–1300: Virginity and Its Authorizations* (Oxford, 2001). Peter Riga's poem is edited by Mozley, "Susanna and the Elders" (see n. 4 above), 30–41. For a more recent edition, as well as comments on Peter Riga, see Paul E. Beichner, ed., *Aurora: Petri Rigae Biblia Versificata: A Verse Commentary on the Bible*, vol. 1, Publications in Medieval Studies 19 (South Bend, 1965), 360–67, 371–74. Peter Riga, according to Beichner (notes to lines 451–646), first wrote the *Historia Susanne* as an independent poem before putting it into the *Aurora*. Aegidius of Paris, in revising the *Aurora*, destroyed the *Historia Susanne* as a debate, rearranging the parts and making additions to it so that it began in the garden and not at the trial. Mozley and Beichner print both versions of the *Historia Susanne*. Beichner also notes (*ibid.*, xxix) that the *Aurora* was in the library at Melsa though he does not say which version. This is not surprising, considering the widespread popularity of the poem.

<sup>34</sup> Mozley ("Susanna and the Elders," 27) also notes that there are references to poems on the subject of Susanna in old library catalogues, such as those of St. Augustine's Abbey, Canterbury, Peterborough Abbey Library, and the library of the Austin Friars at York. For the Austin Friars' importance to textual dissemination, see Ralph Hanna, "Augustinian Canons and Middle English Literature," in *The English Medieval Book: Studies in Memory of Jeremy Griffiths*, ed. A. S. G. Edwards, Vincent Gillespie, and Ralph Hanna (London, 2000), 27–42.

<sup>35</sup> Stevenson, *Latin Poets* (n. 2 above), 132, also talks about this, noting the ways in which Petrus's verbs implicate Susanna as a temptress. My quotations from the *Historia Susanne* are taken from Mozeley's edition of Aegidius's redaction, who takes this section

nea,” 21). He goes on, “Temptat aquam, laudat temptatam, nuda subintrat / Laudatum, nudam uidit ueterque senum” (23–24), implying that Susanna’s testing (“temptat”) of the water is also a test of her, since she praises the results of her test, goes into the water nude, and is then seen by both old men, who become heated at the sight (“Vidit et incaluit,” 25). In the elders’ false account of Susanna’s crime, or what they “saw,” Peter Riga provides a sensual account of the rich fertility of the garden and the beauty of Susanna herself. Peter Riga does not actually blame her for being alone and naked, but he suggests that by her actions she becomes an object of temptation.<sup>36</sup> Willetrudis’s Susanna, as Stevenson points out, is normally surrounded by her serving women and may bathe, but we are treated to a vicarious sight of her removing her clothing. Rather than being subtly complicit in her own predicament, this Susanna is the innocent victim of others’ lechery. Willetrudis ends the poem by using Susanna as a model both for virtuous wives and career virgins, an association possibly also important to William de Brailles of Oxford, whose Hours contain a sequence of depictions of the story of Susanna made about 1240 for a lady named Susanna.<sup>37</sup>

Alan of Melsa’s version of the account of Susanna differs in its opening emphasis. After recounting the story of his conversion, the narrator states the benefits of telling this particular story, which renders the chastity of the woman, the wickedness of the judges, the wisdom of the man, presumably Daniel, the lasciviousness of the old men. Alan refers to the story as a case (“causa”). He underlines that the work honors Susanna’s “manliness” and her skill: “Pretitulatur opus Susanne causa uirilic; / Femina que uicit scribitur arte senes” (39–40). As he sets up the story, Susanna, the beautiful, chaste, and intelligent, triumphs over the old, corrupt, and lecherous. However, there is another important detail to Alan’s proem to the narrative. Unlike Peter Riga, who consistently refers to the elders as old men (“senes”), Alan of Melsa calls them judges and points out that the story teaches true justice, “Discat in hac causa iudex procedere recto / tramite” (It teaches in this case a judge to proceed according to the right path [33]). Unlike either Willetrudis or Peter Riga, Alan’s account is, from the beginning, a commentary upon the workings of justice, a theme that he introduces in the opening section on conversion where he notes that he had earlier been taught to serve money (“seruire lucris,” 5), to pursue cases (“insistere causis,” 5), not to consider wickedness but to speak silently (“nil reputare nephas: / Doctus eram

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(which belongs to Daniel’s accusation of the Elders) and uses it early in the poem to describe the scene in the garden.

<sup>36</sup> In the *Reductorium Morale Super totam Bibliam* (Venice, 1633), 206, Pierre Bersuire likens Susanna to the soul and says that she should not have been alone (hence, without attendant virtues) in the garden.

<sup>37</sup> See Donovan, *The de Brailles Hours* (n. 2 above), 4–5.

reticenda loqui," 6–7). It is that worldly teaching and worldly self that is cast away with the scales from his eyes. The narrator thus links his former self to self-interested behavior that can only result in injustice and implies that the story of Susanna is meant to refute that early teaching, and his account of it because it serves as a sign of his conversion.

#### THE GARDEN AND THE WORLD

Though sometimes Susanna is invoked in interpretations of the Canticum and the *hortus deliciarum*, Joachim's garden rests uneasily beside other notable biblical gardens, Eden, the garden of the Canticum, the garden of Easter morning, and the garden of the heavenly Jerusalem. Where Eden certainly has a serpent willing to deceive, it also has an Eve, a role Susanna does not play despite Peter Riga's attempt to associate her with the idea of temptation. Matthew of Rievaulx's description of the Cistercian order as a garden without a temptress is clearly meant to describe Melsa as a redeemed Eden. The garden of the Canticum is the site of the love-play between the heavenly bridegroom and the bride and was used to describe the purity of the Blessed Virgin, where Christ joined with human flesh. The garden of Easter morning is the site of the resurrection of Christ, the sign of the resurrection of the flesh in Christ. Heaven's garden is without mutability, unceasing in its reflection of the Lamb. The garden of Daniel 13 does not contain a temptress, is the locus neither for spiritual searching nor for resurrection, and is certainly time-bound; in fact, it is located in Babylon, as a testimony to Joachim's prosperity, and contains the world, or is penetrated by the world. Any attempt to tell the story of Susanna must come to terms with the garden itself, or must decide how that garden means. Alan of Melsa gives an enormous amount of space to this garden and, in so doing, underlines the ways in which it can and cannot mean. What is more, before he lets us into the garden, he introduces us to the world that surrounds it.

Alan's praise of Susanna is punctuated by his account of the false practices of the world around her:

In Babilone fuit, sed nil Babilonis habebat;  
Sed male persuadent ocia, luxus, amor.  
Uxor erat Joachim; quos non petulancia sed Lex  
Unii et legis sanctio, castus Himen.

(51–52)

[She was in Babylon, but had nothing of Babylon,  
But leisure, wealth, and love are badly persuasive.  
She was the wife of Joachim; not lust but law  
united them and the sanction of law, chaste Hymen.]

This opposition between laxity and law guides Alan's description of the marriage between Joachim and Susanna, whom he compares to Penelope

(69), as well as his account of Joachim himself, in whose house law and justice thrived and gifts to clients were not given (79, 80). However, Alan's insistence upon Joachim's legal ethics sets Joachim apart from the old men, who are corrupt judges for whom the judicial forum is a marketplace (89–106). He goes on to suggest that in his own age, power too often corrupts those who were once humble (109–10), linking the biblical narrative with contemporary complaints about corrupt and greedy judges.<sup>38</sup> He then returns briefly to Susanna, following the account in Daniel of her early education in the law by her parents and of the way in which Joachim's house served as a forum for legal proceedings according to the laws of equity. At no point does he ignore the secular and pragmatic world of just and unjust practices.

Alan's description of Joachim and Susanna's garden is long and elaborate, but it is not a picture of Eden or of heaven's garden. Nor is it simply a garden of fleshly delight. Like the garden in the alliterative *Pistel of Susan*, it contains things for both use and beauty. The gallery of the house, which murmurs with clients, opens onto a distinguished courtyard, where the old men deliberate. Joachim's house, though it is ruled according to the law of justice, contains at its heart the unjust judges. Alan goes on to describe the grounds as containing a barn, a mill, a storehouse, a kitchen, and a place for the storage of food ("horrea, pistrinum, zeta, coquina, penu," 142). Alan could easily be describing a Cistercian foundation, since the Cistercians were known for their farming practices and engineering skills, creating self-sufficient estates that redefined the environment around them.<sup>39</sup> The garden is attached to these grounds and contains a sumptuous variety of flowers, herbs, fruits, and birds: white pepper, cumin, lilies, roses, violets, *nardus amomo* — all mixed with decency or good taste ("mixta decenter errant," 146). An orchard blooms near the bed chamber, bringing in sweet smells. There, there are palms, grapes, oaks, apple trees, pear, Syrian fig, and two kinds of cherry trees.<sup>40</sup> Alan here shifts away from the picture of such great

<sup>38</sup> Such complaints would have had a good deal of relevance for Cistercians: see Painter, *The Reign of King John* (n. 17 above), 155, 158, 171, 183; Henry Gay Hewlett, ed., *Roger de Wendover Liber qui dicitur Flores historiarum ab Anno Domini MCLIV*, vol. 2 (London, 1887), 47. For legal conditions, see Turner, *Magna Carta* (n. 17 above), 43, 158–62; David Carpenter, *The Struggle for Mastery: Britain 1066–1284* (Oxford, 2003), 273; Warren, *King John* (n. 17 above), 173.

<sup>39</sup> See Hill, *English Cistercian Monasteries*, 44–45, 76, 78; Newman, *The Boundaries of Charity* (n. 14 above), 70–72, 90–91.

<sup>40</sup> With the exception of *nardus amomo*, an eastern spice plant from which balm was extracted, which is mentioned in Canticle 4, all of the plants Alan mentions were grown in England at this time. See Frank Crisp, *Mediaeval Gardens*, 2 vols. (orig. publ. 1924; repr., New York, 1966), 1:34–48; J. H. Harvey, *Mediaeval Gardens* (London, 1981; 2<sup>nd</sup> rev. ed., 1990), 168–80. Burton notes that, in the fourteenth century, both the prior and the

plenty to a more mythic reference, for in the garden it is perpetual spring (“Ver ibi perpetuum,” 153), a type of Edenic landscape removed from time, having at its heart a clear fountain, whose water was like ambrosia. However, ominously, the water is shaded by a laurel and frequented by blackbirds, nightingales, and parrots. Both the laurel and the nightingale recall the violent Ovidian tales of Daphne and Philomena, while the parrot, who likewise finds its way into Susan’s fourteenth-century garden, is one more reminder of the luxuries of the East that decorate Joachim’s house. This garden is at once an ordered, fruitful, beautiful space and a *locus amoenus*, whose beauty conceals its threat.

To this fountain and shade comes Susanna to avoid the heat, while the old men with their cold blood and old withered members (“marcida membra,” 182) excited by Venus are also drawn by the possibility of seeing her. Alan then pauses to decry the way the eye can seize the mind, can drive it into a fury (“Mens oculo rapitur, mentem furatur ocellus,” 183), stressing the dangerous windows the senses provide, and going on to contrast the crow who left the ark and did not return, with the dove, who returned bearing an olive branch (an example likewise employed by Matthew of Rievaulx), prudent Judith who left in order to kill Holofernes with incautious Dinah who left her home for her own ruin. His warning about the dangers of sins of the eye, the avarice which he has already linked to the corrupt judges, is related to his proem and his contemporary understanding of the nature of the world and its justice. The examples of Judith’s prudence and Dinah’s lack of caution suggest something more thoroughly worldly, a validation of experience, for Dinah was blameless but ignorant of the evils of the world around her. By attaching the adjective *vaga* (wandering) to Dinah (191), a word also frequently used to describe the monk out of his cloister, he suggests an identification with Susanna, who, like Eve, finds a serpent in her garden (194), in this case elders for whom love triumphs over law (“Vicit amor legem . . .” 201).

Alan stages the confrontation between Susanna and the elders as though it were a debate about the nature of the law. Before she is accosted, Alan presents Susanna as vulnerable, as, like Dinah, incautious. Her hair is loose (“resoluta coma,” 213); she is lightly clothed in muslin (“fuit induta sindone nuda fere,” 213), relaxing in the shade of her garden, waiting for her attendants to bring unguents, a lamb among wolves (221). As they do in Daniel 13, the Elders acknowledge their desire for her, but Alan expands this into an argument. They describe themselves as magistrates of the people, learned in laws. However, they then say, “Maiestas sub amore iacet” (Majesty lies

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abbot at Melsa had gardens, the abbot’s off his private chamber. See Bond, *Chronica . . . de Melsa* 3, 242.

under love [235]), converting the word *censores* (magistrates) into *maiestas* (majesty), thereby suggesting their own focus upon public status rather than public duty. They then attempt to woo Susanna by flattery, recalling the examples of Samson, David, and Solomon, all figures of might who were laid low by love. She is doubly valuable to them because she has revived their dead virility (242). As judges, they tell her she will not bear charges of adultery for her act; otherwise they are two witnesses against her. Susanna's response is a stirring question about their law:

O noua res, inquit, noua lex, nouus improbat actor  
 Quod deus et ueteres instituere patres.  
 (253–54)<sup>41</sup>

["O new thing," she said, "a new law, a new advocate condemns  
 What God and the ancient fathers established"]

She reminds them of the sanctity of marriage, recalling the example of Lucretia, returning to the biblical script in Daniel 13 by affirming that God sees all, and it is better for her to be condemned by men than to sin in God's eyes. Their flattery has meant nothing to this Susanna; instead, she has argued against them about the very principles of the "law" they follow, this new law that supports injustice and operates against the innocent. When the elders bring their charges against her, they, again, employ the language of law, this time of the law of Moses, which they say condemns her (331). Susanna is less eloquent publicly than in private, saying, as she does in scripture, that she is innocent in the eyes of God. Alan returns to the biblical text for the final courtroom drama wherein Daniel brings the case to true justice by questioning the two judges separately and proving their lies. This part of the story, which takes place in a real courtroom, is given far less space than the debate in the garden, where Susanna argues for the true law against the corrupt judges. Alan drives home the lesson in justice he perceives the story to have at the end where he says that the narrative teaches judges and witnesses to love the law, women to be chaste, old men to behave themselves, and the young to be wise like Daniel. Despite his remarks about chaste living, which encapsulate a more conventional reading of the story, his emphasis throughout the poem has been upon the law and the ways in which law can be twisted to further self interest.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>41</sup> Peter Riga likewise employs the term "res nova" (line 149), but he uses it to describe the revolutionary force of Susanna's beauty upon the decrepitude of the elders.

<sup>42</sup> Stevenson's reading (*Latin Poets*, 133) of Willetrudis's account of Susanna is instructive here, for Willetrudis shapes the account, probably written for nuns, so that the emphasis is upon female strength and chastity.

Alan of Melsa's *Tractatus . . . de Susanna* reworks the biblical story to capture and reformulate the language of Cistercian vocation during the early thirteenth century, insisting upon the need to think of the cloister as inextricably (for good or ill) joined to a world that could not be described in any but the most realistic language. The great abbeys of Rievaulx and Fountains and their daughters employed the timeless language of conversion and redemption to describe both the monks' experience and their construction of new abbeys. For example, Hugh of Kirkstall's history of the founding of Fountains Abbey begins with a narrative dictated by the abbey's oldest monk, Serlo, to Hugh.<sup>43</sup> Serlo refers to his entry into the Cistercian order as a conversion and to the nascent abbey as like a vine planted in the wilderness.<sup>44</sup> Matthew of Rievaulx's letters to the brother in Beverley suggest how resonant a language it was. Though Alan of Melsa seems to echo the Cistercian tropes of the *hortus conclusus*, the redeemed Eden, his choice to use the story of Susanna as illustrative of conversion is fraught with difficulty. The garden is hardly enclosed. In fact, like the Cistercian order itself, it is permeated by the world.

This is not to say that by the thirteenth century the Cistercians had become lax or corrupt, but it is to say the reality was not as simple as the founding myths present. Cistercian prosperity and success rested on technical ingenuity, agricultural innovation, and careful land deals — all traits that won the order both admiration and scorn from its arrival in England. They refused to house boys and maintain schools, take tithes, exact manorial fees, or have serfs. Instead, they created a land-based self-sufficient economy, where lay brothers occupied and farmed granges close to the abbey. Though they chose isolated sites, they were nonetheless not far from main roads and were diligent in reclaiming old, worn-out land and in stitching together parcels that could form compact estates.<sup>45</sup> In the twelfth century, soon after they arrived, Walter Map, like his friend Gerald of Wales, satirized them for what he perceived as their covetousness. He accused them

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<sup>43</sup> For a study of the documents, composition, and reception history of this narrative, see L. G. D. Baker, "The Genesis of English Cistercian Chronicles: The Foundation History of Fountains Abbey 1," *Analecta Cisterciensia* 25 (1969): 14–41. For the history, see John Richard Walbran, ed., *Hugh of Kirkstall: Narratio de fundatione Fontanis Monasterii in Memorials of the Abbey of St. Mary of Fountains*, vol. 1, Surtees Society 42 (London, 1862), 1–129.

<sup>44</sup> Walbran, ed., *Hugh of Kirkstall*, 2. Cassidy-Welch ("Monastic Spaces" [n. 26 above], 66–68) also discusses the pastoral language of Cistercian foundation narratives.

<sup>45</sup> See Janet E. Burton, *The Monastic Order in Yorkshire* (Cambridge, 1999), 217, 243; Pauline Matarasso, *The Cistercian World: Monastic Writings of the Twelfth Century* (London, 1993), xii; F. J. Mullin, *A History of the Work of the Cistercians in Yorkshire (1131–1300)* (Washington, DC, 1932), 38–39, 88; and Newman, *The Boundaries of Charity* (n. 14 above), 23, 67–72, 90–91.



of turning Mary into Martha (contemplation into labor), of being solely interested in prosperity, and of appropriating surrounding lands as the children of Israel “despoiled” the Egyptians.<sup>46</sup> On the other hand, Ranulf Higden, following William of Newburgh, reports that their early industry was admirable: “Þat ordre encesede so þat tyme þat þe monkes of Cisterciens were spied of alle monkes [þe] myroure of hem þat were goodliche besy, and reproof and chastisyng of slewþe.”<sup>47</sup> They were famous for altering the environments around them, creating water mills, metal works, and breeding methods that put them in the forefront of what was a depressed English agricultural economy. They may have arranged their boundaries to keep out the world, but they also served the world in the scutage they owed their baronial patrons, in the legal scholarship and advice they provided, and in their service as papal judges-delegate.<sup>48</sup> During the reign of John, particularly during the Interdict when John ruthlessly confiscated property and demanded ever greater payments for “justice” in the king’s courts (which always traveled with him), the Cistercians could hardly have kept themselves from knowing something of the dangers to which an unprotected garden was exposed, nor their own covert or overt involvement in a world ruled by exigency.<sup>49</sup> There are several poems in Matthew of Rievaulx’s collection that concern contemporary issues. He includes a work on the Interdict, upon one entitled “Discord of the English,” and one on King John. Each of these proclaims the need for true justice, for honesty, for devotion to the Church.<sup>50</sup>

When juxtaposed with Matthew of Rievaulx’s letters, or other Cistercian self-descriptions, Alan of Melsa’s poem asks, or begs us to ask questions rather than to accept conventional images and ideas. In large part, these questions arise from the fissures in the poem itself. For example, if the story of Susanna seems a good narrative to tell after conversion, what does the narrative illustrate? Since he presents Susanna as dangerously innocent, not as an Eve whose curiosity and vanity are aroused by the serpent, but as chaste and vulnerable, is he implying that the very unworldliness that was

<sup>46</sup> See M. R. James, ed. and trans., *Walter Map, De Nugis Curialium: Courtiers’ Trifles*, rev. C. N. L. Brooke and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford, 2002), xlv, 72–113.

<sup>47</sup> Lumby, ed., *Polychronicon Ranulphi Higden* (n. 12 above), 405.

<sup>48</sup> Hill, *English Cistercian Monasteries* (n. 13 above), 57–59, 137–40.

<sup>49</sup> On justice during the reign of John, see Warren, *King John* (n. 17 above), 168–73; Carpenter, *The Struggle for Mastery* (n. 38 above), 273; Turner, *Magna Carta* (n. 17 above), 41–43.

<sup>50</sup> Wilmart, “Les mélanges” (n. 25 above), 47, 56–57, 66–67. For a study of one way in which the political issues associated with the reign of John were refracted through a literary text, see Andrew Galloway, “Lagamon’s Gift,” *Publications of the Modern Language Association* 121 (2006): 717–34.

fundamental to the Cistercian self-description cannot be sustained because there are no safe places for solitude? Is he questioning the very ideal of the solitary life as incautious? Is he exploring the two different worlds he has inhabited, one in Beverley as part of Geoffrey, Archbishop of York's extended household, the other in Melsa, which was not a safe haven during the first fifteen years of the thirteenth century? Is he underlining the need for knowledge of and an adherence to the law, law that was severely tested during the reign of King John? The end of the poem, with its morals and classical modesty statements, implicitly disclaims the severity of the questions embedded in the body of the poem, but it cannot muffle them entirely. Alan builds the *Tractatus . . . de Susanna* upon the idea of reflection, that moment when the mind observes itself as having one self in the past and another in the present, a self-scrutiny that does not resolve into soothing accounts of the peace to be had in the enclosed garden. It seems a rejoinder to Matthew of Rievaulx, an elegant tale of innocence lost, transformed into experience. Alan narrates the poem as a wiser Susanna.

#### TEXTUAL TRANSMISSIONS

If Alan of Melsa's *Tractatus . . . de Susanna* looks backward to the founding language of the Cistercian order, it also, I believe, provided a fourteenth-century Yorkshire poet with material for his own arresting poem on the subject of Susanna and the elders. In making such a suggestion, I inevitably intervene in the wide-ranging arguments about the provenance and origins of English alliterative poetry. The work of Elizabeth Salter and, more recently, work by Michael Bennett, Ralph Hanna, David Lawton, and Susanna Fein has sketched in a wider geography for alliterative poets, confining neither them nor their work to northern or midland locales and audiences.<sup>51</sup> Not only were the holdings of magnates spread throughout England and monastic orders equally widespread, but texts traveled along the same roads, from monastic library or copying center to other copying centers, libraries, or great houses. Textual transmission is one aspect of the incessant mobility of medieval life.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Michael Bennett, *Community, Class, and Careerism: Cheshire and Lancaster Society in the Age of "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight"* (Cambridge, 1983); Susanna Greer Fein, "The Early Thirteen-line Stanza: Style and Metrics Reconsidered," *Parergon* 18 (2000): 97–126; Ralph Hanna III, *Pursuing History: Middle English Manuscripts and Their Texts* (Stanford, 1996); and idem, "Sir Thomas Berkeley and His Patronage," *Speculum* 64 (1989): 878–916; Hanna and David Lawton, eds., *The Siege of Jerusalem*, EETS 320 (Oxford, 2003), Introduction; and David Lawton, "The Diversity of Middle English Alliterative Poetry," *Leeds Studies in English* 20 (1989): 143–72.

<sup>52</sup> See, for example, F. M. Stenton, "The Road System of Medieval England," *Economic History Review* 7 (1936): 1–21.

During the Middle Ages, Yorkshire, networked by ecclesiastical foundations, allowing for a good deal of textual cross-fertilization, was a center for vigorous vernacular literary production, as well as for Latin writing.<sup>53</sup> If we look simply at the Cistercian houses, the evidence for literary activity and interest is great. Though the Cistercians did not give prominence to the arts, the writings of Aelred of Rievaulx and Roger of Byland in the twelfth century, of Matthew of Rievaulx, Alan of Melsa, and Stephen of Sawley (d. 1252) in the early thirteenth, and in the fourteenth century, John of Hovedon (d. 1322), poet and abbot of Sawley, William of Rymynton (d. 1372), prior of Sawley, suggest both scholarly acumen and attention to literary style.<sup>54</sup> David Bell's work on the libraries of the Cistercians, while underscoring their conservative character, also evinces the care Cistercian houses took to acquire volumes that served both their everyday liturgical needs and their continuing pedagogic and scholarly aims.<sup>55</sup> Though the cata-

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<sup>53</sup> The term is Burton's (*Monastic Order in Yorkshire*, 286–87). For vernacular production, see Ralph Hanna's recent work on Yorkshire, "Yorkshire Writers," Sir Israel Gollancz Memorial Lecture, *Proceedings of the British Academy* 121 (2003): 91–109, along with his "Contextualizing the *Siege of Jerusalem*," *Yearbook of Langland Studies* 6 (1992): 109–21. Hanna, of course, follows in a tradition established by C. Horstman, *Yorkshire Writers*, 2 vols. (London, 1895–96) and Hope E. Allen, *Writings Ascribed to Richard Rolle, Hermit of Hampole and Materials for His Biography* (New York, 1927). For Latin culture during the earlier period of Yorkshire's history, see Burton, *Monastic Order*, 277–96. For historical writing, see J. Taylor, *Medieval Historical Writing in Yorkshire* (York, 1961).

<sup>54</sup> See Glyn Coppack, "Sawley Abbey: An English Cistercian abbey on the Edge of 'Stabilitas,'" *Cîteaux* 52 (2001): 319–36; J. Harland, ed., *Historical Account of the Cistercian Abbey of Salley* (London, 1853); E. Mikkers, "Un Speculum novitii inédit d'Etienne de Salley," *Collectanea Ordinis Cisterciensium Reformatorum* 8 (1946): 2–68; C. H. Talbot, "Letters of Vocation by Roger de Byland," *Analecta Sacri Ordinis Cisterciensis* 7 (1951): 218–31. Though just over the border from Yorkshire, Sawley had extensive ties to the Yorkshire Cistercian houses, since it was a daughter house of Newminster (Burton, *Monastic Order*, xix).

In addition, in the fourteenth century Thomas Burton, abbot of Melsa, wrote the chronicle of that abbey. Burton was affiliated with Thomas of Woodstock, who was accused of forcing Burton's election to abbot. From 1394, after the death of Queen Anne and in the same year that he founded the college of secular priests at his Essex seat of Pleshey, Thomas was granted the lordship of Holderness and thus stood in relation of the founder to the monastery of Melsa. See Bond, *Chronica Monasterii de Melsa* (n. 16 above), 1: lxiii; and Anthony Goodman, *The Loyal Conspiracy: The Lords Appellant under Richard II* (Coral Gables, FL 1971), 76–77, 93.

Though abbot of Swineshead in Lincolnshire, Gilbert of Holland (d. 1172), who was one of the two English continuators of St. Bernard's commentary on the *Canticum*, had extensive ties to the Yorkshire Cistercians, since Furness was the mother house of both Byland and Swineshead. See Lawrence C. Braceland, ed. and trans., *The Works of Gilbert of Hoyland* (Kalamazoo, 1978).

<sup>55</sup> David Bell, ed., *The Libraries of the Cistercians, Gilbertines and Premonstratensians* (London, 1992), xxiii–iv.

logue for what must have been an extensive library at Fountains Abbey is no longer extant, those for Rievaulx and Melsa are rich in exegetical and homiletic texts, with a smattering of classical and historical. The organization of Cistercian houses into families is also suggestive of possible textual transmission, especially since the Cistercians valued homogeneity among houses. Thus, Fountains was the mother house for Melsa, Kirkstall, and Newminster, which was in turn the mother house of Sawley — all associated with literary activity. Sawley, founded by the Percy family and situated in Craven near the border of Yorkshire and Lancashire, was very close to the Abbey of Whalley, whose chronicle, probably of Lancastrian provenance, is important to late fourteenth-century Ricardian history.<sup>56</sup>

Suggestive of later, and possibly more mundane, literary activity are the late fourteenth-century records of expenses incurred from hospitality for both Sawley and Fountains, as well as evidence for Cistercian associations with important manuscript collections. By this time, Cistercian houses were more like other monastic foundations, thus far more open to the world than during the early days of the order. Sawley in 1381 paid 27 shillings for minstrels, and Fountains on various occasions paid for minstrels, a fool from Byland (where there was another Cistercian abbey), players from Thirsk, a fool, players, a fabulist, and the king's minstrels.<sup>57</sup> The Cistercian house, Bordesley Abbey in Worcestershire, was given by Guy de Beauchamp in 1306 a vast collection of romances, including a *Tresor* by Brunetto Latini, a *Lancelot*, *Titus and Vespasien*, *Romaunce Iosep ab Arimathie et deu Seint Grael*, *Romaunce de Ama(da)se e de Idoine*, *Romaunce deu Brut*, and *Mort ly roy Arthur e de Mordret*.<sup>58</sup> Bordesley is also loosely associated with the Vernon and the Simeon manuscripts, both large anthologies of devotional and instructional vernacular texts. Though there is no hard evidence that these manuscripts are of Cistercian provenance, there are hints of possible involvement or filiation. In his introduction to the facsimile of the Vernon manuscript A. I. Doyle notes that one of the paid scribes, who was probably from Lichfield or Coventry, was also responsible for some later copying in the

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<sup>56</sup> M. V. Clarke, *Fourteenth Century Studies*, ed. L. S. Sutherland and M. McKisack (Oxford, 1937), 91. Hanna, "Contextualizing *The Siege of Jerusalem*," 116, also cites Whalley for its potential for literary activity. See Thorlac Turville-Petre, "The Author of the *Destruction of Troy*," *Medium Ævum* 57 (1988): 264–69, who identifies the author of the poem as a monk of Whalley.

<sup>57</sup> F. J. Mullin, *A History of the Work of the Cistercians in Yorkshire* (n. 44 above), 91–93.

<sup>58</sup> For the full list and commentary upon each volume, see Bell, *The Libraries of the Cistercians*, 4–5. Sometime after 1386, John Northwood, a monk of Bordesley, wrote a miscellany (BL MS Add. 37787), fifteen of whose twenty English pieces are likewise in the Vernon manuscript. For an edition, see Nita Scudder Baugh, *A Worcestershire Miscellany compiled by John Northwood, c. 1400* (Philadelphia, 1956).

chronicle and cartulary of the Cistercian abbey of Stoneleigh in Warwickshire, which was affiliated with Bordesley Abbey. Doyle also remarks that the historiated initial of the *Prick of Conscience* in Vernon contains a male religious, probably a Cistercian. The cost of employing two copyists for four years, the time it would take to produce both books, would have been beyond the resources of either Stoneleigh or Bordesley, but Doyle speculates that perhaps several persons, lay or religious, supplied contents and expenses. Or possibly the manuscripts were made for a wealthy convent.<sup>59</sup> The manuscripts, which were copied in the last decade of the fourteenth century, contain the two earliest copies of the *Pistel of Susan*. The poem itself was probably written a decade or two earlier in south Yorkshire or by a writer from south Yorkshire.<sup>60</sup>

None of this is intended as an argument for the Cistercian provenance of *A Pistel of Susan*, but is meant to sketch the ways in which one thirteenth-century Latin poem might have come to the attention of a late fourteenth-century poet. Texts were frequently transmitted along ecclesiastical routes. Monasteries owed hospitality to travelers, indeed had rooms for guests, and with guests of means came clerks, who must have been interested in the texts owned by their hosts and to whom we may owe much thirteenth- and fourteenth-century vernacular literature.<sup>61</sup> We are used to thinking about the great Benedictine houses as centers of culture and hospitality, less so the Cistercians. Alan of Melsa's poem, though now unique, could well have traveled along the southern routes of the Fountains family, which included Melsa, Kirkstall, Sawley, and Roche.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Turville-Petre (*The Alliterative Revival*, 44–46) has suggested that the manuscripts were copied at Bordesley. However, see A. I. Doyle in *The Vernon Manuscript: A Facsimile of Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Eng. Poet.a.1*, with an introduction by A. I. Doyle (Cambridge, 1987), esp. 13–16. For information about Stoneleigh Abbey, see Dugdale, *Monasticon* (n. 9 above), 443–45. Stoneleigh was first founded in 1154 at Radmore in Staffordshire, and the monks of Bordesley helped to instruct the new monks in the Cistercian discipline. As Dugdale (*ibid.*, 443) notes, “there grew great friendship betwixt these two monasteries. . . .” Twelve years later, the monastery moved to Stoneleigh.

<sup>60</sup> The suggestion about dating belongs to Ralph Hanna; see Lynn Staley, *Languages of Power in the Age of Richard II* (University Park, PA, 2005), 340 n. 3.

<sup>61</sup> Derek Pearsall (“The Alliterative Revival: Origins and Social Backgrounds,” in *Middle English Alliterative Poetry and Its Literary Background*, ed. David Lawton [Cambridge, 1982], 34–53) has suggested that we might look to the monasteries themselves for the alliterative poets, whose poems might have been intended as entertainment for visiting patrons. Harland (*Historical Account* [n. 53 above]) has made a similar suggestion for Sawley Abbey.

<sup>62</sup> For a map of Cistercian monasteries in England in the twelfth century, see Peter Ferguson, *Architecture of Solitude: Cistercian Abbeys in Twelfth-Century England* (Princeton, 1984), plate 1; see plate 2 for the filiations of these monasteries.

*A Pistel of Susan* shares with the *Tractatus . . . de Susanna* more than a Yorkshire provenance and more than a possible link to the English Cistercian houses. Like the Latin poem and unlike other treatments of the story, *A Pistel of Susan* devotes an extraordinary amount of space to a description of Joachim and Susanna's garden and contains some details to be found, to my knowledge, only in Alan of Melsa's poem. Moreover, *A Pistel of Susan* suggests that its author found in the Latin poem an emphasis upon law, or upon justice under the law, as it pertains to individual rights. The relationship I pose between the two poems suggests ways in which medieval poets expanded upon earlier work and ways in which vernacular poets drew upon and secularized the Latin spirituality to be found in monastic collections. Finally, the affinities between the two poems point up the types of questions each poem seems to prompt in its audience. Where Alan of Melsa explores the very idea of a cloistered safety and its relationship to the world, the author of *A Pistel of Susan*, in locating his poem within the world, queries the security of the gentry household within a world of potentially unjust legal practices.

#### *A PISTEL OF SUSAN*

The *Pistel of Susan* begins not with Susan, but with her husband Joachim.<sup>63</sup> The poet focuses the first four stanzas of the poem through him, or through our appreciation of Joachim's status as a just man, a rich man, and a husband protected by his righteousness and wealth. He is introduced in the first stanza, which begins by saying he is rich (1), of gentle blood (2), a Jew living in Babylon, loyal to his law (3), properly arrayed (4), and, to some extent, separated from the city in which he lives by the hill upon which his home is built and by the moat surrounding it (5–6). The emphasis upon Joachim as householder continues into the next stanzas, which detail what he "has": he "hed" a wife, Susan, and he "hed" an orchard, open to his privileged circle, among which are two judges of the law, whom the poet reveals to be as powerful as priests and governors (33) but known by God to be unjust. That the poet intends us to link Joachim's wife with his garden is apparent in the opening lines of the second and third stanzas, which are similarly constructed: "He hed a wife higt Susan, was sotil and sage" (14)

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<sup>63</sup> Citations from *A Pistel of Susan* refer to the edition edited by Thorlac Turville-Petre in *Alliterative Poetry of the Later Middle Ages* (Washington, DC, 1989), 120–39, and will be cited by line number in the text. There are two other editions of the poem, both of which contain excellent notes and commentary: *Susannah: An Alliterative Poem of the Fourteenth Century*, ed. Alice Miskimin (New Haven, 1969); *The Pistel of Sweete Susan*, in *Heroic Women from the Old Testament in Middle English Verse*, ed. Russell A. Peck, TEAMS (Kalamazoo, 1991), 73–108.

and “He hedde an orchard newe þat neized wel nere” (27). However, from the beginning it is clear that this orchard is not so much an extension of his private life as open to him and to his friends, a feature of his great house and of his hospitality and generosity. By inference, what the judges will transgress is the hospitality of his household, which is based upon honorable wealth (“For he was real and riche of rentes to rere, / Honest and auenaut and honorablest aye,” 28–29). Where Alan of Melsa emphasizes the openness of Joachim’s household, which functions as a hall of justice, and the privacy of the orchard, which is proximate to the bedchamber, the author of *A Pistel*, like the biblical author, links the orchard to the broader concept of the secular household.

Where Daniel 13 does not describe this garden or orchard, the author of *A Pistel* presents an elaborate account of its delights. As a *locus amoenus*, this garden is affiliated with those to be found in Genesis and the Song of Songs, as well as with the garden of the *Roman de la Rose*.<sup>64</sup> However, it is more directly affiliated with the garden in Alan of Melsa’s *Tractatus . . . de Susanna*, sharing with it details not to be found in other accounts of Susanna and the Elders. For example, in addition to other birds, it has parrots, which the poet mentions twice (75, 81), once, as Alan does, in conjunction with nightingales.<sup>65</sup> Like Alan of Melsa, the *Pistel*-author catalogues in loving detail the many types of herbs, flowers, and fruits growing in the garden: grapes, apples, cherries, cinnamon, pears, figs, pomegranates, chive, chervil, parsley, peonies, sage, and many more. More important, it is under a laurel tree that Susan washes:

Forþi þe wyf werp of hir wedes vnwerde,  
 Vnder a lorere ful lowe þat ladi gan leende  
 So sone.

(124–26)

Alan describes the fountain as shaded or overshadowed by a laurel, “Laurus obumbrat aquam” (165), a tree that does not occur in other accounts of the story. The laurel and the nightingale, signifiers of the fates of Daphne and Philomena, remind both audiences of the dangers the garden presents to the unaware. Just as Alan compares Susanna to heedless Dinah, the author of the *Pistel of Susan* says that she is “unwerde” (unguarded) in removing

<sup>64</sup> Turville-Petre, *Alliterative Poetry*, 126 nn. 66–117. See also Peck, *Heroic Women*, Introduction, 73–78.

<sup>65</sup> See *Tractatus . . . de Susanna*, line 166. With the exception of cinnamon, which is mentioned in the Canticle, all of the plants were grown in England at this time. See n. 40 above.

her clothing. Again, like Alan of Melsa, he amplifies that remark by describing her as only taking off her “kelle,” her headdress (128).<sup>66</sup>

In its wealth of florescent detail, as well as in some of its particulars, the account of the garden in *A Pistel of Susan* strongly suggests that its author had come across Alan of Melsa’s poem and read it closely enough to understand ways in which the garden itself was central to Alan’s use of the narrative of Susanna and the Elders. They are not, however, the same poem; nor, despite their mutual emphasis upon law, do they have the same focus. The topical concerns I adduce in Alan of Melsa’s poem suggest his awareness of judicial corruption in the early thirteenth century as it can be filtered through the idealized Cistercian language of pastoral inlaustration. The author of *A Pistel of Susan* speaks from another place — from an England now far more urbanized, possessing a different set of conditions and judicial conflicts and from (or to) an audience whose values are those of the Christian secular community.

The furniture of that society is everywhere in the poem. As in medieval representations of biblical events, notably in the cycle plays, Joachim and Susan’s Babylon is recognizably English: their home is moated (5); Susan is thrown into a dungeon (174); her father has an “affinite”; she is brought before justices at the bench (183), brought back to the guild hall (293) for Daniel’s examination of the elders, who are referred to throughout as judges. The scene at the end, while nodding to the biblical account of the people’s capital justice upon the unjust judges (Dan. 13:60–62), describes an English scene: “Þei trompe bifore þis traiters and traylen hem on tres / Þorwout þe cité bi comuyn assent” (356–57).<sup>67</sup> Dragged around the city as exemplars of particularly dreadful crimes, the judges are subjected to derision as part of their punishment. The term “comuyn assent” is likewise important to Chaucer’s construction of community, for the twenty nine pilgrims assembled at the Tabard agree with “oon assent” to their host’s plans for the trip. “Assent” meant agreement or approval, necessary in seeking to understand the degree to which covenants were binding; “comuyn assent” is the mutual agreement of two or more parties. The term thus would have possessed a certain resonance for an English audience and could be associated with the civil need to present crimes against neighbors in iconic and mnemonic ways. In fact, Philippe Buc notes Nicholas of Lyra’s discomfort with the scene of popular justice at the end of the Book of Daniel. Nicholas

<sup>66</sup> *Tractatus . . . de Susanna*, line 213. In the *Pistel of Susan*, the poet has the judges repeat the word “lorere” (laurel) twice more (lines 136, 143), probably to have them incriminate themselves as persecutors of the innocent, as well as to look forward to Daniel’s questioning about the type of tree later in the poem.

<sup>67</sup> In reference to this line, Turville-Petre, *Alliterative Poetry*, 139, notes that such punishment before execution was reserved for “particularly heinous crimes.”



of Lyra can be placed close to French ruling circles and consequently proximate to a far different understanding of regal power.<sup>68</sup> Nicholas thus pauses to insist that the judicial power of the Jewish subjects of Babylon was delegated to them by the king of Babylon and was thereby derived from him.<sup>69</sup>

The author of *A Pistel of Susan* is not concerned about regal power, but constructs the poem to focus upon the judicial abuse of power and hence upon the processes by which injustice is redressed. Like other fourteenth-century English texts, such as *Athelston* and *The Tale of Gamelyn*, *A Pistel of Susan* explores judicial abuses to the property and status of those gently or nobly born.<sup>70</sup> *A Pistel of Susan* is without the explicit violence of the other two works, but Daniel 13 describes the inherent violence of the judges that the poem brilliantly captures. Surprised in her own garden, she is asked by the two judges, “Wolt þou, ladi, for loue on vre lay lerne, / And vnder this lorere ben vr lemmone?” (135–36). “Lay” is richly suggestive. A “lai” could be a short narrative poem about love, such as the *lais* of Marie de France, or it might designate the laws, either civil or ecclesiastical, which govern communal life, the practices by which that life is ordered. Though Alan of Melsa does not have the judges say this to Susanna, they do preface their attempted seduction by reminding her that they are judges and can manipulate the law to their benefit. Susanna replies to them with the scornful, “O noua res,” which I have already discussed. *A Pistel of Susan*’s author quite possibly exploits those legal references by having the judges offer to teach Susan their “lay” under the laurel tree. And what kind of law would Susan learn from two men under a tree? The grotesqueness of their demand suggests the violence of the law they will turn on her.

Where *The Tale of Gamelyn* depicts a protagonist who is perfectly capable of meeting violence with violence, and *Athelston* depicts the violence and suffering produced by betrayal and treachery, *A Pistel of Susan* concentrates its focus upon Susan herself, whose space, privacy, and physical integrity are compromised and threatened by the judges. The poem shares with *Athelston* an acute sense of the vulnerabilities of the household to injustice, and of the feminine as a marker for household inviolability. *Athelston*, however, concerns the household of the realm and treachery in high places,

<sup>68</sup> Philippe Buc, “The Book of Kings: Nicholas of Lyra’s Mirror of Princes,” in Philip D. Krey and Lesley Smith, eds., *Nicholas of Lyra: the Senses of Scripture*, Studies in the History of Christian Thought 90 (Boston, 2000), 83–110 at 89.

<sup>69</sup> Nicolaus de Lyra, *Postilla super totam Bibliam*, vol. 2 (Strasburg, 1492; repr., Frankfurt, 1971), on Daniel 13.

<sup>70</sup> For these poems, see *The Tale of Gamelyn in Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, ed. Stephen Knight and Thomas Ohlgren, TEAMS (Kalamazoo, 1997), 184–226; *Athelston*, in *Four Romances of England*, ed. Ronald B. Herzman, Graham Drake, and Eve Salisbury, TEAMS (Kalamazoo, 1999), 341–84.

while *A Pistel of Susan* concerns a noble or gentry household threatened by an unjust use of legal power. Here, the poet's treatment of Susan is central to his presentation of violence.

He epitomizes the rough handling of Susan by continuing to focus upon her head covering as a sign of her modesty. The people of her own court find her unveiled or uncovered when they come at her cries, "Whon kene men of hir court comen til hir cri, / Heo hedde cast of hir calle and hire keuercheue" (156–57). The poet embellishes the biblical account by describing Susan as put in a dungeon, manacled, and without food, while her father with all his "affinité" (180) is helpless in the face of judicial falsehood. She appears in court as the great lady she is, "sengeliche arayed / In a selken schert, with scholdres wel schene" (196–97). Her regal appearance notwithstanding, when she appears, the judges lay familiar hands on her head, "Homliche on hir heued heor hondes þei leyed" (200). The poet echoes the biblical narrative, which says that Susanna is ordered to remove her veil in court, but, by substituting head covering for the heavy veiling of the Middle Eastern wife, he translates the poem into the language of fourteenth-century fashion and marital chastity. Like the garden, Susan is violated by the public intrusion into her physical privacy. Susan's prayer before she is led off to judgment accosts God's privacy:

"Þou Maker of Middelert þat most art of miht,  
 Boþe þe sonne and þe see þou sette vppon seuene.  
 Alle my werkes þou wost, þe wrong and þe riht;  
 Hit is nedful nou þi names to neuene.  
 Sepþe I am deoffolich dampned and to deþ diht,  
 Lord hertelich tak hede and herkne my steuene  
 So fre.  
 Sepþe þou maizt not be sene  
 Wiþ no fleschliche eyene,  
 Þou wost wel I am clene.  
 Haue merci on me."

(263–73)

Susan here gives full evidence of her learning and wisdom. In introducing Susan (14–26), the poet goes beyond both the references to her training in the law in Daniel 13:3, and Alan of Melsa's poem, in reiterating the degree to which she has been taught the law of Moses, which he ascribes to the Trinity (line 21), in order that she might both read and understand it. Her prayer is beautifully balanced between the demands of spiritual devotion and courtly address, which, in this prayer, seem not unrelated. She reminds God of his power, by which he created the world in seven days, of his knowledge of her most intimate self, saying that it is now necessary to call upon God's names, inevitably suggesting that she knows them. She then states her own helplessness and asks God to listen to her own voice, so hon-

orable. The wheel of the stanza reiterates God's own unseen nature, by extension his privacy, and her own. She ends by asking for mercy. A courtier could do no better in asking a king to redress judicial corruption.

But an earthly king does not hear her. God hears her and directs Daniel, whose own gifts are from God. Susan's voice, grounded in her knowledge of divine law, is thus the catalyst for Daniel's defense. In the remainder of the poem, in which Susan largely disappears, the poet employs Daniel to outline the fundamental relationship between divine and civil law. He describes the laws of the judges as foul ("leip"), the judges' behavior as not suitable for such judgments ("ȝor dedes vnduwe such domes to dele," 292). Earlier, the poet describes Susan as before the justices "on bench" (183) and as brought to "the barre" (189). Firmly anchoring the final moments of the poem in late medieval England, Daniel now calls, "Agein to þe gild-halle" (293) where true justice will now be executed. He thus locates justice not in a king's court, nor in neutral territory, but in an urban guildhall, where civil judicial proceedings, though subject to royal justice and, indeed, related to the king's peace, took place in city space.<sup>71</sup> Both *The Tale of Gamelyn* and *Athleston* describe final scenes wherein true justice is restored, but they do so in very different terms. Athelston is apprised by one brother, the archbishop of Canterbury, that he has been deceived by a second brother and, by his credulity, has brought suffering upon himself, his queen, and his third brother. The truth emerges after a trial by fire, and the wicked brother is punished with hanging and drawing. The poem is set in London, but it is not focused by any emphasis upon civic liberties or the workings of the law, partially because the king has taken the law into his own hands and refuses to listen to counsel. *Gamelyn*, like *A Pistel of Susan*, seems more concerned with the rights of citizens, but Gamelyn is able to redress the wrongs done to him and his other brother, Sir Ote, by taking over the court, killing the sitting justice, and assuming his seat, from whence he hands out true judgments. Afterwards, Gamelyn and Sir Ote make peace with the king, who makes them chief justice of the forest and justice, respectively.

Only Chaucer's "Physician's Tale" presents anything like the scene of civic redress that preoccupies the author of *A Pistel of Susan*. Apius, the false judge, is removed from his office by the people and thrown into prison; his servants and confederates are brought to justice by the people, though Virginius has the sentence of Claudius reduced from hanging to exile. Since

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<sup>71</sup> I am extrapolating here from Caroline Barron, who speaks of the London Guildhall and London city privileges. See her *London in the Later Middle Ages: Government and People 1200–1500* (Oxford, 2004), 37. Royal justices could also sit in urban guildhalls, but there is no reference in *A Pistel of Susan* to royal justices, which would be Babylonian; rather, all the characters are the Jewish exiles. Barron also notes the struggle in the city of London regarding where royal justices shall sit.

this is a tale of Republican Rome, Apius, who is both governor and justice, is the highest ranking person in the tale. Like that of Susan, the story of Virginia concerns the transgression of female privacy: Susan is accosted in her own garden, Virginia in her home by the judicial writ that claims her from her father as Claudius's abducted slave. Both stories are grotesque, in the sense that the chaste wife is invited to have sex with two men under a tree and the girl is to be given as a sex slave to the corrupt judge. However, the Physician is less interested in legal processes than the narrator of *A Pistel of Susan*, drawing an incongruous and passive moral from Livy's tale of civic action:

Beth war, for no man woot whom God wol smyte,  
 In no degree, ne in which manere wyse. . . .  
 Therefore I rede yow this conseil take:  
 Forsaketh synne, er synne yow forsake.<sup>72</sup>

Not only does the moral not match the tale, since God is less the smiter than Apius, but the last line warning us to forsake sin before it forsakes us does not really make sense. The Physician shifts the emphasis of the story of Virginia and Virginius from the judicial to the personal, foreclosing questions about the administration of justice and its effect upon the well-being of citizens. The Man of Law more explicitly refers to Susanna when Custance invokes her name in her prayer for a champion, "Immortal God, that savedest Susanne / Fro false blame" (639–40). This conventional invocation keeps her as helpless and passive as the Physician's Virginia and makes no attempt to suggest any more complicated version of Susanna's story.

In his account of Susanna and the Elders the author of *A Pistel of Susan* seems to recognize the complexities of the narrative, complexities likewise evident in Alan of Melsa's *Tractatus . . . de Susanna*. Though I believe the *Pistel of Susan* author had read the Latin poem, he used it to think with and thus to create a fourteenth-century poem that does not foreclose questions about justice but urges its readers to ask them. It is those questions that at once invigorate a poem dated to the last years of the reign of

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<sup>72</sup> Larry D. Benson, gen. ed., *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd ed. (Boston, 1987), lines 277–78; 285–86. The Physician pulls back from the warning about false judges to be found in the account of Virginius in the *Romance of the Rose*, Chaucer's probable source for this tale. See Charles Dahlberg, trans., *Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, The Romance of the Rose*, (Princeton, 1971), lines 5555–692. If Chaucer also knew Livy's history, he would have found there an even greater emphasis upon justice. For both texts in the original, see "The Physician's Tale" in *Sources and Analogues of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales*, ed. W. F. Bryan and Germaine Dempster (Chicago, 1941), 398–408.

Edward III and may well bear some relation to its reappearance in the five later manuscripts into which it was copied.

There were, of course, issues relating to the administration of justice in the later years of Edward III, as there were during the 1390s when the poem was copied into both the Vernon and Simeon manuscripts. In the 1360s, a good deal of attention was paid to the administration of local justice. The Statute of 1361 gave local judicial authorities determining power in local law enforcement, in effect putting justice in the hands of county gentry, a move that reflected the tug-of-war between magnate and local power and which was reversed again in 1368.<sup>73</sup> Richard Kaeuper notes that the *Tale of Gamelyn* could be reproduced from court records of the period, suggesting that the evidence indicates a frustration with a justice potentially at the mercy of money or force and the impulse for a serious inquiry into what might serve as an acceptable way of maintaining the King's Peace.<sup>74</sup> That Peace was, of course, directly threatened not simply by violence, but by perjury and corruption.<sup>75</sup>

*A Pistel of Susan* seems designed to ask particular questions about justice as it pertains to landed gentry. The early emphasis upon Joachim's status, the openness of his house and grounds, underlines the ways in which the narrative depicts an assault on a secular household that is vulnerable to the greed of the judges. Just as Alan of Melsa introduces the judges by saying that they took bribes before he describes their lechery, the author of *A Pistel of Susan* swiftly links their desire for Susanna with covetousness:

Whon þeos perlous prestes perceyued hire play,  
 Do þouȝte þe wrecches to bewile þat worly in wone;  
 Heore wittes wel waiwordes þei wrethen awai  
 And turned fro his teching þat teeld is in trone;  
 For siht of here souerayn, soþli to say,  
 Heore hor heuedes fro heuene þei hid apon one.  
 Þei cauȝt for heor couetyse þe cursyng of Kai,  
 For riȝtwys jugement recordet þei none,  
 Þey two.

(53–61)

<sup>73</sup> Bertha Haven Putnam, "The Transformation of the Keepers of the Peace into the Justices of the Peace, 1327–1380," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 4th series, 12 (1929): 19–48, esp. 45–48; W. M. Ormrod, *The Reign of Edward III: Crown and Political Society in England, 1327–1377* (New Haven, 1990), 23, 32, 152.

<sup>74</sup> Richard W. Kaeuper, *War, Justice, and Public Order: England and France in the Later Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1988), 181–82, 375. Kaeuper pays particular attention to the Robin Hood tales.

<sup>75</sup> See Richard Firth Green, *A Crisis of Truth: Literature and Law in Ricardian England* (Philadelphia, 1998), 64, 220, 221; T. F. Tout, *Chapters in the Administrative History of Mediaeval England*, vol. 3 (Manchester, 1937), 259–64.

The poet follows Daniel 13:9 in saying that the two turn their eyes away from heaven so that they might not remember just judgments, but he embellishes it by naming their crime as “couetyse” and linking it to the out-cast Cain (Kai). Covetousness is, of course, “lust of the eyes”; and by the term the poet suggests that their desire for Susanna, Joachim’s wife, is a form of avarice, transgressing both his household and his wife.<sup>76</sup>

The courtroom scene that follows seems more faithful to Alan of Melsa’s poem than to the account in Daniel 13. The biblical account merely presents the judges making their accusation before the people. Alan of Melsa describes a judicial forum (298), where the splendid and honorable Joachim appears, along with the old men, while Susanna is led into the center of the forum. The alliterative author is even more explicit about the court. The justices are on the bench (183); she is brought to the “barre” (189) manacled. Her accusers rise up (198) and present a “pleint” (202), a term repeated in the stanza’s wheel (206), thus designating them as bringing a suit at law.<sup>77</sup> As a result, Susanna is “dampned on deis” (235) and led forth to her death. Daniel may be God’s spokesman and Susanna’s champion, but he is also a lawyer. He states that he will “by proces apert disprove þis apele” (294), by open legal process disprove this appeal. When Daniel separates the judges, he accuses the first one of having “on benche brewed muche bale” (307) and of delivering false judgments (310). After answering Daniel, he is thrown into prison. When the second judge gives a different answer to Daniel’s question (“Under what tree did you see Susanna committing adultery?”), Daniel tells him that an angel waits nearby to “Takes þe domes of ȝor honde” (349), to remove his power to judge. What is presented is a cleansing of the city (357) and of the means by which it creates and preserves a system of justice.

*A Pistel of Susan* is both a tale of divine justice and an inquiry into the ways in which the gentry household can be placed in jeopardy by false justice. It describes a judicial coup, where the false is purged, the true restored. That very issue of civil justice is pertinent to Chaucer’s Parson’s use of Susanna’s story to point up the dangers of false witnessing, which is a subset of avarice, since it is her good name that was taken from her. He puts her

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<sup>76</sup> He uses covetousness again in line 306. J. B. Post (“Ravishment of Women and the Statutes of Westminster,” in *Legal Records and the Historian*, ed. J. H. Baker [London, 1978], 150–60) notes the materialistic concerns embedded in the rape law of the late fourteenth century. For a survey of the laws of rape as they apply to Chaucer, see Christopher Cannon, “*Raptus* in the Champaigne Release and a Newly Discovered Document Concerning the Life of Geoffrey Chaucer,” *Speculum* 68 (1993): 74–94.

<sup>77</sup> See *Middle English Dictionary*, ed. Hans Kurath, assoc. ed. Sherman M. Kuhn, (Ann Arbor, 1952–2001), s. v. “pleint.”

squarely within the fallen world, a victim of those sins that prevent the making of community by causing sorrow and pain to our fellows. He also locates legal processes within that same fallen world, implying a link between avarice and witnessing, “Ware yow, questmongeres and notaries! Certes, for fals witnessyng was Susanna in ful gret sorwe and peyne, and many another mo” (Chaucer, “The Parson’s Tale,” 797). Speaking from a more explicitly secular position, Sir John Fortescue uses the case of Susanna to emphasize the need for due process, saying the story underlines the dangers when law allows proof only by witnesses, “Who, then, can live secure of himself or his own under such a law — a law that offers assistance to any-one hostile to him?”<sup>78</sup>

Who indeed? That question may, in fact, bear a relation to the relative popularity of *A Pistel of Susan*. Only one of the five manuscripts into which *A Pistel of Susan* was copied does not contain a mix of religious and secular texts.<sup>79</sup> The two earliest manuscripts, though later than the poem, are the important Vernon and Simeon manuscripts, dated to the last decade of the fourteenth century. These are large and related anthologies of Middle English writing, containing mainly devotional and instructional texts, but some romances. The Simeon manuscript has two words which might be “Joan Boun” written in a margin.<sup>80</sup> Joan Bohun, the daughter of Richard Fitzalan, Earl of Arundel, the sister of Thomas Arundel, bishop of Ely, archbishop of York and of Canterbury, and widow of Humphrey Bohun, Earl of Hereford, Essex and Northampton, mother-in-law of both Henry Bolingbroke and Thomas of Woodstock, was wealthy, powerful, pious, and long-lived, as Doyle notes — the sort of woman for whom the manuscript would have

<sup>78</sup> Shelley Lockwood, ed., *Sir John Fortescue, On the Laws and Governance of England* (Cambridge, 1997), 30.

<sup>79</sup> New York, Pierpont Morgan MS 818 (Ingilby MS), ca. 1425–75. According to the Pierpont Morgan notes, this manuscript is possibly from Yorkshire and possibly associated with the Cistercian abbey of Fountains. However as Ralph Hanna noted in a private communication, it is linked with Fountains because it was long owned by the Ingilbys of Ripley, who may have pillaged Fountains at the Dissolution. It contains *A Pistel of Susan*, Rolle’s *Form of Living*, and the earliest known version of the A-text of *Piers Plowman*. The other two manuscripts are: BL Cotton Caligula A.ii, part 1 (ca. 1440–60). This manuscript contains a number of romances, as well as the *Siege of Jerusalem* and moral and religious works. For a description of this manuscript, in which *A Pistel of Susan* appears in a separate booklet at the head, see Ralph Hanna and David Lawton, eds., *The Siege of Jerusalem* EETS, 320 (Oxford, 2003), xxiv–xxvi. And Huntington HM 114, (ca. 1425–50), which contains a text of *Piers Plowman*, but also of *Mandeville’s Travels*, *Three Kings of Cologne*, and Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde*. See C. W. Dutschke et al., *Guide to Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts in the Huntington Library* (San Marino, CA, 1989), 150–52.

<sup>80</sup> Peck, *Pistel of Sweete Susan* (n. 62 above), 78, quotes Doyle’s comments from his Introduction to the Vernon Facsimile (*The Vernon Manuscript* [n. 58 above], 15–16), to which I refer. See also my remarks in *Languages of Power* (n. 59 above), 340–45.

been appropriate. Both manuscripts would have been costly, and, if they were intended for a secular household rather than a religious house, it must have been a large and pious one, such as those formed by powerful widows in the later Middle Ages.<sup>81</sup>

If Joan Bohun ever owned or had anything to do with the making of the Simeon manuscript, texts like *A Pistel of Susan* would have had a variety of appeals. First, and most obviously, Susan is an example of a prominent, wealthy, devout, and chaste wife, an example that might mean much to other women. The narrative's legal ramifications might have added to its appeal for a secular woman, especially during the last decade of Richard II's reign when false witnesses seemed to predominate. Both Richard Fitzalan, the Earl of Arundel, Joan's brother, and Thomas of Woodstock, her son-in-law, were murdered by Richard in a sham of due process in 1397.<sup>82</sup> Thomas, in fact, was taken from his own Essex seat, Pleshey, by the king himself and his henchmen. Since they were convicted of treason, their goods were technically forfeit to the Crown though much of his property was held in right of his wife, Eleanor, Joan's daughter.<sup>83</sup> The Simeon manuscript, which is shorter and possibly subsequent to the Vernon, cannot so simply be attached to Joan Bohun because it contains *A Pistel of Susan*, but the poem raises some of the concerns Joan Bohun or other landed families certainly experienced when contemplating the security of their households and the likelihood of being able to defend their interests.

In later years, Susanna continues to appear in court. The judicial inequities and communal context that are central to the biblical narrative and that are heightened by the author of *A Pistel of Susan*, make the story a potentially useful one to those facing crises of power and, to a certain extent, Susanna is radicalized.<sup>84</sup> She is invoked in the Lollard treatise *The*

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<sup>81</sup> The history of the Bohun family is inevitably a history of English books and book-making. See, for example, Lucy Freeman Sandler, *The Lichtenthal Psalter and the Manuscript Patronage of the Bohun Family* (London, 2004). Joan and her husband Humphrey were important patrons of many religious foundations, especially Walden Abbey in Essex. Joan also helped found a chantry in the Cistercian abbey of Coggeshall in Essex (see Dugdale, *Monasticon* [n. 9 above], 451), and her son-in-law, Thomas of Woodstock, a notorious book collector himself, was deeply involved with Melsa in Yorkshire. For books associated with both, see Sheila H. Cavanaugh, "A Study of Books Privately Owned in England, 1300–1450," Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1980.

<sup>82</sup> See Nigel Saul, *Richard II* (New Haven, 1997), 373–75.

<sup>83</sup> Anthony Goodman, "The Countess and the Rebels: Essex and a Crisis in English Society," *Essex Archaeology and History: The Transactions of the Essex Archaeological Society* 2 (1972): 274. On forfeiture, see C. D. Ross, "Forfeiture for Treason in the Reign of Richard II," *English Historical Review* 71 (1956): 560–75.

<sup>84</sup> David Lyle Jeffrey ("False Witness and the Just Use of Evidence in the Wycliffite *Pistel of Swete Susan*," in *The Judgment of Susanna: Authority and Witness*, ed. Ellen Spol-



*Testimony of William Thorpe*, which was carried over into John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*.<sup>85</sup> Thomas Wimbleton in his 1388 Paul's Cross sermon mentions her when considering the very idea of civil authority.<sup>86</sup> Susanna is referred to by John Fisher in his *Spiritual Consolation*, written when he awaited his death at the hands of regal injustice, in Nicholas Ridley's remarks about those unjust elders who insist upon the truth of transubstantiation, and in Sir Walter Raleigh's defense of himself, where he invokes Susanna by way of Fortescue when arguing about proof and the dangers of miscarriage of justice.<sup>87</sup> In the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, there are three extended treatments of Susanna, by Thomas Garter (1578), Robert Roche (1599), and Robert Aylett (1622).<sup>88</sup> In various ways, each emphasizes the nature of the law as fundamental to the common good. In none of these treatments is there the sense that anyone is above the law but rather is a servant to it, whether the law is that of Moses or of civil jurisprudence.

This essay began with a thirteenth-century poem by the Yorkshire Cistercian, Alan of Melsa, and has gone several centuries beyond that poem or the fourteenth-century *A Pistel of Susan* that is indebted to it. Though Susanna may have traded a monastic garden for an estate, the shift across centuries and from sacred to secular, from Catholic to Protestant, matters less than what I would describe as the Englishness of Susanna's relation to the law. Though she can certainly be used as a virtuous woman or as a type of Christ, she is also frequently and subtly used to question the uses to which

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sky [Atlanta, 1996], 57–71) has argued that *A Pistel* should be situated "in the context of Wycliffite concerns about oppression by false witnesses" (69). His argument is rich and informative, but the manuscripts in which the poem appears do not warrant the identification. But see also his discussion of later Wycliffite allusions to Susanna.

<sup>85</sup> In *Two Wycliffite Texts*, ed. Anne Hudson, EETS 301 (Oxford, 1993), 24–93 at 35. See Jeffrey, "False Witness," 66–67 for Wyclif's references to her as an example of injustice.

<sup>86</sup> For editions of the sermon, see Ione Kemp Knight, *Wimbleton's Sermon: "Redde Rationem Villicionis Tue": A Middle English Sermon of the Fourteenth Century* (Pittsburgh, 1967); and Nancy H. Owen, "Thomas Wimbleton's Sermon: 'Redde rationem villicionis tue,'" *Mediaeval Studies* 28 (1966): 176–97. This sermon is extant in fifteen manuscripts; it was also printed eighteen times between 1550 and 1635 and carried over into Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*. For detailed manuscript information, see I. K. Knight's introduction (*Wimbleton's Sermon*).

<sup>87</sup> John Fisher, *A Spiritual consolation written . . . to hys sister Elizabeth* (London, 1578); Nicholas Ridley, *An Account of a Disputation at Oxford, anno dom. 1554, with A Treatise of the Blessed Sacrament* (London, 1685); and Sir Walter Raleigh, *The Arraignment and Conviction of Sr. Walter Rawleigh . . . on 17 November 1603* (London, 1648).

<sup>88</sup> Thomas Garter, *The commody of the Moste Virtuous and Godlye Susanna* (London, 1578); Robert Roche, *Eustathia, or the Constancie of Susanna* (London, 1599); Robert Aylett, *Susanna: or, the Arraignment of the Two Vniust Elders* (London, 1622).

law is put, to examine its processes, and, more radically, to locate the law in the hearts of the subject. But “she is used” is a passive construction, and the texts I have mentioned employ her as actively speaking in her own defense, as standing and speaking from within the community and in defense of the workings of true justice.

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