CHAPTER 2

SILENCE, LANGUAGE, SEXUALITY

The "silencing" of Silence is a rich metaphor for the way medieval women writers chose to express themselves. As R. Howard Bloch has shown, medieval male authors associated women with verbosity and saw their language as a cover for deception. Eve, through her speech and its sexual consequences, created discord between man and God.[1] Silence, then, can be seen as the dispossession of women's voices, and it finds a parallel in other discourses in the century before *Le Roman de Silence* was written, in particular, theological debates on marriage and sexuality as well as misogynist literature. In this chapter I argue that this evidence shows a preoccupation with women's ability to own their own power and contributes to an environment in which the proper boundaries of women's roles were well-defined, whether as wife or as the bride of Christ.

As Jack Goody has explained, when women are receivers of "male" property, either by inheritance or dowry, marriage, as well as courtship and sexuality, tend strongly to be controlled.[2] As carriers of property, women's sexuality needed to be controlled in the patrilineal system of the twelfth century. If property passed through the male, then the husband had to be certain he was the father of his wife's children. In a society in which property is controlled and can be bequeathed through the woman, her sexual fidelity is of no consequence. As Georges Duby has pointed out, marriage in the early Middle Ages was an official recognition of a union between two houses (*pactum conjugale*). As such, it was an exchange that involved a woman, "or, more precisely, her anticipated motherhood."[3]

The tangled web of property, marriage, and sexuality became especially crucial in the twelfth century precisely because the legal and social landscape had changed. Marriage customs were transformed from a purely civil act to one increasingly regulated by the church, itself rapidly becoming a major owner of property. At the end of the seventh century, one-third of the productive land in France rested in ecclesiastical hands.

S. A. Livingston, *Marriage, Property, and Women's Narratives*
© Sally A. Livingston 2012

By the ninth century, that amount had doubled due to bequests, donations, and tithes. Although that growth began to drop off in the tenth and eleventh centuries, the church remained a significant landowner and needed to keep hold of its property.[4] Using the early church fathers as their authority, medieval clerics developed a new theory and practice of marriage, one that brought it increasingly under their control and solidified a standard of feminine behavior that mirrored the already dwindling legal rights of women.

Although marriage in the early church was a secular custom not under clerical direction, the early church fathers wrote extensively on the subject. In his *Confessiones*, written between 397 and 401, Augustine recounts his own experience and makes a distinction between wives and concubines. The former produces children, while the latter satisfies lust:

> In illis annis unam habebam non eo quod legitimum uocatur coniugio cognitam, sed quam indagauerat uagus ardor inops prudentiae, sed unam tamen, ei quoque seruans tori fidem; in qua sane experirer exemplo meo quid distaret inter coniugalis placiti modum, quod foederatum esset generandi gratia, et pactum libidinosi amoris, ubi proles etiam contra uotum nascitur, quamuis iam nata cogat se diligi.[5]
>
> [In those years I lived with a woman, not my lawfully wedded wife, but a mistress whom I had chosen for no special reason but that my restless passions had alighted on her. But she was the only one and I was faithful to her. Living with her I found out by my own experience the difference between the restraint of the marriage alliance contracted for the purpose of having children, and a bargain struck for lust, in which the birth of children is begrudged, though, if they come we cannot help but love them.]

He tempers this somewhat in *De bono coniugali*, written the year he finished his *Confessiones*, by making commitment, not sex, the decisive factor in marriage:

> Et potest quidem fortasse non absurde hoc appellari conubium, si usque ad mortem alicuius eorum id inter eos placuerit, et prolis generationem, quamuis non ea causa coniuncti sint non tamen uitauerint ut uel nolint sibi nasci filios uel etiam opere aliquo malo agant ne nascantur.[6]
>
> [It is not absurd perhaps to call this a marriage provided they maintain the arrangement until the death of one of them, and provided they do not avoid having children either by being unwilling to have children or even by doing something wrong to prevent the birth of children.]

Dyan Elliott points out that the Old Testament's reproductive function of marriage, "increase and multiply" (Gen. 1:28), becomes transformed

by Paul. Advocating the avoidance of all sex (1 Cor. 7:1), he allows that men and women may have one partner if sexuality cannot be completely avoided (1. Cor. 7:2 and 9).[7] The early church fathers, Elliott contends, had "a growing awareness that marriage and procreation were best defended if they were admitted as a part of God's original plan."[8] Similarly, Augustine distinguishes three levels of guilt in intercourse. If the purpose of sex is procreation, there is no sin. If intercourse is performed with a spouse to satisfy lust, then it is only a venial sin. However, sex with someone to whom you do not have a commitment (his definition of marriage) is adultery or fornication and therefore a mortal sin. Abstinence, he stresses, is preferable to any of these.[9] Augustine argues that something good comes out of the evil of lust:

> carnalis uel iuuenalis incontentia, etiamsi uitiosa est, ad propagandae prolis redigitur honestatem, ut ex malo libidinis aliquid boni faciat copulatio coniugalis, deinde quia reprimitur et quodam modo uerecundis aestuat conupiscentia carnis, quam temperat parentalis affectus.[10]
>
> [carnal or youthful incontinence, which is admittedly a defect, is applied to the honorable task of begetting children, and so intercourse within marriage engenders something good out of the evil of lust. Moreover, the lustful tendencies of the flesh are kept in subjection, and their hot passion becomes more seemly, for parental love contains it.]

Marriage, in fact, becomes a safeguard against fornication and adultery, a legal way to contain lust: "nuptiae tamen ab adulterio seu fornicatione defendunt."[11] To protect one's spouse from sin, St. Paul in 1 Corinthians 7.3 ("uxori uir debitum reddat") created what became the "marriage debt," the binding obligation to satisfy the other's sexual needs. This idea predominates in *De bono coniugali*. Augustine sees the purpose of marriage as not only to procreate, but also to bear responsibility for each other's sins of the flesh:

> Debent ergo sibi coniugati non solum ipsius sexus sui commiscendi fidem liberorum procreandorum causa, quae prima est humani generis in ista mortalitate societas, uerum etia informatis inuicem excipiendae ad illicitos concubitus euitandos mutuam quodam modo seruitutem …
>
> [So married couples owe fidelity to each other not merely in performance of the sexual act to bring forth children—and this is the primary compact between the human species in this mortal life of ours—but also in ministering, so to say, to each other, to shoulder each other's weakness, enabling each other to avoid illicit sexual intercourse…]

For Augustine, a spouse must consent to intercourse, even if the demand appears to be too great: "in eo ipso sibi inuicem coniuges debitum

soluunt, etiamsi id aliquanto intemperantius et incontinentius expetant, fidem tamen sibi partier debent" ("in the very act, in which married partners pay the debt they owe to each other, even if they demand this too passionately and too lustfully, they owe equal fidelity to each other").[12] These theological discussions, however, were quite separate from the actual ritual of early medieval marriage, which was essentially a pact between two families, not two individuals. As described by Duby, the ceremonial sealing of this agreement was split in two. The first part was the marriage, essentially a business meeting: "a ritual of faith and pledge, verbal promises, a show of disinvestment and of assumption of possession, the handing over of pledges, the ring, the deposit, the coins, and finally the contract."[13] Then came the wedding, which was the meal, the sexual consummation, and the morning gift, "the present expressing the gratitude and hope of the man whose dream it was already to have embarked upon his legitimate paternal role by impregnating his wife."[14]

Beginning in the ninth century, according to Duby, the church began to insinuate itself into the secular model of marriage, gaining full strength in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Prior to this time, the church used its powers of excommunication to intervene in marriages that were considered scandalous, but it did not have any clear-cut matrimonial jurisdiction.[15] By the mid-twelfth century, three distinct views on marriage were held by Western jurists. The Italian school, led by Gratian, believed that the process began with consent and was completed with physical consummation. Without sexual intercourse, no binding marriage contract existed. Peter Lombard, the leading advocate of the French school, decreed that sexual consummation had no relevance and consent alone created marriage. A third group, composed of Master Vacarius and the anonymous author of the *Summa coloniensis*, wrote that the neither of these was essential to the marriage. The physical delivery of the bride to the groom (*traditio*) was the key element. This view, however, soon faded. In 1180 Pope Alexander II in his decretal *Veniens ad nos* resolved the issue and agreed with the French that consent was the key determinant in marriage. This remained the rule until the Council of Trent in 1563.[16]

Consent was fundamental to the ecclesiastical model of marriage, since the church could use lack of it as an argument against marriages arranged by heads of households. In the writings of the early church fathers, parental consent was important. In the 600 years between the collapse of the Roman Empire and the eleventh-century reforms, the head of the household had the responsibility to arrange his children's marriages, in both Germanic practice and ecclesiastical teaching. As Charles J. Reid, Jr., has described it: "This basic tension between the freedom of consent, on the one hand, and the need to retain some institutional and parental control

over the celebration of marriage remained a constant feature of high and late medieval law and life."[17] By stressing consent of the two parties, canon lawyers in essence gave approval to marriages of which parents disapproved.

The church's increasing control over marriage, however, was not only to regulate sexuality, but also to maintain its own vast property and wealth. Audrey B. Davidson and Robert B. Ekelund, Jr., have convincingly argued that the church produced profits and rent streams by manipulating doctrine and policy. In particular, as it gained control over marriage, it earned significant income by providing exemptions to its rules on consanguinity, clandestine marriages, and marriage dissolution.[18] One way to ensure its hold on land was to prohibit clerical marriage: most clergy in the early church were married, and although the debates on this issue began in the fourth century, clerical marriage was not prohibited until the Second Lateran Council in 1139.[19] Pope Gregory VII's enforcement of clerical celibacy in 1074 insured that their property would not be passed to descendants or into lay hands.[20]

According to Neil Cartlidge, the establishment of clerical celibacy may have fostered the development of antimatrimonial and antifeminist literature in this period.[21] It certainly increased the divide between the clergy and laity. In the words of Dyan Elliott, "a clerical celibate elite requires a copulating laity."[22] Similarly, Jo Ann McNamara has noted that arguments for segregating the clergy were buttressed by the belief that women had uncontrollable sexual urges.[23] By labeling the female body as dangerous, clerics could make the case that women's sexuality had to be controlled, further differentiating between the good woman and the evil one.

The roots of medieval misogyny go back to ancient Judaic law and early Greek texts. Already in Hesiod, woman was identified as the plague of man. In addition, women were seen as more lustful than men and associated with the material rather than the spiritual.[24] The idea that women and men differ significantly and that men are superior was first formulated, according to Prudence Allen, in Aristotle, who argued that women have a passive role in generation. St. Augustine later developed this idea into the belief that woman is the helpmate to man for the activity of generation and is not in the image of God.[25] As E. Ann Matter has pointed out, this Augustinian tenet that women qua humans were created in God's image but women as specifically female were not was virtually unopposed in the Middle Ages.[26] Although Aquinas softened Augustine's belief that women were defective men, he agreed that they had inferior rational capacities, mainly because of the weakness of their bodies.[27]

Gradually, as R. Howard Bloch has noted, sex became identified with evil, and Eve's sin identified with its cause.[28] In both Latin satires and vernacular literature, women are portrayed as domineering, disobeying, neglectful, and demanding creatures who use sex as a way to get their wishes.[29] Walter Map, for example, in *De nugis curialium*, blames Eve for first disobeying God. Because of her disobedience, all women carry this sin. Note the many times the word "first" is used in this passage:

> Prima primi uxor Ade post primam hominis creacionem primo peccato prima soluit ieiunia contra preceptum Domini. Parentauit inobediencia, que citra mundi terminum non absistet expugnare feminas, ut sint semper indefesse trahere in consequenciam quod a matre sua traxerunt.[30]
>
> [The first wife of the first Adam after the first creation of man, by the first sin broke the first fast against the precept of God. Disobedience parented this, and on this side the end of the world, it will never cease to lay seige to women, that they may be ever unwearied in carrying out what they have derived from their mother.]

Women ensnare men by their beauty, which masks a monster:

> Desiderio tuo totus inflammaris, et speciosi nobilitate capitis seductus, chimeram miser nescis esse quod petis; sed scire deuoues quod triforme monstrum illud insignis uenustetur facie leonis, olentis maculetur uentre capri, uirulente armetur cauda uipere.[31]
>
> [You are all inflamed by your desire, and seduced by the nobility of a beautiful head, you are not able to know, poor man, that what you seek is a chimera; but you refuse to learn that a three-formed monster is adorned with the face of a extraordinary lion, polluted with the body of a stinking goat, and armed with the tail of a virulent viper.]

Citing biblical and classical examples, Map shows how men succumbed to women and sinned. Even David fell prey to a woman's innate sinful nature:

> Veritas que falli non potest ait de beato Dauid "Inueni uirum secundum cor meum." Hic tamen egregie precipitatus est amore mulieris ab adulterio in homicidium, ne umquam sola ueniant scandala.[32]
>
> [The truth which cannot err says of the blessed David, "I have found a man after my heart." Nevertheless, he was felled by the love of a woman notably from adultery to murder, lest offences never come singly.]

Petrus Alfonsi, the twelfth-century Jewish convert to Christianity, expressed his negative views on women through parables in his *Disciplina*

clericalis. Although the aim of this text was not specifically misogynist, its goal was didactic and meant to impart a moral education. A "tremendous success," in John Toland's words, it survives in seventy-six medieval manuscripts.[33] It was adapted by countless medieval writers, including Chaucer, who refers to Alfonsi five times in the *Tale of Melibee*.[34] His main theme is that women are lascivious and unfaithful. In Exemplum XIV, "De puteo" ("Of the well"), he recounts how a young man who had spent much time learning the wiles of women decided to marry. He went to a wise man to ask how he could best prevent his wife from deceiving him. The man told him to build a house with high walls and only one window and one door and to keep her locked in with only minimum food and clothing. One day the wife, looking through the window, saw a handsome young man and immediately fell in love with him. Getting her husband drunk every night, she stole the keys and went out to meet her lover. One night the husband caught her and locked her out of the house. She cried and told him she would throw herself in the well, and he would be responsible for her death. Hearing a sound of something falling into the well, he ran out of the house. The wife, who had merely thrown in a stone, ran into the house and locked her husband out. She blamed him for her infidelities and told his parents about his nightly visits to prostitutes. Petrus Alfonsi describes how his life was ruined:

> Parentes uero hec audientes atque uerum esse existimantes increpauerunt eum. Et ita mulier illa liberata arte sua flagicium quod meruerat in uirum retrusit. Cui nichil profuit, immo obfuit mulierem custodisse: nam iste eciam accidit cumulus miserie quod existimacione plurimorum quod paciebatur meruisse crederetur. Unde quidem bonis compluribus pulsus, dignitatibus exutus, existimacione fedatus ob uxoris maliloquium incestitatis tulit supplicium.[35]
>
> [In fact, hearing this and deeming it to be the truth, his parents rebuked him. And so through her guile, the woman freed herself from the opprobrium she had deserved and thrust it on the man. It benefited him nothing to have kept watch over his wife; on the contrary, it harmed him: for this mass of miseries happened to him and, in the estimation of many, he was believed to have earned what he suffered. Thus removed of his many goods, stripped of his dignities, his reputation soiled by the bad words of his wife, he suffered punishment for his unchastity.]

Even good women, according to Walter Map and Petrus Alfonsi, must be feared. In Alfonsi's "De canicula lacrimante" ("The Crying Bitch"), a teacher tells his pupil how a chaste and faithful wife is duped by an old hag into sleeping with a young man who has fallen in love with her. Attributing this episode to black magic, the pupil exclaims, "Spero quod

siquis homo tam sapiens erit ut semper timeat se posse decipi arte mulieris" ("I hope that any man will be so wise that he may fear the possibility of being deceived by a woman's tricks").[36] Map declares that even the best woman, who is "rarer than a phoenix" ("rarior est fenice"), must be feared.[37] Even a chaste woman can become evil in sleep: "Amice, ecce quam illibatam seruauerunt uigilie, deflorauit illusio per sompnium, ut semper omne rosarium aliquo turbine sua purpura spolietur" ("Friend, behold that one whom they had observed as virginal [literally, 'intact'], the illusion withered in sleep, as when the redness of a rose bed is always despoiled by some wind").[38]

Not only women, but the institution of marriage itself must be avoided. Using the example of Cicero, who divorced Terentia and then refused to remarry, Map declares that a man cannot have time for both a woman and philosophy.[39] Furthermore, marriage prevents happiness: "Amice, utinam tu semel maritus fueris et non sis, ut scias quid felicitatem impediat" ("Friend, would that you once should be and not be a husband, so that you may know what impedes happiness").[40]

According to Katharina M. Wilson and Elizabeth M. Makowski, "misogamy occurs in literature only when there is a certain level of civilization, order, and urbanization in a society and when women attain a certain level of economic or legal independence." When women are dependent on men, however, misogamy is absent.[41] It too had an economic component, they argue; it was a "potent propaganda tool in the hands of Gregorian reformers devoted to clerical celibacy as a means of 'husbanding' finite resources of landed wealth and public influence."[42]

Despite this pervasive misogamy, other monastic authors wrote positively about the attributes of wives. As Sharon Farmer has shown, authors such as Thomas of Chobham heralded women who influenced the economic decisions of their husbands to support monastic institutions.[43] Although excessive gifts of charity were seen as disobedient and unreasonable acts, according to P. H. Cullum, they "could be forgiven, indeed lauded, because the giving was in the service of a higher calling, by which they demonstrated their victory over their inherent weaknesses as women."[44] In the emerging money economy, wives were encouraged to give alms secretly on behalf of their greedy husbands.[45] That these gifts contributed to the wealth of the church played no small role in why generous women were seen as exemplary.

In addition, the peacekeeping and nurturing qualities of women were also stressed.[46] As Alcuin Blamires has shown, this "case for women" often drew on the paradox of women's strength in their inherent weakness, rising from St. Paul's belief that "power comes to its full strength in weakness" and continuing through Fortunatus, Peter Venerable, and

Peter Abelard.[47] Nonetheless, Blamires calls this "misogyny in disguise" since maleness is the standard, and women's softness is perceived only in relation to men.[48]

Clearly, medieval male writers took women's inherent weaknesses and polarized them into two clearly defined images: Eve, the "bad" woman who transgresses and brings down her husband with herself, and Mary, the "good" woman who transcends her bodily state and nourishes her child. Marbod of Rennes in his *Liber decem capitulorum* differentiates between these two kinds of women. As we have seen earlier, he is vitriolic in his condemnation of one sort of woman, but sees an opposite kind as well, one for whom Mary's virginity is the model:

> Et sub lege nova postquam laus integritatis
> Virgineo partu mundo celebrata refulsit,
> Innumerabilibus sunt tempora plena puellis
> Quae vitae damno comprensavere pudorem . . .[49]
> [But under the new law, after the glory of purity
> Shone brightly by the virgin birth, honored in the world,
> Time has been full of innumerable girls
> Who embraced chastity by the loss of life.]

In *De virginibus* Ambrose defines a virgin as one who is free from sin: "Quid autem est castitas virginalis nisi expers contagionis integritas?"[50] "Contagio" underscores the notion of a virgin as standing alone—whole, untouched and untouchable. Christianity is a prerequisite for a true virgin, in Ambrose's mind; he catalogues pagan virgins who do not deserve that name, who are immodest, overcome by lust or need to be chaste only for a short period of time. He concludes:

> Quanto nostrae virgines fortiores, quae vincunt etiam quas non vident potestates, quibus non tantum de carne et sanguine, sed etiam de ipso mundi principe saeculique rectore victoria est![51]
>
> [How much stronger are our virgins, who conquer even those powers which they do not see, to whom the victory is not only over the flesh and blood but also over the very prince of the world and ruler of the age!]

Pagan virgins, in the end, seem to give themselves up to lust. Recounting a Pythagorean virgin who bit off her tongue rather than reveal a secret to a tyrant, he denigrates her because in the end, she was overcome by passion.[52]

Medieval writers appropriated the notion that the "good" woman values her virginity above all else and is willing to martyr herself to maintain it. It permeates the *Legenda aurea* (1275), the extremely popular

medieval catalogue of saints. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne has described the typical profile of the female virgin martyr: The girl is young, beautiful, rich, and noble and is secretly a Christian. Her father is a pagan, or absent. There is a pagan suitor or judge. She is approached for marriage, seduction, or rape and is persecuted by the father/suitor/judge. She is threatened, incarcerated, stripped naked, publicly flogged, lacerated, burnt, boiled, or dismembered. Her conduct is so impeccable that she converts the tyrant's populace. Her formal execution comes by beheading. She rises to heaven with doves and angelic hosts "to be welcomed into the bower of the greatest and most handsome of bridegrooms."[53]

Sexuality, or rather the absence of it, is a key determinant in the definition of a good woman. Married women who appear in the *Legenda aurea* usually are forced into marriage, but manage to keep chaste through various devices that tend to appear with the help of divine intervention.[54] This tendency, as Glasser articulates, was buttressed by the church's decision to make consent, not consummation, the key determinant of marriage. An unconsummated marriage in the eyes of some medieval theologians made its sanctity even greater.[55] John W. Baldwin has pointed out that the division of sexuality into *coniugate*, *continentes*, and *virgins* was more pervasive that the better-known social classification of *oratores*, *bellatores*, and *laboratores*.[56]

The example of the Holy Family became an important, if complicated, motif. Early church writers, such as Tertullian, believed that since Joseph and Mary produced other children after Jesus's birth, they necessarily had sexual relations. This view was vehemently denounced by Jerome, among others, who argued for their chaste marriage, describing Jesus's brothers as part of a spiritual family.[57] The arguments about what exactly constitutes marriage—consent or consummation—were complicated by the case of Joseph and Mary. Resnick explains:

> If the absence of sexual intercourse were to invalidate the marriage bond between Joseph and Mary, then Mary would suddenly appear as an unwed mother—a conclusion unacceptable to the twelfth or thirteenth centuries . . . But if their relationship resulted in a chaste spiritual marriage, and if lay people were encouraged to realize this model too, then the distinction between a celibate clergy and the laity would be threatened.[58]

This high standard of what women needed to do to overcome their evil nature, inherited from their mother Eve, was an unrealistic option for most women. Those who did accept virginity as their highest calling entered female monasteries. Women such as Hildegard of Bingen and Catherine of Siena, according to E. Ann Matter, found ways to use to

their own advantage the accepted belief that, although inferior, women had special nurturing and spiritual qualities.[59] They did not, however, necessarily believe that their role related directly to their sex.

Hildegard, in particular, saw herself as the transmitter of the holy light. In her letters she refers to herself as a "paupercula," a poor little woman. As Barbara Newman has pointed out, this idea of "feminine frailty" actually validated her authority: because God is perfected in weakness and the humble are the most exalted, human impotence could be seen as divine empowerment.[60] Furthermore, as a self-proclaimed "indocta" (unlearned one) who spoke such words of wisdom, she could be explained "only as a living intimate of the divine Spouse, a dwelling-place of the Spirit."[61] In a letter to Eberhard, bishop of Bamberg, she says that she, a "paupercula," has looked to the true light and is sending him a "vera visio" that has been shown not in her words but in those of the true light:

> Nunc autem, o pater, ego paupercula forma ad uerum lumen prospexi, et, secundum quod ibi in uera uisione uidi et audi, quod tibi exponi petisti ita expositum non uerbis meis sed ueri luminis, cui numquam ullus defectus est, in hunc modum transmitto.[62]
>
> [Now, however, O father, I, a poor little womanly form, have looked out to the true light, and, according to what I have seen and heard there in a true vision, convey to you in this manner that which you sought to be explained to you, not in my words but in those of the true light, which never has any imperfection.]

As Barbara Newman has noted, Hildegard's biographers describe her as the bride of Christ, a description that she herself rejects.[63] She sees her authority as being a higher one, a direct link to God through the "living light." When her correspondents use lengthy Song of Songs references, she responds in a haughty and accusatory fashion. She does not specifically confront their use of the nuptial theme; instead, she makes clear exactly why she should be listened to. For example, Odo of Soissons seeks her prayers as the bride of Christ ("Hildegardi sancte ac Dei amice, sponse Christi"): "Obtestor uos per pretium sanguinis Iesu Christi; dilecti sponsi uestri, de cruce fluentis, per quem uos subarrauit et sponsam assumpsit" ("I beseech you through the value of the blood of Jesus Christ, your beloved spouse, flowing from the cross, through which he paid your dowry and accepted you as his spouse").[64] Hildegard responds to him, not as the bride of Christ, but instead says: "In uera uisione mysteriorum Dei scribo, uidendo et audiendo et sciendo in uno modo" ("I write in a true vision of the mysteries of God, to be seen and heard and understood

in one way").[65] Her link is directly to God, as she tries to make clear to Odo. He writes her again in the same year, calling her the bride of God:

> Quia tu, domina, ancillam te fecisti Christi, ipse te super te eleuauit et secreta tibi uirginalis thalami adhuc in carne posite reuelasse ex parte creditur, ut una ex his credaris de quibus canitur: Introduxit me rex in cubiculum suum.[66]
>
> [Because you, lady, have made yourself the handmaid of God, he has elevated you beyond yourself and has trusted to reveal to you the secrets of the bridal chamber while you are placed in the flesh so that you may be believed to be one of those about whom it is sung: the King has brought me into his bedroom.]

Odo then interjects what can be interpreted, given their exchange, as a barb: "cum nihil horum didiceris" ("although you have studied none of these things").

In her response, Hildegard talks about the nature of the divine and ends by referring back to where she gets her authority: "Nunc iterum audi, o homo, pauperculam formam in Spiritu tibi dicentem" ("Now *again* hear the poor little womanly form speaking to you in the Spirit" [emphasis added]).[67] With this juxtaposition of the "paupercula" speaking as the Spirit, Hildegard asserts both her direct connection with God, not as spouse, but as his representative and her knowledge of the divine one in spite of being "indocta." It is as if she is telling Odo that only she can call herself unlearned. Hildegard, clearly, refuses to be silenced and marginalized.

The "bride of Christ" idea came directly from Origen's interpretation of the Song of Songs, in which he identified the bride with the perfected soul. This allegorical interpretation became the basis, according to Ann W. Astell, of all subsequent medieval writings on the Canticles.[68] Filled with longing and sexual imagery, the Song of Songs, if read literally, recounts the longing of a lover for his beloved. Stephen D. Moore has noted that a literal interpretation of the erotically charged book would have been "unthinkable."[69] The Song of Songs, he writes, "was a ticking time bomb within Scripture itself, an occasion for sin just waiting to happen, which only the ingenuity of the allegorist could successfully defuse."[70]

It was, as E. Ann Matter points out, "the most frequently interpreted book of medieval Christianity."[71] The relationship between the lovers was seen as the love between God and his church or, especially in the twelfth century, between God and the individual soul.[72] The most celebrated commentator was the Cistercian abbot Bernard of Clairvaux,

whose *Sermones super Cantica Canticorum* emphasize the union of the soul with God only in heaven.[73] Bernard deconstructs the language of the Song of Songs in order to strip it of any sexual or even physical meaning. Astell notes that his allegorical reading "deliteralizes" the Song.[74] I would argue that this deliteralization is, in itself, a kind of dispossession of women's sexuality, a silencing of the female body, akin to silencing of women's voice. By using the vocabulary of sex, but confining it to the discussion of Christ's love for his bride, here distinctly *not* a real woman, Bernard is defining the perfect marriage as allegorical. His bride is unattainable in any physical sense, further polarizing women by making the possibility of being a good one even more impossible to achieve.

In his first sermon, Bernard emphasizes that the Song of Songs was meant to be read allegorically. Solomon gave us the bread, which is the Song for us to break and eat: "Est panis apud Salomonem, isque admodum splendidus sapidusque, librum dico, qui Cantica canticorum inscribitur: proferatur, si placet, et frangatur" ("There is bread in Solomon, wholly splendid and delicious, I mean the book which is entitled the Song of Songs: Let it be offered, if you please, and let it be broken").[75] Two evils are enemies of the soul: "namely, an empty love of the world and an excessive love of self" ("vanus scilicet amor mundi, et superfluus sui").[76] Continuing to detach the Song from any kind of physical interpretation, he exhorts his listeners to tame the flesh and free their spirits:

> Alioquin ante carnem disciplinae studiis edomitam et spiritui mancipatam, ante spretam et abiectam saeculi pompam et sarcinam, indigne ab impuris lectio sancta praesumitur.[77]
>
> [In general before the flesh is tamed by the zeal for knowledge and is given up to the spirit, before the ostentation and burden of the world are despised and cast aside, it is unworthy that the holy teaching be taken up by impure ones.]

Only when the soul is purified can the Song be heard because it is a marriage song of chaste souls: "Est quippe nuptiale carmen, exprimens castos iucundosque complexus animorum . . . " ("It is certainly a marriage song, expressing the chaste and delightful embraces of souls . . . ").[78]

In Sermon 7, Bernard develops his notion of the bride as the soul thirsting for God ("anima sitiens Deum"): "Si ergo amare sponsis specialiter principaliterque convenit, non immerito sponsae nomine censetur anima quae amat" ("If therefore it befits brides especially and principally to love, it is not unfitting that the soul which loves be called by the name of bride").[79] That bride will want a kiss, which is all that she desires: "Osculetur me, ait, osculo oris sui" ("Let him kiss me, I

say, with the kiss of his mouth").[80] This kiss of the mouth is the subject of Sermon 8. Bernard distinguishes between the kiss of the mouth and the kiss of the kiss. The Father kisses, the Son receives the kiss, and the Holy Spirit transmits the kiss, which becomes the kiss of the kiss: "Filius osculatus accipitur, non erit ab re osculum Spiritum Sanctum intelligi, utpote qui Patris Filiique imperturbabilis pax sit, gluten firmum, individuus amor, indivisibilis unitas" ("The son accepts the kissing, the kiss will not be understood as from the Holy Spirit, seeing that it is the calm peace of the Father and the Son, firm glue, undivided love, indivisible unity").[81]

The long dissection of the kiss separates it from any carnality. Not only allegory is at work here, but also a hierarchy of worthiness. By taking place between the Father and Son, the primary kiss becomes redefined as something sacred. The bride, that is, the soul, cannot receive this kiss, but only the "kiss of the kiss" communicated through the intervention of the Holy Spirit.

This disembodiment of potentially sexual imagery continues in Sermon 9, in which Bernard analyzes the breasts of both the bride and the bridegroom. Since breasts are a central sensual feature of the Song of Songs, he cleverly uses them to his advantage. Not ignoring the arousal associated with them, he shows how when the kiss is received, the bride's breasts grow large as if in pregnancy, which for him is the sign of grace: "Tantae nempe efficaciae osculum sanctum est, ut ex ipso mox, cum acceperit illud, sponsa concipiat, tumescentibus nimirum uberibus, et lacte quasi pinguescentibus in testimonium" ("Truly the holy kiss is so efficacious, that as soon as she receives it, the bride conceives, her breasts swelling with conception, as if growing fertile by her milk in testimony"). To separate the image further from any carnal meaning, Bernard says that those who pray frequently will understand: "Quibus studium est orare frequenter, experti sunt quod dico" ("For those for whom the zeal to pray is frequent have understood what I say").[82]

Just as the Song of Songs associates breasts with wine, so does Bernard. But he stresses how wine, which he associates with sensuality, is inferior to the milk of the breasts. Once a grape is pressed, he says, it can never produce any more wine; this is exactly the fate of sensuality:

> Ut enim uva expressa semel non habet iam quid denuo fundat, sed perpetua ariditate damnatur, sic caro in pressura mortis ob omni prorsus sua delectatione siccatur, nec ultra revirescit ad libidines.[83]
>
> [For the grape, once pressed, is not able to flow a second time, but is damned to eternal dryness. Thus the flesh in the press of death is utterly drained of its pleasure, and never again revives towards its longings.]

The breasts of the bride, however, flow forever:

> Merito proinde meliora carnis saeculive amore asseruntur ubera sponsae, quae nullo umquam lactentium numero arefiunt, sed semper abundant de visceribus caritatis, ut iterum fluant.[84]
>
> [Therefore, by right, the breasts of the bride are claimed to be better than worldly or carnal love. The breasts of the bride which never become dry from the number of those drinking from them, but always well up from the inmost heart of love, so that they flow again.]

By feminizing the text of the Song of Songs, as Ann Astell has pointed out, Bernard "immunizes" his monks "against lustful desires for the feminine exteriorized and objectified in sexual fantasies."[85]

The Bride, according to Astell, is associated with female characteristics: need, frailty, endurance, contemplation, compassion, and nurturing.[86] Matter explains that because *ecclesia* and *anima* are both feminine nouns in Latin, it was easy to have the church or the soul speak the words of the bride. Nonetheless, the bride of Christ became more and more closely identified with a human woman, the Virgin Mary.[87] The *Sigillum Beatae Mariae*, written right at the beginning of the twelfth century by Honorius Augustodunensis, signals the growing cult of the Virgin Mary.[88]

Mary, however, has little biblical authority. She is mentioned in fewer than a dozen passages in the New Testament. Jaroslav Pelikan characterizes her biblical account as "tantilizingly brief."[89] The Gospels of Matthew and Luke state that Mary was a virgin when she conceived Jesus, but the rest of the New Testament is silent on this, even St. Paul.[90] As Peter Brown has commented, in late antique literature Mary is portrayed as the "enclosed child," one who grew up "in total isolation from the profane world." In the second-century *Protoevangelium* of James, as Brown relates, Mary was presented "as a human creature totally enclosed in sacred space," controlled not by any male guardian but only by the "holy thought" that was inside her.[91] This idea stresses the early belief in Mary's importance in her own right, as opposed to her role in the Later Middle Ages as the immaculate conceiver of Christ. Bernard, for example, did not have much interest in Mary. As Rachel Fulton has point out, she is the protagonist only once in his *Sermons on the Song of Songs* (Sermon 29), where she is seen as the mediator to Christ.[92] Other twelfth-century commentators, she argues, see her as a compassionate symbol in her identification with Christ's pain.[93]

What, then, is the significance of all of these threads in looking at women's views of marriage in the twelfth century? Alongside a challenge to women's inheritance rights, a written discourse developed that divided

women into two opposing stereotypes, Mary and Eve. Authority for these polarized images came from biblical and early church sources and conspired to marginalize women both spiritually and morally, adding to their already diluted economic position. Concurrently, the church managed to wrest authority over marriage away from what had been a civil custom and narrowly defined it so as to increase its own political, religious, and financial power. Marriage, the act by which women became the property of their husbands, was now in the hands of an institution that saw them as dangerous beings if they were not properly controlled.

In the next chapter I turn to women's narratives, which, although not dealing with the inheritance issue directly, instead question the institution of marriage. Unlike the romances analyzed in chapter one, these writers do not confront the loss of property, but rather their loss of independence. However, the economic issue is not far from their minds.