

Three Short *Exempla* Concerning the Purity of Gerard “*la Pucelle*”

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Master Gerard “*la Pucelle*”: Introduction and Biographical Sketch

Master Gerard “*la Pucelle*” (ca. 1118–1184) was a canonist, theologian, and professor of law as well as a (not uncontroversial) member of Archbishop Thomas Becket’s extended *familia*.¹ In addition to a widespread reputation for scholarly rigour and diplomatic skill, Gerard appears to have been acclaimed during his lifetime for his irreproachable commitment to continence and chastity. The aim of this article is to introduce and contextualize a suite of three previously unnoticed preaching *exempla* which trade on this reputation.²

Based on the linguistic origins of his evocative *cognomen* “*ex castitate*” (“*la Pucelle*”

¹ Stephan Kuttner and Eleanor Rathbone, “Anglo-Norman Canonists of the Twelfth Century: An Introductory Study,” *Traditio* 7 (1949–51), 297.

² *Exempla* are short, didactic narrations typically used to illustrate sermons and theological arguments, or for other scholarly or devotional purposes. Tales were primarily drawn from the Bible, the *Vitae patrum*, Gregory the Great’s *Dialogues*, or other early medieval sources. By the middle of the twelfth century, authors were incorporating tales of more recent provenance — and often from their own experience — into their treatises and sermons. In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, collectors began to fashion vast, searchable compendia of *exempla* (works such as John Bromyard’s *Summa praedicatorum* and Arnold of Liege’s *Alphabetum narrationum*). The *liber exemplorum* (example book) continued to flourish as a literary form well into the sixteenth century. The *locus classicus* for the genre is J.-Th. Welter, *L’exemplum dans la littérature religieuse et didactique du moyen âge* (Paris and Toulouse, 1927). See also Claude Bremond, Jacques Le Goff, and Jean-Claude Schmitt, *L’“exemplum,”* (Turnhout, 1982).

translates as “the Virgin” or “the Maiden”), Charles Donahue suggests that the English-born Gerard had French or Norman ancestry.³ While little is known of his personal or social origins, he appears to have entered the Paris schools by the late-1130s, concentrating his studies on the two laws.⁴ Gerard must have gained a considerable reputation throughout the 1150s as he appears to have opened his own school on the Left Bank by the middle of the decade.⁵ It was also around this time that he won the “special favour” of the Capetian monarch, Louis VII.⁶

It is unclear precisely when or under what circumstances Master Gerard left Paris to enter Becket’s service. Nevertheless, Herbert of Bosham numbered him amongst the *eruditi* who surrounded the archbishop in the mid-1160s.⁷ As a specialist in canon law, no doubt Gerard was well situated to offer the Primate expert counsel in his extended contest with King Henry II. In return for his fidelity, the archbishop extended holy orders and preferment. Gerard accompanied the archbishop into exile in 1164. While Archbishop Thomas went to a conspicuous seclusion at the Cistercian abbey of Pontigny, Gerard returned to Paris.

After a brief interlude in the schools of that city, Gerard undertook his most controversial venture: a mission to the German emperor Frederick Barbarossa. Arriving in Cologne in 1165/6, he was effusively received by Rainald of Dassel, the city’s prince-archbishop. While Gerard almost certainly knew Rainald *via* his Paris network, his warm reception probably sprang from the exigencies of international politics. In addition to his metropolitan responsibilities, Rainald was Barbarossa’s chancellor. Both he and the emperor had recently been anathematized by Pope Alexander III for their part in the latest episode in the protracted Guelph-Ghibelline contest, *viz*, their support of the antipope, Victor IV.⁸ The appearance of such a widely-reputed legal theorist in their midst no doubt must have buoyed the imperial side. However, Gerard’s friends feared that he would be contaminated by his association with the schismatics and, thus, implored him to leave the city. Sensing an opportunity for advancement, the Parisian master demurred and determined to remain in the Rhineland metropolis.⁹ Rainald

³ Charles Donahue Jr., “Pucelle, Gerard (d. 1184),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004. [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/49666>, accessed 12 Feb 2014]

⁴ John of Salisbury may have been an early confederate, though the degree of their amity is disputed. The two men developed a (sometimes uneasy) epistolary relationship in the 1160s, one which would continue, with extended silences, until Becket’s assassination. See Yoko Hirata, “John of Salisbury and His Correspondents: A Study of the Epistolary Relationships between John of Salisbury and His Correspondents.” Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Sheffield (1992), esp. pp. 485–509.

⁵ Students who are known to have subscribed to his classes include Walter Map, Radulphus Niger, Master Richard (a relative of John of Salisbury), and Lucas of Hungary, the future Bishop of Eger.

⁶ John of Salisbury, *epist.* 185.

⁷ This was Bosham’s term for the learned clerics of Becket’s retinue. See Anne Duggan, “The Price of Loyalty: The Fate of Thomas Becket’s Learned Household,” in *Thomas Becket: Friends, Networks, Texts and Cult*, ed. Anne Duggan (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), III, 1.

⁸ Ottaviano di Monticelli was the second antipope to be styled Victor IV.

⁹ John of Salisbury was particularly dismayed; his correspondence with Gerald now fairly bristled with remonstrances and imprecations.

obligingly granted him one of the archdiocese's most lucrative prebends and probably orchestrated his elevation to principal of the city's incipient school of canon law. According to John of Salisbury, Gerard's legal opinions were thereafter regarded as "sacrosanct" by imperial officials.¹⁰

In 1168, Gerard returned to England without previously consulting the still-exiled Becket. Whether this was perfidy, carelessness, or callousness is indeterminable from this distance. The fact that he alone (at this early point) took the oath of fealty which King Henry had demanded of all the Becket exiles suggests, at the very least, an instinct for self-preservation. Nevertheless, Becket forgave Gerard, on the condition that he repudiate the benefice he had received from the German excommunicates. There remains some question about whether Becket acted out of purely altruistic (or perhaps pastoral) motives or whether he still required Gerard's counsel.¹¹ Regardless, Master Gerard spent the remaining eighteen months of Becket's life in a precarious position between the royal and the archiepiscopal parties.

Gerard's seeming betrayal of Thomas Becket does not appear, however, to have harmed his career to any significant extent. Indeed, after the archbishop's assassination, he returned briefly to the academic life in Paris before being recalled to Canterbury by Archbishop Thomas's immediate successor, Richard of Dover. Between *ca.* 1174 and 1183, Gerard became a trusted *familiaris* and principal signatory to several pieces of archiepiscopal *diplomata*.¹² He also appears to have intervened professionally in several disputes touching on, among other things, the matter of ecclesiastical independence. By this time, Gerard's canonistic and theological opinions had circulated widely, and a number of scholars cited his arguments in their *summae* and glosses. In 1179, Gerard's reputation was such that Archbishop Richard deputed him to represent English interests at the Third Lateran Council. He was made Bishop of Coventry in 1183 but died the next year. Rumours at the time insisted that he had been poisoned.¹³

"The Llanthony Stories"

Though critics accused him, perhaps justifiably, of political and personal treachery,

¹⁰ John of Salisbury, *epist.* 189 and 197 (PL 199, cols. 199c, 216d–217b). Cf. W. Giesebrecht, *Geschichte der deutschen Kaiserzeit* vol. 2 (Leipzig, 1888) 518f. and VI (1895) 457; R. Knipping, *Die Regesten der Erzbischöfe von Köln im Mittelalter* II (Bonn 1901) no. 856; J. Spörl, "Rainald von Dassel in seinem Verhältnis zu Johann von Salisbury," *Historisches Jahrbuch der Görres-Gesellschaft* 60 (1940) 250–57.

¹¹ Gerard appears to have been the sort of figure at whom it was impossible to remain angry. In the wake of his betrayal, he was forgiven by Becket, King Louis, and Pope Alexander. On his death, the monks of Canterbury celebrated his obits with the sort of extravagant ritual usually reserved for prelates. See the obit list in London, BL Cotton MS Nero C. ix, f. 3v. Cf. Kuttner and Rathbone, "Anglo-Norman Canonists," 303.

¹² In more than 50 Canterbury charters from this period, Gerard's name appeared first amongst listed witnesses.

¹³ See, for example, Gervase of Canterbury, *Chronica Gervasii, pars* I: 1183–86, in *The Historical Works of Gervase of Canterbury*, ed. Stubbs (Longman & Co., London, 1879), 308: *Erat autem rumor in populo eum (i.e., Gerard) interiisse veneno, quod et manifestis secundum physicos claruit indiciiis.*

Gerard's reputation for sexual probity appears never to have been seriously challenged. While the sobriquet "*la Pucelle*" could be construed as a wry or even mocking comment on a perceived fastidiousness or effeminacy, there is little reason to suppose the nickname was ever intended in anything but earnest. Indeed, one early thirteenth-century *exempla* collector from the West Midlands or the Welsh Marches seems to have corroborated or amplified Gerard's reputation by recording a clutch of tales which revolve around his putative rectitude.

The narrations have been preserved in "The Llanthony Stories," an anonymous, unedited and fragmentary *libellus* of illustrative tales (*i.e.*, *exempla*) which survives uniquely in Oxford, Corpus Christi College MS 32, ff. 92r–99v.¹⁴ This is a composite manuscript from the first half of the thirteenth century, which, according to Rodney Thompson (who has recently catalogued Corpus Christi's medieval Latin codices), contains parts of four books.¹⁵ The *libellus* containing the Gerard *exempla* forms the third of the four constituent books contained in the manuscript. N. R. Ker has tentatively assigned MS 32 to the Augustinian priory of Llanthony Secunda in Gloucester.¹⁶

While the ultimate geographical origins of the other three parts of the codex remain open to debate, "The Llanthony Stories" appear not to have strayed too far from their point of origin. They are manifestly the literary product of an aristocratic and well-connected author living in the West Midlands, possibly an inmate of Llanthony priory itself. The *libellus* clearly stands at the confluence of at least four distinct circles of affinity. That is, the collection's *exempla* connect the overlapping worlds of: 1) the Anglo-Norman Marcher lords, 2) the Oxford-Paris scholarly axis, 3) the Thomas Becket circle, and 4) the Canterbury archdiocese. At every level, the collection is saturated with the concerns, mores, and social views of the Anglo-Norman clerical elite living along the Welsh border. Of the 35 *exempla* contained in the extant portion of the text, more than half explicitly indicate such connections and provenance.¹⁷

The Gerard "*la Pucelle*" *exempla*

The three illustrative stories concerning Master Gerard occur towards the end of the fragment, on f. 99v. The first two tales (nos. 46 and 47) must have originally circulated

¹⁴ I am currently preparing an edition and translation of the text.

¹⁵ Rodney Thompson, *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Medieval Manuscripts of Corpus Christi College Oxford* (D. S. Brewer: Cambridge, 2011), 10–12.

¹⁶ Neil R. Ker, *Medieval Libraries of Great Britain: A List of Surviving Books* (Royal Historical Society: London, 1941. 2nd ed., 1964), 108–110.

¹⁷ The following is a partial list of protagonists/authorities who can claim membership in one of the four circles of affinity: The Marcher lords: Giles de Braose, William of Verdun of Gloucester, Walter Map; Oxford-Paris axis: an unnamed nepos of Langton, Henry Calne, Walter of London, Richard of Buleia; The Becket circle: Alexander of Wales, Gerard la Pucelle, Thomas Carbonel, Alan of Tewksbury; The Canterbury orbit: Stephen Langton, Baldwin of Exeter, Thomas Becket, Richard of Dover. Clearly my divisions are artificial and there is cross-over amongst the various categories.

after *ca.* 1155, as they present Gerard as a Parisian academic master.¹⁸ The third *exemplum* (no. 48) dates from the period, 1174–1183, as it depicts him serving under Archbishop Richard. However, because the Llanthony *libellus* could not have been compiled before *ca.* 1207, the stories did not assume their current form until some 25 years after Gerard's death.¹⁹ Whether this points to an attempt at posthumous rehabilitation or simply fond reminiscence is uncertain. The author's criteria for selecting these particular narrations are, of course, irretrievably lost. That he still considered Gerard a worthy subject for exemplification a quarter century after his passing will perhaps only add to the frustration expressed by some scholars of canon law who would like to know more about the professional basis of Gerard's celebrity.

All three of the *exempla* deal with aspects of Gerard's putative moral excellence. The first *exemplum* explores Gerard's ability to flatter a royal patroness (*i.e.*, Eleanor of Aquitaine) while, at the same time, offering a witty rejoinder and maintaining his bodily integrity. The second documents his principled, but seemingly jovial, refusal to take "morally compromising" medical advice. The third appears to demonstrate an amiable unwillingness to take advantage of his proximity to a powerful lord.

While the compiler of "The Llanthony Stories" presented Gerard as a deeply moral agent, he did not characterize him as a prig or a prude. Indeed, the Parisian master exhibits a wit that is mordent, slightly bawdy, and self-deprecating.²⁰ In each *exemplum* he appears to display what might be called a kind of "charismatic chastity": it combines *verecundia* (dignified modesty) with the strongly courtly attributes of *lepor* (charm, grace, wit) and *hilaritas* (serene good humour). Historian Stephen Jaeger has associated this particular admixture of qualities with the *cultus virtutum*, *i.e.*, the comprehensive program of manners undertaken by students in the cathedral schools between the tenth and twelfth centuries.²¹ They are also prominent components of the courtier-bishop's social formation.²²

Thus, the author appears to understand Gerard's *pu(c)ellitas*, his "maidenhood," not only as a marker of personal discipleship, but also as an overtly political or social contrivance. Gerard's "inviolability" is constructed in such a way that it is not a passive trait, but rather a political instrument to be wielded at opportune moments. His virginity enables him to erect a conceptual and physical *cordon*, making him

¹⁸ He taught in the schools of the Left Bank on at least three separate occasions: *ca.* 1155–1162/3, 1164–1165/6, 1170/1–1174. He also spent time in the city in 1178, though it is unclear whether he was there for pedagogical reasons.

¹⁹ The *terminus post quem* is based on the date of Stephen Langton's elevation to the See of Canterbury. In *exemplum* no. 35, the author described an otherwise unknown Oxford arts master, Radulphus, as *nepos magistri Stephani de Longed', postea Cant' archiepiscopi*.

²⁰ In the first story, the author describes Gerard's body in overtly sensual terms.

²¹ C. Stephen Jaeger, *The Envy of Angels: Cathedral Schools and Social Ideals in Medieval Europe, 950–1200* (University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1994), 102–103.

²² In Jaeger's words, "charm and winning grace are qualities vital to survival in the hothouse atmosphere of court life and administrative service." See *Envy of Angels*, p. 102. Cf. Jaeger, "The Courtier Bishop in Vitae from the Tenth to the Twelfth Century," *Speculum* 58, no. 2 (April 1983), 291–325.

impenetrable not only to sin, but also to the advances and blandishments of worldly men (and women). His chastity not only prevented his moral ruin, it also facilitated his independence as an advisor and diplomat.

While Gerard la Pucelle will remain an elusive figure, the Llanthony *exempla* begin to address the issue of how his legacy was constructed in the decades immediately after his death. A more thoroughgoing analysis of the narrations will no doubt reveal more.

Editorial Principles

While every effort has been made to preserve the integrity of the text and the presumed intentions of the author (and scribe), I have taken the liberty of adopting modern forms of punctuation and capitalization. I have also expanded conventional abbreviations. With respect to spelling orthography, I have retained upper- and lower-case u and i in consonantal positions throughout.

The Text

/...99v/ xlvi. Erat apud ciuitatem Parisiacum magister quidam qui ob elegantem et proceram membrorum dispositionem nec non et laudabilem uerecundiam sanctamque continentiam, dictus est Gerardus «la pucele». Erat autem tunc temporis Alienora regina Francie, uxor Regis Lodouici. Que audiens de pulcritudine
10 clerici illius, mittens uocauit eum, familiariterque allocuta est eum. Cumque cerneret pulcherrimas manus ipsius et digitorum ordinem decentissimum, impacienter et inpudenter ait ad illum: “O decentes manus, ad contrectanda crura pulcre mulieris. Cui ille, alter Ioseph, conuenienter et simpliciter respondit: “O domina. Quibus ergo manibus tractarem porretam meam?”

15 xlvii. Egrotauit idem apud ciuitatem Parisiacum. Medici autem considerantes qualitatem morbi dixerunt ei: “Nisi coieris cum aliqua muliere moriendum est tibi.” Ille, uerus amator castitatis, ait: “Mallem, si necesse esset, mori centies quam semel fornicari.”

20 xlviii. Idem, rogatus facere petitionem pro quodam clerico, intercessit pro eo apud archiepiscopum Cantuariensis. Ricardum. Erat petitio minus rationabilis. Cui ait archiepiscopus: “Magister. Si consulis ut hic faciam, forsitan fiet quod petis.” Et ille: “Multum,” inquit, “distat inter preces et consilia.”

Translation

/...99v/ 46. In the city of Paris there was a certain master who, on account of the elegant and well-formed disposition of his limbs, and because of his laudable modesty and holy

continence, was called Gerard "*la Pucele*" (i.e., the Virgin). At that time, Eleanor, the wife of King Louis, was the Queen of France. Hearing of the beauty of this cleric, she called him to her, and addressed him rather intimately. And when she noticed his exceedingly beautiful hands and the very handsome arrangement of his fingers, she impudently and rashly said to him, "O what lovely hands for touching the leg of a beautiful woman!" He, another Joseph, responded to her honestly and agreeably: "O my Lady, with what hands would I then eat my pottage?"

47. The same master fell sick while in the city of Paris. Reflecting on the nature of his illness, the physicians told him: "Unless you have sex with some woman, you will die." He, a true lover of continence, said: "I would prefer, were it necessary, to die a hundred times rather than to fornicate but once!"

48. The same master, when asked to prepare a petition for a certain clerk, interceded on his behalf with the Archbishop of Canterbury, Richard. The petition lacked a rationale. On account of this, the archbishop said, "Professor, if you advise that I should do this, perhaps I ought to do as you ask." And he responded: "There is a great distance between requesting something and advising it."

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