CHAPTER NINE

GENDERED SANCTITY IN MARIE DE FRANCE’S
L’ESPURGATOIRE SEINT PATRIZ AND LA VIE SEINTE AUDREE

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In an article published in 2002 in Speculum, “La Vie seinte Audree: A Fourth Text by Marie de France?” I made a case for including this hagiographical text on the life of Saint Audrey (or Etheldreda) within the corpus of Marie de France, concluding that it has “as much right to be considered among the works of Marie de France as the other three that scholars have attributed to her.”¹ That is not entirely true. Her Ysopet or collection of fables is, of course, the text from which we derive her name in the famous verses “Me numerai pur remembrance: / Marie ai nun, si sui de France” [“I’ll give my name, for memory: / I am from France, my name is Marie”] (Epilogue, vv. 3–4).² And as Richard Baum has reminded us, it is perhaps the only text that can be said with absolute certainty to have been written by this Marie who says she is from France.³ Having clarified that point, let me hasten to add that the Vie seinte Audree certainly has as much claim to have been written by this same woman as the other two texts attributed to her—the Lais and the Espurgatoire seint Patriz. I would argue, in fact, that it should have an even greater claim, given the similarity of the epilogues of the two works, which could only have been written by the same author or a blatant imitator who happened to have the same name and background, the same rhetorical training, the same attitude toward her writing, and the same determination to be remembered.⁴

³ Richard Baum, Recherches sur les œuvres attribuées à Marie de France (Heidelberg, 1968).
⁴ For a more detailed comparison of these two epilogues, see McCash, “La Vie seinte Audree,” pp. 748–49. See also The Life of Saint Audrey: A Text by Marie de France, ed. and trans. June Hall McCash and Judith Clark Barban (Jefferson, NC, 2006), pp. 5–6. All quotations and translations are from this edition.
Indeed, she calls particular attention to that desire when she closes her epilogue to the Audree with an unrhymed verse ending with the word *remembree*: “Mut par est fol qui se oblie. / Ici escrit mon non Marie / Pur ce ke soie remembree” [One is indeed foolish who forgets herself: / here I write my name “Marie” / so that I may be remembered] (vv. 4623–25).

It is evident beyond any doubt, in my view, that the woman who wrote the *Vie seinte Audree* also wrote the *Espurgatoire seint Patriz*, which most scholars accept without question to be a text by Marie de France. Within the article cited above and in a later conference paper presented in 2003, I began a preliminary comparison of these two texts based on a study of lexical, linguistic, stylistic, and intertextual data. In this present chapter, which will not waver from the assumption that they share a common author, I would like to expand that comparison to strengthen the argument that led me to such a conclusion, as well as to discuss why Marie would have chosen to culminate her career with these two particular works.

The woman we call Marie de France began her career by spurning the idea of translating Latin works into French, since so many others had already done it. Instead, as many scholars have pointed out, she set out to carve a new role for herself and to bring into the French vernacular Breton *lais* composed “pur remambrance.”

7 By the time she began her *Ysopet*, however, she may already have softened her stance on Latin translation. Although her epilogue claims that she was translating from English into French, many scholars have identified her primary source for the first 40 fables as the Latin *Romulus Nilantii*.8

5 *Life of Saint Audrey.*


8 Marie writes that for love of Count William “M’entremis de cest livre feire / e de l’engleis en romanz treire” [“This volume was by me created, / From English to Romance translated”] (Epilogue, vv. 11–12). If indeed there was an English translation by “li reis Alvrez” (presumably Alfred the Great, who was in fact noted for his translation skills), it is now lost. Thus, it is possible that she was translating either directly