



Eleanor, Henry II and Walter Map : BnF fr. 123, f. 229

Mousket and the Queen of England

It is difficult to imagine that Henry II was still alive when his courtier, the elusive Walter Map, had the impudence to portray his wife, Eleanor of Aquitaine, in the following terms:

Cui successit Henricus Matildis filius, in quem iniecit oculos incestos Alienor Francorum regina, Lodovici piissimi conjux, et injustum machinata divorcium nupsit ei, cum tamen haberetur in fama privata quod Gaufrido patri suo lectum Lodovici participasset. Presumitur autem inde quod eorum soboles in excelsis suis intercepta devenit ad nichilum.¹

Henry son of Matilda succeeded to the throne, but Eleanor, queen of the French and wife of the exceedingly pious Louis, cast her lascivious eyes on him. Having contrived a questionable divorce, she married Henry despite rumours circulating to the effect that she had already shared Louis's bed with Geoffrey, Henry's father. This, one supposes, is why their progeny, sullied as their origins were, finally came to naught.²

Eleanor, naturally, also enjoyed her ration of encomium from writers willing to praise their lady queen in fittingly rhetorical and hyperbolic terms. According to a description attributed to Ralph of Diss, for example, she was a highly intelligent woman distinguished by her noble lineage (*mulier prudentissima et nobilitate generis insignis*), while for William of Newburgh she was simply a radiant beauty (*formae venustate praeclara*). Richard of Devizes, lapsing into conventionally panegyric mode, described her as a woman beyond compare, beautiful yet modest, powerful yet moderate, humble yet eloquent (*femina incomparabilis, pulchra et pudica, potens et modesta, humilis et disert*).³ Such, however, was Eleanor's reputation, already in 1192, and before her death in 1204, that Richard felt obliged to add:

Multi noverunt quod utinam nemo nostrum nosset. Haec ipsa regina tempore prioris mariti fuit Ierosolymis. Nemo plus inde loquatur, et ego bene novi. Silente !

Many people know that this same queen did something which none of us should rightly know, when she went to Jerusalem during her first marriage. I myself am well aware of what it was, but let no one provide any further details! Hush! ⁴

Richard's contemporary Gerald de Barri (Geraldus Cambrensis), another courtier, an opinionated scholar and celebrated gossip, was to be counted among those who were well acquainted with Eleanor's salacious reputation. In his *De principis instructione*, written in 1191 but still being revised in 1216, he sees fit to record the adulterous, indeed incestuous, relationship she reportedly enjoyed with her uncle Raymond of Poitiers, prince of Antioch, while in the Holy Land in 1148. If Gerald already knew of her even more celebrated exploit, as imagined in romance legend, namely her elopement and love affair with Saladin, as we shall see below, he was polite enough to pass over it in discreet silence:

Comes Andegavis Gaufridus regina Alienora, quando senescallus Franciae fuit, abusus fuerat; super quo et filium suum Henricum pluries, ut dicitur, preemunit, monens et prohibens modis omnibus ne tangeret illam, tum quia domini sui sponsa, tum etiam quoniam a patre suo fuit ante cognita. Ad cumulum igitur excessuum nimis enormium sic dictam Franciae reginam rex Henricus adulterino concubitu sicut fama dispersit, polluere praesumpsit, dominoque suo sic ipsam subtraxit sibi que maritaliter eandem de facto copulavit. Qualiter, quaeso, ex copula tali felix potuit prosapia nasci ? ⁵

Count Geoffrey of Anjou, when he was steward of France, had seduced and taken advantage of queen Eleanor. It is said that he had frequently warned his son Henry against her, forbidding him to have any sort of contact with her, both because she was married to his lord Louis VII and because she had previously had a sexual relationship with him, his father. Adding, therefore, to his already unrivalled record of debauchery, king Henry, so rumour has it, presumed to abuse the so-called queen of France by having intercourse with her. In this way he alienated Eleanor

from her husband and then actually married her himself. How, I ask, could any sort of successful family line develop from such adulterous behaviour?

It looks rather as if Eleanor's fall from favour, and her imprisonment by Henry from 1173 until at least 1183, could have been the signal for a campaign of concerted denigration against her.⁶ However that may be, these are the earliest indications we have of the existence of a subversive counter-culture movement taking shape around Eleanor during her lifetime. This was referred to, by an earlier generation of scholars, as her Black Legend.⁷

Stoked by clerical antifeminism in general, and more particularly by monastic misogyny, this was a phenomenon that gave voice to the fear of powerful women exerting a political authority that had hitherto been the exclusive privilege of the medieval patriarchy. It has more to tell us about collective male neurosis among historians of the time than about Eleanor's character or her real role in 12th-century history. She can, in a feminist perspective, be seen as walking purposefully in the footsteps of the formidable empress Matilda, daughter of Henry I, wife of emperor Henry V, mother of Henry II, and 'Lady of England and Normandy.'

Be that as it may, Gerald's diatribe proves to have suspicious origins, and is unlikely to have been an independent and personal judgement of his. It is more than likely that Gerald was here, as elsewhere, simply plagiarising his contemporary and fellow courtier Walter Map. This archdeacon of Oxford had composed his *De nugis curialium* at some stage between 1184 and 1192, and, in the course of this curious hotchpotch of macabre legend and inconsequential anecdotes, had contrived to insert the acerbic appreciation of Henry's queen that we have cited above. Immediately following this, Walter launches into the story of the wife of one Haimo Dentatus, a character with a prototype in history who we also encounter in Orderic as well as in William of Malmesbury. He is assumed to be the ancestor of Robert fitz Haimon, father of Robert of Gloucester's wife Mabel.⁸

Frequens erat in ecclesia mater, ilia frequencior; orphanorum et uiduarum et omnium panis egencium . . . ilia magis. Ut fine concludat optato maliciam, omnem in conspectu hominum complet leticiam, excepto quod aspersionem aque benedictae vitabat, horamque corporis dominici et sanguinis conficiendi cauta preueniebat fuga, simulata multitudine uel negocio. Mater hoc Hennonis aduertit, iustaque suspicione sollicita cuncta metuens, instat artissima sedulitate scrutari quid hoc. Scit earn diebus dominicis post aquam datam ecclesiam ingredi et consecrationem fugere, cuius ut sciat causam, modico secretoque foramine facto in thalamum eius occultas tendit insidias. Videt eam igitur summo mane die dominica, egresso ad ecclesiam Hennone, balneum ingressam, et de pulcherrima muliere draconem fieri, et in modico exilientem a balneo in pallium nouum quod ei puella strauerat et in minutissima frusta dentibus illud concidentem, et inde in propria reuerti formam, que postmodum per omnia simili argumento famule famulatur. Mater filio visa reuelat. Ergo sibi presbitero ascito, inopinas occupant, aqua benedicta conspergunt, que subito saltu tectum penetrant et ululatu magno diu culta relinquunt hospicia ... Huius adhuc extat multa progenies.⁹

Henno's mother regularly attended church, and his wife did likewise. If one of them was unstinting in her support of orphans, widows and all those suffering from hunger, the other did even better. In order to achieve her evil ends, she fulfilled every duty that was required of her, except that she had a particular aversion to

holy water, which she consistently avoided. At mass, on the excuse that there were too many people there or that she had something else to do, she cleverly arranged always to be absent at precisely the time when the body and blood of our Lord was being consecrated. The young woman's mother-in-law, growing suspicious, spied on her, and in order to learn the reason why, she surreptitiously made a little hole in the wall so that she could peep into her chamber and watch her. What she sees, early on a Sunday morning when Henno had gone to church, is that his wife, when taking her bath, reverts to her non-human form and turns from a beautiful woman into a dragon. She resumes human shape by using her teeth to rip to shreds a new cloak held out for her by her servant, after which she proceeds to behave with her as if nothing unusual had happened. Henno's mother revealed what she had seen to her son, and he called the priest. They then caught the woman and her servant unawares, and sprinkled them with holy water. With one lightning leap they jumped up and away through the roof, and, howling and shrieking, they abandoned the house where they had lived for so long ... The lady went on to have many children, some of whom are still living to this day.¹⁰

From the end-of-century English court we jump to Flanders of the 1240s where we encounter one Philippe Mousket, author of a voluminous but little known *Chronique rimée*. Using a bewilderingly diverse variety of sources, oral as well as written, this poet from Tournai in Flanders (present-day French-speaking Belgium), had composed a long narrative verse history of the kings of France from Troy down to 1243.¹¹ It was, if nothing else, a monument to poetic industry in that it consisted of no less than 32 000 octosyllabic rhyming couplets. Mousket was, however, no chronicler or historian, and his poem was much more of a pseudo-history in the sense that its otherwise rather plodding narrative is skilfully enlivened by a peppering of amusing anecdotes including passages from popular chansons de geste. Jules Horrent famously described Mousket as 'un chroniqueur à l'oreille épique.'

This sort of pseudo-historical compilation has its origin in Anglo-Norman England, in the narrative verse of Geffrei Gaimar (1136-37) and Wace (1155-75), for example. The rhyming tradition was extended into the 13th century with the *History of William Marshal* (1226) and Mousket's *Chronique rimée* (after 1243), at a time when the Anonyme de Béthune, amongst others, had already, in 1220, gone over to prose as the historiographic medium of choice. Ambroise's history of the 3rd crusade was in traditional verse, Villehardouin's 1208 account of the 4th in innovative prose.

Mousket is often described as a layman without clerical status and accompanying *clergie*. He is more likely, however, to have been a professional jongleur, writing, apparently without any specific patron, for a non-noble city audience. His voice, in any case, is individualistic and curiously authentic. It affords us, first and foremost, a rare opportunity of catching a glimpse of how a provincial, no doubt bourgeois audience of the first half of the 13th century could be entertained: their literary tastes, their political preoccupations, their popular beliefs — their mentalities, in other words.

The prologue to the *Chronique rimée* situates the poem among those that reached their audience through oral performance: 'Ore oiés mon livre !' Mousket urges his listeners (v. 48), which he had translated, he tells us, from another book 'ki des anchiens Tiesmougne les maus et les biens En l'abëie Saint-Denise' (v. 7-9). Given the extraordinary length of the poem (how many sittings would it have needed for its listeners to reach the end?), this is surely no more than a conventional epic tag, a suspicion confirmed by

Mousket's use of the well worn (and fictitious) reference to a written source in the abbey of Saint-Denis. Where and how the author actually had access to all the sources he used for his compilation (some surely in Latin) we are not told, but we need probably look no further than the library of Notre-Dame cathedral of Tournai or nearby Mons. Mousket's access to a cathedral library would, in any case, seem to exclude him from being a layman (albeit a literate one), while his 32 000 rhyming couplets are certainly not the work of an amateur poet.¹²

More than 18 000 lines after his prologue, Mousket arrives at that part of his history that he devotes to notable events in the Anglo-Norman world. Here the anecdote concerning Eleanor of Aquitaine and her 'Black Legend' hold pride of place. Mousket's is an amplified version of the Eleanor core narrative. The strictly 'historical' parts of the compilation act, as it were, as points of anchorage around which anecdotal tales about celebrities that history has thrown up are attracted. This sort of literary jetsam is designed for the entertainment of a presumably bourgeois audience happy to see their aristocratic heroes presented in human rather than superhuman terms.

Abandoning history, therefore, as a series of events in favour of legend out of time, Mousket boldly integrates the Eleanor episode into a conventional and popular literary topos, that of the fairy-human encounter in the Melusine tradition, most widely known, perhaps, in Marie's *Lai de Lanval*.¹³ He does so using the same technique as Gerald before him had used, namely association by means of simple juxtaposition, passing from 'fact' to fiction, from pseudo-historical narrative to folk tale, without any link or transition. Immediately following an account of Eleanor's rejection of Louis VII ('disdaining Louis's decrepit embraces', as the monk Gervase of Canterbury put it),¹⁴ Mousket presents us with a supernatural scenario in which a nameless fairy (of Eleanor's line) seduces and then marries a nameless Angevin count (of Henry's line). The anonymity of the protagonists adds an additional hermeneutic dimension to a narrative that is skilfully handled with verve and humour:

Or vous dirai le voir sans falle	18720
Dont li rois la clama deable.	
Li quens d'Aquitaigne a sejour	
Estoit en son païs; un jour	
S'ala en ses forests chacier,	
Atant qu'il avint par tracier	18725
K'il perdi ses chiens et sa gent,	
Si nel vosist pour nul argent.	
Et chevauçà seus ça et la	
Tant qu'en un beau liu s'avala	
Sour le riu d'une fontenelle	18730
Ki moult estoit et clere et bele,	
Et dalés çou trouva sèant	
Une pucele trop plaisant	
De cors, de membres et de vis.	
Tout a un mot le vous devis,	18735
C'onques nature si tres bien	
Ne pot el monde former rien.	
Et li quens ki bien la mira,	
De nule chose ne s'ira.	
Saluee l'a hautement,	18740

Et cele respont basement.
 Li quens descent, lés li s'asist
 Et de s'amour bel li requist;
 Et dist li k'il l'espouseroit,
 Quar sans feme iert, se li plaisoit. 18745
 Et cele ki sot tout les maus,
 A ris couviert et a cuer faus,
 Li respondi qu'ele en iroit
 Avoec lui, se il l'espousoit.
 De bel parler moult s'en espri, 18750
 Parlé ont tant k'il avespri,
 Et puis li quens l'en amena
 A son més et grant joie en a,
 Quar si tres bele li sambloit,
 Que cuer et cors tout li embloit. 18755
 S'iert li diables voirement
 Qui s'en cusa si faitement
 Pour prendre et decevoir le conte,
 Ki puis en ot et duel et honte.
 Or ot li quens sa gent mandee, 18760
 S'a d'un chevalier espousee
 Celi ki diables estoit
 Et pour feme iestre s'aprestoit.
 Puis en ot enfans a plentet,
 Jou ne sai par qui volentet, 18765
 Fors que tout ensi l'espousa
 Li quens, qui moult la goulousa.
 Chascun jour au mostier aloit
 Mais en créance defaloit,
 Quar quant ce venoit au secrer 18770
 Del provoire sage et discrer,
 Fors de l'église s'en aloit,
 Ne plus arester ne voloit.
 Mais en la fin fu decëue,
 Car sa gille fu percëue. 18775
 S'el disent ensi lor seignor
 Et li plus sage et li meillour.
 Par quoi li quens bien se prova,
 Qu'el moustier prendre la rova
 A cele eure qu'ele en issoit, 18780
 Et il mëismes i seroit.
 Ensi fu gaitie al moustier,
 Mais sa gille n'i ot mestier.
 Sicom l'évangilles fu lus,
 Petit après si fu li lius 18785
 Qu'ele au secrer s'en vot aler,
 Doi chevalier, sans demorer,
 L'ont ahiersé; et li prestres vint,
 Li quens et sergant plus de vint.
 Et quant li prestres la parole 18790
 Pour li prendre, avança l'estole,

S'a la benoite aigue aprestee
 Qu'uns clers li avoit aportee
 Pour mieus saisir et bareter.

Vers la dame le vot geter 18795
 Qui mise iert en wise de feme,
 Et si ert avenans comme gemme.
 Mais quant perçut l'aigue benoite
 Et le provoire ki s'esploite
 Pour li prendre, moult peu l'en chaut, 18800
 Fors de lor mains a force saut.
 Diables iert et, com debles,
 Desrompi couverture et tables,
 Fors de l'eglise s'esforça
 Si que desrout tout le porche a, 18805
 Et le comble del mostier prist,
 Si l'emporta et si l'esprist
 De sa malice et de son fu,
 Voiant le peule ki la fu.
 Set enfans ot ëus del conte 18810
 Ki remesent, ce truis el conte.
 Mais il estoient baptisiet,
 Crestïenet et presigniet ;
 Si n'i ëut diables poïr.
 De ces enfans issirent oir 18815
 Dont la reine Alienors
 Fu l'une, de ce livre recors.
 Quar d'oir en oir, a droite ensaigne,
 Fut icil oir, oir d'Aquitaine,
 De signourie et de contet ; 18820
 Et s'eurent barnage et bontet,
 Dont li uns des seignors Saint-Gille
 Eut ceste Alienors a fille,
 Qui fu aukes vaillans et franche
 Et fu donnee au roi de France. 18825
 Mais il ne l'ama ne nel pot,
 Pour çou que de ces oirs le sot,
 Et pour tant cist rois Loeys
 Le congea de son païs,
 Et la rëine s'en rala. 18830
 Sa tere tint et ça et la,
 Mais puis la prist, que que nus die,
 Li dus Henris de Normendie
 Qui fu li rois au Court Mantel
 Ki d'Engletiere eut maint chastel, 18835
 Sicom l'estoire nous raconte.
 Puis en issirent roi et conte,
 Duc et reine et contesses
 Qui ne furent de rien mauvesses,
 Car il ot de li quatre fils 18840
 Qui moult furent preu et gentils.

I will now tell you exactly, and truthfully, why king Louis VII considered Eleanor to be the Devil in disguise. The count of Aquitaine was spending some leisure time in the country where he lived, and one day went out hunting in one of his forests. Hot on the trail of a stag, he happened to become separated from his hounds and his fellow hunters. This was something he did not want to happen at any cost. So there he was, alone, riding aimlessly this way and that, when he came across a most pleasant spot in which there was a stream of clear water running from a beautiful little fountain. Sitting next to this he found a really lovely young lady with a slim figure, shapely legs and an exquisite face. Not to put too fine a point on it, never in the whole world had nature ever been able to produce such a wonderful creature. (18737)

The count looks long and hard at her, and sees nothing he does not like. He is profuse in his greetings, and she replies shyly and modestly. Climbing down from his horse, he goes and sits next to her and immediately starts his wooing. Not being married himself, he explains, he would like to ask for her hand in marriage, if she so wished. Being experienced in the ways of the world, she gives a discreet smile of feigned affection, and replies that she would be willing to have sex with him on condition that he marry her. Whereupon the count was galvanised into dazzling her with sweet talk that lasted right through until nightfall, at which point he led her off to his house. So extraordinarily beautiful did he find her that she quite stole his heart — and his body also. He had the time of his life with her. (18755)

She did indeed behave like the very Devil in performing so skilfully, and in seizing and entrapping the count. As for him, he was destined to live his life in both shame and torment as a result. The count then summoned his vassals and proceeded to marry a woman, the daughter of a mere knight, who was the Devil in disguise, but someone quite willing to take on human form. In the course of time they had a large number of children — I know not on whose initiative, except that the count maintained a love for his wife that can only be described as gluttonous. (18767)

The wife attended mass every day, though her faith left something to be desired. When it came to the point at which the wise and learned priest was to perform the Consecration, she was unwilling to stay any longer and would walk out of the church. In the end, however, her guile was exposed and her deceit clear for everyone to see. The count's wisest and most trusted advisors gave her husband a quite different explanation of her behaviour to what it seemed. The count then showed his true self by ordering that she should be apprehended when she was on the point of leaving the church, adding that he would be there himself to witness it. Accordingly she was kept under close observation when she was next in church, and this time her cunning proved to be of no use to her. (18783)

As soon as the Gospel reading was finished, she was about to take the opportunity of missing the Consecration by leaving the church, two knights suddenly jumped out and dragged her to the ground. The priest came running up at the same time as the count, who was accompanied by more than twenty men-at-arms. When the priest informed her that she was being arrested, he stretched out the arm of his stole in order to help seize and detain her. He was preparing also to sprinkle this Devil disguised as a gem of beauty with some holy water that a cleric had brought along for him. On catching sight of holy water and the priest poised to arrest her,

she showed no emotion at all. With a single jump, she contrived to escape from their clutches, a sure sign that she was indeed the Devil. This evil-minded creature fled from the church by breaking clean through the panelled ceiling onto the roof, sending the church porch crashing down. She ended up on top of the building which she then set on fire, before carrying the whole structure up and away in full view of the startled onlookers. (18809)

According to what this story recounts, she took the count's seven surviving children with her. All of them, however, had been duly primesigned and baptised as Christians, with the result that the Devil could have no power over them. One particular heiress, queen Eleanor, the latest in a long line of legitimate succession, came to inherit the lordship of the whole duchy of Aquitaine, This, at the time, was a centre of chivalric excellence and knightly pomp. One of the lords of Saint-Gilles, duke Guillaume X of Aquitaine, a valiant and noble man, was the father of Eleanor, who, being a worthy and noble lady, was given in marriage to king Louis VII of France. But Louis, being well aware of her family pedigree, found it impossible to love her, so had her expelled from his kingdom, and Eleanor left France. (18830)

She returned to Aquitaine, where she took control of the whole duchy. Some time after, despite what other people might say, duke Henry of Normandy married her. This was the future king Henry Courtmantle, a man — so history tells us — who had great power and an exceptionally large number of castles in England. It was here that the count and the countess were married and where they became king and queen. They proved this time to be a well matched couple and produced four sons, all of whom were valiant and noble men.¹⁵

The anonymous author of the *Récits d'un ménestrel de Reims* of c. 1260 writes in the same historically-orientated register with enlivening anecdotes as Philippe Mousket.¹⁶ This time, however, we are dealing with a work by someone with 'un excellent style', according to an enthusiastic Victor Leclerc: 'c'est l'oeuvre d'un homme qui sait écrire.'¹⁷ Not only is the text far less extensive than Mousket's 32 000 rambling verses, but it is also written in prose. Some index of the popularity of the *Récits* is to be found in the 14 extant manuscripts of it compared to the two in which Mousket has survived. Apart from the fact that the two authors share a common interest in the history of the region of Reims, there is otherwise minimal overlap in their coverage. An exception to this is the alternative history of Eleanor. Here the minstrel's contribution to her legendary love affair with Saladin is to fictionalise it still further by locating it within the literary tradition of *amor de lonh* dear to the troubadours:¹⁸

Li baron s'acorderent que li rois fust mariez, et li donnerent la duchoise Elienor, qui mout fu male famme. Et tenoit le Mainne et Anjo et Poiteu et Limoge et Tourainne, et bien trois tans de terre que li rois ne tenoit. Or avint que il li prist talant d'aleir outre meir, et volentiers meist conseil a delivreir la sainte Terre des mains aus Sarrezins. Et se croisa, et esmut grant gent avec lui, et atournerent leur muete. Et monterent sour meir a une Saint Jehan, et nagierent par meir; et furent un mois en la menaide des venz, et arriverent a Sur; car plus de terre ne tenoient adonc crestien en la contree de Surie. Et fu la tout l'iver après; et sejournoit a Sur, et plus n'i faisoit que le sien despendre.

Quant Solehadins aperçut sa molesce et sa nicetei, si li manda pluseurs foiz bataille; mais li rois ne s'en vout onques melleir. Et quant la roine Elienor vit la deffaute que

li rois avoit menée avec li % et elle oï parler de la bonteï et de la prouesce et dou sens et de la largesce Soleliadin, si l'en ama durement en son cuer; et li manda salut par un sien druguement; et bien seust il, se il pouoit tant faire que il l'en peust mener, elle le penroit a seigneur et relanqueroit sa loi. Quant Solehadins l'entendi par la letre que li druguement li ot baillie, si en fu mout liez; car il savoit bien que ce estoit la plus gentis dame de crestienteï et la plus riche. Si fist armer une galie et mouvoir d'Escaloingne ou il estoit, et aleir a Sur atout le druguement; et arriverent a Sur un pou devant la mie nuit.

Et li druguement monta amont par une fause posterne en la chambre la roine qui l'atendoit. Quant elle le vit, si li dist: « Quels nouveles? » Dame, dist il, « veez ci la galie toute preste qui vous atent. Or dou hasteir, que nous ne soiens perceu. » « Par foi, dist la roine, c'est bien fait. » Atant prist deus damoiseles et deus coffres bien garniz d'or et d'argent, et les en vouloit faire porter en la galie, quant une de ses damoiseles s'en perçut et se parti de la chambre au plus coïement qu'elle pot, et vint au lit dou roi qui dormoit, et l'esveilla et li dist: « Sire, malement est : ma dame s'en veut aleir en Escaloingne a Solehadin, et la galie est au port qui l'atent. Pour Dieu, sire, hasteiz-vous ! »

Quant li rois l'oi, si saut, et se vest et s'atourne, et fait sa mesnie armer et s'en va au port. Et trouva la roine qui estoit ja d'un pié en la galie ; et la prent par la main et la ramainne arriere en sa chambre. Et la mesnie au roi retindrent la galie et ceus qui estoient dedenz, car il furent si surpris qu'il n'orent pouoir d'eus deffendre.

Li rois demanda la roine pourquoi elle vouloit ce faire. « En non Dieu, dist la roine, pour vostre mauvestié, car vous ne valez pas une pomme pourrie. Et j'ai tant de bien oi dire de Solehadin que je l'ain mieuz que vous ; et sachiez bien de voir que de a moi tenir ne jorrez vous ja. » Atant la lascia li rois et la fist tres bien gardeir, et ot conseil qu'il s'en revenroit en France, car si denier li aloient faillant, et il n'aquestoit la se honte non.

Si remonta sour meir atout la roine et s'en revint en France. Et prist conseil a touz ses barons que il feroit de la roine, et leur conta comment elle avoit ouvrei. « Par foi, dient li baron, « li mieudres consaus que nous vous sachiez donner, ce est que vous la laissiez aleir, car c'est uns diables, et se vous la tenez longuement, nous doutons qu'ele ne vous face mourdrir. Et ensourquetout vous n'avez nul enfant de li. » A ce conseil se tint li rois, si fist que fous : mieuz li venist l'avoir enmuree; si li demourast sa granz terre a sa vie, et ne fussent pas avenu li mal qui en avilirent, sicomme vous en orrez conteir ça en avant.

Ainsi renvoia li rois la roine Elienor en sa terre. Et elle manda maintenant le roi Henri d'Engleterre, celui qui fist saint Thomas de Cantorbie occirre. Et il i vint volentiers et l'espousa, et fist homage au roi de la terre que il prenoit, qui mout estoit granz et riche. Et enmena la roine en Engleterre, et la tint tant que il en ot trois fiuz, dont li ainsneiz ot non Henriz au Court Mantel, qui fu preudons et bons chevaliers.

It was agreed among the French barons [in 1137] that king Louis VII should marry, and the bride they selected for him was duchess Eleanor of Aquitaine, an exceedingly evil woman. Her lands included Maine, Anjou, Poitou, Limoges and Touraine, in fact easily more than three times as much territory as the king himself

held. What happened next was that Louis conceived the idea of going to the Holy Land, having eagerly resolved to liberate it from the hands of the Saracens. So he took the Cross and prepared to set out with a large contingent of troops. They embarked on the feast of St John, and spent a whole month sailing wherever the winds happened to drive them until they finally made landfall at Tyre. This was the only part of Syria over which the Christians had control at that time. Louis spent all of the following winter staying in Tyre, doing nothing more than fritter away what money he had.

When Saladin saw how supine Louis was and how crassly he was behaving, he challenged him on several occasions to do battle. The king, however, had no appetite for a fight. Queen Eleanor, whom Louis had brought with him, realised how inadequate the king was. She had already heard talk about Saladin and his excellent qualities, his prowess, his intelligence and his generosity, and this was enough to make her fall madly in love with him. She sent him greetings by way of one of her interpreters, and let him know that, if he could contrive somehow to abduct her, she would be willing to accept him as her husband and renounce her religion. When Saladin learned of all of this from the letter that the interpreter delivered to him, he was absolutely delighted because he knew that Eleanor was the grandest lady in the whole of Christendom, and the richest. He ordered an armed galley to be made ready, and set out from Escalon, where he happened to be, and sailed to Tyre, taking the interpreter along with him. They landed at Tyre shortly before midnight.

The interpreter used a secret passage to go up to the queen's chamber where she was expecting him. When she saw him, she asked: 'What news do you have for me?' 'My lady,' he replied, 'as you will see, there's a galley here, ready and waiting for you, but make haste, otherwise we'll be spotted!' 'Well now, that's excellent work', said Eleanor. She sent for two ladies-in-waiting, and had two chests brim full of gold and silver fetched which she intended to have taken on board the galley. It was at that moment that one of her attendants realised what was happening, and she slipped out of the chamber as quietly as she could. She went straight to the royal bed-chamber where the king was sleeping. She woke Louis and said: 'Sire, we're in trouble! My lady's on the point of leaving to run off to Saladin in Escalon, and the galley's waiting in the harbour. In God's name, hurry, sire!'

On hearing this, the king leapt out of bed, threw on his clothes and got himself ready. He called his household knights to arms and hurried down to the harbour. He found the queen with one foot already poised on the boat. Taking her by the hand, he brought her back to her chamber. The king's men took possession of the boat, and everyone on board was taken prisoner. They had been taken so much by surprise that they were not even able to put up any defence.

The king demanded to know why Eleanor had done what she did. To this the queen replied: 'In God's name, I did it because you're such a failure, a useless husband not worth a fig. I'd heard such good reports about Saladin that I now love him more than I do you. One thing you can be certain of is that you'll never again find any pleasure in my arms.' At this, the king turned away and had Eleanor placed under heavy guard. It was then that he took the decision to go back to France, both because he was running out of money and because staying would only bring more shame on him.

So he took to sea again and, bringing Eleanor with him, returned to France. He consulted all of his barons to see what he should do about the queen, having first explained to them how she had behaved. 'Quite honestly,' the barons replied, 'the best advice we can give you is to let her go. She's a diabolical sort of woman, and if you keep her around you any longer, our fear is that she will have you murdered. What is more, you've not even had any children with her' Louis accepted this advice, which was a foolish decision on his part. He would have been better advised to keep her in strict confinement. In that way he would have been able to keep control of her extensive lands for the rest of her life. Nor would he have suffered all the misfortunes that were to befall him, as you will hear me tell you shortly.

The king, accordingly, sent queen Eleanor away to her own lands. She immediately issued an invitation to king Henry of England, the one who had saint Thomas of Canterbury killed. Henry was happy to accept and he came and married her. He then did homage to the king of France for the lands that he was taking over, extensive and extremely valuable lands. He took the queen off to England, and lived long enough with her to have three sons. The eldest of these was Henry Courtmantle, that valiant and most worthy man and superb knight.¹⁹

Ian Short 20.iv.2026

via <http://www.anglo-norman-texts.net>

ENDNOTES

¹ M.R. James, C.N.L. Brooke & R.A.B. Mynors (eds. & trans.), *Walter Map: De Nugis Curialium ...*, OMT (Oxford 1983), 474–76.

² My translation. 'A uniquely dysfunctional family' is how Matthew Strickland aptly describes the Angevins; *Henry the Young King 1155-1180* (Yale UP, 2017), p. 9.

³ *Ricardus Divisiensis, De Rebus Gestis Ricardi Primi*, ed. Howlett in *Chronicles of the Reigns of Stephen, Henry II and Richard I*, RS, vol. 3: 402. For Gervase of Canterbury (I: 80, 241-42), she was 'an extremely astute woman, of noble descent but *instabilis* [inconstant or flighty].' Bernard de Ventadorn's lady, from whom he receives no

reward (*La domna don ja pro non ai*) has been thought to be Eleanor, and his *Be-m meravilh com plus no-m fon orguelha* to be a reference to her lack of hautiness. But cf. Ruth E. Harvey, 'Eleanor of Aquitaine and the Troubadours' in *The World of Eleanor of Aquitaine*, ed. M.M. Bull and C. Léglu (Woodbridge, 2005), p. 101-14. For Wace (1170s), who enjoyed Eleanor's patronage up until 1174, she was 'a lady of great nobility, elegance and intelligence' (ed. Holden, I: v. 24). Still in 1224 the author of the *History of William Marshal* was praising her as 'an amalgam of pure and gold' (ed. ANTS, v. 9508).

⁴ Ricardus Divisiensis, *De Rebus Gestis Ricardi Primi*, ed. Howlett in *Chronicles of the Reigns of Stephen, Henry II and Richard I*, RS, 3: 402. Gervase of Canterbury shared this discretion: 'Discordia inter [Ludovicum] et reginam suam Alianor ex quibusdam forte quae melius tacenda sunt quae in illa peregrinatione contigerunt'; *Gervase of Canterbury: Historical Works*, ed. Stubbs, RS (London, 1879-80), I: 149.

⁵ *Gerald of Wales, De principis instructione*, ed. George F. Warner in *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera*, (London, 1891), 8: 30-31 (my translation). Also now *Gerald of Wales. Instruction for a Ruler (De Principis Instructione)*, ed. and trans. Robert Bartlett (Oxford, 2018).

⁶ Cf. G. Seabourne, *Imprisoning Medieval Women ... in England c. 1170-1509* (London, 2011); Ralph V. Turner, *Eleanor of Aquitaine, Queen of France, Queen of England* (Yale UP, 2011), p. 229-55.

⁷ Ralph V. Turner, 'Eleanor of Aquitaine, Twelfth-Century English Chroniclers and her 'Black Legend'' in *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 52 (2008), 17-42.

⁸ Orderic (2: 156), Malmesbury (*GRA* 1: 428). The original Haimo Dentatus died in the battle of Val-ès-Dunes in 1047 (see Wace, *Rou* III: v. 4021-50). His son Robert was dapifer to king William Rufus, and died in 1107.

⁹ *De Nugis*, 348 (my translation.)

¹⁰ Closely similar stories resurface in *Gervase of Tilbury, Otia Imperialia*, ed. S. E. Banks and J. W. Binns (OMT 2002), 85-91, 665-69. Cf. F.M. Chambers, 'Some Legends concerning Eleanor of Aquitaine', *Speculum*, 16 (1941), 459-68. Place is later found for the anecdote in Vincent de Beauvais' *Speculum Naturale* and in the *Grandes Chroniques de France*. Cf. Dominique Boutet, 'De la *Chronique rimée* de Philippe Mousket à la prose des *Grandes Chroniques de France*: un choix d'écriture?' in *Littérales* 41 (2007), 135-54, and Antoine Brix, 'Une réécriture méconnue des *Grandes Chroniques de France*: signalement, tradition manuscrite, sources' in *Bibliothèque de l'École des chartes* 171 (2013), 383-406 (398-400). It also appears in the Middle English *Richard Coer de Lyon* (ed. Karl Brunner, Wien, 1913, p. 90-91, l. 197-234).

¹¹ *Chronique rimée de Philippe Mouskes ... publiée pour la première fois ... par le Baron de Reiffenberg* (Bruxelles, 1836-45), 3 vol. A modern re-edition of Mousket's text has been undertaken by Elisabeth Mathieu of the University of Angers. For a valuable synthesis of Mousket's history, see Pierre Courroux, *L'Écriture de l'histoire dans les chroniques françaises (XIIe - XVe siècle)* (Paris, 2016), p. 246-90. Cf. also the earlier work of Frank Chambers, 'Some Legends concerning Eleanor of Aquitaine' in *Speculum* 16 (1941), 459-68. Ronald N. Walpole, 'Philip Mouskés and the Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle' in *University of California Publications in Modern Philology* 26 (1947), 327-440. R. L. Chapman, 'A Note on the Demon Queen Eleanor', *Modern Language Notes*, 70 (1955), 393-96. B. Bachrach, 'Henry II and the Angevin Tradition of Family Hostility', *Albion* 16 (1984), 111-30. R. Labande, 'Les Filles d'Aliénor d'Aquitaine: étude comparative', *CCM* 29 (1986), 105-12. Edmond-René Labande, 'Pour une image véridique d'Aliénor d'Aquitaine', *Bulletin de la Société des antiquaires de l'ouest*, 4/ii (1952). Reine Mantou, 'Notes lexicologiques sur la Chronique rimée de Philippe Mousket' in *Mélanges de philologie et de littérature romanes offerts à Jeanne Wathelet-Willem* (Liege, 1978), p. 403-12. Ralph V. Turner, 'Eleanor of Aquitaine and Her Children: an Enquiry into Medieval Family Attachment', *JMH* 14 (1988), 321-35. Peter Dembowski, 'Philippe Mousket and his Chronique rimée' in *Contemporary Readings of Medieval Literature*, ed. Guy Mermier (U. of Michigan, 1989), p. 93-113. Georges Duby, *Dames du XIIe siècle: Héloïse, Aliénor, Iseut et quelques autres*. vol. 1 (Paris, 1995). Peggy McCracken, 'Scandalising desire: Eleanor of Aquitaine and the chroniclers' in *Eleanor of Aquitaine: Lord and Lady*, ed. John C. Parsons and Bonnie Wheeler (New York, 2003), p. 247-65. Daniel Power, 'The Stripping of a Queen: Eleanor of Aquitaine in 13th-Century Norman Tradition' in *The World of Eleanor of Aquitaine*, ed. M.M. Bull and C. Léglu (Woodbridge, 2005), 115-35. Ralph V. Turner, 'Eleanor of Aquitaine: Twelfth-Century English Chroniclers and her 'Black Legend'', 17-42. On Eleanor more generally, see Jean Flori (ed.), *Eleanor of Aquitaine: Queen and Rebel* (Edinburgh UP, 2007). D.D.R. Owen, *Eleanor of Aquitaine: Queen and Legend* (Oxford, 1993). Ralph V. Turner, *Eleanor of Aquitaine, Queen of France, Queen of England* (Yale UP, 2011). Michael R. Evans, *Inventing Eleanor: The Medieval and Post-Medieval Image of Eleanor of Aquitaine* (London, 2014). Karen Sullivan, *Eleanor of Aquitaine ... Truths and Tales* (Chicago UP, 2023).

¹² Philip Bennett, 'Épopée, historiographie, généalogie' in *Les Chansons de geste : Actes du XVI^e Congrès International de la Société Rencesvals* (Granada, 2005), p. 9-38 (26-37).

¹³ Laurence Harf-Lancner, *Les Fées au Moyen Âge : Morgane et Mélusine ...* (Paris, 1984). Cf. Harf-Lancner's *Le Monde des fées dans l'occident médiéval* (Paris 2003), p. 163–71.

¹⁴ *Gervase of Canterbury: Historical Works*, ed. Stubbs, RS (London, 1879-80), I: 149. According to William of Newburgh, the queen felt that she 'had married a monk instead of a king'; *Historia Rerum Anglicarum of William of Newburgh* in *Chronicles, Stephen, Henry II and Richard I*, ed. Howlett, RS (London, 1885-90), I: 93: 'causante se monacho et non regi nupsisse.'

¹⁵ Ed. Reiffenberg, II : 245-51, v. 18720-18830 (my translation).

¹⁶ *Récits d'un ménestrel de Reims*, ed. Natalis de Wailly, Société de l'histoire de France (Paris, 1876), § 6-12, p. 3-7. Marie-Geneviève Grossel, *Les Récits d'un ménestrel de Reims, traduction et commentaires* (Presses universitaires de Valenciennes, 2002). Pascal Bonnefois, *Edition critique des Récits d'un ménestrel de Reims*, doctoral thesis (unpublished), University of Paris VII, 1990. Danielle Quéruef, 'La Chronique d'un ménestrel de Reims (MS 482)' in *Les Manuscrits français de la bibliothèque Parker, Corpus Christi College Cambridge*, ed. Nigel Wilkins (Cambridge, 1993), p. 39-68 (50-53). Robert Levine, (trans.) *A 13th-century Minstrel's Chronicle (Récits d'un ménestrel de Reims) ...* (Lampeter, 1990).

¹⁷ Victor Leclerc in *Histoire littéraire de la France* 21 (1847), 711-17.

¹⁸ On the Antioch episode, see Ralph Turner, 'Black Legend', p. 26-28. Cf. also John of Salisbury's *Historia Pontificalis* (ed. Chibnall, p. 52), Roy Owen, *Eleanor: Queen and Legend*, p. 24-25, and Ruth Harvey, *The Poet Marcabru and Love* (London, 1989), p. 195. On *amor de lonh*, an aspect of the Courtyl Love tradition, see *The Troubadours: an Introduction*, ed. Simon Gaunt & Sarah Kay (CUP, 1999), p. 212-27.

¹⁹ Ed. Natalis de Wailly, § 6-12, p. 3-7 (my translation).